History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam

1960–1968

Part 1

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff in session, September 1961. *Clockwise left front*: Lieutenant General Barksdale Hamlett, Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations, US Army (*back to camera*); General Clyde D. Eddleman, Vice Chief of Staff, US Army; Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., Chief of Naval Operations; General David M. Shoup, Commandant, US Marine Corps; Major General Frederick L. Wieseman, Deputy Chief of Staff (Plans), US Marine Corps; Major General John W. Carpenter II, Deputy Director of Plans, US Air Force; General Curtis M. LeMay, Chief of Staff, US Air Force; General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, USA, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Lieutenant General Earle G. Wheeler, USA, Director, Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Major General J. M. Reynolds, USAF, Deputy Director, Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff (*top of head visible*); Rear Admiral Francis J. Blouin, USN, Secretary, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Colonel Michael J. Ingelido, USAF, Deputy Secretary, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff in session, November 1962. *Left to right (clockwise)*: Lieutenant General T. W. Parker, Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations, US Army; General Earle G. Wheeler, Chief of Staff, US Army; Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., Chief of Naval Operations; Vice Admiral U. S. G. Sharp, Jr., Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Plans and Programs); Mr. Paul H. Nitze, Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs); General David M. Shoup, Commandant, US Marine Corps; Major General C. H. Hayes, Deputy Chief of Staff (Plans and Programs), US Marine Corps; Lieutenant General D. A. Burchinal, Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans and Programs, US Air Force; General Curtis E. LeMay, Chief of Staff, US Air Force; Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara; General Maxwell D. Taylor, USA, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Vice Admiral H. D. Riley, USN, Director, Joint Staff *(not visible)*; Brigadier General M. J. Ingelido, USAF, Secretary, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Colonel R. C. Forbes, USA, Deputy Secretary, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam

1960–1968
Part 1

Jack Schulimson

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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 times of crisis 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 events in Vietnam. Two prior volumes dealt with Indochina and the prelude to Vietnam. The nature of the activities of the JCS and the sensitivity of the sources used caused the volume to originally be written as a classified document.

This volume describes those JCS activities related to developments in Vietnam during the period 1960–1963. At times, the role of the Joint Chiefs may appear to be submerged in the description of foreign relations, politics, economics, and other areas having little to do with military matters. However, developments in these areas provide essential background for understanding the military activity of the 1960s.

The original volume was a collaborative effort of the entire Historical Division of the Joint Secretariat. The current version has been updated by Dr. Jack Shulimson and reviewed by Dr. Graham A. Cosmas. Dr. John Shortal edited the final revision; 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
January 2011

JOHN F. SHORTAL
Director for Joint History

Preface

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, Part 1, 1960–1968, covers the formulation of policies and decisions during the years 1960–1963 when the United States expanded its initial military commitment to Southeast Asia. As the initial manuscript was written well before the war ended, the original authors had only limited access to vital documentation. They did not have access to most of the records available in the Pentagon Papers and other primary sources in Personal Paper collections, declassified official records, and especially the significant amount of scholarly histories of the Kennedy presidency. I have basically used the original manuscript as a primary source and in effect created a new history of the Vietnam War and the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Kennedy administration incorporating much of this material.

Beginning in 1960, the United States continued to expand its military advisory strength in South Vietnam in response to increased Communist infiltration from the north through Laos and to more sustained guerrilla attacks in the south. At the same time, the United States also increased its contingency planning effort for the deployment to Southeast Asia of regular US forces in both Laos and South Vietnam to counter any threat by Communist Army units from the north or from China. At the same time President Kennedy called for a new emphasis upon guerrilla warfare, which at first received only lukewarm support from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Despite this emphasis upon Southeast Asia, especially in Laos and the establishment in South Vietnam in 1962 of the US Military Assistance and Advisory Command, such tinderboxes as Cuba and Berlin continued to receive most of the attention of the administration. In fact, the failed invasion of Cuba during the Bay of Pigs episode very early in his administration caused President Kennedy to lose his faith in the advice of the Joint Chiefs. Indeed the President appointed General Maxwell Taylor to act as his intermediary with the Joint Chiefs until General Taylor assumed the position of Chairman himself in October 1962. Throughout the President's tenure in office, the Kennedy administration's policy in Southeast Asia was marked by clashes between factions in the Defense Department including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department, and the White House. By 1963, these differences involved the support the US should provide the Republic of Vietnam under its President, Ngo Dinh Diem. The history ends its account with the killing of Diem by a coup followed by the coincidental murder of President Kennedy a short time later. The interpretation of these events still remains a matter of debate among historical scholars.

Dr. Jack Shulimson

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History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam 1960–1968 Part 1

1

Vietnam and the Eisenhower Administration: The View from Washington and Vietnam

Prelude

During its last years in power, the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Joint Chiefs of Staff [1] remained committed to resisting further communist expansion, especially in the sensitive area of Southeast Asia. With the division of former French Indochina as a result of the 1954 Geneva Accords, an uneasy truce, accompanied by outbreaks of violence, existed between the two Vietnams. They remained divided along the 17th Parallel by a Demilitarized Zone monitored by an international commission. While not recognizing the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north, led by the charismatic revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh, the American government acknowledged the status quo.

Beginning in 1955, however, the United States unilaterally assisted the anti-Communist regime in the south, the Republic of Vietnam headed by Ngo Dinh Diem, with both material assistance and a military mission. Internationally, the Eisenhower administration succeeded in placing under the protection of the newly formed Southeast Asia Treaty Organization not only South Vietnam but also Laos and Cambodia, two other members of the former French Indochina empire.[2]

Policy Formulation in the Eisenhower Administration

In his formulation of American policy to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia and other vulnerable areas of the world, President Eisenhower relied in part on an elaborate formal bureaucratic structure. At the pinnacle of this hierarchy was the National Security Council (NSC), chaired by the President himself. By statute, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were the military advisors not only to the President and Congress but also to the Secretary of Defense and to the NSC. The Chairman and occasionally the Service Chiefs, either singly or as a body, sat in on meetings of the Council. More important, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had representation on the NSC Planning Board, whose mission was to prepare recommendations and set the agenda for NSC meetings. The Joint Staff helped to modify these proposals and produce recommendations that reduced differences to "as clearly defined and narrow an area as possible."[3]

Despite the formality and bureaucratic complexity of both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council, the President usually depended upon a small coterie of advisors for his major policy decisions. This group usually included the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or at least the Chairman, in all matters relating to the military, even when the President did not take their advice. By the end of President Eisenhower's second term, the only Service Chief who had served more than four years in his position was Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, appointed in 1955. Second in seniority was Air Force Chief of Staff Thomas H. White, who had replaced General Nathan F. Twining in 1957 when the latter became Chairman of the JCS. In 1960 President Eisenhower appointed both the Army Chief of Staff, General George H. Decker, and the Marine Corps Commandant, David M. Shoup, to their respective positions. The President selected Decker's predecessor, Army General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, to take the place of the ailing General Twining as Chairman.

Despite President Eisenhower's own extensive military experience, including a tour as Army Chief of Staff—or because of it—his relations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not always harmonious. In 1959 he referred to criticism of administration policy by the Chiefs to a Senate subcommittee as "legalized insubordination."[4] The President believed that the Chiefs should be "exemplars of jointness" and have "broad-gauged judgment." As some JCS official historians have noted, however, "Unsurprisingly Eisenhower defined a broad-gauged officer as one who held the same views about policy and strategy that he did."[5]

While President Eisenhower was able to select all four of the official members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, including the Chairman, within four months of taking office in 1953, he was never able to find the unanimity among the Chiefs that he desired. The administration's military and diplomatic policy as enunciated by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in terms of "massive retaliation" and by Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson as the "New Look" emphasized a dependence upon nuclear power. In effect, the Pentagon policy under Secretary Wilson maximized "firepower and minimized the footsoldier."[6]

Charles Wilson's "New Look" guidelines, with their emphasis upon "greater bang for the buck," naturally led to tighter budgets and internecine appropriation struggles among the respective Services. The Eisenhower administration usually placed a ceiling on the annual Defense budget of about 10 percent of gross national product. Sharing the opinion of General Omar Bradley, the Chairman during the previous administration, that "the budget controls military policy," none of the Services during the Eisenhower period was willing to cut its estimates, which often exceeded the assigned ceiling by 15 percent. It then devolved upon the JCS Chairman and the Secretary of Defense to attempt to bring the respective Service budgets into conformity with the administration's desires.[7]

The acrimony over budgetary and policy concerns was especially bitter during the tenure of Admiral Arthur Radford as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1953 to 1957. The 57-year-old Radford, a 1916 graduate of the Naval Academy, was somewhat of a surprising choice for this sensitive position. Not only was he a naval officer, but in 1949 he had expressed doubts about a nuclear strategy. Admiral Radford, however, had impressed President Eisenhower during a visit to the Korean battlefront in 1952. At that time the admiral was serving as Commander in Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC), one of the first of the Unified Commands. There may, however, have been a political dimension to the President's selection of Admiral Radford. According to one defense expert, Secretary Wilson prevailed upon the President to choose the Navy admiral for the chairmanship because he had the support of Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, who had challenged Mr. Eisenhower the previous year for the Republican presidential nomination.[8]

Whatever the reasons behind the selection of Admiral Radford, and despite his previous reservations about the military usefulness of nuclear weapons, he proved to be an enthusiastic supporter of the New Look and its "primary reliance on massive nuclear retaliation."[9] The Chairman, a zealous advocate of air power himself, an early naval aviator who earned his wings in 1921, strongly defended President Eisenhower's manpower policies, which involved major cuts in the Army. Both General Matthew B. Ridgway and his successor as Army Chief of Staff, General Maxwell D. Taylor, vigorously opposed the New Look and its manpower reductions. President Eisenhower and Admiral Radford blamed General Taylor in 1956 for having his subordinates leak to the press the Chairman's proposal to reduce the Army to small nuclear-armed task forces, thereby helping to defeat the plan. The following year, when the Chiefs were split over manpower policies, Admiral Radford did succeed in convincing the Secretary of Defense to go along with less drastic cuts in the Army.[10]

The rifts over manpower were only a symptom of the division among the Chiefs relative to the implementation of the New Look. This was clear in the debates in the National Security Council and among the Chiefs relative to the Basic National Security Policy (BNSP) document. Produced by the National Security Council, its text was to be "the comprehensive statement of American strategic policy" and to provide guidance for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in planning for force and weapon levels.[11] The Army Chiefs, Generals Ridgway and Taylor, were particularly unhappy with elements of the BNSP that President Eisenhower approved in March 1956 as NSC 5602/1 relating

to the employment of nuclear weapons. This document maintained that the United States required military forces "with sufficient strength, flexibility, and mobility . . . to deal swiftly and severely with Communist aggression." It called for the integration of nuclear weapons "for use in general war and in military operations short of general war as authorized by the President." While recognizing that the United States depended upon highly mobile ready forces to counter local aggression, these same units required "a flexible and selective nuclear capability." Nonetheless, NSC 5602/1 contained the precautionary clause that "dependence upon tactical nuclear capabilities should not become so pronounced 'that any decision to intervene against local aggression would probably be tantamount to a decision to use nuclear weapons.'"[12]

Because of continued infighting among his civilian and military advisors about interpretation of the employment of nuclear arms, President Eisenhower decided in April 1957 to modify the BNSP. The previous month, Admiral Radford told the National Security Council that in "operations short of general war, 'atomic weapons will be used when required to achieve military objectives,' subject to prior presidential approval."[13] Basically, the new BNSP, approved in June as NSC 5707/8, reflected Admiral Radford's views with some modifications. According to a JCS official history of the period, "NSC 5707/8 marked the apogee of the New Look" with its emphasis on the need for fiscal restraint and the use of nuclear weapons when necessary even in local wars.[14]

The questions about overall US strategic policy remained and would come up again during the 1958 review of the BNSP statement. Presidential Special Advisor and Chairman of the NSC Planning Board Robert Cutler recommended that the entire subject of limited wars be examined, including the question of whether the United States could be involved in such wars for "limited objectives, perhaps with conventional weapons alone."[15] The Planning Board asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assess the proposition. They divided along Service lines. In the JCS discussion, Army Chief of Staff General Taylor, Chief of Naval Operations Arleigh A. Burke, and then Commandant of the Marine Corps General Randolph McC. Pate supported the Cutler recommendation. General Taylor argued that "relative nuclear parity" would prevent the United States and the Soviet Union from engaging in a general war unless their vital interests were at stake. He called for more flexible forces that could fight a limited war where "vital interests" were not involved and that could end up with traditional victory "or some lesser solution which is to our net advantage."[16]

Former Air Force Chief of Staff General Nathan F. Twining, who had replaced Admiral Radford in August 1957 as Chairman, took the opposing tack. While less combative than Radford and enjoying better relations with the Chiefs, Twining was still a strong advocate of the New Look.[17] He believed General Taylor's concept of mutual deterrence was dangerous. Backed by the new Air Force Chief of Staff, General Thomas White, Twining argued that the emphasis of US strategy should be on "first priorities." Neil H. McElroy, who replaced Charles Wilson as Secretary of Defense in October 1957, also supported the Twining-White viewpoint, as did the National Security Council. While not rejecting the usefulness of conventional forces, the NSC concluded that they were not of "first priority" and that there was no need to alter the overall strategic statement. As Secretary

McElroy concluded, US defense programs would continue to emphasize "highest priorities to deterring all-out nuclear war" in the belief "that any hostilities with the Soviet Union could not be confined to limited operations and limited objectives." In July 1958 President Eisenhower accepted the NSC and McElroy's recommendations as NSC 5810/I. Although this document differed very little from the BSNP approved the previous year, the President directed that the United States should continue to reexamine it.[18]

The debates over strategic policy, budget levels, and manpower reflected a deeper concern among the Chiefs about the part their respective Services would continue to play in the defense of the nation. As Admiral Burke, the forthright Chief of Naval Operations, observed in his oral history, these differences "centered on the definition of roles and missions" that determined "force size and structure and the research, development, and procurement of new weapons systems." This in turn resulted in "interservice competition for scarce resources [and] impinged on the Chiefs' ability to cooperate in the interest of national security."[19] President Eisenhower viewed such disputes with disquiet. He believed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a body should present a common front based on what was good for the country rather than the narrower standpoint of the individual Service.[20]

In 1958 the Eisenhower administration supported legislation to restructure the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Basically, the President wanted to end what he considered inappropriate wrangling among the Services, to broaden the perspective of the individual Service Chief, and to increase the power of the Chairman. In fact, part of this movement originated with the Chiefs themselves. In December 1957, Air Force Chief of Staff Thomas White proposed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff undertake a study of Defense Department reorganization. The Joint Chiefs of Staff nominated then Army Major General Earle G. Wheeler to head an ad hoc committee to come up with recommendations. Wheeler's committee proposed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a whole—rather than an individual Service, as was the case at the time—should become the operational executive agent to the Unified Commands. At the same time, President Eisenhower formed his own informal committee consisting of former JCS Chairmen and General Twining, the incumbent. In April 1958 the President sent draft legislation to Congress.[21]

The result was the Defense Reorganization Act of 1958, which President Eisenhower signed into law on 6 August. According to the new statute, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Service Secretaries would be taken out of the direct chain of command between the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Unified Commands. The Service Secretaries were largely confined to their administrative and logistic responsibilities. Moreover, the Service Chiefs had as their primary duty their tasks with the Joint Chiefs of Staff rather than the everyday running of their Service. This latter responsibility was to be delegated to their Vice Chiefs. The new legislation also enhanced the role of the Chairman. He was given a vote at the meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which previously had been denied to him. More important, he now had the authority to select the director of the Joint Staff and to set the agenda for the newly expanded Joint Staff. The Joint Staff was doubled from a force of 200 officers to 400 and organized into J-sections similar

to the G-sections of the Army and Air Force (e.g., J–1, Personnel; J–2, Intelligence; J–3, Operations; J–4, Logistics). To satisfy concerns expressed by the Navy and Marine Corps leadership, Congress inserted a clause that expressly stated that they "shall not operate or be organized as an overall Armed Forces General Joint Staff."[22]

While the purpose of the 1958 reorganization was to provide for a more systematic and smoother running agency, as one official historian noted, these improvements were not readily apparent at least as far as the organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was concerned.[23] The new law gave the Secretary of Defense more centralized control over the agency at the expense of the Service Secretaries, but it had much less effect upon the Service Chiefs. As one defense analyst observed, "None of the changes have altered the format by which the JCS reaches decisions or the process by which men reach the JCS."[24]

The decision process remained a convoluted one. The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to meet three times a week, taking up agenda items supported by position papers prepared by the Joint Staff. These items were largely requests on particular issues asking the Chiefs for their views and went through a complex bureaucratic system. First, staff action officers prepared a draft joint position on "flimsy" paper; second, after review by the individual Service action officers, the document was printed on buff paper to include issues that had not been resolved; third, after further Joint Staff review, it was reproduced on green paper and included dissenting opinions as attachments. If deemed of appropriate significance, the green version was forwarded as an agenda item for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Finally, after approval by the Chiefs or their designated representatives, it was published as a "red-striped" decision paper. This entire process took about three weeks from start to finish, with an estimated 15,000 items going through this process annually.[25]

As scholars have observed, this paper ritual served as a cover for "fierce bureaucratic infighting among the Services."[26] While the vast majority of issues coming up before the Joint Chiefs of Staff were routine and usually passed unanimously, serious differences existed among the Chiefs, usually relating to "crucial matters of budget ceilings, force levels, and ceilings."[27] Very often even these disagreements were camouflaged by the "flimsy, buff, green, and red-striped" process into a meaningless waffling, watered-down "least common denominator" consisting simply of Service positions added together and called a joint paper.[28]

This papering over of differences was especially prevalent in the formulation of the Joint Strategic Operations Plan (JSOP), which an official history described as the "weakest link of a none-too-strong chain" in the JCS planning effort.[29] It was one of three in a family of short-range, medium-range, and long-range plans that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had responsibility for developing. The JSOP was the middle-range plan and was in some respects the most important in that it was supposedly the first step in the preparation of the Defense Department budget. Based on guidance provided by the Basic National Security Plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to prepare the JSOP to reflect the forces the United States required to carry out its military strategy and to attain its national objectives over a three-year period. In actuality, one critic wrote,

each Service Chief had his own interpretation of what was essential and emphasized the role of his own Service so that "consequently, the JSOP was really three separate plans added together and called a joint plan."[30]

Despite such criticisms, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were quite aware that the making of military and defense policy was "essentially a political process"[31] and were sensitively attuned to changes in that policy. This was especially true in their adaptation and modification of strategic plans. As the Eisenhower administration between 1957 and 1960, in the words of one official historian, "underwent a modest but marked shift in its thinking about limited war," the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that "non-nuclear limited conflicts" were now acceptable.[32]

While General Taylor, the Army Chief of Staff, who had been the most ardent proponent of a limited war strategy, retired in July 1959 to be replaced by the less contentious General Lemnitzer,[33] the debate over the employment of nuclear and conventional forces continued. During the review of the Basic National Security Policy that month, the chairman of the National Security Council Planning Board recommended the insertion of the statement that "Planning should contemplate situations short of general war where the use of nuclear weapons would manifestly not be militarily necessary nor appropriate."[34] Because of the continuing division among the Chiefs, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not comment on the proposed new phrasing in the BNSP. When the National Security Council approved the revision, the Defense Department appended a note that the revision was a clarification rather than any change in policy.[35] In light of the change in the BNSP, the Joint Chiefs of Staff substituted the term "limited wars" to replace such phrasing as "local aggression," "peripheral wars," and "hostilities short of war" in Joint Strategic Operations Plan (JSOP)–62 (the plan for 1 July 1962). In January 1960 the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the new Secretary of Defense, Thomas S. Gates, Jr., who had assumed his office the previous August, JSOP–63, which for the first time contained a "strategic concept for limited war." The concept read in part that planning for such wars "should be based upon 'a flexible and selective capability including nuclear capability for use in cases authorized by the President.'"[36]

President Eisenhower called for no further revision of the BNSP in 1960, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their short range plan, Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) 62, in December 1960 allowed "more clearly for operations without nuclear weapons." Furthermore, the directive tasked the Unified Commands "to support pro-western and neutral governments against communist or other anti-western uprisings or movements."[37] By the end of the Eisenhower presidency the administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, while not disowning "massive retaliation," were looking for more flexibility in meeting crisis situations.

While the US strategic concepts focused on nuclear forces and deterrence, President Eisenhower employed more conventional means in the various international crises that his administration faced. He rejected the advice of Admiral Radford, his Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, when the Chairman wanted to launch American air

strikes against the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 in support of the French in Vietnam. Again the following year, during the confrontation with China over the off-shore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, the President refused to act upon Radford's counsel to launch air attacks against Chinese mainland bases. In 1956 Admiral Radford, this time backed by the rest of the Chiefs, recommended military action against Egypt after its President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, seized the Suez Canal. Once more President Eisenhower refused to employ military forces, and indeed placed diplomatic pressure upon Britain and France to withdraw their troops after their intervention at Port Said in support of the Israeli attack in the Sinai Peninsula.[38]

Although the US Government during this period was reluctant to commit US forces, it was prepared to intervene in certain instances. In July 1958, fearing the spread of a strident Nasser-led Pan-Arabism and Soviet exploitation of the turbulence in the Middle East after a coup in Iraq, President Eisenhower inserted US Marines and an Army airborne brigade into Lebanon. He withdrew these troops three months later after a return of some stability in the region once the Lebanese warring political factions had agreed upon a new government.[39]

Shortly after the landing in Lebanon, the Chinese Communists in August 1958 renewed their harassment of Quemoy and Matsu with artillery bombardment of the offshore islands. While contemplating the use of nuclear weapons and directing the Seventh Fleet to convoy resupply ships, President Eisenhower decided to defuse the situation through political moves. The US Government convinced the Taiwanese to reduce the size of their garrisons on the islands at the same time as the Chinese Communists reduced their artillery bombardment to every other day, thus allowing resupply on the off day.[40]

In almost all of the crises cited above, the President received recommendations from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who in most cases advocated a stronger action than he was willing to undertake. This pattern would continue. In March 1959, during a period of tension with the Soviet Union over Berlin, Eisenhower declined to take the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a major mobilization. Only General Twining, the Chairman, supported the position of the President.[41]

At the end of the Eisenhower presidency, the United States again faced the prospect of a major intervention in Southeast Asia, this time in Laos. The coalition of rightists, neutralists, and Communists established in the Geneva Accords had come apart during 1959, and by September of that year armed clashes had broken out between the Communist Pathet Lao and government forces. As the situation simmered in Laos through 1960, President Eisenhower rejected recommendations by the Joint Chiefs of Staff "to step in alone" and "clung to a hope of collective action" with his SEATO allies.[42]

Vietnam Policy in the Eisenhower Administration

Until 1960 the general focus of the Eisenhower administration in Southeast Asia had not been on Laos but on its commitment to the preservation of the Republic

of Vietnam (South Vietnam) as an independent non-Communist counterforce to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam). From the beginning of his first term, the Republican President accepted the viewpoint of his Democratic predecessor's Joint Chiefs of Staff when they stated in March 1952 that a Communist victory in Southeast Asia would involve "a deep loss" for the Western world.[43] He would continue the US support to the French in their struggle to maintain their rule in Indochina against the Communist Viet Minh.

This support, however, was not unlimited. With only the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in support of providing air support for the embattled French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, President Eisenhower and his advisors vacillated and finally decided against US military intervention. In fact, during this debate in May 1954, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense arguing that Indochina was "devoid of decisive military objectives and that the allocation of more than token American armed forces would be a serious diversion of our limited capabilities."[44]

With the signing of the Geneva Accords between France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in July 1954, the United States began a formal reassessment of its Far Eastern policy, especially in relation to Southeast Asia and the newly independent regime in South Vietnam. On 20 August 1954 President Eisenhower approved NSC 5492/2, which stated that in Southeast Asia the United States would view "local Communist subversion . . . so gravely that in addition to giving all possible covert and overt support within Executive Branch authority, the President should at once consider requesting congressional authority . . . [to use] US military forces." Relative to Indochina, the United States would "make every possible effort, not openly inconsistent with the US position as to the [Geneva] armistice agreements, to defeat Communist subversion, to maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam, and to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections."[45]

Despite the publication of the NSC memorandum, this review of American policy would continue for the next few months. In September the United States joined with several of its allies to form the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) defensive alliance. A separate protocol of the treaty extended security guarantees under certain conditions "to the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam."[46] The following month the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed very reluctantly to take on the task of training the new South Vietnamese Army. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 19 October 1954, Admiral Radford pointed out that US participation in the Vietnamese training program under the existing conditions in South Vietnam "would have but limited beneficial effect." He emphasized that "from a military point of view" the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not believe that the United States should accept this mission. Nevertheless, the Chairman concluded, "if it is considered that political considerations are overriding, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would agree to the assignment of a training mission to MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group], Saigon, with safeguards against French interference with the US training effort."[47] At about the same time, President Eisenhower sent retired General Lawton J. Collins, who had been Army Chief of Staff during the Korean War, to South Vietnam as his personal representative to determine "whether a viable military position could be created" there.[48]

Finally, on 22 December 1954, President Eisenhower approved a new NSC statement (NSC 5429/5) relative to "Current US Policy in the Far East." The National Security Council declared that "the primary problem of US policy in the Far East is to cope with the serious threat to US security interests which has resulted from the spread of hostile Communist power on the continent of Asia over all of Mainland China, North Korea, and more recently over the northern part of Vietnam."[49] The document incorporated the references to Indochina and Vietnam in NSC 5429/2 as Annex A.[50] Historians of the Joint History Office observed that the National Security Council in the development of this document perceived Communist China "as the principal threat to US interests in the area." They maintained that the "basic decision . . . was to halt the spread of communism in the Far East and, if possible to roll it back." According to their analysis, "in a sense, the policy toward Indochina was developed as a corollary to the broad and basic policy."[51]

Despite the President's approval of NSC 5429/5, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were uncertain how to implement this policy in South Vietnam. On 21 January 1955, Admiral Radford again wrote to Secretary of Defense Wilson, remarking that while national policy called for "every possible effort to prevent South Vietnam falling to the Communists, the degree to which the United States is willing to support this policy in men, money, materials, and acceptance of additional war risks is not readily apparent." According to Radford, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed there were four options available to the United States in Vietnam: first, it could continue its present assistance in cooperation with both the French and the Vietnamese; second, it could initiate a "unilateral program . . . through an 'advisory' system"; third, if those two options were not sufficient, the United States could "deploy self-sustaining . . . forces to South Vietnam, either unilaterally" or as part of a SEATO force; or finally, "it could withdraw all US support from South Vietnam and concentrate on saving the remainder of Southeast Asia." The Chairman observed that before the Joint Chiefs of Staff could develop a "military course of action . . . a firm decision at national level as to implementation of US policy in Southeast Asia is mandatory." While not specifically recommending any of the various options, he concluded by noting that "the Joint Chiefs of Staff have recommended previously against a 'static' defense" in Southeast Asia and reiterated "a concept of offensive actions against the 'military power of the aggressor.'"[52]

About a week later, General Collins reported to the National Security Council about his perception of the situation in Vietnam. In his formal report he recommended continued support of the Ngo Dinh Diem government in South Vietnam. He related that, after thwarting an attempted coup by former Vietnamese Army Chief of Staff Nguyen Van Hinh the previous year, "Diem now has a fair measure of control over the armed forces." According to General Collins, "on balance . . . Diem's integrity, strong nationalism, tenacity, and spiritual qualities render him the best available Prime Minister to lead Vietnam in its struggle against Communism." In concluding his report, the American general stated that he could not "guarantee that Vietnam would remain free. [But] without our aid Vietnam will be lost to Communism." He further warned that the withdrawal of American assistance to South Vietnam would have repercussions throughout Southeast Asia, and therefore "we cannot afford to let free Vietnam go by default."[53]

In the following months, the US review of its Southeast Asia policy would be interrupted by events in Vietnam itself. Feeling confident in his growing prestige, Premier Diem began to consolidate power in himself and his family at the expense of the various sects that had allied themselves with the French. With waning French influence in South Vietnam, sects such as the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and the Binh Xuyen resisted Diem's efforts as best they could. In April, open fighting between the Binh Xuyen and the Vietnamese Army broke out in the streets of Saigon. By this time General Collins had become disillusioned with the uncompromising Diem, who refused to form a broad anti-communist nationalist coalition. The general had returned to Washington and had recommended the replacement of the Vietnamese leader with a more accommodating figure. The US Government was about to acquiesce to Diem's removal when the circumstances in Saigon once more interfered. Much to everyone's surprise, at the end of April the sect coalition against Premier Diem suddenly collapsed and the South Vietnamese Army defeated the Binh Xuyen forces in the South Vietnamese capital.[54]

With the success of Diem's forces in Saigon, the question about Diem retaining his position was one of the main subjects of the trilateral meeting in May of the foreign ministers of Great Britain, the United States, and France. At the conference, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles insisted that Premier Diem should remain in office or that the United States would withdraw from Vietnam. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgar Faure was equally adamant in his opposition to Diem, stating that with him there "was no chance to improve the situation" and threatened to withdraw the entire French Expeditionary Corps still in Vietnam.[55]

During a brief few days recess in the meetings, Secretary Dulles asked Washington for further advice. The administration referred the question about the military ramifications of the present situation to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In his reply the Chairman, Admiral Radford, observed that there was no good choice. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that Diem's government showed "the greatest promise" of achieving stability, they warned that the hasty departure of the French Expeditionary Corps would result "in an increasingly unstable and precarious situation." They suggested that the "immediate objective" should be the "utmost cooperation and energetic action by the Vietnamese, United States, and French Governments toward the restoration of internal order and governmental control in Vietnam." The document noted, however, that the departure of the French force "was ultimately to be desired," and even suggested that in the long run United States actions under SEATO could provide the security now supplied by the French.[56]

In fact some elements of the National Security Council saw the possible withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps as an opportunity for the United States. In a memorandum of the NSC Planning Board, Brigadier General Charles H. Bonesteel, III, the DOD member of the panel, proposed that the United States make a deal with Premier Diem that would trade French withdrawal and assurances of increased American assistance for a South Vietnamese guarantee to protect French property and lives. General

Bonesteel admitted that "a tacit assumption by the US of the support of Free Viet Nam might, of course, eventually involve us in a substantial commitment."[57]

At this juncture, however, the United States was not prepared to take on such a radical departure. In his final meeting with French Foreign Minister Faure, Secretary Dulles agreed to a compromise. Premier Diem would stay in power but his government would be enlarged to represent other parties. The French wanted an end to agitation against them, continued economic and cultural relations with the South Vietnamese, and Emperor Bao Dai to remain as head of state. Secretary Dulles reminded Mr. Faure, however, that South Vietnam was an independent nation and that the United States could only advise Premier Diem, not tell him what to do. According to Secretary Dulles, there could not be a "contractural agreement" between France and the United States over Vietnam, only an understanding between the two about the actions of the other. In effect, there no longer existed a joint French-American Vietnam policy.[58]

With Premier Diem in clear control of his government at this point, the question remained about what he would do about the elections called for by the Geneva Accords to unite the two Vietnams. While the elections were supposed to take place in July 1956, the agreement signed by the French and the Viet Minh at Geneva called for consultation to begin a year earlier. Both the US Government and Premier Diem maintained that they were not signatories to the agreements and therefore were not necessarily bound to carry out the elections. Still, the United States did not want to give the impression of obstructing the popular will or the possible unification of Vietnam.

The Eisenhower administration in early 1955 took the subject under study. The NSC Planning Board sent its draft to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their review. In its analysis of the situation, the Planning Board had recommended that the United States encourage Premier Diem to consult, but that he should reach "no agreement that did not guarantee free elections" in both North and South Vietnam. Moreover, the Planning Board had recommended that if this policy led to renewed hostilities, the United States be prepared to oppose any communist attack, "preferably in concert with the Manila Pact allies of the US, but if necessary alone." While approving most of the draft, the Joint Chiefs of Staff demurred against US intervention by itself. Instead, they recommended language that would "immediately" invoke SEATO "and taking vigorous action thereunder to repel the Communist military aggression." At a meeting of the full National Security Council on 9 June 1955, the members agreed that it was not necessary at that time for the United States to issue any statement relative to "All Vietnam Elections." Furthermore, they decided against altering already existing US defensive policy in Southeast Asia until the NSC Planning Board completed a further study.[59]

Despite no formal decision by the NSC, the new US Ambassador to South Vietnam, G. Frederick Reinhardt, who relieved General Collins in May, met with Premier Diem two days before the NSC meeting. The Ambassador agreed with Mr. Diem that South Vietnam was not bound by the Geneva Accords but tried to convince him to hold consultations "under carefully defined conditions" with the North Vietnamese. Despite Reinhardt's efforts and pressure from the French and British, Premier Diem remained adamant in his

refusal to meet with the North Vietnamese. Finally on 16 July 1955, the South Vietnamese premier issued a statement that he did not reject the principle of "free elections" but that it was "out of the question for us to consider any proposal from the Vietminh if proof is not given that they put the superior interest of the national community above those of Communism."[60] There would be no consultations and there would be no elections.

Diem's rejection of the elections called for by the Geneva Accords and the pending departure in a few months of the French Expeditionary Corps again caused a flurry of discussion in Washington about what repercussions would follow. Once more the Eisenhower administration asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to determine what the implications were and what requirements would be necessary for military operations in the event of renewed aggression in Vietnam. They were to develop plans that would either "repulse and punish overt Vietminh aggression" or/and "destroy Vietminh forces and take control of North Vietnam." Moreover, the planners were to assess what advantages the employment of nuclear weapons would have on both campaigns.[61]

None of the Unified Commands, including CINCPAC, had yet developed contingency plans for this situation, and therefore the Joint Chiefs of Staff formed an ad hoc planning committee. This committee reported its findings in September 1955. In the event of a North Vietnamese attack against the South, the United States would respond immediately with naval and air attacks upon the Vietminh with those forces immediately available. On the ground, the South Vietnamese units would have to hold the best they could until reinforced by forward deployed mobile US Army and Marine units. Depending upon the capability of the South Vietnamese Army units to withstand the onslaught from North Vietnam and the availability of US ground and supporting forces, the planners estimated that it would take a few months to over a year to force the North Vietnamese behind the 17th Parallel.[62]

If the decision was to proceed north, the Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw "joint and combined operations in the Tonkin Delta area" to seize base areas and to cut existing supply lines from China. These operations were to be followed by a major pacification campaign that would involve member nations of SEATO as well as "additional indigenous forces." The planners could not estimate how long this second campaign would last. The JCS memorandum to the Secretary of Defense noted that any restriction on the employment of atomic weapons "would not permit the most effective employment of US armed forces and consequently might require greater forces than the US would be justified in providing from the over-all point of view." Furthermore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cautioned, in a pointed reference to South Vietnam, "the United States cannot guarantee the territorial integrity of any member nation [of the Manila Pact], but at most can help secure the independence of those countries whose peoples desire it and who are willing to undertake the responsibilities of self government. This appears to be particularly applicable to protected, non-member countries." Finally General Twining, the Air Force Chief of Staff, who signed the memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, admitted that his presentation was only "a rough estimate of the requirements." He stated that "a more definitive answer" would have to wait until the Pacific Command completed its planning effort.[63]

Despite verbal protests about the lack of consultation, the North Vietnamese made no overt move against South Vietnam. Indeed, in South Vietnam in the latter half of 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem continued to consolidate his power. In July, he began negotiations with the French for the complete withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps from South Vietnam. With his victory over the sects, Mr. Diem called for a national plebiscite to remove Bao Dai, the former Emperor, who still held the position of the Chief of State in South Vietnam. In the election held in October 1955, Mr. Diem received a suspicious 99 percent of the vote against Bao Dai. He immediately declared South Vietnam the Republic of Vietnam with himself as president.

By the spring of 1956, with the pending departure of the French high command leaving behind only a small military mission, the United States had largely taken over both the economic and military assistance to the newly established Republic of Vietnam. While dependent upon American support, President Diem in a sense had become more independent. Ignoring American advice, he had established a Constituent Assembly largely dominated by his own adherents to draft a constitution. When this constitution was later promulgated it would grant extensive powers to President Diem, including the right to rule by edict when the legislature was not in session. While some American officials expressed concern over his methods, they realized that their influence over Mr. Diem was limited because the United States was committed to backing him and he could take this support for granted.[64]

In March 1956 the Eisenhower administration again began a reexamination of its policy in Southeast Asia and in particular its commitments to the Diem regime. In this review the Secretary of Defense assigned the Joint Chiefs of Staff responsibility for a study to determine the ability of US forces "with and without nuclear weapons, to deal with local aggression in Vietnam."[65]

On 7 June Admiral Radford reported the results of the JCS study to the NSC Planning Board. In his presentation the Admiral limited his discussion only to the stopping of North Vietnamese aggression south of the 17th Parallel. He declared that if the South Vietnamese in repelling an invasion from the north had the capability with limited US air, naval, and logistic support "in retaking North Vietnam, it is my hope that we would encourage them to do so." On the other hand, the Chairman observed, "We would not want to deploy large ground forces in this operation."[66]

Radford's concept of operations was straightforward. He explained that his plan was based on the assumption that the Chinese Communists would not intervene but would provide logistic, advisory, and possibly air support to the North Vietnamese. The Chairman foresaw heavy fighting in northern Quang Tri Province near the Demilitarized Zone as the South Vietnamese Army attempted to stanch the offensive. He expected that US aircraft would provide air support within twenty-four hours. If as anticipated, however, the North Vietnamese Army prevailed against the outnumbered defenders, the South Vietnamese would retreat to more defensible ground just north of the city of Da Nang (Tourane). There, reinforced by other South Vietnamese units, American air and naval bombardment, and "specially trained US ground forces,

with atomic support," the South Vietnamese would turn the tide. A SEATO command structure would be established as the South Vietnamese ground force with its allies and US air and naval support mounted its counterattack.[67]

In contrast to the earlier JCS planning effort in September of the previous year, which foresaw the possible use of two to four US infantry divisions, Admiral Radford cut the proposed American ground element to four reinforced regimental-size forces. Most of the US contribution would consist of air, naval, and logistic support. One of the US Army regimental combat teams (RCT) with an Honest John missile battalion would be airlifted immediately to the South Vietnamese airbase at Da Nang. The United States would place a second RCT on air alert to reinforce the first at the airbase. Two other regiments, either Army RCTs or, more probable, Marine regimental landing teams (RLTs), would be in amphibious shipping for possible deployment in the defense of Saigon or Cam Ranh Bay. They could also reinforce the units at Da Nang if the situation required. The Chairman, however, wanted to keep US ground forces as limited as possible and observed that "victory should be won by the Vietnamese backed as much as possible by other Asians. What we should seek and attain is an Asian victory over Asians."[68]

In the National Security Council meeting, after Admiral Radford completed his presentation, questions about the employment of nuclear weapons arose. In his remarks the Chairman had observed that North Vietnam presented no fixed targets that could not be destroyed by conventional bombs. He noted, however, that atomic weapons employed against concentrated groups of Viet Minh troops "might end the aggression very rapidly." Assistant Secretary of State Walter Robertson then stated that the employment of atomic weapons "would have the gravest impact on public opinion throughout Asia" and suggested that the United States "would not resort to the use of atomic weapons ... except in the gravest of situations." Admiral Radford replied that he did not "subscribe to the view just presented by Secretary Robertson." At that point Acting Secretary of Defense Reuben Robertson declared that he had had several hours conversation with President Diem on a recent visit to South Vietnam. According to Reuben Robertson, Diem had no qualms about the possible use of atomic weapons in resistance to Communist aggression." The discussion over atomic weapons ended with President Eisenhower suggesting the possibility of sending "some Nikes to Southeast Asia equipped with small atomic warheads."[69]

During the discussion, while generally praising Radford's presentation, both President Eisenhower and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Allan Dulles expressed doubts that the North Vietnamese would attack South Vietnam directly across the Demilitarized Zone. They suggested that the North Vietnamese would more likely mount their assault from the west through Laos and the Central Highlands rather than directly along the narrow eastern coastal strip. Neither Mr. Dulles nor the President suggested, however, that Admiral Radford change the outlines of his plan.[70]

The council rather focused on reassuring the South Vietnamese that the United States would stand by "Free Vietnam." Admiral Radford advised the Council that the North Vietnamese "military dispositions indicated no current intention to launch any

large scale military aggression" and he stated they "would be very foolish" to make such a move. There was some further discussion about joint military planning efforts with the South Vietnamese and the possibility of expanding the US military advisory group in South Vietnam. President Eisenhower, however, forbade any numbers that violated the ceilings on manpower set by the Geneva Accords.[71]

While the President approved Radford's plan, there had been significant opposition to it within both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military chain of command in the Pacific. Earlier, Admiral Arleigh Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, as the executive agent for the Pacific area sent a classified message containing the details of the Radford plan to Admiral Felix B. Stump, the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC).[72] Admiral Stump found several shortcomings in the plan. First, he doubted whether the South Vietnamese could make an effective defense in the Da Nang area unless allied reinforcements arrived within a week. Like President Eisenhower and CIA Director Dulles, he mentioned the possibility of a flanking attack by the North Vietnamese through Laos, although this would not be likely until autumn because of the rainy season west of the mountains. Moreover, he questioned whether the SEATO allies could provide a total of one division among them and then only if the United States led by example. Admiral Stump also believed that US air and naval support by itself was not sufficient to offset the manpower advantage that lay with the North Vietnamese Army. Finally, Admiral Stump suggested an alternative strategy by proposing that US Marines make an amphibious assault north of the 17th Parallel at Vinh and "seal off the enemy forces to the south and prepare for further offensive to the north to seize and occupy North Vietnam." He estimated that it would require two US divisions to initiate the operation in the north and that additional forces might be required to exploit the situation. While perhaps not written tongue in cheek, Admiral Stump stated that he concurred in Admiral Radford's plan with the exception of the above comments.[73]

The Pacific commander was not the only one unhappy with the proposed plan. Admiral Stump had sent a copy of the JCS concept together with his remarks to Lieutenant General Samuel T. "Hanging Sam" Williams, the Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group in Vietnam, who was in the CINCPAC chain of command relative to military matters.[74] General Williams, who had assumed command of the advisory group in October 1955, had many of the same reservations as Admiral Stump, as well as some of his own. In his initial reaction, General Williams mentioned that he doubted the premise that the Chinese would not intervene. He believed that "ChiCom [Chinese Communist] volunteers will march at least in Vietminh uniform, at first sign of American intervention to secure North Vietnam while Viet Minh invaded south."[75] In his more extended commentary, while no longer referring to possible Chinese intervention, he, like Admiral Stump, worried about the strength of the North Vietnamese Army in comparison to the South Vietnamese forces. General Williams expressed even more concern than the Pacific commander about the possibility that the North Vietnamese would outflank the South Vietnamese defenses by moving through Laos. Again like Admiral Stump, he believed that the United States would have to commit much larger ground forces to the

conflict. He ended his message by declaring, "the analysis of the problem presented by the JCS reemphasizes to me the importance of building in South Vietnam an indigenous ground force stronger than now contemplated."[76]

Admiral Radford did not take kindly to criticism. In a personal letter to Admiral Stump, he complained that General Taylor, the Army Chief of Staff, during discussions by the Joint Chiefs of Staff had suggested that the three RCTs in his plan would require in support "a division slice of 40,000 men." According to Admiral Radford, "this type of thinking" was "to be avoided." He insisted that his plan was "to be implemented on a very austere basis." The JCS Chairman dismissed the MAAG commander's criticisms, stating, "if this really represents his considered thinking on the military aspects of this area, I have grave doubts as to his ability and as to his being a proper representative in this important area." Admiral Radford declared that he had conferred with General Williams' predecessor, Lieutenant General John W. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, "who concurs in the concept set forth in the plan."[77]

In his letter to Admiral Stump, the Chairman did not mention Stump's criticisms except to note that he had seen the comments and a draft CINCPAC plan. The Chairman stated that there were "basic differences" between the two concepts, "which I am sure you will recognize." Since a new planning directive would overtake the CINCPAC plan, he implied that Admiral Stump would want to make some changes.[78]

Although the revised CINCPAC plan followed the Radford outline closely, this did not end internal misgivings among the US military. According to historian Ronald Spector, the US Army staff still had serious reservations. Like General Williams, they believed that China would very likely intervene with its troops in any war that involved the United States and North Vietnam. They also agreed with General Williams that the North Vietnamese would most likely launch any invasion of South Vietnam through Cambodia and Laos as well as directly across the DMZ. Moreover, according to the Army planners, the CINCPAC plan overestimated the quality of not only the South Vietnamese Army but also of US naval and air capabilities, while giving short shrift to the required numbers of American ground forces.[79]

Despite these differences, for the time being the Radford outline remained the basic concept to counter any North Vietnamese armed incursion into the south. In their formal directive to Admiral Stump for the drawing up of the CINCPAC plan in July 1956, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stressed "the importance they attached to primary reliance on indigenous ground forces and the necessity of prompt arrival of US supporting forces."[80]

In the interim, the Eisenhower administration continued the review of its policy in Southeast Asia. The NSC Planning Board circulated a draft of the revised policy statement to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their review. The Joint Chiefs had only one major change to the document relating to "overt communist aggression." They recommended that the administration obtain "advance Congressional authority for the employment of US forces against such aggression rather than waiting until the aggression actually occurred." The National Security Council rejected this suggestion and, on 30 August 1956, adopted the original draft statement. On 5 September, President Eisenhower approved the policy statement as NSC 5612/1.[81]

Like the previous policy statements, this document reaffirmed US support to South Vietnam. In contrast to the previous iterations, this declaration limited itself to Southeast Asia rather than to the entire Far East area. The National Security Council at this time articulated a version of the "Domino Theory," declaring "the loss to Communist control of any single free country would encourage tendencies toward accommodation by the rest."[82] The NSC reaffirmed its support of South Vietnam and endorsed Diem's refusal to take part in unification elections until such elections could be held unhampered in both the north and the south. Relative to North Vietnam, the National Security Council refused to recognize the "Viet Minh" as "constituting a legitimate government" and declared that it was US policy to deter North Vietnam "from attacking or subverting Free Viet Nam or Laos."[83]

The Eisenhower administration issued two other policy statements relative to Southeast Asia, first in April 1958 and then two years later in July 1960. For the most part, the 1958 document was a restatement of the one in 1956, with one significant addition. In the section relating to the US military role, the new version read that the United States would "maintain striking forces adequate to counter aggression in Southeast Asia with the capabilities described in current basic national security policy."[84] What was not mentioned was that "current basic national security policy" had changed from the authority cited in the 1956 statement. As described earlier, in June 1957 President Eisenhower had approved a new Basic National Security Policy document that emphasized the use of nuclear weapons even in local wars.[85]

The 1960 statement, like the one for 1958, also reiterated much of the language of the previous ones, but again with significant differences. In the section on the communist threat, the National Security Council noted that both Laos and South Vietnam encountered increased "militant subversion" in contrast to most countries in Southeast Asia. The Council also added a new paragraph in the section on "Regional Courses of Action" urging that the United States "exercise caution to ensure" that it not be too closely identified with a particular regime or individual.[86] This addition was probably influenced by a JCS study that suggested that US policy had often developed around "the person of the head of the government rather than the government itself." The study pointedly mentioned Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam and observed, "these men have come to power as a result of armed conflict, are firmly entrenched . . . [and] limit US maneuverability" because of identification of them with American policy." The study concluded that the United States should avoid such "personal commitments" in the future.[87]

While the 1960 text retained the same words as the 1958 section on the use of American forces, including the phrase "current basic national security policy," the President had approved in the interim another Basic National Security Policy statement. The new BNSP document placed less emphasis on the employment of nuclear weapons and stated that new plans "should contemplate situations" where such weapons would not be "militarily necessary nor appropriate."[88] This would be the last formal statement on "Mainland Southeast Asia" during the Eisenhower administration.

The Beginnings of a New War

As the authors of the National Security Council's 1960 statement on Southeast Asia had observed, communist insurgents in Vietnam—now called the "Viet Cong"—had shown a new militancy. While the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north continued to call for the reunification of the two Vietnams, it had done little through 1956 to support its partisans in South Vietnam. In June 1956 the northern leadership indicated that they were about to alter this passive policy. Prodded by members in South Vietnam, especially Le Duan, who headed the Vietnamese Communists' Regional Committee for the South, the Politburo of the Vietnamese Communist Party that month issued a proclamation entitled "The Situation and Missions of the Party in the South." According to this party document, "South Vietnam had become a virtual colony of the United States" and "it was necessary to consider the adoption of a policy of armed struggle for self-defense."[89]

Despite its belligerent tone, the statement also contained a cautionary clause that called for the party to continue for the time being a "strategy of political struggle." Ho Chi Minh contributed to the mixed messages emanating from North Vietnam, declaring in July 1956 that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam would "pursue national unification by peaceful means through the mechanism of the Geneva Accords." About the same time, Le Duan in a seminal pamphlet entitled *The Path of Revolution in the South* observed that "the Vietnamese revolution faced two major tasks, building socialism in the north and liberating the south." He argued that the North Vietnamese policy of focusing on the political struggle "conformed to the existing realities, in light of the current weakness of the party apparatus in South Vietnam." As historian William J. Duiker, however, concluded, Le Duan used the political struggle as a possible subterfuge to emphasize "the need for a more vigorous approach to the revolution in the south." As part of this "more vigorous approach," the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party in December 1956 called for "a program of limited terror" in the south to protect the revolutionary apparatus there. In early 1957 Le Duan became Acting Secretary General of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.[90]

Le Duan's appointment to this influential position in the government notwithstanding, the support from the north to their Communist compatriots in the south through 1958 was more rhetoric than substance. Outside of some minor infiltration, resupply, and moral encouragement, the North Vietnamese did very little to help the Viet Cong in their struggle against President Diem. In a dispute among the leadership of the North Vietnamese government, those who favored concentrating on building a socialist state in the north had the upper hand over the proponents led by Le Duan who wanted to complete the "Vietnam Revolution" in the south. In his analysis of the differences between the two groups, William Duiker suggests that the debate between the two schools in the North Vietnamese hierarchy was one more of timing rather than of goals: "All—or almost all—Party leaders agreed that armed struggle might be needed and would be fully justified if all other avenues had failed."[91]

By the beginning of 1959 the North Vietnamese realized that the Communist movement in the south was in dire straits. Between 1957 and 1959, President's Diem's anti-terror campaign had eliminated more than 2,000 suspected Viet Cong, convicted by roving tribunals.[92] A Communist internal document related that "doubt in our struggle method . . . [was] now revived. People said that the struggles for 'democratic and civil rights only lead to the prisons and to the tombs,' and that 'such struggle will end with everyone's death.'"[93] One Vietnamese historian called this period "the darkest hour" for the southern Communist forces.[94]

In mid-January 1959, after returning from a secret inspection trip to South Vietnam, Le Duan reported his findings to the North Vietnamese Politburo confirming the perilous situation in South Vietnam. Shortly afterward, the Central Committee of the Communist Party held its Fifteenth Plenum. At the plenum, Le Duan advocated a policy of armed struggle "to take a giant step toward . . . reunification."[95] After a heated debate between the "hawks" who wanted to intensify communist resistance in the south and those who believed in a more cautious approach, the delegates finally agreed to a compromise solution. In Resolution Fifteen, the Plenum declared "the fundamental path of development for the revolution in South Vietnam is that of violent struggle." At the same time, however, the delegates indicated that there was still hope that these ends could be obtained through "political strength as the main factor, in combination with military strength to a greater or lesser degree depending on the situation."[96] Robert S. McNamara, who would become Secretary of Defense under President Kennedy, observed in 1999, "In any case, Resolution 15 was a watershed, after which armed struggle—violent revolution, ultimately supplied and even fought by northerners, as well as southerners—would become the rule rather than the exception."[97]

While Resolution Fifteen was not approved by the Central Committee until May 1959, its effects were soon to be felt. In that same month the North Vietnamese established Group 559, whose responsibility was the establishment of the Trung Son Route, better known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, in Laos for the movement of men and supplies from the north to the south.[98]

As the South Vietnamese and the American military advisory group soon discovered, the southern Communists once thought to be on the ropes were again a threat to the stability of the Diem regime. In March 1960 US Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow, who had replaced G. Frederick Reinhardt in the spring of 1957, notified Washington that the security situation in South Vietnam had deteriorated badly since August 1959. He observed that since then "the monthly rate of assassinations rose substantially," together with more aggressive tactics on the part of the Communist partisans. These included ambushes against local security forces and against regular Republic of Vietnam Army (ARVN) troops. According to available intelligence sources, the "VC armed cadre" in the southwest of the country numbered about 3,000, almost double their strength of the previous September.[99]

The apogee of the communist offensive occurred on the eve of the Tet lunar holiday in January 1960, when a force of about 300 Viet Cong (VC) overran an ARVN regimental

command post near the provincial capital of Tay Ninh and close to the border with Cambodia. According to US military sources in Vietnam, the attackers employed small arms, explosive charges, and fire bombs, inflicting over seventy casualties among the defenders. After destroying five buildings, the Viet Cong apparently escaped unscathed.[100] In his March message, Ambassador Durbrow wrote that even President Diem, who in December was still stating that the situation "was continuing to improve . . . [was] now showing a reassuring awareness of the gravity of the situation."[101]

President Diem was not the only one who had been confident of success against the communist forces in the south the previous year but now was having second thoughts. In July 1959 General Williams, the Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group in Vietnam, testified on progress before a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee headed by Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana. General Williams told the subcommittee that he wanted the Vietnamese to "learn what we are trying to teach . . . so we can get out and go home." Understandably then, in the spring of 1960 Senator Mansfield was particularly disturbed to read a news report that the administration planned to double the size of the MAAG with the addition of 350 more men.[102]

Replying to a question from Senator Mansfield about the reported expansion, General Williams attempted to blur the issue by stating that the 350 additional men were not really reinforcements but former personnel of the Temporary Equipment and Recovery Mission (TERM), which had been deactivated. This mission had been established in the spring of 1956 with the departure of the French to assist the Vietnamese in inventorying, storing, and repairing the extensive military equipment the United States had shipped to both the French and Vietnamese forces. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense argued that the terms of the Geneva Accord would permit the replacement of departing French advisory personnel with American advisors, the Eisenhower administration decided to use TERM as a temporary expedient. The International Control Commission established by the Geneva Conference neither approved nor disapproved of the organization.[103]

The MAAG commander admitted that TERM had been a "subterfuge" to provide the Vietnamese with logistic advisors. With the addition of the former TERM personnel, the general maintained that the MAAG advisory strength would be "considerably lower than total 850 US and French MAAG at time of Geneva Accords." General Williams mentioned in passing that because of the current increase in Viet Cong activities, "a small number of US experts in guerrilla warfare" had been brought in on a temporary duty status "as substitutes for regular advisors and are within previous overall strength." What he did not mention was that in February the South Vietnamese government had formally notified the International Control Commission that it had asked the United States to expand its MAAG to 685 personnel, which the Commission approved in April. This was seven billets less than the total of the advisory group with the TERM personnel. General Williams ended his letter in a strongly confident tone, stating that it continued to be his opinion that the "MAAG should and can work itself out of a job." He maintained that a 15 percent reduction could actually begin in June 1961, followed by annual 20 percent reductions.[104]

Despite the optimism voiced by General Williams, there was mounting concern in Washington about the growing strength of the communist forces in the south. General Lyman Lemnitzer, the Army Chief of Staff, addressed a memo on 24 March 1960 to his fellow Joint Chiefs declaring that the "critical situation" in South Vietnam required definite action. While agreeing with Admiral Harry D. Felt, CINCPAC, who had relieved Admiral Stump in 1958, that regular South Vietnamese forces could develop an anti-guerrilla capability, General Lemnitzer believed that additional support in specialized fields was warranted. He stated that the United States could now introduce these specialists overtly with the absorption of the TERM organization by the MAAG. He offered to send to South Vietnam US Army Special Forces mobile training teams that would include psychological operations advisors, communications specialists, civil affairs advisors, and a counterintelligence and combat intelligence training team with Vietnamese language capability.[105]

On 30 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the proposal and asked Admiral Felt for his views and any other manpower requirements. Admiral Felt requested and received three Special Forces detachments of ten men each as well as three intelligence officers. These 33 soldiers together with psychological warfare specialists from the Pacific Command were to develop a counterinsurgency program to train South Vietnamese Ranger cadres.[106] In addition, since January the Eisenhower administration had authorized the assignment of US advisors to the South Vietnamese Army and Marine Corps down to the battalion level.

Even with the increased American assistance, the South Vietnamese failed to improve conditions and bring about much-needed internal reforms. The South Vietnamese government was responsible itself for much of the deterioration of the situation in the country. According to US intelligence sources, President Diem retained the respect of some of the populace because of his dedication to Vietnamese nationalism, but to most South Vietnamese he remained an "austere and remote figure."[107] While retaining the outward vestiges of representative government, the regime was basically authoritarian and controlled by Diem's cadre and cell-structured Can Lo Party. President Diem and a small family circle, including his two brothers, Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can, retained the reins of real power in both the government and the party. The president delegated to Mr. Can, described by US officials as a "withdrawn eccentric feared by most Vietnamese," the administration of the north, which Can ruled from his headquarters in the former imperial capital of Hue. Similarly, President Diem allowed his brother Nhu and his wife Madame Nhu a free hand in the south and a major role in foreign affairs.[108]

According to US officials in Vietnam, the tightly controlled party and government apparatus was rife with corruption and nepotism. President Diem and his brothers showed partiality to fellow minority Catholics, especially those who had moved south from North Vietnam after 1954, over Buddhists, the religious majority in the two Vietnams. The South Vietnamese government had failed to make any meaningful land reform after taking power and had antagonized southern farmers even further by relocating many of the refugees from North Vietnam in some of the prime agricultural areas in the south. In the initial campaigns against the sects and local communist forces

in South Vietnam after 1954, the Diem regime further alienated local farmers by its hard-nosed tactics and by revoking the Communist regulations limiting the power of absentee landowners.[109]

By early 1960, to counteract communist influence in the countryside and to alleviate the situation for the Vietnamese peasant population, the government initiated the ill-fated *agroville* program. The idea was to relocate independent landless farming families into so-called "prosperity and density centers" where they could be protected and separated from the communist guerrillas. From the outset, this plan had problems. The Viet Cong obviously perceived these centers as a threat to their connections with the local population and immediately targeted them for attack. On its part, the Diem government's protection of the agrovilles was haphazard at best. Moreover, the government authorities did little to attract people into the centers and much to antagonize them. They often placed the centers in undesirable sites and also failed to provide fair compensation to the relocated farmers for their old lands. Hampered by mismanagement and harassed by the communist guerrillas, the agroville experiment was short lived, and by the end of the year the Vietnamese government allowed the program to lapse.[110]

Some Divergences

In actuality, there had been significant differences between President Diem and the Americans in Vietnam for some time, especially with the Embassy and to a lesser degree with the MAAG mission. These differences related to the size and organization of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (RVNAF) and paramilitary groups and further compounded by concern over the insularity of the Diem government. At the beginning of 1960 the RVNAF numbered about 45,000 men, with the bulk in the Vietnamese Army (ARVN). The ARVN was organized into three corps, seven divisions, and one airborne brigade, supplemented by a three-battalion marine corps and a token air force and navy. In addition, the South Vietnamese had approximately 50,000 men in the Civil Guard responsible for interior security on the provincial level and another 35,000 in the ill-organized and ill-trained Self-Defense Corps. Both militia groups were under the Interior Minister rather than the Defense Minister.[111]

In mid-January 1959, stating that his country was under siege, President Diem attempted to convince both Ambassador Durbrow and General Williams to support an increase in his armed forces and in the Civil Guard. The Civil Guard consisted of many Catholics from the north, with personal loyalties to the President and to the Can Lo Party.[112] Suspicious that Mr. Diem was motivated in part to avoid reforms and to increase his personal control, both the Ambassador and the MAAG chief had opposed these moves. In a memorandum to Ambassador Durbrow on 2 February 1960, General Williams argued that the number of ARVN troops assigned to pacification efforts in the countryside together with the Civil Guard were "more than ample to handle the Viet Cong."[113] About ten days later Ambassador Durbrow met with President Diem, who renewed

his request that the United States support a 20,000-man increase in the RVNAF, from 150,000 to 170,000, which would include 10,000 volunteer "commandos" or "rangers." Ambassador Durbrow repeated General Williams' objections and tried unsuccessfully to convince Mr. Diem that the need was not for expansion, but for better trained forces.[114]

Declining to take advice from the Ambassador and the MAAG chief, President Diem decided to take steps on his own to create his ranger force. On 15 February 1960, three days after his meeting with the Ambassador and without notifying either Mr. Durbrow or General Williams, President Diem directed all division and military region commanders to form a total of 50 ranger companies of 131 men each by the end of March. These companies were to consist of volunteers from the Army, the reserves, and the Civil Guard. President Diem told an American visitor that "20,000 rangers were needed above and beyond the regular army" to deal with the danger. He observed that if funds were not available to support that number he would start with half that number. When General Williams heard about Diem's action, he declared that the entire concept was "hasty, ill-considered, and destructive to overall instruments of power." He further stated that to accomplish the mission the Vietnamese would have to dismantle three or four regular Army companies to form one of the new ranger companies.[115] In a message to the State Department, Ambassador Durbrow complained that President Diem was "moving in all directions at once" without any real plan to meet the "deteriorating internal situation."[116]

While generally agreeing with the Ambassador, the MAAG chief decided that the best way to handle the ranger problem was "to get the figure of 10,000 reduced." General Williams finally convinced President Diem to begin the program with 5,000 men on a "trial and error basis."[117] In this manner, General Williams hoped to maintain the MAAG's influence and to keep the new ranger formations as part of the regular South Vietnamese Army. While believing what was needed was a "revitalized Civil Guard" and not specialized units, the MAAG chief revised his opinion and supported Diem's request for more troops.[118]

In contrast, Ambassador Durbrow still maintained his opposition to any increase in the Vietnamese armed forces. In a message to Washington in August 1960, he observed that General Williams supported a 20,000-man increase in order to permit continuing rotation of combat units without weakening the units responsible for the defense of the borders against a conventional attack. Ambassador Durbrow believed that while the likelihood of such an attack was "fairly remote," guerrilla war was a present fact, and that President Diem would use the increase of forces to mask the need for reform of both the government and the armed forces. He argued that what was needed was a better trained Civil Guard and for the Diem government to take the political and psychological actions necessary to win the loyalty of the people.[119]

The split between the Ambassador and the US military in Vietnam continued even when at the end of the month Lieutenant General Lionel G. McGarr relieved General Williams and took over the Vietnam MAAG. He too was an advocate of an emphasis upon fundamental infantry individual and small-unit combat training. Like his predecessor,

General McGarr also supported the 20,000 man increase in order for the Vietnamese Army to continue the rotation of regular units between combat operations and training. Moreover, while recognizing the present ineffectiveness of the hybrid ranger units, General McGarr worked to improve their training and expand the program.[120]

Despite his support of an expanded Vietnamese military, which put him at odds with the Ambassador, General McGarr wanted to take the MAAG in a different direction than his predecessor. Prior to his coming to Vietnam, General McGarr had served as the Commandant of the US Army Command and General Staff College. In that role he had overseen counterinsurgency studies and, in contrast to General Williams, believed guerrilla warfare to be a singular type of warfare that required its own doctrine and tactics. General McGarr recognized the need to protect the country against a North Vietnamese invasion but viewed the insurgency as "the most immediate danger." To a much greater extent than General Williams, he wanted to "redirect . . . training and operations emphasis [in Vietnam] towards a greatly improved counter-guerrilla posture."[121]

Another Look at Counterinsurgency

General McGarr's appointment and emphasis upon counterinsurgency reflected the new interest in the antiguerrilla war in Washington in the Defense establishment. As noted in a later US Army study of the US advisory experience, General Lemnitzer's memorandum of 24 March 1960 and the resulting JCS decision at the end of the month to send US Special Forces to Vietnam reversed past policy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff now wanted the "Vietnamese Army [to] develop a counter-insurgency capability over and above that supplied by the territorials."[122] Moreover, civilian officials in the Department of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency advocated a rethinking of the Vietnam antiguerrilla war.[123]

This new impetus resulted in a flurry of counterinsurgency planning from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the Pacific Command, to Vietnam. At the behest of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Harry D. Felt called a conference in April 1960 in Okinawa to study the security situation and problems in both Vietnam and Laos. With representatives from both the MAAG in Vietnam and the Programs Evaluation Group, its counterpart in Laos, in attendance, the conferees together with the Pacific Command headquarters staff produced a planning document entitled "Counter-Insurgency Operations in South Vietnam and Laos." Based upon supposed lessons learned in the recent insurgencies in Malaya and the Philippines, the authors of the plan emphasized the need for centralization of the counterguerrilla campaign. They argued that a coordinated national effort that incorporated military, psychological, and socioeconomic measures was necessary to gain the confidence of the population and defeat the insurgency. In forwarding the plan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Felt declared that "maintenance of internal security is not a purely military job."[124] In their concurrence with the CINCPAC recommendations on 6 June, the Joint Chiefs

of Staff urged the Secretary of Defense to ensure that "the US Government provide sufficient material and budgetary support to insure the successful accomplishment of these emergency campaigns."[125]

Vietnam counterinsurgency planning would go through more convolutions in the following months. Following up on the initial effort at the end of June, Admiral Felt's headquarters produced an outline plan relating solely to Vietnam. In his covering letter, the admiral recommended that the document be forwarded to the country team in Vietnam for further amplification and then reviewed again in Washington.[126] After studying the plan for two months, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval to the Secretary of Defense, who then forwarded the plan to the State Department for its concurrence.[127] Finally on 6 October, the Defense and State Departments agreed to send a joint message directing Ambassador Durbrow, General McGarr, and the rest of the country team in Saigon to develop "an overall plan to support the Diem government in [a] 'national emergency effort' to defeat the Viet Cong and restore order and stability to the country." After the completion of the draft plan, it was to be submitted once more to Washington for review.[128] It would not be until January 1961 that the Ambassador would be prepared to forward the country team plan.

The Failed Coup

In the meantime, the struggle against the Viet Cong continued to go badly for the South Vietnamese, and unhappiness with the Diem regime grew in both the civil society and in the armed forces. According to a United States Intelligence Estimate in August 1960, "developments . . . over the last six months indicate a trend adverse to the stability and effectiveness of President Diem's government." The authors of the report observed the lack of support of the government "among the people in the countryside" because of the "ineptitude and arrogance" of many local officials and harsh measures in the implementation of the agroville program. Moreover, the US intelligence analysts pointed to increased "urgent and articulate" criticism aimed largely against the Can Lao Party and Diem's inner circle "which had been prevalent for some time among intellectuals and the elite" spreading among government officials in both the civilian and military bureaucracies. The analysts suggested that this growing dissent had encouraged the North Vietnamese to increase their support of the Viet Cong, who in turn had mounted an increasingly effective guerrilla campaign against the government. The authors of the intelligence estimate warned that these trends could bring about "the collapse of Diem's regime." While not anticipating such dire results in the near future, they wrote that there was a possibility "during the period of this estimate that the government will lose control over much of the countryside and a political crisis will ensue."[129]

The crisis was not long in coming. In the early morning hours of 11 November, Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi, the commander of the South Vietnamese elite army airborne group, led three battalions of his paratroopers and two companies of Vietnamese marines

in an aborted coup. Surrounding the Presidential Palace in Saigon, the rebels called for a reform government. President Diem, his brother Nhu, and Nhu's wife, the notorious Madame Nhu, huddled in a basement of the palace but were able to retain communication with military forces not sympathetic to the rebels. Instead of moving against the palace when they had the chance, the coup leaders, Colonel Thi and Lieutenant Colonel Vuong Van Dong, attempted to negotiate with President Diem and also asked American Ambassador Durbrow to use his good offices to assist them. Colonel Thi and Lieutenant Colonel Dong were well-regarded officers and had played a large role in winning the battle against the sects in the spring of 1955. Lieutenant Colonel Dong later told an American reporter that the "objective had simply been to force Diem to change," not to overthrow the president.[130]

Both Ambassador Durbrow and General McGarr attempted not to take sides. According to the lieutenant colonel, Ambassador Durbrow told him, "We support this government until it fails."[131] Later, the Ambassador explained that during the coup attempt "we did all in our power to prevent bloodshed and urge rebels when they had the power to oust Diem that he should be given an active role in any government established."[132] According to Air Force Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale, a careful observer of events in Vietnam and a former advisor to Diem, General McGarr "came through this test . . . very well" by providing prudent advice to both the rebels and the loyalists.[133]

In the interim, President Diem and Ngo Pinh Nhu continued the pretense of negotiating with the rebels, going so far as to agree to a series of reforms. These included the addition of more independent non-Communist political figures into the government, freedom of the press, an unhampered electoral process, and a reinvigorated campaign against the Viet Cong. President Diem used the negotiation process as a subterfuge to provide time for the movement of loyalist troops supported by armored units into the capital. After a brief bloody skirmish, the outnumbered and outgunned paratroopers and marines surrendered and their leaders took refuge in Cambodia. Within thirty–six hours the entire affair was over with President Diem still in power and repudiating his agreement with the would-be coup makers.[134]

Despite certain opera bouffe aspects of the coup, it revealed severe schisms not only among the Vietnamese but also between the US Embassy in Saigon and the Diem government. *Time* magazine correspondent Stanley Karnow remembered that a few days after the coup he interviewed Diem's brother Nhu in the latter's office. According to Mr. Karnow, an agitated Nhu, obviously upset with Ambassador Durbrow, declared that "the regime's enemies were 'not only Communists, but foreigners who claim to be our friend.'"[135] A few weeks after the event Ambassador Durbrow in a message to the State Department referred to President Diem telling visitors that he believed "some Americans may have backed coup."[136] In an appraisal of the situation in a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Gates, General Lansdale wrote that he doubted that after the coup Ambassador Durbrow "has any personal stature remaining" with President Diem and suggested that it might "be useful to get Durbrow out of Saigon."[137] On 4 December

1960 Ambassador Durbrow ended a long message to the State Department with the statement, "we may well be forced, in the not too distant future, to undertake a difficult task of identifying and supporting alternate leadership."[138]

The End of the Year and the Beginning of the New

Despite the doubts that the US Mission in Vietnam and the Diem regime had about one another after the coup, they continued to maintain at least a façade of working together. In December, Diem issued a presidential decree placing the Civil Guard under the Ministry of Defense, a reform pushed by the MAAG but with lukewarm support from the Ambassador. On the American side, on the urging of Ambassador Durbrow, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Defense Department approved the sending of eleven H-34 helicopters to the Vietnamese armed forces and also expedited the shipment of more modern communication equipment. Finally, Ambassador Durbrow withdrew his objection to the 20,000-man increase in Saigon's forces.[139]

Still the relationship between President Diem and the Ambassador remained cool. Ambassador Durbrow reported that in a meeting with the South Vietnamese president on 23 December 1960 that lasted more than an hour, he found Diem pleasant but "basically negative." The Ambassador concluded in his report that he received the impression that President Diem was reluctant "to adopt reforms and is still basically thinking in terms of force to save the day."[140] In its response, the State Department told Durbrow that it believed that the Embassy had pushed as far as possible for "liberalization."[141]

On 4 January 1961 the Ambassador forwarded the "Country Team's Basic Counterinsurgency Plan for Viet-Nam" to Washington for approval. The authors of the team plan were a composite committee from both the MAAG and Embassy staff with Joseph A. Mendenhall, the counselor of the Embassy for political affairs, as the chairman. In his covering letter, Ambassador Durbrow explained that "because of the importance of military affairs in the development of the plan, MAAG assumed the major burden in its preparation." He related that the drafting committee relied on the outline plan provided by CINCPAC for its military recommendations but also included "requirements for coordinated and supporting action in the economic and psychological fields."[142]

The planners provided three objectives for the Vietnamese government: to defeat the guerrillas and still retain the ability to counter conventional attacks from within or outside its borders; to establish political stability; and to improve the standard of living and unify the population. While describing the political and economic shortcomings of the Diem regime, they stressed in the plan that "the most vital consideration of US policy in Viet-Nam is the eradication of insurgency in the Republic of Viet-Nam." In their portrayal of the existing situation, the authors of the plan observed that the Viet Cong had grown by three-fold in 1960, from an estimated strength of 3,500 in January to about 10,000 at the end of the year. The most important security tasks were now to institute centralized and coordinated control of military operations and planning, to develop

intelligence and communications, and to establish an adequate border and coastal patrol system. Moreover, the plan contained a clause that included the 20,000-man increase for the South Vietnamese armed forces.[143] President Diem had already accepted some of the recommendations, including the creation of a national internal security council. In his cover letter, Ambassador Durbrow still maintained some reservations about the extent of the enlargement of the armed forces, but he acknowledged that it was "probably now justified."[144] Security was to have priority over reform.

In Washington, however, a crisis in Laos overshadowed the concern with the counterinsurgency situation in Vietnam. In December 1960 the Laotian right-wing forces headed by General Phoumi Nasavan seized Vietianne, the capital, and drove the neutralist prime minister, Souvanna Phouma, into exile in Cambodia. General Phoumi, with the concurrence of the Lao National Assembly, formed a new government with Prince Boun Oum as a figurehead prime minister and himself as the defense minister and deputy prime minister. The United States recognized the new government, but the Soviet Union continued to recognize Souvanna Phouma, who had refused to resign as head of government. Souvanna's military forces, commanded by Kong Le, retreated to the north to join the communist Pathet Lao in northern Laos. In mid-January Kong Le and the Pathet Lao, reinforced by North Vietnamese cadres, seized the strategic Plain of Jars. In the meantime, Soviet aircraft continued to deliver military supplies including weapons and ammunition to the communist and neutral forces.[145]

The Laotian crisis presented a dilemma for the Eisenhower administration. Despite some previous contingency planning for Laos, General Lemnitzer, now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the National Security Council that US forces would "hold the two main cities and leave to the Laotians the protection of the countryside." On 5 January 1961 the Chairman again explained the difficulty of conducting operations in the isolated country, which would result in "wretched logistics and communications." The President himself told the NSC, "Even now we do not know what we could do about Laos because of the attitude of our allies."[146] In their famous meeting on 19 January, President Eisenhower advised his successor John F. Kennedy that "Laos was the key to the entire area of Southeast Asia . . . [and] if we permitted Laos to fall, then we would have to write off all the area."[147] Ironically, President Eisenhower mentioned Vietnam only in passing, but it was Vietnam that President Kennedy was to consider the key to Southeast Asia.

2

The Kennedy Administration and Crisis Management: Vietnam and Laos, January–March 1961

A New Administration

On 20 January 1961 when John F. Kennedy took the oath of office as President of the United States, the situation in Vietnam was only one of several foreign policy problems that challenged the new administration. In fact, Vietnam ranked in priority behind Castro in Cuba, a possible confrontation with the Soviet Union over the Berlin question, and the crisis in Laos. Still, in the words of his inaugural address, the new President pledged that the United States would "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty."[1]

These words related in part to President Kennedy's long-standing interest in the threat posed by Communist insurgent movements. Nikita S. Khrushchev, Chairman of the Soviet Union's Council of Ministers, reinforced this concern in a speech in early January when he declared that in "wars of liberation" against colonial powers the Soviet Union would "fully and unreservedly support such just wars and march in the van of the peoples fighting wars of liberation."[2] President Kennedy viewed this statement as meaning that the Russians would avoid direct confrontation with the United States while supporting Communists all over the world who were striking at the foundations of newly independent and developing nations. He believed that the way to combat such

tactics was to increase limited war capabilities and to develop special skills in guerrilla warfare. From the start of his administration, the President took a personal interest in the training of US Special Forces and pressed the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to expand and refine antiguerrilla training.[3]

President Kennedy brought into office a strong commitment to activism in foreign relations and in national security affairs. He had serious doubts about what he considered the passivity of the preceding administration and wanted to break away from the Eisenhower and Dulles doctrine of massive retaliation for the flexible response strategy advocated by former Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell Taylor. He looked for a strong Secretary of Defense who was willing to make broad changes and not afraid of innovation. Impressed by Eisenhower's incumbent in the position, Thomas S. Gates, President Kennedy momentarily toyed with the idea of retaining him until dissuaded by members of his staff. Instead, the President selected Robert S. McNamara, the president of the Ford Motor Company, who had come highly recommended with a reputation as a dynamic and brilliant executive.[4]

The McNamara influence was immediately felt in the Defense Department. According to one Defense analyst, Secretary McNamara brought about "not just a reorganization, but a revolution" in the running of the Department.[5] He introduced systems analysis, employing quantitative techniques that included a new budgetary process called planning-programming-budgeting system (PPBS). Based on a five-year planning cycle, this system, according to Secretary McNamara, provided for "long-term cost and effectiveness comparisons across service lines for weapons systems, force structures and strategies." He made no secret about his intention of "shaking things up" and that "big decisions would be made on the basis of study and analysis" rather than "allocating blocs of funds to the various services and letting them use the money as they saw fit."[6] In a perceptive self-analysis, the former Secretary of Defense thirty some years later wrote: "To this day, I see quantification as a language to add precision to reasoning about the world."[7]

The relationship between the Secretary and the Joint Chiefs of Staff was not a smooth one. According to a defense expert, Secretary McNamara believed the Joint Chiefs of Staff was only one of many sources of advice "available to him [and] to be used on his own terms." He wanted them to take into consideration economic as well as military factors in their advice and deliberations.[8]

In one of his first moves, the Secretary asked for a series of studies and papers, nicknamed "ninety-nine trombones," that "covered the entire range of the Defense Department's activities, including the threats we faced, the force structure necessary to counter them, the major weapons systems required, and an evaluation of our nuclear strike plan."[9] He often assigned the Joint Chiefs of Staff various projects, that consisted of specific questions, "short deadlines, and had great potential implications for the budget."[10] Moreover, Secretary McNamara brooked little opposition and expected the Joint Chiefs of Staff to support his decisions, even if they opposed his rationale. A presidential advisor quoted one general officer declaring, "a Japanese general who got a query like

this . . . would commit hara-kiri."[11] Much of the military officer establishment, including several of the Chiefs, perceived the Secretary's introduction of social science and cost saving techniques as a substitute for "military experience and transferring the making of strategy from the military to inexperienced civilians."[12]

The Defense Department was not the only major government agency undergoing significant change. Influenced by reforms suggested by a congressional subcommittee headed by Senator Henry M. Jackson, the Kennedy administration prepared to change the workings of the National Security Council. According to Arthur M. Schlesinger, an historian and political activist who joined the administration as a presidential advisor, the newly elected President "praised the Jackson study and . . . hoped to use the NSC and its machinery 'more flexibly than in the past.'"[13] Mr. Schlesinger recalled that McGeorge Bundy, former Harvard dean who became the White House Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, after the inauguration "promptly slaughtered committees right and left and collapsed what was left of the inherited apparatus into a compact and flexible National Security Council Staff."[14] He abolished the Operations Coordination Board (OCB) and curbed the powers of the Planning Board. Roger Hilsman, a former State Department official, related that "over forty-five interdepartmental committees died with the OCB." According to Mr. Hilsman, the NSC itself met only sixteen times during the first six months of the administration.[15]

The Lansdale Report and the Counterinsurgency Plan

Vietnam was to be the subject of one of the first meetings of the National Security Council. Two reports relative to that war-torn nation awaited action on the part of the new administration. The first was the Counterinsurgency Plan forwarded by the Vietnam country team, and the second was a new report by Air Force Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale. Since 1957 General Lansdale, a former advisor to South Vietnam's President Diem, had served as Deputy Assistant for Special Operations to the Secretary of Defense. From this vantage point, he had often commented upon events in Vietnam.[16] In early January 1961 at the request of President Diem, General Lansdale made a two-week "consultation" visit to Vietnam. Returning to Washington, he submitted his disquieting analysis on 17 January to then Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates in the last days of the Eisenhower administration.[17]

In his report General Lansdale expressed alarm over the progress of the Viet Cong, who appeared to be closer to seizing control of South Vietnam than dispatches from Saigon indicated. He stated that South Vietnam could be kept free, but it would require a changed American attitude, hard work, patience, and a new Vietnamese spirit. General Lansdale believed that Ambassador Durbrow was out of favor with the Government of Vietnam (GVN). The general recommended that the United States should replace the Ambassador with someone who could influence Asians and make the country team function harmoniously. General Lansdale also suggested the replacement of the director of the

US Operations Mission in Vietnam (USOM) in Saigon, whom the Vietnamese viewed as "a nice man who has fallen asleep in our climate." Moreover, the general asserted that the US MAAG in Vietnam needed some revamping. He wanted US advisors to move out of "snug rear areas" and earn their way into positions of influence with the Vietnamese in the field.

General Lansdale still believed that Ngo Dinh Diem was the only Vietnamese with enough ability and determination to be an effective president. He granted that Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, had the strongest influence with the president, but he was not the only person to whom Mr. Diem would listen. According to General Lansdale, if the United States was unhappy with Mr. Nhu, it should "move someone of ours in close," who would have ready solutions to South Vietnam's problems and merit Diem's confidence. Stating that Vietnam was a "combat area of the cold war," he argued that the United States must back President Diem to the hilt until another strong executive could replace him legally: "We have to show him by deeds, not words alone, that we are his friend. This will make our influence effective again."[18]

According to General Lansdale, both Secretary Gates and Deputy Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ISA) James H. Douglas were impressed with his report. He noted that Deputy Secretary Douglas forwarded his account to "our top people at the White House and State Department" and that leading members of the new administration in Washington also had expressed interest in what he had to say.[19] Indeed, Walt W. Rostow, like Mr. Schlesinger an academic historian who was to become Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to President Kennedy, later related that General Andrew Goodpaster, the military aide to General Eisenhower, gave him a copy of Lansdale's report.[20]

The week after Kennedy's inauguration, General Lansdale received an invitation to discuss his views on Vietnam at a National Security Council meeting on 28 January 1961. McGeorge Bundy explained that the President invited General Lansdale because of his own "keen interest in General Lansdale's recent report and his awareness of the high importance of this country [Vietnam]."[21] At the meeting, which included Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Allen Dulles, and General Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Kennedy complimented General Lansdale on his report. Secretary Rusk then asked the President whether they should discuss the Lansdale Report first or take up the matter of the country team Counterinsurgency Plan.[22]

With general agreement to take up the Counterinsurgency Plan, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs J. Graham Parsons stated that although the document itself consisted of over 220 pages, its basic elements were contained in the 20-page summary. Essentially, the plan called for a 20,000-man increase in the South Vietnamese Army and the revamping and expansion of the Civil Guard. Further recommendations included provisions for a restructuring of the South Vietnamese government that would provide for certain reforms and more efficiency in the Diem regime. Assistant Secretary Parsons observed that his section would probably recommend approval of the general provisions of the plan.[23] In fact, Secretaries McNamara and Rusk had already "accepted

the desirability" of increased military assistance funds to support the increase in the South Vietnamese Army.[24]

After listening to Assistant Secretary Parsons' briefing, President Kennedy questioned the need for a 20,000-man increase in the South Vietnamese Army. He wanted to know why an army of 150,000 men could not contain a guerrilla force of only 10,000. Furthermore, the President wondered if the additional troops and militia would be of any use in the present counterinsurgency because of the time required for their recruiting and training. Finally, he asked "whether the situation was not basically one of politics and morale" rather than manpower.[25]

Mr. Parsons attempted to answer the President's observations and obvious reservations. According to the Assistant Secretary, "it was the judgment of the people out there that this plan would be useful . . . [and] that civil guard training was already under way." Moreover, he argued, the President should keep in mind that the South Vietnamese faced a two-pronged threat: the first was the conventional danger posed by the North Vietnamese regular army just across the Demilitarized Zone in the north, and the second was the irregular warfare mounted by the Viet Cong guerrillas, "which, of course, has elsewhere [in South Vietnam] pinned down a much greater number of men."[26]

The President was still not satisfied that the South Vietnamese were making the best use of their manpower resources. He wanted to know what measures the South Vietnamese had taken to mount guerrilla operations against the North Vietnamese in the "Viet Minh area [North Vietnam]."[27] Assistant Secretary Parsons responded that President Diem had demonstrated "small taste" for such a policy and offered little cooperation. The Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles, explained that four teams of eight men each had been organized and trained but, as an assistant stated, they were deployed instead "in the contaminated areas of South Viet-Nam."[28]

At this point General Lansdale entered the conversation, declaring that he was familiar with the program as was President Diem. According to the general, any such campaign "would require that the Vietnamese themselves become fully engaged." He then expressed his belief that the proposed 20,000-man increase in the South Vietnamese military "could significantly affect the margin in the field available for counter-guerrilla operations."[29]

President Kennedy then asked General Lansdale what were the prospects of the Communists overthrowing the Diem government. The general replied that in his opinion the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong viewed 1961 as their "big year," but he believed "that a maximum American effort could frustrate a definitive effort in 1961 and move over into the offensive in 1962." He then laid out three conditions:

> first, the Americans in Viet-Nam must themselves be infused with high morale and a will to win, and they must get close to the Vietnamese; secondly, the Vietnamese must, in this setting, be moved to act with vigor and confidence; third, Diem must be persuaded to let the opposition coalesce in some legitimate form rather than concentrate on the task of killing him.[30]

General Lansdale then continued to analyze the situation in Vietnam in much the same vein as in his written report. In reference to the Counterinsurgency Plan, he observed that the original draft was drawn up in the Defense Department and then forwarded to Saigon for recommendations from the MAAG and the US Embassy. General Lansdale said that during his visit to Vietnam he found a "constructive" spirit among the personnel of the US MAAG and the CIA, as well as an excellent relationship between President Diem and the US military and intelligence leadership there. On the other hand, he declared the situation between the Embassy and President Diem was just the contrary, and furthermore, "the Foreign Service people were defeatist and not as interested as they should be."[31]

President Kennedy picked up on General Lansdale's depiction of the tension between the Embassy and President Diem. Secretary of State Rusk explained that the members of the US Embassy, including Ambassador Durbrow, were betwixt and between. They were attempting to maintain a balance between placing pressure upon Mr. Diem to make reforms that he did not want to make and convincing him that his regime had the full backing of the US Government. The President suggested that he might send President Diem a personal letter to reassure the South Vietnamese leader that he had the support of the new American administration.[32]

The discussion then turned to the question of the tenure of Ambassador Durbrow in Vietnam. Secretary Rusk declared that the Ambassador had carried out US policy "energetically and effectively . . . but that it was now time for a change and he should be relieved in the near future."[33] During the ensuing conversation, General Lansdale's name was mentioned as a possible successor, but no decision was made at this time. Roger Hilsman remembered that President Kennedy had all but decided to send General Lansdale as the new US Ambassador to South Vietnam, but the suggestion "raised a storm in the Pentagon, where Lansdale was viewed as an officer who through his service with the CIA had become too 'political.' Since there was, of course, a certain amount of truth in the charge, McNamara was persuaded and Lansdale was put aside." On the other hand, according to a recent scholarly account Assistant Secretary Parsons met with Secretary Rusk, "explained that Lansdale was a 'lone wolf and operator' who resented the State Department, and effectively killed the idea of sending him to Saigon as Ambassador."[34]

The meeting ended with President Kennedy suggesting that a special task force, similar to ones already organized for Cuba and Laos, be formed for Vietnam that would be able to cross over individual departmental jurisdictions. As he told Walt Rostow, he "wanted to get prompt action on the question of personal responsibility in Washington" for crisis areas such as Vietnam. According to the President, he wanted a change of course and "we must be better off in three months than we are now."[35]

In a discussion after the meeting with Mr. Rostow and Secretary McNamara, Secretary Rusk "expressed some anxiety that development of these task forces might obtrude on the normal workings of the government." Secretary McNamara agreed but stated that crisis situations sometimes demanded unorthodox measures.[36] In the new administration's decision-making process, these ad hoc task forces would play a larger

role than the traditional government bureaucracies. This would have an impact on the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the development of policy in Southeast Asia, especially in relationship to the situations in both Laos and South Vietnam.

Civilian and Military Tensions

The implications of the procedural changes in policy making were not readily apparent. In actuality neither the formation of the Vietnam Task Force nor the appointment of a new ambassador occurred immediately after the NSC meeting of 28 January. However two days later President Kennedy approved an increase of $28.4 million to pay for the expansion of the Vietnamese Army and another $12.7 million for the improvement of the Vietnamese Civil Guard.[37]

Despite this step, the President remained uneasy about US counterinsurgency strategy in Vietnam and still had doubts that increased manpower was the solution. On 1 February, at another meeting of the National Security Council, the President suggested that the Secretary of Defense in coordination with other agencies place more emphasis on "the development of counterguerrilla forces."[38] Five days later, in a memorandum to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lemnitzer, he wrote, "Is it possible for us to distribute the available forces we now have in Vietnam more effectively in order to increase the effectiveness of anti-guerilla activities?" He noted that with the proposed 20,000-man increase the South Vietnamese Army would total 170,000 men. President Kennedy recommended that some troops be immediately transferred from the static northern border region to the counterguerrilla campaign in the south. He believed that the available South Vietnamese troops would be more than a match for the 7,000 to 15,000 Viet Cong guerrillas and "we would not have to wait for action during the training period of the new troops." The President asked General Lemnitzer to provide him with his opinion on the matter "when next we meet."[39]

The response from the Joint Chiefs of Staff was not what President Kennedy wished. As the authors of an official JCS history observe, "There was a basic difference between Lemnitzer and the President over how to respond to the anticipated increase in Communist-sponsored 'wars of national liberation.'" The Chairman did not share the President's confidence in Special Forces and counterinsurgency tactics and "believed that historically, regular forces had played a key role in defeating insurgencies."[40]

These differences in outlook between the President and his senior military advisors soon became apparent. On 20 February Secretary McNamara told President Kennedy that the US military had "too little ability to deal with guerrilla forces, insurrections, and subversion."[41] Three days later in a meeting that he held with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Kennedy again expressed his interest in counterinsurgency warfare. Army Chief of Staff General George H. Decker's reply to a question about the mission of the Special Forces confining them to "cold war, limited war, and even general war, if it occurred," failed to impress the President. In response to a query from the President as

to whether US troops could be used to train guerrilla and counterguerrilla forces, Marine Corps Commandant David M. Shoup answered that marines could operate themselves in such a capacity, "but they preferred not to train other people." At that point President Kennedy pointedly disagreed, observing "that it is not always possible for us to take direct action and that, for most of the problems that face us now, we will have to satisfy ourselves with training the people of these various countries to do their own guerrilla and anti-guerrilla operations." In relation to the situation in Vietnam, General Decker informed the President that only three of the US advisors attached to the MAAG there were "skilled in guerrilla warfare operations."[42] A few months later, Secretary McNamara still reported that US forces "were not organized" to challenge "the indirect aggression carried on by the Communists in many parts of the world."[43]

Still, notwithstanding its emphasis on guerrilla warfare in Vietnam, the situation that immediately confronted the new Kennedy administration was US policy regarding the on-going civil war in neighboring Laos. One presidential advisor recalled that President Kennedy, during the first two months of his administration, "probably spent more time on Laos than on anything else."[44] Kennedy himself observed that President Eisenhower told him that Laos "was the cork in the bottle" for Southeast Asia.[45]

The Eisenhower Laotian Heritage

Starting in December 1960, US forces in the Pacific were on a semi-alert status. Admiral Harry D. Felt, Commander in Chief, Pacific, had activated for planning purposes the headquarters of Joint Task Force (JTF) 116 under the operational control of Major General Donald M. Weller, USMC, the commander of the 3rd Marine Division. By 7 January 1961 the Communist Pathet Lao and the Kong Le forces had occupied most of the *Plaine des Jarres* (Plain of Jars) located midway between the two capital cities of Laos: Vientiane, the administrative center to the south; and Luang Prabang, the royal capital to the north. The Joint Chiefs had authorized the Pacific Command to provide aerial logistical support to the Royal Laotian Army, and Admiral Felt outlined to General Weller the basic mission for JTF 116 in the event that the United States activated its Laotian contingency plan.[46]

CINCPAC Operational Plan 32–60 consisted of four phases, two of which bore directly on Laos. The first phase provided for deterrence to Communist aggression and assistance to "free nations to combat and control Communist activities" as well as the means "to react to more serious contingencies." In effect, this first phase was in continuous operation for the Pacific Command.[47] The second phase more or less applied to the situation in Laos. Admiral Felt observed in his 7 January message that if the United States decided to act unilaterally, the task force would "deploy rapidly to Laos and make an airborne and airlanded operation." The seizure of key points on the Plain of Jars was a key element of the mission.[48]

At this point, however, the United States was ill-prepared to undertake any lengthy forceful ground activity in Laos. As General Lemnitzer had explained earlier at a

National Security Council meeting, any US military operation in Southeast Asia would be "handicapped by logistical limitations stemming from lack of communications, lack of transportation, and lack of port and terminal facilities." While the US Pacific Command had taken some remedial actions, the Chairman of the Joints Chiefs remarked that "in the light of total requirements, not all of the deficiencies could be remedied at once."[49]

While the internal situation in Laos continued to simmer, on 14 January 1961, the Joint Chiefs suggested to then Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates that the "ultimate goal" for the United States in Laos was the formation of a "viable government" there which was "friendly to the United States, and in complete control" of the country. They were rather vague about the means of achieving this goal. They mentioned the possibility of setting up a "legitimate" US Military Assistance Advisory Group in order to replace the makeshift US Program Evaluations Office (PEO) that the Eisenhower administration had established to evade the terms of the Geneva Convention, which forbade foreign advisory groups. In effect, the United States would take over the training of the Royal Laotian Army.[50]

Moreover, if the present government with Phoumi Nasavan as its dominant figure should be unable to counter the Communist threat, the Joint Chiefs wanted the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization to move militarily into Laos by implementing its Operational Plan 5/60. They recognized, however, that there was little possibility that SEATO could obtain the unanimity among the Western powers to agree to such a move. If this were the case, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted the American government to obtain the consent of as many of its SEATO allies as possible "to intervene in accordance with the principles of SEATO." Finally, they concluded their memorandum with the statement that the United States should only intervene unilaterally after "reasonable efforts to secure SEATO or multilateral support had failed," and then only if "circumstances required such intervention to attain minimum US objectives." The Joint Chiefs of Staff offered, however, no definition of what such "minimum objectives" should be.[51]

With Eisenhower's term coming to an end, the new President would have to make the decisions about the extent of US support of the Laotian government. On 17 January Eisenhower's Secretary of State, Christian Herter, and Secretary of Defense Gates provided a detailed briefing on Laos for two incoming members of the new administration, Secretary of State designate Dean Rusk and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs designate Paul Nitze. Other participants included General Lemnitzer, Chairman of the JCS, and Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA. Secretary Herter opened the meeting by asking General Lemnitzer to provide a detailed summary of the military situation in Laos. In his remarks, General Lemnitzer gave a rather upbeat account of the current battle status, describing the Royal Army's capture of a key crossroads near the Plain of Jars. At the same time, however, he cautioned that both sides appeared to be building up their forces.[52]

Much of the rest of the meeting revolved around the military and diplomatic options available to the United States. During the course of this discussion, General Lemnitzer read aloud the salient points of the memorandum that the Joint Chiefs had forwarded

to Secretary Gates. Chairman Lemnitzer declared that the main concern of the Chiefs was "that we were not winning on the ground because we were not able to train and support the FAL [Lao Armed Forces] fully" and that the French training of the Royal Army was inadequate. Secretary Gates observed that all of the military recommendations "were heavily linked to political questions" that obviously would have to be settled by the incoming administration.[53]

Two days after the meeting, the Laotian Royal Army suffered another reversal. The Communist Pathet Lao recaptured the crossroads that the Royalists had just occupied. On his last day in office, Secretary Gates wrote in a letter to Secretary of State Herter that despite the pending changes in the American government, the "rapidly deteriorating situation in Laos" required immediate attention. Secretary Gates provided his successor, Robert McNamara, a copy of the document as well as suggesting that Mr. Herter show it to incoming Secretary of State Dean Rusk. In his analysis, the outgoing Secretary of Defense largely seconded the view of the Joint Chiefs relative to the possible intervention of the United States in that troubled country. While advocating, if necessary, a SEATO task force to be deployed to Laos, he also thought "unilateral intervention by the US might be 'a necessary prerequisite to obtaining the desired multi-lateral response.'"[54]

Secretary Gates was not alone in his emphasis upon the importance of Laos to US interests in Southeast Asia. On 19 January, together with several other senior Eisenhower administration officials, he attended a hasty meeting between President Eisenhower and his successor. Secretary of State designate Rusk and Secretary of Defense designate McNamara, as well as Clark Clifford, accompanied President-elect Kennedy. According to the President-elect, newspaper columnist Roscoe Drummond had told him that President Eisenhower "would welcome a second visit from me." He also had his own reasons for this meeting in that he was "anxious to get some commitment from the outgoing administration as to how they would deal with Laos." The incoming President came away with the distinct impression that "the Eisenhower administration would support intervention—they felt it was preferable to a communist success in Laos."[55]

The Initial Kennedy Laotian Policy, January–February 1961

Even during the inauguration weekend on 21–22 January, President Kennedy concerned himself with the Laotian situation. He appointed J. Graham Parsons, then serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, to head the Interagency Task Force on Laos to study the ramifications of the Laotian situation for US policy. The other members of the task force were Walt Rostow, Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, representing the new White House; Assistant Secretary Paul Nitze of the Defense Department; Deputy Director Richard Bissell for the Central Intelligence Agency; and William J. Sheppard, Director of Far East Operations for the International Cooperation Agency (the forerunner of the Agency for International Development

[AID]). They completed their report in time to present it at a White House meeting on 23 January chaired by President Kennedy.[56]

In their summary, the Parsons task force remarked upon the various handicaps facing the Phoumi regime and any US effort to assist the Royalists in their struggle against the Communist and neutralist forces in Laos. These included the military situation in Laos, the inadequate training and poor performance of the Royalist forces, the geographic isolation of Laos, and the lack of support on the part of most of the SEATO allies for the present Laotian government. This especially applied to any proposal for SEATO military intervention in Laos. In general, the task force report was pessimistic about the ability of the Laotian government to survive under existing circumstances.[57]

The task force in its long and convoluted report came up with a series of political and military recommendations. It advised that the United States should attempt to convince the SEATO nations of the importance of Laos and also indicate to the Communist bloc nations the determination of the new Kennedy administration "to back the RLG [Royal Laotian Government] both now and in the indefinite future." At the same time, the Parsons group suggested the immediate implementation of several military measures. These ranged from providing additional US airlift support to the Royalists, increasing the number of US military personnel in the PEO "as tactical advisers to FAL units, ostensibly as training advisers," and improving SEATO intelligence resources to establishing a small American logistic support group in Thailand. Elsewhere in its report the task force advocated that if the situation required, "US contingency forces should be landed in Thailand, on request of the Thais."[58]

In the discussion of the report on 23 January at a White House meeting, President Kennedy voiced hesitancy about becoming entangled in what he considered the Laotian morass. He observed that the military situation there was tenuous as well as compounded by the lack of French and British support of the Laotian Royalist regime. The President remarked that "if the British and French aren't going to do anything about the security of Southeast Asia, we tell them we aren't going to do it alone." At this point, General Lemnitzer declared that he did not believe "Laos was lost" and emphasized its "vital importance" to the strategic position of the United States in Southeast Asia. After further discussion, Secretary of State Rusk outlined the available diplomatic measures, stressing consultation with allies and the possibility of SEATO action. According to Assistant Secretary of Defense Nitze, President Kennedy "authorized, but not directed" the carrying out of the immediate military recommendations of the Laos Task Force with the added proviso that they were relevant "after further detailed exploration." Furthermore, any proposal to use PEO personnel as advisors "would be subject to clarification by the State and Defense Departments as to the legal status of the persons engaged in this operation and clearance with the French in the field."[59]

The following day the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded a memorandum to Secretary of Defense McNamara that reiterated many of the themes on Laos that they had provided the previous administration. They once more placed emphasis upon frustrating Communist designs and countering any aggression in Laos, including preparation for

possible SEATO or even "overt US intervention." They suggested a presidential statement that declared clearly that "The sole US objective in Laos was a free independent and territorially intact Laos."[60]

President Kennedy probably had not read this document when he met on 25 January with all the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but once again the subject of Laos dominated the agenda. The President referred to a recent telegram from US Ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn E. Thompson expressing concern that the United States apparently sought a military solution to the Laotian situation. General Lemnitzer protested that he did not understand how Ambassador Thompson came to that conclusion. The Chairman claimed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff never viewed Laos solely in military terms. He, nevertheless, maintained that "if we do not assist a legitimate government of Laos when the Pathet Lao are pushing in, we will have a very great problem."[61]

While President Kennedy agreed that it was desirable to help the Laotian government, he did not want to overreach by acting alone. He believed that it was necessary to work in concert with the British and French. General Lemnitzer at that point countered that the best avenue was SEATO, remarking that most of the member nations, especially the "Asiatic" ones, were in agreement with the American position. The President insisted that any commitment of troops would be "the last step to be employed." Finally, after some further inconclusive conversation, President Kennedy asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a memorandum in which they would address the subject of the possible insertion of US troops in Laos. The President specifically wanted an approximate status of the US military buildup thirty days after an initial deployment. He also desired an estimate of the probable reaction of the North Vietnamese to an American intervention. General Lemnitzer observed, "they could come in fast, but we could cut their supply lines and limit what they could do."[62] The meeting then turned to other subjects.

As a result of the presidential request, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 6 February completed their memorandum on the ability of the United States to commit forces to Laos. According to their study, the number of American forces in a thirty-day buildup in Laos would be sufficient "to protect key cities, communication centers, and lines of communication." The planners predicted that the Americans would have secured a base "for subsequent operations to defeat the Pathet Lao" provided that neither China nor North Vietnam intervened. Even if one or both of these nations did enter the fray, they maintained that the American troops would "still be able to hold Vientiane and southern Laos, provided other US and allied forces took certain counteractions outside Laos."[63]

On this date as well, the Joint Chiefs of Staff outlined the essence of the plan to President Kennedy. At this meeting President Kennedy indicated that he wanted to be briefed more fully on the subject at a later time. He then asked if the study "gave him any information on the relative buildup from North Viet-Nam over the roads that could be accomplished in the same thirty days which he had asked for before." The Joint Chiefs admitted that the study did not provide these items since they believed these facts would be meaningless, asserting it was obvious that the Communists could put in more troops "there than we could . . . if they so decided." President Kennedy insisted that he "wanted

their best opinion on what the Viet-Namese could do in the same thirty days." The Chiefs promised to give him this information as soon as possible.[64]

Two days later General Lemnitzer met again with the President and other senior officials including the Secretaries of State and Defense as well as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency about the Laotian crisis. The situation in the seesaw battle for the Plain of Jars had once more changed, this time favoring the Laotian Royalists. They had earlier in the month taken the vital crossroads and on 6 February had launched a two-pronged attack against Pathet Lao troops holding the strategic plain. At the session with the President on 8 February, General Lemnitzer described the new offensive mounted by the Phoumi government. After some discussion about the feasibility of a political settlement of the Laotian question, the group turned to the question of using US C–130 transport aircraft to provide air resupply for the Royalist Army. General Lemnitzer argued that such an airlift was "essential" for the government forces to maintain the offensive. President Kennedy allowed the resupply missions, but only as far as Udorn in northern Thailand. From there the cargo was to be loaded into aircraft belonging to the American-manned CAT (Civil Air Transport) Airline, the forerunner of the CIA Air America, and flown into Laos. The President also authorized the sending of nine US training teams to Laos, a total of ninety-two persons, with the goal of eventually providing a team to every battalion of the Royalist Army. Although approving these measures, the President decided against a proposal to station a SEATO military force in Thailand at this time.[65]

On 16 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded their calculation concerning the forces that the Communists could launch into Laos during a thirty-day period. They estimated that the North Vietnamese could have about fifteen of their divisions in Laos, numbering over 105,000 men. During the same time span, the report indicated these initial troops could be reinforced by eight Chinese Communist divisions and three parachute battalions, totaling another 51,000 troops, thus making a total ground strength of 156,000. In addition, the Chinese could provide 465 jet aircraft in support of the ground forces. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff hedged on the numbers of Communist personnel that actually would be available in the event of a real crisis. In their report, they observed that they did not take into consideration such limiting factors as geographic barriers or "competing requirements for these forces." Moreover, they believed it "unrealistic" for the North Vietnamese "to commit their whole force to Laos in view of their internal security problems and the danger of possible attack by [South] Viet Nam."[66]

In the interim, the Kennedy administration had embarked upon a strategy employing both military and political pressure against the Communists. As suggested by Parsons' Laotian Task Force, the United States proposed the establishment of a neutral nations commission composed of Burma, Cambodia, and possibly Malaya to investigate the possibilities of a solution to the crisis in Laos. The US position was that Laos was a "neutral state, unaligned in her international relations but determined to preserve her national integrity."[67] In a conversation with the US Ambassador to Laos, Winthrop G. Brown, President Kennedy voiced his unease about the differences between the United

States and its Western allies and "indicated sympathy" to the "political approach" of the "neutral commission." Kennedy, nevertheless, remained skeptical that the Communists would accept the idea of the commission if they believed that the military situation favored them.[68]

Together with its proposal for the establishment of the neutral nations commission, the Kennedy administration proposed certain military measures to disabuse the Eastern bloc, and especially the Soviet Union, of the prospects for an easy victory for the Pathet Lao. This lay behind the presidential decision on 8 February to back the Royalist offensive to recapture the Plain of Jars with indirect logistic air and advisory support. In any event, the President backed measures that would involve SEATO in finding a way out of the Laotian dilemma. The State Department in a circular message indicated that it could support a broadened Laotian government, hinting at some compromise with Souvanna Phouma, the prime minister ousted by Phoumi and now allied with the Pathet Lao, and the Neutralist forces headed by Kong Le. The document also mentioned favorably an Australian-sponsored motion for SEATO to sponsor a fact-finding commission to investigate Communist intervention in Laos. Finally, Secretary of State Rusk maintained that while SEATO would prefer to settle the Laotian situation peacefully, the member nations, and particularly the United States, had responsibility for the integrity of Laos and that the violation of this integrity "cannot be allowed to take place with impunity." Still, Secretary Rusk insisted that the United States would emphasize a peaceful solution to the crisis.[69] Yet as General Decker reported to President Kennedy on 23 February in the meeting on counterinsurgency, the Army was placing "75 more people into the Laotian training program" and there was an American team with each of the 71 battalions of the Laotian Royal Army. Moreover, according to General Decker, there were: "1200 Meo tribesmen in the hills who have been trained by our people."[70]

Growing Crisis in Laos, February–March, 1961

Despite the American assistance, the situation in Laos had shown only limited improvement since the beginning of the year. In their meeting with the President on 23 January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reported that the conditions there were now "stable," but admitted that the Royal Army's campaign to recapture the Plain of Jars was "pretty slow going."[71] The news did not get any better. By the end of the month White House advisor Walt Rostow wrote to President Kennedy that General Phoumi's troops during the month had only advanced four to seven kilometers. According to Mr. Rostow, the Royalists had "been stopped by a better organized and better equipped [enemy] than anyone had calculated; employing artillery on high ground." He suggested that there had been some progress in the training of the Royalist commissioned and noncommissioned officer corps, but that the Laotian Army remained a "relatively weak reed for an offensive against determined and well armed opposition."[72]

To compound matters, the US-sponsored airlift of supplies and munitions for the Laotians had also run into difficulties. Mr. Rostow described the Udorn airfield in Thailand as of limited use and stated that the Civil Air Transport Airline flights from Bangkok to Laos, which were costing about $450 million a month, were "running down." He suggested that President Kennedy might want to approve the use of US military aircraft to fly the supply missions to Vietianne, the Laotian administrative capital. Mr. Rostow also advised the President that such a move would serve as an American "show of strength and determination" to counter the continuing Soviet airlift to the Pathet Lao forces.[73]

Behind the scenes, the United States continued its diplomatic efforts to reach some sort of international agreement to settle the Laotian crisis. The Kennedy administration had hopes that its proposal for a neutral commission and its hints at a more inclusive government in Laos might influence the Soviet Union to defuse the situation. In meetings in both the United States and the Soviet Union, Soviet officials rejected the neutral commission and instead proposed a renewed Geneva Conference. While welcoming US overtures about an expanded Laotian government, they insisted that Souvanna Phouma was the legitimate prime minister, not the figurehead Prince Boun Oum, whom General Phoumi had installed. The American position was that a Geneva type of conference would prove too cumbersome to reach any agreement. Moreover, the United States protested the massive assistance that the Soviet Union had provided to the Pathet Lao as well as its support of the North Vietnamese insertion of arms, manpower, and equipment into Laos. Continuing into March, American and Soviet officials would remain at loggerheads.[74]

During the interim, with the lack of progress on the diplomatic front and the seeming military stalemate on the Plain of Jars, President Kennedy decided to take action on both fronts. On 3 March the President met with his senior advisors, including General Lemnitzer. Under the planned escalation of US assistance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to take the lead in formulating a military plan for the Laotian forces to capture finally the Plain of Jars. These plans were then to be confirmed in a following meeting, which would include representatives of the State Department and the CIA as well as Defense. At the same time, American diplomats were to explore contacts with Souvanna Phouma regarding his possible return to the Laotian government.[75] In addition, President Kennedy sent a personal letter to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev outlining the US position on Laos and other critical international issues.[76]

On 9 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented their "Concept for the Recapture of the Plaine des Jarres." According to the plan, the idea was to seize the base complex and thus deny it to the enemy. Prior to the offensive, air strikes and Meo guerrilla interdiction raids were to isolate the Pathet Lao defenders. The Royalists would then launch a two-pronged infantry attack, followed by a parachute drop. The paratroopers would then link up with the two infantry groups. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were quite aware that this elaborate battle design was beyond the present capability of the Royalist Army. They recommended a series of actions to strengthen the Laotian forces, including increasing the Meo fighting forces, providing older US aircraft to the Royalists as well as helicopters,

and expanding the number of American training teams in Laos. They concluded their list of requirements with the statement: "Above all the additional air and artillery support and logistic means needed to capture the Plaine des Jarres should be provided. The Chief PEO should be authorized to inform Phoumi of support to be provided, operations to be undertaken and results expected."[77]

Coincidentally on this date as well, the Pathet Lao once more drove the Royalist forces out of the strategic crossroads village near the Plain of Jars, leaving the path open for a possible enemy offensive against Vietianne.[78] This gave a sense of urgency to an already scheduled meeting that afternoon in Washington of high-level officials with President Kennedy to discuss the JCS plan. The Defense Department had called back from Honolulu the CINCPAC commander, Admiral Felt, and Army Brigadier General Andrew J. Boyle, who headed the PEO, the US military advisory effort in Laos, to attend this conference. Other attendees included Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, and General Lemnitzer. Assistant Secretary George C. McGhee led the State Department representatives, and Director Allan Dulles and his deputy Richard Bissell, the Central Intelligence Agency. In addition to the President and Vice President, presidential advisors McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow also represented the White House.[79]

Secretary of Defense McNamara opened the meeting with a discussion of the plan provided by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the Royal Army offensive. General Lemnitzer laid out the essentials of the concept while Admiral Felt revealed that the offensive would have three objectives: "(1) to fragment and split the guerrillas; (2) to fragment and split the Pathet Lao from support which is coming from North Vietnam, and (3) to destroy the Pathet Lao forces."[80] According to President Kennedy's military aide, Army Major General Chester V. Clifton, General Phoumi actually had drafted the original plan with only minor modifications by both CINCPAC and the Joint Staff.[81]

Playing something of the devil's advocate, the President at the meeting questioned his advisors very closely about the military situation in Laos. For example, when Admiral Felt tried to explain the Pathet Lao success as a result of Russian aid, Mr. Kennedy asked him the extent of the Soviet assistance. The admiral estimated that since December the Russians had flown about 2,400 tons of armaments and other equipment and supplies directly into Laos for the Communist forces. According to intelligence sources, they supplied at the same time another 1,000 tons that arrived by truck from North Vietnam. Through another set of questions, the President quickly established that during this period the United States had provided much more tonnage for the Royalists than the Soviets had for the Communists.[82]

The President took much the same tack with General Lemnitzer. He asked the general how the plan could be carried out to its full extent "without an escalation on the Soviet part." General Lemnitzer answered that the Soviet lines of communication "would make it harder for them to escalate in the near future than it would for us if we took this step." At that point President Kennedy reminded the Chairman of the Joint Staff study that indicated that in the event of "full scale" fighting, the Communists "could

still put five troops to one of ours into the battle." Admiral Felt observed that the United States had plans for a unilateral intervention in Laos and that he had formed for that contingency a task force that would operate under an officer of his command, Lieutenant General Paul D. Harkins, USA, who at that time was Deputy Commander US Army, Pacific. After some further debate about possible courses, including diplomatic moves as well as possible SEATO intervention, the President left the meeting. While remaining somewhat skeptical, before his departure President Kennedy directed the group "to get together and set up a plan of action and get things in orderly priority of activity."[83]

At a second meeting that night with Secretary McNamara as the chairman, the participants came up with a seventeen-point military agenda for the President's approval. These included supplying of sixteen US Marine UH-34 helicopters to support CIA operations in Laos. The Marine Corps was also to provide a maintenance detachment in Thailand to support the helicopters. Other decisions were for the Department of Defense to provide four C-130 aircraft to the CAT Airline, for the US Air Force "to resume direct supply delivery to Vientiane in case of emergency," and to reinforce the PEO in Laos with 100 more tactical advisors. The President approved these proposals almost immediately, and by 11 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff relayed the details to Admiral Felt, who had returned to Honolulu.[84]

During the following week a series of confusing and countervailing events occurred that blurred the situation in Laos even more. On 10 March, even as the Pathet Lao mounted their attack on the Royalist forces, General Phoumi and Souvanna Phouma signed a joint statement in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital, where the two had met for a two-day conference. In their communiqué, the two Laotian leaders acknowledged the necessity for "strict neutrality and conventional neutralization" for Laos in both external and internal affairs. They called for the end of foreign interference and for an impartial commission to assist in the restoration of "mutual confidence" and "national reconciliation." The two agreed upon the need of further negotiations.[85]

Secretary Rusk, two days later, remarked on the paucity of information on the unsettled state of affairs in Laos at a special high-level interdepartmental meeting of Defense, State, and CIA officials. He mentioned that the intelligence being received was usually between twelve and twenty-four hours old. When discussing the news coming out of Laos he referred to press stories rather than official accounts, and he stated that "the situation appeared serious."[86] In fact, the *New York Times* that morning carried on its front page an Associated Press dispatch that "Assault troops of the pro-Communist Pathet Lao movement burst through Government defenses in central Laos today, severing the main highway link between this administrative capital [Vientiane] and the royal capital of Luang Prabang."[87] General Lemnitzer, who was one of the Defense Department representatives on this committee, attempted to minimize the importance of the Communist offensive. According to the general, the Pathet Lao were not about to move on Luang Prabang despite the fact that they had captured the road junction and were "fanning out north and south." The general observed that the enemy troops "could not move any faster than the road would permit."[88]

Despite the terrain difficulties that would limit the Pathet Lao, the interdepartmental group viewed the enemy offensive as a serious setback for the Royal Laotian Army. Secretary Rusk outlined three possible steps that the United States could undertake in response. The first would be the rapid implementation of the military assistance to the Laotians that the President had already authorized. If that were not sufficient, the United States would consider the deployment of foreign troops to Laos, especially from Asiatic nations, with American logistic and air support. In this eventuality, Secretary Rusk suggested the possible movement of a "Marine combat group into the area as a demonstration of our seriousness of purpose." Finally, if the Communists escalated their efforts in either South Vietnam or in Laos or both, the United States would have to decide about intervening with "military action against the whole complex." General Lemnitzer observed that air power could not accomplish the mission by itself and that there "must be adequate forces on the ground." While the meeting did not arrive at any final resolution, its members agreed that there was a need for CINCPAC to revise its contingency planning, including the plan for an offensive on the Plain of Jars, which was no longer feasible with the loss of the crossroads.[89]

By this time Secretary of Defense McNamara had directed General Lemnitzer to send a senior officer to Southeast Asia to try to appraise the situation there. On 14 March the Chairman selected Lieutenant General Thomas J. H. Trapnell, Commanding General, XXVIII Airborne Corps, for the mission. According to General Trapnell's instructions, he was to accomplish three things. The first, already caught up by events, was to determine the practicality of the plans for the Plain of Jars offensive. Secondly, he was to appraise the Royal Army to ensure that the best officers were in command of the forward areas. Finally, he was to examine the command relations between the US Ambassador in Laos and CINCPAC headquarters and with the PEO group. He was to report back to the Secretary and the Chairman before the end of the month.[90]

As General Trapnell departed for his inspection tour, the situation in Laos appeared to become even more desperate. By 17 March any hope for a truce in the fighting as a result of the meetings between General Phoumi and Souvanna Phouma had disappeared. According to General Phoumi, Mr. Souvanna had changed his position as a result of being "roundly criticized from all quarters," and the conference had ended in complete stalemate.[91] On the battlefield in Laos, the Associated Press reported on 18 March that the Communist offensive was "still rolling." According to the press item, the Pathet Lao artillery was only twenty-two miles from Luang Prabang.[92]

In Washington, the Kennedy administration deliberations grew more hurried and intense. This was not helped by a conversation on Laos that Secretary of State Rusk had on 18 March with Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister. According to the Secretary, Mr. Gromyko was "quite negative." Secretary Rusk declared that the foreign minister was "completely elusive" and insisted that any discussion on the subject should be held at an international conference.[93]

On the same day General Boyle, the head of the US military mission in Laos, reported more bad news. According to General Boyle, General Phoumi had become

"rather desperate" and refused advice about mounting a counteroffensive. The Laotian leader's idea was now "to dig in and to hold what he has."[94] The Joint Chiefs of Staff looked upon this information with some alarm. In a message to CINCPAC on 20 March they declared it absolutely necessary for future operations that the Royalists recapture the crossroads, "followed by implementation of the original plan . . . [for] the Plaine des Jarres." They also wanted to know what weapons the Laotians required to take the crossroads.[95] The reply from Admiral Felt provided very little room for optimism. According to the Pacific Commander, any weaponry was less important than the willingness of General Phoumi and his troops to carry the fight to the enemy. He claimed that unless the Royal Army launched its attack against the road junction, "we are spinning our wheels."[96]

In Washington on the evening of 20 March, President Kennedy held an off-the-record meeting with some of his senior advisors on the alternatives for the United States in Laos. Those in attendance included representatives from the CIA, the Defense Department, and the State Department: McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, and Theodore Sorensen were there from the White House Staff; Secretary McNamara and Admiral Arleigh Burke were the Defense Department representatives; and Admiral Burke stood in for Chairman Lemnitzer, who was in Miami on a speaking engagement. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Walt Rostow proposed stationing a small contingent of US infantry at a strategic point in the Laotian Mekong River Valley. His argument was that the American force would serve by their very presence as a deterrent to further inroads by the Pathet Lao. Admiral Burke presented the point of view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which vehemently opposed any limited commitment of US troops without air cover or sufficient manpower. In Schlesinger's account, the JCS recommended a "large-scale" intervention involving some 60,000 troops and even the possible use of nuclear weapons.[97]

With no meeting of the minds, President Kennedy scheduled a more extended session for the next day. On the morning of the 21st, Walt Rostow sent a note to President Kennedy suggesting the deployment of troops to Thailand. As he explained, the existing military contingency plan for Laos now being modified called "for the placing of our forces, in the first instance, in Thailand rather than Laos." As Mr. Rostow observed, the United States could send as many troops there as it wanted once it had the permission of the Thai government. He then elaborated, "we would then be in a position to feed them into Laos at the times and places the situation demands."[98]

At the meeting that afternoon, with many of the same people in attendance with the addition of Vice President Johnson, Rostow's proposal appeared to be the basis for a compromise for the military reaction to the crisis. Instead of the simple deployment of American forces, the idea was now for the Laotian government to request support from SEATO. As part of this concept, a SEATO force would be stationed in Thailand where it could be easily deployed to Laos. Secretary of State Rusk reminded the conferees, nevertheless, that US policy was "two-stringed—negotiation and action."[99]

According to the Secretary, the administration planned to continue to explore diplomatic avenues both with its allies in SEATO and with the Soviet Union despite

the nonresponsiveness of the Soviet foreign minister in their last meeting. Basically, the Kennedy administration had changed its negotiating position. Secretary Rusk declared that if the Soviet Union could guarantee that the Pathet Lao would halt their offensive, thus creating "a defacto ceasefire," the United States would remove its objection to reviving the International Control Commission for Laos and, moreover, would participate in a new international conference. The British government would be willing to meet with the Soviet Union as permanent co-chairman of the 1954 Geneva conference to call for a fourteen-nation meeting to be held there once a cease-fire in Laos was in effect. At the same time, the United States would press its SEATO allies, especially the British, to support a SEATO action if the Communists failed to respond to the call for the cease-fire. In actuality, the American government was to depart from the Eisenhower policy of demanding a pro-Western neutral Laos to one of backing a united nonaligned neutral Laos.[100]

Following this White House meeting, the Kennedy administration pressed forward on its "double-stringed" campaign to bring some sort of resolution to the Laotian crisis. The next day Vice President Johnson and Secretary Rusk briefed members of the congressional leadership about the precautionary military steps as well as the new initiatives planned in the diplomatic arena. The White House also announced that President Kennedy planned a televised press conference scheduled for 1800 the evening of 23 March. At the same time, the administration made sure that the major news media were aware of the measures that the President was to outline. On the morning of the 23rd, the *New York Times* carried on its front page the headlines: "West Will Offer New Plan to Test Moscow on Laos" and "US Revises Stand." The body of the article discussed not only the latest diplomatic moves but also US shipment of military supplies and equipment to Laos. The article ended with a quote from Vice President Johnson stating, "the United States, while it is going to be reasonable and prudent in all of its moves, is not in a mood to meekly permit an independent nation to be gobbled up by an army [sic] minority supported from the outside."[101]

The climax of this informational buildup was the presidential news conference. Timed to reach a large audience, and with three large maps of Laos showing the existing battle lines as dramatic backdrops, President Kennedy addressed the Washington news corps and the American people. The *New York Times* the following morning summarized his remarks in a front page banner headline reading: "KENNEDY ALERTS NATION ON LAOS; WARNS SOVIET BLOC, ASKS TRUCE; STRESSES SEATO'S ROLE IN CRISIS." The President told his audience that the United States desired in Laos "peace and not war, a truly neutral government and not a cold war pawn, a settlement concluded at the conference table and not on the battlefield." He emphasized the US relationship to SEATO, referring to an upcoming meeting of the foreign ministers of the organization and declaring that they would "have to consider their 'necessary response' if the Communist-backed force in Laos continues to advance." President Kennedy avoided responding to questions as to whether the United States had alerted any forces or was deploying any to Laos. According to the *Times*' account, however, it was common knowledge that the administration was sending military hardware to Southeast Asia.[102]

In actuality the US forces in the Pacific were already on a higher level of readiness. Members of the Joint Staff in Bangkok for the upcoming SEATO conference had alerted the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the "military situation in Laos was critical and would become progressively worse." At the same time, Admiral Felt ordered the concentration of the Seventh Fleet under Admiral Charles D. Griffin in the South China Sea and the activation of Joint Task Force 116 headquarters on Okinawa under the command of the 3rd Marine Division commander, Major General Weller, for the possible implementation of CINCPAC Plan 32–60 (Phase 2 Laos). The Pacific Commander had also designated the same high level of alert for US forces designed to carry out the companion SEATO contingency plan 5/61 for intervention in Laos. In addition, 300 helicopter maintenance personnel from Marine Airbase Squadron 16 deployed earlier than planned from Okinawa to Udorn, Thailand, in position to support possible air operations in Laos.[103] According to Roger Hilsman, "the President ordered *not* [emphasis in the original] the movement of troops—not just yet—but the necessary steps preliminary to the movement of troops."[104]

Still, there was as much "carrot" as there was "stick" in American policy and in the President's statements. As Mr. Kennedy spoke, the British foreign ministry sent its aide-memoire to the Soviet Union accepting the Soviet overture to activate the International Control Commission (ICC) for Laos. The British also agreed to the Soviet call for an international conference but insisted, at the request of the United States, that it could convene only after the ICC had reported an actual cease-fire in the fighting in Laos.[105]

On 26 March British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan met with President Kennedy at Key West, Florida, to coordinate their respective positions on the Laos question. According to the lead story the next morning in the *New York Times*, the two "reached 'absolute agreement' at all aspects of a common power to preserve a truly neutral Laos against threats of Communist domination."[106] In effect, President Kennedy officially acceded to the British view for a cease-fire in Laos and a new Geneva conference. Prime Minister Macmillan, in return, agreed to support a "united front" with the American delegation at the SEATO conference and the possibility of limited intervention in Laos. The American President later wrote Secretary Rusk that the statement did "not imply that we agreed to a British veto over our action, but is rather a statement of agreed conditions for British active participation."[107]

In the meantime, Secretary Rusk had departed for Bangkok for the meeting of the SEATO ministers. While there he discussed the situation with Admiral Felt and General Trapnell, who were both attending the conference. According to the Secretary, they all agreed that the most important move for the American delegation was to obtain "the maximum solidarity" among the member nations. Secretary Rusk stated that if the Communists continued the offensive, there would be the need for "some action on [the] ground." He argued that eight nations acting together would have a strong influence upon world opinion as well as on any possible resolution by the United Nations. The Secretary believed that there was a strong possibility that they would be able to obtain the consent of all the members of the alliance with the probable exception of the French.[108]

On 27 March President Kennedy made some progress on the diplomatic front with the Russians. At a morning presidential meeting in the White House, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko was the first to raise the subject of Laos. According to President Kennedy, Mr. Gromyko apparently had received new instructions from Moscow and referred to the British proposal as a possible basis for a "pacific settlement acceptable to both sides." The Soviet minister mentioned several times the need of restraint on the part of both the United States and the Soviet Union so as not to add any more fuel to the tense situation. The President called for "an immediate cessation of hostilities" in Laos and emphasized the importance of that country to US "interests and prestige." Following the meeting, President Kennedy contrasted the tenor of this session with the Russian foreign minister to the earlier one that the Secretary of State had with him. He told Secretary Rusk that Gromyko's "presentation was a serious one and devoid of the deliberate evasion . . . used in talking with you."[109]

Two days after this meeting the SEATO Council of Ministers ended its conference. They had passed a unanimous resolution on Laos, which, in effect, condemned the Communist effort to overthrow by force the Royalist regime. The conference delegates maintained that the SEATO member nations desired a "united, independent, and sovereign Laos . . . not subordinate to any nation or group of nations." The allied ministers called for an immediate cease-fire so that substantive negotiations could take place. They praised the effort to peacefully resolve the current conflict but stated that if this failed "members of SEATO are prepared, within the terms of the Treaty, to take whatever action may be appropriate in the circumstance."[110] This declaration was far from the strong statement that the United States had originally desired, but according to Secretary Rusk the conference had accomplished more than he had expected. Given the low level of unity at the start, it had ended with "a renewed sense of individual and collective responsibility."[111]

Vietnam Again, February–March 1961

While the Kennedy administration continued to struggle with the Laotian crisis, the situation in Vietnam hardly had improved. There continued to be differences and tensions between the MAAG, headed by General McGarr, and Ambassador Durbrow, as well as with the South Vietnamese government. On 3 February General McGarr reported to his superior in the military chain of command, Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, that the "civilian element" of the country team did not understand or accept certain basic considerations. These included the necessity of gaining military superiority over the Viet Cong before political reform could have any meaning; the absolute necessity of an increase in the Vietnamese armed forces to contain the insurgency; the dependence of antiguerrilla training on a firm foundation of basic military training; the long lead time required to train new forces; and finally the ever-present threat of attack from North Vietnam.[112]

Despite the disagreements between the Ambassador and General McGarr, they both supported the Counterinsurgency Plan. On 3 February a joint State and Defense message relayed to Ambassador Durbrow the presidential approval of the plan. Durbrow's instructions nevertheless contained several reservations similar to those held by the Ambassador about the Diem government. First, the US commitment was only for that portion covering Fiscal Year 1961. Second, while recognizing the importance of defeating the Viet Cong, the South Vietnamese government was also "to move on the political front towards liberalization." Success required carrying out the "entire plan," the political, economic, and social measures as well as the military. Finally, the message authorized Ambassador Durbrow, if he believed that the South Vietnamese government was not carrying out its requirements, to make necessary recommendations "which may include suspension of the US contribution."[113] Interestingly, neither the President nor Secretary McNamara formally solicited the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff about the Counterinsurgency Plan. On 9 February, nevertheless, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara that they approved the plan in principle, subject to "revision of support requirements for military personnel, equipment, and logistics that detailed review by the Services concerned may indicate is necessary or desirable."[114]

Still, three days earlier President Diem, who was running for reelection, had announced several planned reforms, and even Ambassador Durbrow expressed optimism. In a message to Washington, he described Diem's newly announced program as "substantial, forward-looking and, if properly implemented, should provide solid base to build on. While he has been slow in acting, the steps he has taken are in the direction we have been urging."[115]

A week later, on 13 February, Ambassador Durbrow accompanied by General McGarr formally presented the Counterinsurgency Plan to President Diem. He explained to Mr. Diem that the South Vietnamese government was to absorb the local currency (piaster) expenses of the plan and also made it clear that certain "fundamental political actions" were expected on the part of the Diem regime. In the discussion with the Ambassador about the plan, President Diem focused on the costs that the South Vietnamese government would have to accept to provide for the additional 20,000 men for its armed forces. Ambassador Durbrow countered that the plan provided several solutions for Mr. Diem to meet these expenditures. South Vietnam's Secretary of State for the Presidency, Nguyen Dinh Thuan, who was also at the meeting, then asked "what . . . [the US] position would be if, for instance, GVN could not see [a] way to finance [the] plan." Mr. Durbrow answered that the plan was a "comprehensive document and therefore all facets should basically be carried out although our position [was] not inflexible." At one point President Diem raised a question about rumors he had heard that the new leadership in the United States was not behind him. The Ambassador denied the validity of such hearsay and declared that $40 million in US Military Assistance funds was a tangible sign of the US commitment to South Vietnam.[116]

The meeting ended with Secretary Thuan and President Diem promising to study the plan and to provide their answer as soon as possible. In his comments to Washington,

Ambassador Durbrow observed that he knew the administration wanted an agreement with the Vietnamese on the plan by the end of the month, "but I am not very sanguine GVN will move that fast." The Ambassador's supposition proved to be correct. While the Embassy and MAAG continued to brief Secretary of State Thuan on both the military and political aspects of the Counterinsurgency Plan, Mr. Thuan and President Diem still voiced reservations to changes that they believed diluted Diem's direct control.[117] At the end of the month there still was no agreement.

In Washington, key administration officials began to grow impatient with the pace of negotiations in Saigon with the Diem government. On 1 March Secretary of State Dean Rusk cabled Ambassador Durbrow that the "White House ranks defense Viet-Nam among highest priorities US foreign policy." Secretary Rusk expressed the concern of President Kennedy as to whether the Vietnamese could continue to hold off the increasing pressure of the Viet Cong during the 18- to 24-month period that it would take the Counterinsurgency Plan to be fully realized. The Secretary directed that the Ambassador, unless he had specific objections, undertake several actions that were part of or related to the plan without waiting for the approval of the Vietnamese government. These included bringing in more US advisors skilled in guerrilla and counterguerrilla warfare to replace "less qualified MAAG personnel now in Viet-Nam." The document placed a large emphasis on counterguerrilla training for the existing Ranger companies and a large increase in the number of Ranger companies, together with a proportionate reduction in the planned boost in infantry regiments. Secretary Rusk also directed that the country team "start immediately, with or without GVN participation as judged best by Ambassador," the development of a comprehensive operations plan for driving the Viet Cong from Vietnam. The message concluded with a discussion of the means of winning the loyalty of the population and causing disaffection among the Viet Cong.[118]

Agreeing with the thrust of his new instructions, in his reply Durbrow related the frustrations in negotiating with President Diem and his advisors about the adoption of the Counterinsurgency Plan. He observed that General McGarr and he had already taken several measures "without awaiting formal approvals." He recounted that they had had "repeated meetings" with South Vietnamese officials, including President Diem. The Ambassador declared that despite "repeated advice pressing for immediate counterinsurgency action, . . . there are strong indications that they [the Vietnamese] will continue to delay necessary actions unless highly pressured to act promptly and decisively." According to Ambassador Durbrow, the Vietnamese employed these tactics because the "main features of [the] plan involve personnel and personalities, and these are hardest decisions for Diem to make because of his reluctance [to] risk sharing power with anyone outside his family." Mr. Durbrow suggested that if he continued to fail to obtain Diem's consent to the plan "we may then be compelled to request strong personal message from President Kennedy to Diem."[119]

In contrast to the Ambassador, General McGarr believed the new instructions to be ill-timed and a further example of civilian intrusion into matters that were better handled

by the military. Just prior to receipt of the State Department message in the Embassy, the general voiced in a letter to Rear Admiral Luther C. Heinz, Director for Far Eastern Affairs, International Security Affairs, in the Department of Defense, his desire that the "opposite numbers in State" might become convinced that "we of the military are professionally trained in the complex business of warfare—all kinds—and that continual defense by MAAG against overly simplified civilian solutions can be not only time consuming . . . but dangerous militarily."[120]

After the arrival of the new instructions, the Chief, MAAG, continued to write in the same vein to other military officers in the Pentagon. In a letter to the Director of Military Assistance in the Pentagon, General McGarr forthrightly indicated his objections to the recent State Department message, declaring that it would be "counterproductive." If followed, he predicted, "it will confuse and will retard the offensive of the Government of Vietnam against the Viet Cong which is finally getting underway." Furthermore, General McGarr claimed that, in contrast to the implication in the message, there already existed an "approved overall Operations Plan for driving the Viet Cong from Vietnam . . . and parts of it are already underway." According to the MAAG commander, what was required was "time to implement our present sound plans with GVN—not directives to make major changes." He took strong exception to threats to withdraw aid to the Vietnamese: "It must also be understood that neither MAAG or the Ambassador can direct the GVN to follow our recommendations—we can only work through persuasion and advice." General McGarr concluded with the hope that "our decision-making people will probably wish to reconsider the possible withholding of such aid as contrary to our President's policy."[121]

Despite his reluctance to place pressure on Diem, General McGarr had his own problems with the Vietnamese president. On 6 March he presented Diem a French language analysis drafted by the MAAG headquarters of the Vietnamese counterinsurgency effort. Summing up the paper, the American general told President Diem that the government's strategy of static security combined with offensive sweeps was too defensive. President Diem, however, rejected this assumption. He argued, in turn, that the South Vietnamese concept of operations developed by his brother Nhu and based on "lines of strength" was actually offensive in nature. According to the Vietnamese president, it only became defensive when there were not sufficient troops to carry out the missions. Furthermore, he maintained that he had ordered his troops to carry the offensive to the enemy, "and they had done this with good results."[122]

General McGarr believed, however, that this "is largely wishful thinking." He argued that this emphasis on manning blockhouses and guarding fixed installations had caused the troops to go "on the defensive mentally." The American commander wanted the Vietnamese to employ mobile striking forces as part of a comprehensive offensive plan. Moreover, he urged President Diem to give his military commanders full control of operations in their sectors. While the Vietnamese president insisted that his military commanders already had such authority, General McGarr countered that his MAAG advisors observed "that the Province Chief has far too much autonomy in the military area and often circumvents the senior military officer's exercise of his command authority."[123]

In his report of the conversation to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, McGarr wrote:

> The tenor of Diem's remarks were consistently favorable to the Province Chiefs as opposed to the purely military commanders and there is little doubt of his sympathy for and confidence in the former. This, of course, gives warning of inevitable future problems in the actual implementation of command and control, regardless of the expected unity of command edict. The problem is now, and will continue to be the direct and personal contact of Province Chiefs with the President—outside the military chain of command.[124]

President Diem then told General McGarr that he was considering placing the Field Command in complete charge of military operations throughout the country in both peace and war. At this time, the Field Command was a planning headquarters and only became operational during time of war. The American believed that this move on Diem's part would be "eminently satisfactory provided it is actually implemented." In his report of the conversation, General McGarr related that he had "often tried to persuade the President to officially recognize that a state of war exists here now, but for political reasons, this has not been done."[125]

Finally, the MAAG Chief outlined to President Diem the basic military recommendations of the Counterinsurgency Plan. These consisted of the reorganization of the top command structure to insure unity of command as well as to provide a staff that could carry out these measures. Furthermore, the Vietnamese were to develop a national operations plan for controlling counterinsurgency operations.[126]

After this meeting, General McGarr believed he had made some progress in obtaining approval of the military aspects of the Counterinsurgency Plan, but once more there was evidence that the Vietnamese were hedging. In a letter to Secretary Thuan the following week, he observed that in February when he and Ambassador Durbrow presented the plan to President Diem, they were "encouraged by our apparent unity of interests and the likelihood that the plan in its entirety would prove substantially acceptable to your government." General McGarr further stated that the meeting the previous week with President Diem "bore out my feeling that he was favorably inclined to adopting the plan substantially as presented." The American commander, however, now learned that follow-on staff meetings have "cast some doubt as to the understanding by your government of certain important military provisions of the Counterinsurgency Plan which presumably had been agreed upon." General McGarr observed that he could not provide any of the military assistance funds until "agreement has been reached on the military portion of the Counterinsurgency Plan as a whole."[127]

Ambassador Durbrow followed up on General McGarr's letter and on 16 March met with President Diem "to urge his acceptance" of the Counterinsurgency Plan. He told the Vietnamese leader that he understood that the general had "come to basic oral agreement" with Secretary Thuan about the "main military" components of the plan. The Ambassador nevertheless enumerated several aspects that needed further clarification. According to Mr. Durbrow, "Diem was most affable, exuded confidence and for first time

expressed some gratitude" about the plan "which he promised [to] implement as best he could." The Ambassador, nevertheless, recommended, "before giving full green light" to President Diem "we should await outcome detail discussion by GVN-US officials." He noted that in the meantime, MAAG was quietly ordering some equipment for the proposed 20,000 man increase in the Vietnamese Armed Forces.[128]

While both General McGarr and Ambassador Durbrow pressed the Vietnamese about accepting the Counterinsurgence Plan, they still differed about the amount of pressure that should be applied and, more important, about the relationship between the US MAAG and the Embassy. In several formal and informal communications through and outside the military chain of command, General McGarr had complained about what he termed unwarranted ambassadorial interference. On 22 March he wrote to General Lemnitzer that the Ambassador was overstepping his authority. The MAAG commander acknowledged that by a November 1960 executive order US Ambassadors had "affirmative responsibility for the coordination and supervision" of the functions of other agencies "in the respective countries," but he questioned the manner in which Ambassador Durbrow exercised this authority. According to General McGarr, the Ambassador was "exercising significant control over military operations here . . . even down to the tactics of these operations."[129]

The MAAG Chief continued:

> I have repeatedly been faced with the problem of securing Country Team approval of actions in the purely military field only to find these plans and proposals thwarted or delayed—not for purely political or economic reasons, which would be more understandable—but often on purely military grounds as interpreted by nonmilitary men. This accomplished by 'coordinating' military professional opinion out of a Country Team paper.[130]

Finally, General McGarr observed that he had occasionally made his views known to Defense Department officials through military channels. He believed that he had the responsibility to provide his military superiors with his "considered, unadulterated military opinions." In three such instances, Ambassador Durbrow had taken official notice of these reports as being a contravention of his authority.[131]

In his inspection trip to Southeast Asia, General Trapnell had visited South Vietnam, and in his final report on 28 March to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he largely supported the position of General McGarr. In the report he made ten recommendations including the strong suggestion that military matters should be directed through military rather than country team channels. General Trapnell observed that although the concept of overall policy coordination through the Ambassador and country team was a sound policy in most cases, it was not applicable to the situation in South Vietnam. He argued that in the special circumstances existing there, the country team review had "sometimes delayed, thwarted, or precluded military plans or recommendations of Chief MAAG." According to General Trapnell, the deterioration of internal security in South Vietnam demanded that:

> the Country Team concept of control and coordination under the Ambassador should not apply and that pure military matters should be the responsibility of the senior US [military] officer in the country concerned. Military directives should not come through the Ambassador for his review but directly through military channels.[132]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were sympathetic to what they considered the plight of General McGarr but were cautious in their support of General Trapnell's recommendation for limiting the coordinating authority of the Ambassador. In their memorandum on 31 March to Secretary McNamara, they suggested only that he initiate a study of the problem. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that any resolution of the question over the authority of the Ambassador would involve discussion with the State Department and ultimately presidential approval. Secretary McNamara referred the entire matter to his Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, Paul H. Nitze, for action.[133]

The first meeting between the representatives of the State and Defense Departments ended in a stalemate. The Department of Defense suggested sending a joint message that stressed the need for rapid reporting of military information through military channels, "including information relating to divergences of view which might produce delays in required actions." In denying the request, the State Department spokesman "adamantly [was] opposed to any communication which could be construed or misconstrued as a challenge of the Ambassador's 'absolute' authority and responsibility for supervising all US activities in the country."[134]

At this point, the Defense Department officials decided that pressing the State Department on this subject would only bring diminishing returns. The compromise that led to the November 1960 executive order had only been achieved after very hard bargaining and was considered the best that could be obtained. In its report on the subject, the Assistant Secretary for ISA held that to reopen the question now "would serve no useful purpose and might, in fact be counterproductive."[135]

Despite deciding against forcing the issue, the Defense Department retained the belief, held by both Defense and State legal advisors, that the existing agreement allowed for direct communication "between program chiefs abroad and their respective agencies." According to this judgment there was "no actual prohibition against the use of military communication channels by the Chief MAAG in Viet-Nam for any information that he cares to transmit." In the ISA report, the author observed that visiting officers found the "current procedures established by the Ambassador have the effect of strongly inhibiting the free flow of military information and views from the Chief MAAG through military channels."[136]

While discovering there was merit in the MAAG's complaints, the ISA investigation also concluded that much of the difficulty lay in the unsatisfactory personal relationship between the Ambassador and the Chief, MAAG, as well as his predecessors. This being the case, the ISA report contained a practical solution to the entire affair without causing a fracas with the State Department. Noting that the US Senate on 15 March had

confirmed Frederick E. Nolting, the Deputy Permanent Representative to NATO, to be the new American Ambassador to Vietnam, the author of the report observed:

> Optimum prospects of enhancing the ability of the Chief MAAG to perform his mission more effectively lie in establishing close rapport with the new Ambassador. If Mr. Nolting fully understands, prior to his departure for his new post, the true nature of the military emergency in Viet-Nam and the desirability of treating the counterinsurgency aspect of the situation as an essentially military operation, he will likely appreciate the need for entrusting to the Chief MAAG a considerable measure of delegated responsibility in military matters.[137]

To facilitate this easing of relations between the US military and civilian representatives in Vietnam, the report recommended that the Defense Department recall General McGarr to Washington to participate in the orientation of the new ambassador. Other suggested participants were Secretary McNamara, Assistant Secretary Nitze, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lemnitzer.[138]

While General McGarr later in April received orders to take part in "urgent high-level consultations on US policy and actions re Vietnam,"[139] this was probably due to events outside the internal disputes between the Defense and State Departments. The Kennedy administration had begun the first of many major reassessments of US Policy in Vietnam and Laos.

3

Continuing Crises: Laos and Vietnam, March–May 1961

The Trapnell Report on Laos and Status of Contingency Planning, March 1961

Lieutenant General Thomas J. H. Trapnell returned from the SEATO meeting in Bangkok in late March with a much more pessimistic view than Secretary Rusk, especially of the military situation in Laos. In his extensive report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the general outlined the basic problems facing the Laotian Royal Forces. He observed that the terrain in Laos was basically inhospitable to the deployment and employment of conventional forces but was "made to order for guerrilla warfare." As could be expected given the existing battle lines, he described the Laotian Army's plans for the taking of the Plain of Jars as "unrealistic." Nevertheless, he recommended an air bombing campaign against the Pathet Lao forces there to facilitate the capture of this vital sector by General Phoumi's troops. General Trapnell believed this possibly could be accomplished by early June. Furthermore, he argued that there should be no restrictions placed upon the "use of conventional air weapons including napalm."[1]

His other recommendations included providing armed helicopters to the Royalists, conversion of the Program Evaluation Office to a full-fledged Military Assistance Advisory Group, the placement of US advisors at the battalion level, and the establishment of a Joint Unconventional Warfare Task Force to conduct both psychological and special operations against the Pathet Lao. According to the American general, the Pathet Lao soldiers were no better than the Royalist troops and it was only the presence down to the company level of "Viet Minh [North Vietnamese] advisors as 'stiffeners'" that made the qualitative difference. General Trapnell's final proposal

was to replace Ambassador Winthrop Brown in Laos with a more accommodating personage. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved most of Trapnell's report except this last paragraph. General Lemnitzer ordered the offending passage deleted from the final version, declaring that it was too sensitive and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff "could deal with it 'amongst ourselves without the necessity of broad staffing.'"[2]

At about this time the Joint Chiefs of Staff also had under consideration a new CINCPAC contingency operational plan for Laos that Admiral Felt labeled X–61. According to the Pacific commander, the new operational plan was a combination of the old CINCPAC Operational Plan 32–59 (Phase II Laos) and SEATO Operational Plan 5/61. Based on the presumption that the Laotian government would ask SEATO for assistance against a reinforced Pathet Lao, the plan called for the deployment to Laos of a multinational task force under an American commander. The American portion of the multinational task force would include the equivalent of a Marine regiment supported by a Marine air group, an Army Airborne battle group, an Army brigade task force, an Air Force mobile strike force, and an Army logistic command. Other nations that were to contribute forces were: Thailand—2 infantry battalions, 1 ranger company, and 1 regimental combat team, as well as 2 air units; the Philippines—a medical detachment and an engineering company; Pakistan—an infantry brigade group and an air squadron; and Australia, "if participating"—an infantry battalion and a fighter squadron. The US Army brigade task force, the Thai regimental combat team, and the Australian fighter squadron were to be held in reserve until needed.[3]

According to the concept of operations, the multinational force would secure the key cities of Vientiane on the northern edge of the Mekong River in Laos, Savannakhet along the river in central Laos, and Paksane along the lower reaches of the Mekong in southern Laos. In addition, the international troops would also take up positions along the key Mekong crossing sites near the respective cities. If ordered, the Multinational Task Force (MTF) would deploy to protect Luang Prabang, the royal capital of the country. The basic mission of the force was to relieve the hard-pressed Royal Army of the defense of the cities so that the Laotians could take the offensive against the Communist troops. The planners estimated that the reaction time for the first elements of the MTF to arrive to assume their mission would be about four days. They based this on the assumption that the execution order would come "without prior warning and without the prepositioning of forces." If activated, the American commander was to be General Weller, the 3rd Marine Division commander, who had already established his Joint Task Force 116 headquarters on Okinawa. His deputy for the new force would be the Thai commander.[4]

In their review of the CINCPAC plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the basic concept but recommended several modifications. The two major ones related to the speed of the deployment of the multinational force and to command relations. First, they changed the reaction time from four days to forty-eight hours. Furthermore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested as much prepositioning of troops as possible. They emphasized the need for the rapid insertion of forces, so movement time should "be compressed to the minimum."[5]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also pointed to the need for command relations to reflect the participation of the Asian nations. They observed that the plan "should be modified [to show] that the SEATO relationships will be achieved with the least practicable delay but with minimum disruption in current planning." They referred to the annex in SEATO Plan 5/61, which dictated that Thailand provide the force commander but that a US Army general command the SEATO Field Force in Laos.[6]

Finally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Admiral Felt to provide them with three items of information. They wanted to know the earliest that Pacific Command forces could be ready to carry out either the SEATO or the multinational plan. Second, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted CINCPAC to provide them with estimates of the number of troops and units that could be deployed within the first 24 hours, then in the first 48 hours of the operation, and then in the first 72 hours. Finally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted Admiral Felt to tell them what assistance they could provide him to assure success.[7] In a message later that day, they warned the Pacific commander against any sudden deployment of troops and ships, cautioning him regarding the "necessity for discreet movements." The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted to avoid any possibility of the Soviets protesting in the United Nations against the presence of US forces near Laos or, especially, Thailand. They feared that such a protest would disrupt the "present sense of timing."[8]

Diplomatic Attempts to Resolve the Laotian Crisis

At the end of March, in addition to their concerns about the CINCPAC contingency plans and General Trapnell's report on Laos, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were involved in discussions with the State Department about the status of US policy in Laos. At a State and Defense Department joint meeting, General Lemnitzer and Admiral Burke joined in a general discussion of the status of diplomatic moves to resolve the Laotian problem. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs J. Graham Parsons expressed some concern that the Soviet Union had not yet formally responded to the British note about the possibility of a cease-fire and a new international conference. Mr. Parsons wondered aloud if the Russian delay was due to "pressure from Communist China." Admiral Burke then asked about the position that the United States would take on the makeup of a new Laotian government. The Assistant Secretary replied that the administration opposed a "tripartite government" based on a neutralist alliance with the Pathet Lao, as that would create a "two out of three basis for the leftists." He acknowledged, however, that the United States could accept one or two Communist leaders being allowed to hold minor cabinet positions.[9]

At this point General Lemnitzer recommended that when and if an international control commission was established that it have more power than the one for Vietnam. He declared that the latter would "not even look into the Russian airlift." Furthermore, the Chairman insisted that the United States remain unwavering in its support of the Royal Laotian government. He argued, with support from then Deputy Secretary of

State Chester Bowles, that there was really no way to police the border between North Vietnam and Laos. General Lemnitzer stated that it was his "belief that the Communists would press their attacks between now and the convening of a conference." The general agreed with an assertion by Walt Rostow that the best response to "Communist pressure" was to employ the two-engine propeller-driven Douglas B-26 Invader aircraft in a bombing campaign against the Pathet Lao. General Lemnitzer added that eight of the World War II vintage aircraft were ready for use and sixteen more would be ready by mid-April.[10]

With the subject of US aircraft in Laos being raised, the Chairman asked about the fate of Army Major L. B. Bailey, the assistant Army attaché at the US Embassy in Laos. On 23 March Major Bailey had been a passenger on board a Douglas C-47 twin-engine Skytrain transport and reconnaissance plane that had overflown the Plain of Jars on a flight from Vientiane to Saigon. Pathet Lao gunners had shot down the transport, but Major Bailey parachuted safely from the stricken transport and immediately was captured by Communist troops. While the aircraft was definitely on a reconnaissance mission, it was doing so with the permission of the Royal Laotian government. US anthorities argued that the mission was legal according to international law and that the major, who held a diplomatic passport, should be released. General Lemnitzer had earlier recommended that the United States issue a formal protest to the Soviet Union, and possibly Communist China, asking for the release of the major. Assistant Secretary Parsons declared that the American government had made overtures through British, French, and International Red Cross channels.

By this time, however, State Department and White House officials had consulted with the President and had reached a consensus that it was necessary to keep this episode "low key." They believed that the United States was in a poor bargaining position since, after all, the aircraft had contained photographic equipment manned by a crew of reconnaissance experts and was flying over a "de facto combat zone." Hence, it was best to concentrate on working quietly to gain the release of Major Bailey rather than publicize the issue. Major Bailey would remain a prisoner of the Pathet Lao for over a year.[11]

A major reason for the tentativeness of the administration's efforts on behalf of the Army major was that the negotiations with the Russians appeared to be reaching a crucial stage. On 1 April Premier Nikita Khrushchev, in a meeting with American Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson in Moscow, indicated that he would agree with the British proposal for an international conference. The Russian premier, however, hedged somewhat on the prospect of a cease-fire, saying only that the Soviets would assist in bringing the Laotians together. Ambassador Thompson thought, all in all, that the Soviet reply was positive and that it did not pay "to quibble over the fine points," except for the issue of the cease-fire.[12]

Despite the possibility of peace negotiations, the Communists continued their on-and-off offensive in Laos. On the same date as Thompson's meeting with the Soviet leader, the Pathet Lao captured Tha Thom, the Royalist base of operations on the southern approaches to the Plain of Jars. According to American observers, the Royalist defenders

provided very little resistance and their withdrawal was "completely uncontrolled." Despite their rout of the Royal force, the Communists made little effort to consolidate their newly won gains. The Royal Army troops reassembled in new positions some ten miles to the south of their old ones.[13]

SEATO Contingency Planning, April 1961

Despite the bad news from the battlefront in Laos, in late March Admiral Felt had returned to Honolulu from Bangkok with some confidence for the allied prospects in Laos. Like Secretary Rusk, he believed that real progress had been made at the SEATO conference. On 2 April, in a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pacific commander wrote that the discussions in Bangkok had resulted in a "meeting of the minds." According to the Navy admiral, the SEATO Council's final resolution was a clear declaration of allied unity and left the distinct possibility, if not probability, that SEATO would take military action if the Communist forces continued their efforts to take over Laos "by force of arms."[14]

The Pacific commander then elaborated on SEATO contingency planning, especially Plan 5, which applied to Laos. Admiral Felt stated that all of the allied military advisors at Bangkok believed it was "a good plan, adequate for the situation as it exists today, and flexible enough to be executed in its entirety or in part." He then went into an analysis of the participation of the allied nations. The admiral believed at first that there might be difficulty with the British concerning their role in the plan, which called for the commitment of a Commonwealth division consisting of Australian, New Zealander, and British units. According to Admiral Felt, at the beginning of the meeting the United Kingdom military advisor apparently wanted to limit his country's activity to "moral and logistic support." With added pressure from the Australian and New Zealander advisors, the United States succeeded in changing the British view. Admiral Felt stated "with some assurance" that the Commonwealth division "contribution to Plan 5 could be counted upon."[15]

While not holding any great expectation for a large number of French units, the Pacific commander allowed that France's military representative at Bangkok was "not 'obstructionist.'" He, however, "conditioned" any participation of French troops upon that nation's capability to obtain enough ships to transport its units from bases in Africa and Europe to Southeast Asia. Admiral Felt suggested that any French contingent would be placed in the SEATO reserve. Other countries expected to supply military forces included Pakistan and the Philippines, and "Thai participation was a foregone conclusion." Except for Thailand, the expected initial troop involvements from these other nations were minimal—a possible Pakistani battalion and a Philippine medical component and engineering company.[16]

Admiral Felt acknowledged that the actual commitment of forces to Plan 5 remained dependent upon the agreement of all the members of SEATO to its implementation and that no such decision had been made. He still, however, was recommending changes

to the plan, which he would then forward for the approval of the other SEATO military advisors. In his conclusion to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the admiral maintained that Plan 5 was "the best basis for multi-national action." Furthermore, for the time being he was placing his CINCPAC Operational Plan X–61 "on ice." Admiral Felt suggested that there needed to be "tactical flexibility" to cope with the "fluid situation in Laos." At present, he was not about to preposition forces but would await the development of events to clarify circumstances there. At the same time, he wanted the SEATO Field Force Command to be as well structured as that of Task Force 116.[17]

During the month of April the United States continued its two-fold policy of simultaneously working both the diplomatic and military tracks to reach some sort of reasonable solution to the Laotian dilemma. In the military arena, in addition to the contingency planning relating to SEATO or US forces operating alone, the United States continued its effort to shore up the Laotian Royalist Forces. On 3 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff reported progress made in the effort to implement the 9 March presidential decisions to improve and reinforce the Laotian Army and irregular troops. According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the United States now had established in Thailand a base including a joint operational command for Marine helicopters and four Air Force C–130 transports to ferry supplies into Laos. Moreover, the airlift had provided enough materiel to supply and equip some 3,800 Meo tribesmen fighting against the Pathet Lao.[18] The next day, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Admiral Felt that, because of the sensitivity over possible political negotiations, presidential approval was necessary before ordering any further flights of the Air Force transports into Laos. Despite this precaution, Secretary McNamara had asked the State Department to request permission from the Thai government to initiate B–26 flight operations over Laos from bases in Thailand.[19]

About this time, on 4 April, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, accompanied by a high-level entourage, began a four-day official visit to the United States. While largely in agreement on the essentials, the British were wary of American military preparations. On the afternoon of 6 April at the State Department in Washington, the British foreign minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, met with Secretary of State Rusk. In his conversation with the Secretary, Lord Home stated his uncertainty about some of the military planning. Secretary Rusk replied that it was his understanding that the British military leaders were "in close consultation with the Pentagon and that no decisions had been made." He acknowledged, however, that there was an increased emphasis on contingency planning. At that juncture, Lord Home declared that he had heard that Admiral Felt was thinking of alerting some of the forces designed to carry out SEATO Plan 5 for Laos. After checking the status of the planning, Secretary Rusk admitted that the admiral "had been in some communication about planning for Plan 5 if and when [the member] governments approve." The Secretary maintained, however, that the United States had not "ground up any military plans about which the UK are not fully informed. . . . We do not want to do anything to interrupt the possibility of a cease-fire or break it up if one occurs. There are a number of steps possible without getting into [Plan] M5." The British foreign secretary agreed with Secretary Rusk that the planning

effort appeared to be viable but ended the discussion by asking the American to "keep an eye on any possible 'alerts.'"[20]

In the diplomatic area, matters continued to remain somewhat at a standstill. When President Kennedy, at an earlier discussion the morning of 6 April on board the presidential yacht *The Honey Fitz*, asked about a formal response from the Russians on the British proposal for an international conference and cease-fire, Lord Home was not able to give him a definitive answer. The United Kingdom had added the condition that the conference could not begin until the cessation of all combat. Lord Home told President Kennedy that he had hoped to receive a reply soon, but he had learned from news reports that "Khrushchev had now gone off again." In actuality, the British would not receive the Soviet reply for another ten days and then with further stipulations.[21]

In the meantime, the military situation in Laos took another one of its twists and turns. On 5 April the Laotian Royal Army supported by American "technicians" or advisors completed a combined drop of parachute troops in C–47 transports and regular infantry in helicopters north of the town of Muong Kasi, eighty miles north of Vientiene near the important crossroads between Vietianne and Luang Prabang. Admiral Felt praised both the paratroop and helicopter assaults as working "very efficiently, with skilled American technicians located at key positions during the execution." The second part of the planned offensive, however, failed to achieve its objectives. According to the Pacific commander, the infantry force that was to move over Highway 13 from Vang Vieng to Muong Kasi failed to reach that town. Admiral Felt also complained that the US Ambassador the previous day had almost called the airlift off because of the "possible effect upon diplomatic negotiations." Admiral Felt protested that such interference was "indicative of indecision" and lack of support for the Royal government.[22]

On 5 April as well, Admiral Felt reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as requested on the status of the deployment of US forces in the Pacific to carry out the US and SEATO contingency plans for Laos. He declared that since 22 March, with the heightened alert for Task Force 116, the first troops could land in Laos within forty-eight hours after "the order to execute." Furthermore, he could reduce this reaction time to twenty-four hours if necessary by moving units to closer "standby positions." This would require, however, that the 315th Air Division in the Philippines be fully "loaded and cocked" to carry out this additional deployment. The admiral believed that all of this could be accomplished on short notice.[23]

At the same time, the US Pacific commander sent out messages to the SEATO senior commanders informing them of some changes to Plan 5 that he wanted to institute. According to the revisions, which incorporated some of the aspects of the CINCPAC X–61 plan, the lead units were to consist of two components, Force A and Force B. Force A, which would go into Vientiene, was to consist of two US Marine battalion landing teams already at sea, two Thai infantry battalions, and a Pakistani infantry battalion. An Australian battalion, a New Zealander battalion, and a British battalion were to make up Force B, which was to operate further south near Savannakhet in central Laos. A base area command was to consist of Thai, Philippine, Commonwealth, Pakistani, and US

support forces. These nations, with the exception of the Philippines, were to provide the supporting air components. Thai infantry units and a US Airborne battle group would make up a central reserve, while a general reserve would consist of a Pakistani brigade group supplemented by a French infantry battalion and a Philippine engineer company.[24]

The following day Admiral Felt changed the command and control of the US and SEATO Forces in the Pacific. He ordered Marine General Weller, the Commander of JTF 116, and his task force staff to "revert to a planning status." Simultaneously, the Pacific commander assigned the Deputy Commander of the US Army Pacific, Lieutenant General Paul D. Harkins, as Commander Designate of the SEATO Field Force under Plan 5. General Harkins was to open up his headquarters on Okinawa, incorporating much of the personnel of the former Task Force 116.[25]

To Talk or to Fight, April 1961

In the meantime, the Kennedy administration continued its efforts to determine the possibilities of a cease-fire and political settlement in Laos. The Defense Department referred to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the question of the establishment of a new International Control Commission to oversee the provisions of such an agreement. In their reply on 11 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff basically repeated General Lemnitzer's earlier reservations about the establishment of the ICC. They bluntly stated that "from a military point of view . . . it would be inimical to US interests to re-establish the Geneva-constituted ICC under its old terms." Despite their doubts, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that US policymakers probably would have to accept the same composition of the old commission to reach any sort of agreement with the Russians. They recommended, however, that the United States insist on changing some of the ground rules that would allow a majority vote among the commissioners and free the inspection teams of the necessity of obtaining the permission of the protagonists before carrying out their missions. They remained rather pessimistic about the results and suggested that the administration make an effort to use the media to expose Communist violations "of whatever agreements might be reached by an international conference."[26]

By 13 April the military situation in Laos had deteriorated, and on the diplomatic front, the Russians appeared to be stalling in their reply to the latest British proposal for a cease-fire. In Laos, the Royal Army had failed to reinforce the airborne troops that had reached the Muong Kasi crossroads and the paratroopers were forced to withdraw to Luang Prabang. Furthermore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reported to Secretary McNamara that the entire battlefront in Laos was disintegrating. According to the Chiefs, the Communist bloc forces including the Russians were increasing their resupply of the Pathet Lao forces in the Plain of Jars area and the "Communist bloc technicians were continuing to operate with the Kong Le and Pathet Lao forces."[27] In a hurried meeting of the administration's Laotian Task Force, the members discussed evidence that the Pathet Lao were massing to threaten the towns of Paksane and Thakhek in central Laos, thus isolating

both Vientiane and Luang Prabang from southern Laos. According to Walt Rostow, the Laotian Task Force recommended some sort of "SEATO operation of a Lebanon type," namely some sort of movement into Laos employing Plan 5.[28]

That evening President Kennedy met with several of his senior advisors, including Secretary McNamara and Secretary Rusk, about the Laotian crisis to study the recommendations of the Laotian Task Force. As a first step, President Kennedy authorized the US military members of the Laotian Training Advisory Group with the Laotian forces, as well as those assigned to the Program Evaluation Office, to wear their uniforms with their rank insignia and if necessary to go on combat operations. In effect, they would become a full-fledged Military Assistance Advisory Group. The idea was to bolster the sagging morale of the Royalists and also to provide some much-needed leadership. The President asked Secretary Rusk to inform the French and British governments of this American action and possible violation of the Geneva Agreement. According to President Kennedy, the United States would only be doing what the Communists themselves had already done with their supply and advisory effort with the Pathet Lao. More important, if the Communists used this as an excuse to expand their operations, the President wanted to inform his European allies that the United States would then consider "appropriate SEATO action in which we would expect their support."[29]

Both the French and, more important, the British were unhappy with the American proposed actions. Lord Home in his reply expressed anxiety that a military move at this time would have an undesirable effect on world opinion in that it would appear that the United States will have "torpedoed the chances of a settlement just when they looked promising." Furthermore, he wrote, according to British intelligence there was actually very little combat in Laos and the Pathet Lao appeared to be "as inactive as the Royal Lao Army." The British foreign minister even suggested that a quasi-cease-fire might now exist on the battlefield. He, nevertheless, accepted "the legitimacy of US paramilitary action, but asked for a delay in implementing the decision for a few more days."[30]

In his reply on 15 April, Secretary Rusk diplomatically stated that there appeared to be "some difference in our assessment" of the Laotian situation. According to Secretary Rusk, both the military and the political areas presented problems. He described the Royalist army's circumstances as "precarious" and the Laotian regime as demonstrating a "disturbing political decay." With all the talk of a cease-fire, he declared, "our Laotian friends, not among the stoutest of heart, at best . . . [were] even less effective militarily than usual." The Secretary maintained, moreover, that the SEATO and US efforts to reform the Phoumi government had caused much resentment and discouragement among the Laotian officials. Secretary Rusk then expressed his concerns about the Soviet delay in responding to the proposal about the cease-fire and their continuing and increasing airlift of supplies to the Pathet Lao. While conceding to Lord Home that there were no big battles at present he observed that the buildup of Communist forces in central Laos and in the Plain of Jars and the failure of the government effort at Muong Kasi were very worrisome. Secretary Rusk then explained that President Kennedy had authorized the establishment of a US MAAG in Laos and advisors to wear their uniforms

and carry weapons. He ended his letter with the statement that the United States was "not spoiling for a fight" and would be pleased with a favorable reply by the Russians to the cease-fire request.[31]

The situation became somewhat less tense when on the following day, 16 April, Foreign Secretary Andrei Gromyko handed the British Ambassador to the Soviet Union a counter-proposal to the call for a cease-fire and an international conference. While differing in language and some of the details from the British note, the Russians basically approved the essentials of the original proposal, including the requirement that a cease-fire would go into effect immediately. The Soviets also agreed that the newly formed International Control Commission would verify the cessation of combat. After consultation with the United States and further negotiations with the Russians, the British accepted the Russian texts. With this agreement on 24 April, the two governments announced the reconstitution of the International Control Commission at New Delhi, appealed for a cease-fire between the two belligerents, and issued invitations to an international conference to open in Geneva, Switzerland, on 12 May 1961.[32]

The Struggle against the Viet Cong, March–April 1961

Meanwhile, the military situation in Vietnam, aggravated by the critical developments in Laos, also grew worse. After a relative lull from September 1960 to March 1961, the Viet Cong renewed their attacks against government positions in earnest, with increasing incidents and casualties. In the interval the Communists had restructured their political and military organizations in South Vietnam. On 20 December 1960 they held a secret meeting in a forested area near the Cambodian border and formed the National Front for the Liberation of Vietnam to provide political cover for the struggle against the Diem regime. In January the Politburo in North Vietnam ordered the formation of the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) in War Zone D to direct both military and political operations. Finally, in February, guerrilla units in the Mekong Delta merged with those in the Central Highlands under COSVN to form the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF), the military arm of the National Liberation Front.[33]

The MAAG estimated the strength of the hard-core Viet Cong at 12,000, an expansion of over 2,000 since December. Moreover, the Communists maintained "some degree of . . . control or influence" over 58 percent of the country. President Diem had recalled 6,000 reservists to active duty but claimed he could call no more for lack of funds. A US National Intelligence Estimate at the end of March reported that in South Vietnam the internal security problem had reached "serious proportions." According to the estimate, discontent was rampant among intellectuals and was increasing in the army. As a result, the report contained the disturbing prediction that the odds favored a noncommunist coup attempt against President Diem in the next year or so.[34]

In one sense, the Laos crisis distracted policymakers from the situation in Vietnam, but in another it provided an impetus for an increased effort in Vietnam. As negotiations

in April sputtered along about the possibility of a cease-fire in Laos, White House advisors recommended a new look at the manner in which the Vietnam counterinsurgency war was being fought and what new American assistance was needed. On 29 March Presidential Advisor Walt Rostow sent President Kennedy a memorandum stressing the need for a more coordinated political and military policy in South Vietnam to strengthen that nation. He suggested that Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson should visit there to symbolize American backing for the Vietnamese government. In addition, Mr. Rostow recommended sending to Vietnam armed helicopters, US Special Forces troops, and other new weaponry to assist in the counterinsurgency war.[35]

At the same time, asked by the President to make a survey of US counterinsurgency training, Walt Rostow sent a series of questions to Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff after a visit to the Special Forces Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The two questions relating to the situation in Vietnam involved the employment of helicopters and US Special Forces troops there. In his almost accusatory query about the use of helicopters, he stated that these aircraft were "uniquely effective in tracking down guerrillas," and he wanted to know, "Why are the capabilities of the helicopter not being fully exploited in the counter-guerrilla program of the Vietnamese?" His second inquiry was just as pointed: "Why were the Special Warfare units withdrawn from Vietnam in November 1960? Why are they not being sent back to work with our MAAG there? General Decker [US Army Chief of Staff], when asked, indicated that CINCPAC had opposed. Why?"[36]

Secretary McNamara responded to Rostow's Vietnam questions in detail and without heat. On the subject of the helicopters, he answered that Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr was "well aware" of their importance and that there were soon to be 25 of the aircraft in country, 14 of the older H–19 and 11 of the newer H–34s. The latter aircraft were specifically sent to Vietnam for counterinsurgency operations. Secretary McNamara declared that General McGarr fully believed that at this time 25 helicopters were all that the Vietnamese could "effectively use and maintain." The Secretary, however, stated that General McGarr was "being further queried by cable with reference to full exploitation of helicopters."[37]

Secretary McNamara's reply to Mr. Rostow about the use of Special Forces in Vietnam was more complicated. It not only involved the willingness to use Special Forces but also the Vietnamese and US bureaucratic structures as well as numerical limitations placed on American advisors by the Geneva Accords. The Defense Secretary noted that in the past counterguerrilla and pacification duties were carried out by the Vietnamese Civil Guard, who until only recently had been under the Vietnamese Interior Ministry rather than under the Ministry of Defense. Because of the Vietnamese organization, the training of the Civil Guard came under the US Operations Mission rather than the MAAG. Moreover, the Central Intelligence Agency had largely been responsible for training the guard in guerrilla warfare, while the MAAG had the responsibility for training the regular Vietnamese Armed Forces in counterguerrilla operations.[38]

According to Secretary McNamara, much of this situation had now changed. President Diem, who in the past had "been trying to conduct counter-guerrilla operations

almost personally and with a complicated fragmentation of responsibilities," had agreed to several reforms. While not yet accepting the entire US Counterinsurgency Plan, he had now given the Defense Ministry responsibility for antiguerrilla operations as well as for the training of the Civil Guard. The US MAAG believed that "this move has greatly facilitated . . . [its] training in this field."[39]

Finally, Secretary McNamara touched upon the problems of sending US Special Forces troops to Vietnam. He noted the stringent limitations placed on the number of American advisors by the Geneva Accords, which was set at 685. While conceding that arguably this number could be recalculated because of the departure of the French, this had not been done. In March of the previous year, with a deterioration of the counterinsurgency situation, General Lemnitzer, then the Army Chief of Staff, had proposed the sending of a "'Cold War Task Force,' consisting of 156 Special Forces personnel and 19 Civil Affairs, psychological and intelligence specialists." Because of the personnel ceilings on the MAAG, the United States decided to send only 30 US Army Special Forces personnel to help train instructors for newly formed Vietnamese Ranger units. Gradually as these Vietnamese instructors became qualified they replaced the Americans, with the last Special Forces troops leaving in November 1960. According to Secretary McNamara, "As we understand it, this training is moving ahead quite effectively and the training load is being adequately carried."[40]

Secretary McNamara then observed that with the limitation on US forces, General McGarr as the MAAG chief had difficult choices to make about the composition of the US advisory team to meet the full training needs of the Vietnamese. The Secretary declared that General McGarr was reevaluating

> the situation and will report if he believes more Special Forces type personnel are needed and can be accommodated within the ceiling. Presuming that the current ceiling is not changed, it is possible that it could be evaded by various subterfuges, but it has so far been the policy of the Country Team to require the MAAG to remain within its ceiling.[41]

On 11 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to Secretary McNamara the adoption of most of the recommendations of the Trapnell report relating to Vietnam. These included full support to the Counterinsurgency Plan in Vietnam, support for the possibility of increased US personnel presence in Vietnam, opposition to any decrease in MAAG strength, and a recommendation that "Defense Support funds [be] provided for a 170,000 man force on the same basis as that now provided for 150,000." In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed military assistance funds to support a 68,000-man Vietnamese Civil Guard. They noted that CINCPAC was in the process of expediting the shipment of 21,000 carbines to the South Vietnamese, as well as other equipment including radios and Claymore mines.[42]

The following day, Mr. Rostow sent another memorandum to President Kennedy advising new initiatives in South Vietnam. Taking note of the reelection of President Diem three days earlier, he suggested that the time had come for "gearing up the whole

Viet-Nam operation" and recommended "an early high level meeting" to discuss a nine-point agenda. These consisted of the following proposals:

1. "The appointment of a full time first-rate back-stop man in Washington";
2. Briefing newly appointed Ambassador Nolting "so that he fully understands the priority you attach to the Viet-Nam problem";
3. The possibility of a visit to Vietnam by the vice president;
4. A return visit to the United States by Diem's acting defense minister, Secretary of State Thuan;
5. Sending a technical and research team to discuss with General McGarr various equipment and "gadgets" as well as techniques that might prove fruitful in a counterinsurgency war;
6. The insertion of Special Forces troops in Vietnam, even if it meant "the raising of the MAAG ceiling, which involves some diplomacy";
7. The replacement of the head of the US civilian assistance program in Vietnam "with a vigorous man who can work well with the military, since some of the rural development problems relate closely to guerrilla operations";
8. The settling of the dispute over extra funds for President Diem;
9. The best tactics to persuade "President Diem to move more rapidly to broaden the base of his government, as well as to decrease its centralization and improve its efficiency."[43]

Finally, Walt Rostow proposed that President Kennedy should write a personal letter to President Diem congratulating him on his recent reelection. Besides pledging continuing American support to the Vietnamese president, he wanted President Kennedy to make "clear to him the urgency you attach to a more effective political and morale setting for his military operation, now that the elections are successfully behind him."[44]

Two days after sending his memorandum, Walt Rostow attended a meeting between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department. At the meeting, in a discussion of the reelection of President Diem, Admiral James S. Russell, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, representing the Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked "whether we are really supporting Diem and, if so, in view of his election victory, shouldn't we publicly affirm our support for him." The State Department representative stated that President Diem had complete US backing and that the Department was trying to make arrangements for President Kennedy to send a personal letter of support to him at the inauguration.[45] At this point, referring to the admiral's question, Mr. Rostow declared that in the next few weeks the "Executive Branch will be taking another concerted look at the entire Vietnamese problem." He then noted the growing concern about the limitation placed on the US effort, observing that "Current thinking is that we should disengage ourselves from the continued support of and adherence to the Geneva Accords since others are openly violating them."[46]

On 15 April Mr. Rostow addressed another memorandum to the President on the Vietnam situation and again made the argument for rethinking the situation in Vietnam. Referring to a recent message from Elbridge Durbrow in which the Ambassador suggested placing increased pressure on President Diem to agree to the Counterinsurgency

Plan, the Special Assistant for Security Affairs recommended that "it would be unwise for us to instruct Durbrow, in his final days in Saigon, to issue the kind of ultimatum he suggests." While remarking upon the necessity of obtaining Diem's acceptance of reform, Mr. Rostow warned, "this is not the moment nor the setting in which to do it." Instead, he believed this incident illustrated the "extreme urgency of getting our Viet-Nam program moving with new faces, enlarged resources, and renewed conviction."[47]

Walt Rostow was not the only one in the administration who was looking to revitalize the Vietnam program. Two days earlier the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sent a memorandum to Secretary of Defense McNamara expressing concern that the possibility of a political settlement in Laos would have an unsettling effect upon its neighbors, especially Vietnam and Thailand. The Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed the need to consider countermeasures to meet the possibility of "intensified counterinsurgency problems" in these two countries.[48] In addition, Secretary McNamara received on 19 April a detailed memorandum from General Lansdale on the Vietnam situation, which he brought to a Cabinet meeting the following day. At that meeting on 20 April, the President authorized the establishment of a high-level interdepartmental Vietnam Task Force, to be headed by Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, to report back within a week an appraisal of the situation in Vietnam.[49]

The Bay of Pigs Episode, April 1961

The Cabinet meeting on 20 April 1961 took place on one of the darkest days of the Kennedy administration. Three days earlier, a Cuban exile brigade organized and sponsored by the United States had landed on two beaches in Cuba off the Bay of Pigs in an effort to topple the Castro Communist regime. Without effective air support or heavy artillery, the brigade soon faced a hopeless situation. Surrounded by Castro forces supported by tanks, artillery, and aircraft, the outnumbered brigade fought valiantly. On the afternoon of 19 April the brigade commander sent his last radio message: "Am destroying all equipment and communications. I have nothing left to fight with. Am taking to the woods."[50]

What effect the Bay of Pigs fiasco had on the Kennedy policy in Vietnam is still unclear. As shown above, his administration was already moving toward a reappraisal of its course of action in that country. The debacle did, however, affect Kennedy's relationship with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Although the President assumed the full blame for the failure of the operation, declaring, "I'm the responsible officer of the government," he strongly believed that both the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had failed him.[51] He later said to Ben Bradlee, the editor of the *Washington Post*, "The first advice I'm going to give my successor is to watch the generals and to avoid feeling that just because they were military men their opinions on military matters were worth a damn."[52]

In particular, the crisis had destroyed his confidence in the advice of General Lemnitzer, the Chairman. Admiral Arleigh Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, recalled that

on 18 April, after attending a high-level small meeting at the White House in which he and General Lemnitzer represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he received a telephone call from Robert Kennedy, the President's brother who was also the Attorney General. Attorney General Kennedy told Admiral Burke that the "President was going to rely upon you to advise him on this situation. He needs advice . . . the rest of the people in the room weren't helpful." Twenty minutes later Admiral Burke received a telephone call from the President, presumably repeating what his brother had said. At this point Admiral Burke told his aide: "What do you do. He is bypassing Lemnitzer, the Chairman, the SecDef, SecNav, CIA and the whole works and putting me in charge of the operation. That is a helluva thing."[53]

After the surrender of the brigade, President Kennedy called upon General Maxwell Taylor, the former Army Chief of Staff, to head a fact-finding commission that included Admiral Burke as the only member from the incumbent Joint Chiefs of Staff.[54] While the CIA played the major role in the Cuban expedition, the Taylor study group declared, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff had the important responsibility of examining into the military feasibility of this operation." Moreover, the Taylor group faulted the Joint Chiefs of Staff for inadequately reviewing "the successive changes of the plan," doing so only "piecemeal and only within a limited context." Moreover, the individual Chiefs "had differing understandings of important features of the operation apparently arising from oral briefings in the absence of written documents."[55] According to Arthur Schlesinger, the Cuban fiasco resulted in President Kennedy choosing "Maxwell Taylor as his personal adviser on military affairs until the time came when he could make him Chief of Staff [actually Chairman of the Joint Chiefs]."[56]

Once More Laos

Throughout the period of final negotiations between the Russians and the British, the Kennedy administration still remained anxious about the final outcome of the crisis. This was not alleviated by the fact that the Laos events occurred almost simultaneously with the Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba. Moreover, the military situation in Laos continued to deteriorate for the Royalist Army as the British and Russian governments deliberated over the parameters of the conference and a possible cease-fire. In fact, on 17 April Walt Rostow informed President Kennedy that the Laotian Task Force viewed the conditions in Laos as very perilous. The task force's intelligence sources reported that the Pathet Lao continued to mass their forces in Central Laos and especially near the Mekong River city of Thakhek, north of Savannakhet. The Laotian Task Force considered the poorly trained Royal Army unit defending the city to be unreliable and its commander to be of "well-proven incapacity." Mr. Rostow reported that the permanent council of SEATO (the local ambassadors in Bangkok) planned to meet soon "in an atmosphere of alarm," fearing that the Pathet Lao soon would reach the Thai border. He did not understand the complacency of the British about this threat and declared, "We are attempting to clarify with them why we are so uneasy."[57]

In actuality, on 17 April in Bangkok, the US representative on the SEATO council informed Washington that he had notified the secretary general of the organization that the United States was requesting a meeting of the council the following day to discuss the present danger to Thakhek. He had proposed that the council members should prepare to consider an appeal for assistance from the Phoumi government as well as issuing a "charter Yellow" warning for the implementation of SEATO Plan 5. The meeting on 18 April was something of an anticlimax. The British representative circulated a copy of the text of the reply that the Russians had given to the British ambassador in Moscow. The SEATO secretary general then recommended, and the council agreed, that it was best to defer any call for Plan 5 until a thorough study of the Soviet response could be made.[58]

Despite the pending agreement, the Pathet Lao continued to maintain their offensive, although, according to Ambassador Brown, carefully avoiding reaching the Mekong River. On 23 April they captured the city and airport of Vang Vieng on Route 13, located halfway between Vientiane and Luang Prabang. The Communists were now in position to threaten the two Laotian capitals in the north as well as the two Laotian cities of Thakhek and Paksane. Ambassador Brown remarked that although the Pathet Lao appeared to be acting cautiously, there was no guarantee that they would do so in the future, or adhere to the proposed cease-fire that was supposed to go into effect the next day.[59]

On 24 April the British and Soviet governments issued their call and invitations for an international conference and for an immediate cease-fire, but this did not end the fighting. While the Phoumi government accepted the appeal for a truce, it immediately became involved in an impasse with the Pathet Lao about where and when to meet to discuss its terms. With this deadlock, the Pathet Lao continued their military pressure and on 26 April overran a Royalist outpost in northern Laos. With this turn of events, Ambassador Brown cabled Washington about the need for possible SEATO intervention. He believed that if the Communists continued their offensive the major Laotian cities were in danger of falling to them. Ambassador Brown saw no way to stop such an enemy advance except by an extensive US air bombing campaign and possible intervention by US and SEATO ground forces. He then asked for the authority, with the advice of the head of the US MAAG in Laos, to employ US B–26s against the Pathet Lao if they made any further advances. The American Ambassador ended his note by declaring that he "realized that such action would blow whole cease-fire negotiation wide open, torpedo conference and most likely involve immediate intervention US-SEATO forces, but see no alternative if enemy presses beyond limits indicated above."[60]

The Ambassador's dispatch immediately caused alarm in Washington, where many of the President's advisors were already leery about the prospects of the Geneva Conference. In a series of hastily called meetings, the Kennedy administration considered what its response should be to the current delays in carrying out the cease-fire and the Pathet Lao's continued pressure on the government forces. Upon reading Brown's note on 26 April, Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles, then acting Secretary in place of Dean Rusk, drafted a hurried memo to President Kennedy. Mr. Bowles laid out basically two options for the United States: "to intervene militarily in Laos" or to

"accept a political solution which will lead to a Souvanna government." According to Under Secretary Bowles, a Souvanna solution "would turn us out of Laos and in time convert Laos into a Communist puppet."[61]

Instead of sending the memo directly to the President, Mr. Bowles spoke to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and outlined the situation. Mr. Bundy in turn talked to the President, who agreed to hold an emergency meeting that afternoon of several senior advisors. Secretary McNamara, Assistant Secretary Nitze, and Admiral Burke represented the Defense Department. Admiral Burke attended in place of General Lemnitzer, who along with Secretary Rusk was at the CENTO Conference in Turkey. Chester Bowles and several assistant secretaries were there in place of Secretary Rusk for the State Department. Presidential Assistants Rostow and Bundy, as well as the President, also took part in the deliberations.[62]

Prior to considering the various options, President Kennedy reviewed the cables from Laos and Bowles' memorandum on the situation. The President appeared to be particularly concerned that the Chinese Communist government had indicated that there would be no cease-fire unless the United States withdrew its military advisors and equipment from Laos. During the group discussion, a general consensus developed, with the possible exception of Admiral Burke, that a conflict should be avoided, "even if the loss of Laos must be accepted." The President, however, did not want to limit his choices, even if that were the case, claiming, "The possibility of a strong American response is the only card left to be played in pressing for a cease-fire." Still, at this point he rejected Ambassador Brown's request to permit a US bombing campaign against the Pathet Lao. All the discussants agreed, however, that if Laos should fall it would be necessary, "at a minimum," to land US forces in both Thailand and South Vietnam.[63]

The meeting resulted almost immediately in an increased readiness of the US military forces in the Pacific. The President authorized the Joint Chiefs of Staff to order Admiral Felt to move "naval forces into Gulf of Siam and into the South China Sea." Furthermore, he was to alert those SEATO Plan 5 units "earmarked for air movement into Laos."[64] In their implementing message, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to deploy Pacific Fleet amphibious forces to within twelve hours steaming time from Bangkok, but they were not to land until in receipt of further orders. If Vientiane fell to the Pathet Lao, the command was to be prepared to defend southern Laos as well as to land troops in both South Vietnam and Thailand. Moreover, the Pacific Command was to be prepared to take steps to prevent intervention by Communist China, including striking, if necessary, bases in North Vietnam and China. The Joint Chiefs of Staff added a cautionary note, however, to Admiral Felt, observing that in Washington there was a "reluctance to use nuclear weapons initially and that decision remained with the President."[65] Interestingly enough, according to a Navy official history, Admiral Burke, who was then still acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, believed at that point that President Kennedy was about to make a "decision to intervene shortly."[66]

On the following day, 27 April, the President held two more conferences on Laos. First, he chaired a full meeting of the National Security Council. The President briefly

outlined the situation in Laos and recommended that congressional leaders should be updated on the emerging crisis. White House Advisor Arthur Schlesinger later wrote that Walt Rostow told him that "it was the worst White House meeting he attended in the entire Kennedy administration."[67]

Following the close of the NSC session, the President and his advisors met with both the House and Senate leadership. Only Speaker Samuel Rayburn represented the House, but the Senate delegation was made up of several senior Senators from both parties. These included Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and Minority Leader Everett Dirksen. Other Senators in attendance were Majority Whip Hubert Humphrey, Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright, Armed Services Chairman Richard Russell, and Republicans Styles Bridges, Bourke Hickenlooper, and Leverett Saltonstall. President Kennedy informed them of both the Brown despatch and the Bowles memorandum and about the grim choices facing the United States. Secretary McNamara outlined US military capabilities, while Admiral Burke explained the ramifications of carrying out a military campaign in Laos, which would be a "tough, long and hard war . . . [and] may well involve war with ChiComs." The admiral argued, however, that the failure to intervene would result in the loss of all of Southeast Asia. Still, the unanimous opinion of both the Democratic and Republican congressional leadership was that the United States should avoid at all costs intervention in Laos. Senator Russell probably spoke for all of them when he declared, "Laos was an incredible fantasy from the beginning . . . we should get our people out of Laos and write the country off."[68]

Outside of Washington, US officials continued by various means to bring pressure on the Communists as well as US allies to find a solution to the Laotian crisis. In the United Nations (UN), Adlai E. Stevenson, the US Ambassador there, consulted with his British and French colleagues about bringing the question of Laos before the United Nations Security Council. Both the French and British governments, however, were opposed to such a move, believing that it might disrupt the upcoming Geneva Conference and provide the Soviets with a further chance to filibuster and delay any action. Moreover, both these governments were much less concerned about the Pathet Lao actions and believed the Americans were overreacting to the Communist maneuvers. In any event, on 27 April at a meeting of the SEATO Council of Representatives the US chargé d' affaires in Bangkok once more requested that the organization issue a Code Yellow alert notice for the implementation of SEATO Plan 5. The council agreed that each of its members would seek instructions from his government. The only bright spot was that on the following day the newly reconstituted International Control Commission met in New Delhi, India, but here too, there seemed to be no hurry to resolve the question of the implementation of the Laotian cease-fire.[69]

By 29 April Secretary Rusk had returned to Washington and that morning he chaired a hurriedly called meeting of senior advisors including Secretary McNamara and most of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Lemnitzer was visiting US bases and missions in the Pacific and General Curtis E. LeMay, the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff, represented the Air Force. Besides several State Department officials, Attorney General Robert

Kennedy and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy also were in attendance. Since the Bay of Pigs, according to the President's speechwriter and special counsel Theodore Sorensen, President Kennedy had asked his brother Robert to attend all of the National Security Council meetings. Apparently the President wanted his brother to attend this conference on Laos since there was a special National Security Council session scheduled for that afternoon.[70]

Secretary Rusk opened the discussion by observing that there was no real change in the battlefield in Laos for the last three weeks that would have any effect on the allied ability to carry out SEATO Plan 5. Secretary McNamara replied that the real question was whether the United States could land troops in Vientiane given the number of Pathet Lao guerrillas in the area and the possibility of Chinese air retaliation. He observed that it would require thirty-six sorties a day to get into the Laotian administrative capital and insisted that the situation was much worse than it was five weeks ago. The Secretary of State noted that there had been no real increase in the number of Pathet Lao in the area, but General LeMay countered that there had been a noticeable buildup and stockpiling of enemy supplies. General LeMay believed that a B–26 bombing campaign would make it "possible to knock out a big wad of supplies." Furthermore, he argued that US airpower alone could force the Communists to come to terms over a cease-fire. Secretary McNamara noted that the use of nuclear weapons would be required for such an air assault to succeed. General George H. Decker, the US Army Chief of Staff, also raised the question of nuclear weaponry. He believed that the United States could "not win a conventional war in Southeast Asia; if we go in, we should go in to win, and that means bombing Hanoi, China, and maybe even using nuclear bombs."[71]

While no one else specifically advocated the use of nuclear weapons during the exchange of opinions about available alternatives, there appeared to be agreement that some action needed to be taken. Attorney General Kennedy kept asking, "where would be the best place to stand and fight in Southeast Asia, where to draw the line?" Secretary McNamara suggested landing US and/or allied forces in either Thailand or South Vietnam before taking any action in Laos. General David M. Shoup, the Marine Corps Commandant, remarked that before deploying troops into Laos, "B–26's should be used." Secretary Rusk even toyed with the idea of sending Thai and US troops into Vientiane and then if they could not hold the city, evacuating them by helicopter. He claimed, "even if they were defeated they would be defeated together and this would be better than sitting back and doing nothing." Admiral Burke also favored intervening, declaring, "If we give up Laos we would have to put US forces into Viet-Nam and Thailand. We would have to throw enough in to win—perhaps the 'works.' It would be easier to hold now than later." The group came to no final resolution, and Secretary Rusk adjourned the meeting saying that "he would like to consider the matter further."[72]

Later that afternoon the President chaired a meeting of the National Security Council to go over once more the viable options for the United States relative to the Laotian conundrum. According to the resulting National Security Action Memorandum, the Council reviewed the various alternative courses of action and then decided "to under-

take 'certain military and diplomatic measures.'" These included the monitoring of the cease-fire talks and the progress of the International Control Commission, as well as examining possible UN and SEATO actions.[73] According to *New York Times* Washington columnist James Reston, there were more fireworks at this meeting than indicated by the relative placid tone of the Action Memorandum. Obviously having informed sources in high places in the Kennedy administration, Mr. Reston wrote that many members of the NSC still were influenced by the debacle of the Bay of Pigs and "want to 'do something'—anything to avenge the bloody nose in Cuba." He then claimed that at the NSC session on 29 April "there were officials who, in their anger and frustration were flirting with military moves which would transform the fiasco in Cuba into a disaster in Laos." President Kennedy, nevertheless, according to the *Times* article, "is not going to side with the jingoists who want him to . . . lunge into a war in the Laotian jungles, where geography and logistics greatly favor the limitless manpower of the Chinese Communists."[74] In any event, the President scheduled another meeting on Laos for the following Monday, 1 May.

In the interim, on 29 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Admiral Felt to prepare plans to move two brigades of 5,000 men each into Thailand and South Vietnam in accordance with the presidential authorization of 26 April. One brigade was to be inserted at Udorn in Thailand and the second was to land at Da Nang in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the Pacific commander to ensure that both brigades "included all appropriate military elements and consist of US forces only."[75] On 1 May Admiral Felt reported back to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he had completed his plans for both deployments. The first brigade force would be assigned to Thailand and would consist of a Marine Corps headquarters, two Marine battalion landing teams (BLTs), an Army battle group, a Marine aircraft group, and an Air Force squadron. According to the concept of operations, the Marine headquarters and one of the Marine BLTs would be airlifted to Udorn on D-Day. The following day the second Marine BLT would arrive at Udorn while the Army's 9th Logistical Command with its control and support elements would be established at Korat, Thailand. On the third day, the Army battle group would join the Marines at Udorn. Three days later the Marine aircraft group would also deploy to Udorn. Eventually the plan was for an Army brigade task force from Hawaii to relieve the Marine forces in Thailand.[76]

The CINCPAC plan for the deployment to South Vietnam of the second brigade-size force involved only Marine Corps and Navy units. On D-Day, a Marine expeditionary brigade consisting of a headquarters and three Marine BLTs would land from the sea and by air at Da Nang (also known as Tourane) in South Vietnam. A Marine aircraft group would join them five days later. The Navy would at the same time deploy two attack carrier task forces in the waters off South Vietnam to provide additional air protection for the ground forces or to launch offensive operations.[77]

At the National Security Council meeting on 1 May, Secretary McNamara had apparently overcome his doubts about intervening in Laos. He recommended that SEATO forces move into the Laotian panhandle, "recognizing that if we do we must be prepared

to win." Secretary Rusk agreed with the Defense Secretary, declaring that if the United States did not support SEATO action in Laos it would mean the "destruction of our alliances." Under Secretary of State Bowles, on the other hand, believed that although there was a danger of war with China in four or five years, "Laos, inclu[ding] the panhandle, is not the place to start." At this juncture, General Maxwell Taylor, whom President Kennedy had brought in as his personal military advisor as a result of the Cuban crisis, voiced his disagreement as well. General Taylor pointed to several military disadvantages. First, the Pathet Lao force could easily outflank and endanger the initial US and Thai advance forces that would arrive in Vientiane before reinforcements could come to their relief. Moreover, the allied forces would be in range of Chinese Communist jet bombers. Even if the initial intervention were successful, he doubted that in the long run it would result in the achievement of US political aims. His conclusion was, "Don't take [a] half-step which will lead to retreat."[78]

The meeting ended with no general agreement about intervening in Laos, but the conferees had made several interim decisions. These included moving naval forces closer into position and also alerting units for possible air movement. President Kennedy also stated that under certain conditions he would be prepared to authorize the deployment of forces to Thailand. At the same time, the President ordered the Defense Department to prepare a memorandum outlining "the military implications of various measures" that could be taken in Laos, Thailand, or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, he wanted each of the Joint Chiefs to provide his personal military evaluation of the options available to the administration in Laos. They were to present these at the next meeting of the National Security Council, now scheduled for the next afternoon.[79]

In the interim, the United States would await possible further developments in the cease-fire negotiations. The President may or may not have seen an urgent message from Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman, who was in Laos to emphasize the importance that the US government placed on a solution to the crisis there. Ambassador Harriman expressed the belief that his presence in Southeast Asia had been responsible to some extent for "the recent improved cease-fire offers" from the other side. He, nevertheless, also believed "that prompt cease-fire will not take place without some positive action by SEATO."[80]

In Washington, after returning to the Pentagon after the NSC meeting on the 1 May, Secretary McNamara met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of the Joint Staff to prepare the required memoranda for the conference on the following day. At this session, Admiral Burke outlined for the other Chiefs, who had not participated in the NSC discussion, the specific military details relating to Laos and Southeast Asia that the President wanted. Secretary McNamara tabled until morning consideration of a draft outline memorandum prepared by the Joint Staff. During the next day, the Defense Secretary conferred twice with the Chiefs about the Department of Defense (DOD) presentation. At the afternoon conference, Secretary McNamara presented a clean copy of his memorandum for the President, which incorporated several suggestions the Chiefs had made earlier that morning. Finally, Secretary McNamara decided

to present as a complete package his memorandum with attachments that included the views of the Secretaries of the Services, a written opinion from each of the Chiefs, as well as a message containing the views of the Chairman, General Lemnitzer, who was then visiting Southeast Asia. He also attached several excerpts from the Joint Staff report "Appreciation of the Military Situation in Laos."[81]

In his covering memorandum to the President, which was also signed by his deputy Roswell Gilpatric, Secretary McNamara offered two stark alternative courses of action: intervention or non-intervention in Laos. First, he and his colleague outlined the political goals and commitments of the United States in Laos. They then examined what the likely results would be if the administration implemented one or the other course. If the United States did not intervene now, they argued that "Laos would be conceded to Communist domination" and moreover, "It would be more difficult to prevent the Communists from overrunning all of Southeast Asia once Laos has fallen." Still, Secretary McNamara and Mr. Gilpatric did not play down the risks that an interventionist policy might encounter. There was always the danger of unwanted escalation as well as the disadvantages that US and allied forces would face in a guerrilla war there. Despite such misgivings, they wrote: "After weighing the pros and cons . . . we favor the 'Intervention Course.'"[82]

This viewpoint was not unanimously held in the Defense Department hierarchy. While General Lemnitzer, the Chairman, voiced support in his message for immediate intervention, the rest of the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred only in part or even opposed an interventionist policy. Admiral Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, came closest to the Chairman's stance; he would first land troops in both Vietnam and Thailand and then wait forty-eight hours before deploying them into Laos "to protect key population centers." The Army Chief of Staff, General Decker, wanted to issue an ultimatum and then move forces into Thailand and South Vietnam, as well as deploy a Navy carrier task force and Air Force units in advance positions. If these actions did not result in a cease-fire, "direct intervention into Laos by SEATO ground forces could be possible." General Thomas D. White, the Air Force Chief of Staff, argued vehemently that "'intervention' by ground forces in Laos on mainland Southeast Asia would be a 'maldeployment.'" He maintained that after a 48-hour warning, the United States should bomb Pathet Lao supply centers, and if that did not work, threaten Hanoi and Southern China with naval attack and air strikes. Marine Commandant General David M. Shoup wrote that he favored the non-intervention course. If that policy failed to bring about a cease-fire, he would then suggest the use of airpower and the assigning of ground units to selected areas in Laos.[83]

At 1600 in the afternoon of 2 May the National Security Council met to discuss again the Laotian question. This time all the Service Chiefs were present, but General Lemnitzer was still on his inspection tour of US forces in the Pacific. President Kennedy asked Admiral Burke once more to outline the military options. Both Arthur Schlesinger and Theodore Sorensen described the President's questioning of the Chiefs as pointed. According to Mr. Sorensen, the written memoranda "looked very different from the operation originally envisioned; and the closer [the President] looked, the less justifiable and definable those answers became." His basic question remained unanswered:

"Once in, how and when do we get out?"[84] Mr. Schlesinger wrote that the day after this meeting, President Kennedy told him, "If it hadn't been for Cuba, we might be about to intervene in Laos." The President then, according to Schlesinger, waved some messages from General Lemnitzer and stated, "I might have taken this advice seriously."[85]

Whatever doubts the President had about the advice he was receiving the afternoon of 2 May, he still made two significant decisions on that date. He directed that contingency planning for Laos continue and be coordinated with the British. At the same time, he tasked both Secretaries Rusk and McNamara to come up with a "joint recommendation on US action with respect to Laos," which he wanted "promptly."[86] President Kennedy was well aware that the British had little interest in a military intervention in Laos, and his emphasis on coordinating with them may well have been motivated by a desire to restrain his advisors from advocating a more militant course of action.

On 2 May as well, there appeared to be a breakthrough in the combat situation in Laos itself. In the Vang Vieng area the Communist forces suspended combat after a meeting between officers of the two sides. The Pathet Lao radio called for a full cease-fire. The *New York Times* on 3 May reported that most of Laos remained quiet and that the cease-fire in the Vang Vieng sector appeared to be holding.[87] While the news from Laos appeared to be more reassuring, both sides continued to jockey for position, with sporadic fighting breaking out in divergent areas.

In the meantime, on 2 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, that questions about SEATO Plan 5 had been raised "at high levels" in Washington. Specifically, the President or his senior aides wanted to know whether the available forces could secure the initial objectives outlined in the plan. Furthermore, the British military command believed that the plan required that the initial area near Vientiane be extended to include both the Luang Prabang sector and the Plain of Jars. The Joint Chiefs of Staff then referred to a suggestion that the United States should limit any commitment of American or allied troops to the area around Vientiane including Seno with its nearby airfield and possibly the neighboring city of Pakse on the Mekong River. They asked Admiral Felt whether the plan should be modified because of these concerns, or in general if the plan needed updating "in view of the current situation."[88]

Admiral Felt responded the following day. He believed very few changes were required for the SEATO plan. The Pacific Commander referred to the modifications that he had incorporated a few weeks earlier. Moreover, he claimed that if the allied forces were to maintain a coherent line of communications, they would need to extend the initial Vientiane and Seno sectors to include other key sites located on the Mekong along the Thai-Laotian border. No other objectives would be occupied besides this border area unless directed by higher authority. The admiral then explained that the plan was not designed to establish a beachhead against an organized foe, but rather it was to reinforce the Royal Laotian Army, which would then be free to take the offensive in its counterinsurgency war against the Pathet Lao. Admiral Felt concluded that if the Royal Army was not able to take to the field then, "SEATO Plan Five would no longer be an appropriate plan for intervention in Laos."[89]

By this time William Bundy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson had completed a second draft of the proposed State-Defense Memorandum to the President on Laos as requested at the National Security Council meeting on 2 May. They had circulated the memorandum to various offices in both Departments, including to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[90]

The document itself basically followed the outline of SEATO Plan 5. While looking to both the UN and especially SEATO, the authors of the memo called for the administration to prepare a plan of action to present to Congress if either there were no cease-fire in Laos or failure of a cease-fire. The memorandum recommended that the political purpose behind any intervention should be made clear, namely that the United States had no intent to "conquer Laos." The military forces involved would consist largely of those in SEATO Plan 5, with the possible exception of the Commonwealth Division. The allied objectives would be the same Mekong cities held by the Royalists as well as the administrative capital of Vientiane. The Royalists would be responsible for the defense of the Royal capital of Luang Prabang. The mission of the allied troops would be defensive in nature, but they were also "to inflict punishment on the attacker."[91]

If the Communist forces maintained their offensive, allied air would respond, but such attacks would not extend to areas within ten miles of the North Vietnamese or Chinese borders. The State and Defense Departments differed about what the allied response should be if additional North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regular forces moved into Laos. The State Department wanted to take no immediate action, while the Defense position would be to launch air attacks against them but limited only to the NVA troops in Laos. If the North Vietnamese attacked Laotian Royal or allied troops, the State Department would ask for political authorization to launch strikes against North Vietnam. The Defense Department recommendation, on the other hand, wanted authorization to strike North Vietnam if an attack appeared imminent even if no overt incident had yet occurred. While providing estimates of both North Vietnamese and Chinese military capability, the drafters of the memo believed that the main enemy opposition would remain the Pathet Lao, who would be confined largely to guerrilla-type operations. They doubted that the North Vietnamese would provide assistance to the Laotian Communists beyond cadre and logistic support. They estimated that the Chinese would continue their limited assistance and that the Soviets would maintain their airlift of selected supplies and equipment.[92]

On 9 May Secretary McNamara forwarded the Johnson-Bundy memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their comments. In essence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred with the general tenor of the document. Their basic concern was the possible involvement of North Vietnamese forces in the struggle for Laos. They wanted some guarantee from the administration that if US troops intervened in Laos either alone or under SEATO auspices that the "United States is thereby prepared and committed to succeed . . . regardless of the extent of possible communist escalation." The Joint Chiefs of Staff insisted that such a statement "was an unequivocal fundamental to US military action."[93]

Apparently the Johnson-Bundy memorandum with the JCS comments never reached the President.[94] At any rate, it was extremely doubtful that President Kennedy would ever accept the conditions and limitation upon his own authority that the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked for in their comments.[95] By the time the document could have reached the President, it had already been overtaken by events. Pathet Lao and Royal Laotian Army officers were meeting to work out the details of a permanent cease-fire, and for the most part an informal truce appeared to be holding. On 11 May the newly formed ICC reported that there existed "a general and demonstrable cessation of hostilities" in Laos.[96]

Even with the new hopeful signs, the United States went into the Geneva Conference knowing full well that the talks over Laos could end in stalemate or even in failure. Keeping this in mind, on 9 May President Kennedy, in his instructions to Secretary Rusk, who was to head the American delegation, wrote: "we should now consider plans by which, if necessary, the political and military position of the present government may be consolidated in southern Laos." The President also thought that the "Communists might accept such a de facto division."[97]

In accordance with this concern, as amplified further in discussion with Walt Rostow, Admiral Burke, still Acting Chairman, notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 12 May that they should develop in consultation with Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, a contingency plan to defend and hold southern Laos. According to Admiral Burke, Walt Rostow made clear to him that the President wanted these plans ready if the United States had to accept the fallback position of a divided Laos. Furthermore, the President expected further discussion with the British to bring them, and perhaps other allies, along to participate with the United States in such a contingency. In any case, Admiral Burke directed that the new plan should be based upon already existing plans for Southeast Asia and should consider circumstances or developments in South Vietnam and Thailand. Moreover, Admiral Burke observed that the plan should cover actions of US forces operating unilaterally or in concert with other SEATO allies. The Chief of Naval Operations also suggested that the plan should include a desired "demarcation line" for the division of Laos.[98]

The following day the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a message to Admiral Felt asking him for his suggestions for the proposed plan code-named "Pork Chop." They repeated much of the information given them by Admiral Burke, but they specifically wanted Admiral Felt to provide them with what he thought the geographic contours for the Royalist enclave in Laos should be. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Pacific theater commander to determine the largest area and population of Laos that the Royalists could hold "consistent with both the military and political realities" of the present situation. They reminded Admiral Felt that the administration would probably not approve any offensive operations and furthermore doubted that the Royalist Army was capable of defending the positions they presently held. The Washington authorities believed that SEATO forces could successfully secure southern Laos until the Royalist forces retrained and regrouped. Finally, the JCS message to Admiral Felt ended with the statement that "SEATO Plan 5 or CinCPac operational plan 32–59 (Phase II Laos) remained valid as a point of departure for the proposed plan."[99]

Three days later, on 16 May, Admiral Felt answered the Joint Chiefs of Staff, largely devoting his entire reply to the question of a proposed demarcation line. He declared that this subject was the basis for determining the military objective of any plan for the defense of Laos. The Pacific commander objected to the implication in the JCS message to him that political considerations overrode military ones in making this decision. He then rejected several of the boundaries suggested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and instead suggested demarcation lines based upon provincial borders and geographical features. The gist of his proposal was that it would incorporate all of Luang Prabang Province including the Royal capital in the government-controlled portion of Laos. Admiral Felt argued that his plan would keep both the Royal Capital of Luang Prabang and the administrative capital of Vientiane in government hands. It would also secure the Laotian and Thai border as well as meet "the minimum objectives of both SEATO and US unilateral plans."[100] Despite support from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CINCPAC demarcation line was not included in the final version of the concept.[101]

Four days later on 20 May 1961, the Joint Chiefs of Staff finally provided their commentary on "Pork Chop" to Secretary McNamara. They agreed that the "basic objective" of Operation PORK CHOP was "feasible from a military point of view." They then implied, however, that elements of the plan had already been proscribed before it reached them. According to their analysis, PORK CHOP outlined a US strategy at Geneva of "producing an impasse by insisting on a genuinely neutral and independent Laos." The theory was that the "Communists would be forced to reveal their true intentions, namely the virtual surrender of Laos." Then the probable resumption of hostilities would permit the United States with or without SEATO to intervene. According to the "Pork Chop" plan, SEATO and US forces would deploy to Vientiane, Seno, Thakhek, and Paksane. From there the allied troops would move out to secure nearby areas from the Pathet Lao. At the same time, the Royal Laotian Army would undergo a vigorous retraining and consolidation program. The allied force, including the Royalist Army, would be limited in operations, however, largely to the Vientiane sector as well as the Mekong River Valley and southern Laos. The result would be a divided Laos with the hope that the "free part" would be "firmly aligned against Communist control."[102]

While giving lukewarm support to "Pork Chop," the Joint Chiefs of Staff described several limitations to the concept. Although admitting that the area outlined by the plan included a substantial portion of Laos, they agreed with CINCPAC that the proposed demarcation line was the "least desirable" of those that were available. They again repeated their assertion that any intervention in Laos "should be preceded by a firm US governmental decision by committing the US . . . to make the necessary effort to achieve a successful outcome regardless of the possible Communist escalation." According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this "was fundamental to US military action." They reiterated that any action in Laos needed to be considered in conjunction with the overall situation in Southeast Asia and "recommended the deployment of 'suitable' forces to South Vietnam and Thailand." Finally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff added this cautionary note:

> Military plans for overseas operations of the magnitude envisioned in Operation PORK CHOP must be prepared in a deliberate manner... if unacceptable risks were to be avoided. Moreover, it should be fully realized that US intervention in Laos might provoke North Vietnamese and Communist Chinese intervention. It was therefore recommended that the military advice of the JCS be utilized from the outset in the preparation of plans for military operations such as those that might stem from the directive of 9 May 1961.[103]

Temporary Denouement of the Laotian Situation

By this time, however, even with the flurry of contingency planning in Washington, there was a relaxation of US forces in the Pacific. On 14 May Admiral Felt officially ended the alert status for the US Naval forces in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Siam. In a message on 18 May the Seventh Fleet commander observed that if needed, "With good luck and sufficient time before the [next] 'flap,' we can pick up the pieces... [and be] ready to jump again in an orderly fashion."[104]

The informal cease-fire in Laos, however, more or less continued to hold, and the diplomats droned on in their seemingly endless talks in Geneva. On 20 May Secretary Rusk departed Geneva for Washington and Ambassador Harriman replaced him as the head of the American delegation at the conference. The negotiations had made some slow progress. In a tortured compromise, the three Laotian factions were permitted to sit at the negotiating table, and the truce talks between the contending parties continued in Laos itself.[105]

By the beginning of June the conference appeared to be deadlocked over the question of veto power over the proceedings of the International Control Commission and conflicting accusations of violations by both sides of the informal truce. Most of the fighting centered on the activities of the Meo or Hmong tribesmen, who were allied to the government forces and supported secretly by the United States. The groups headed by Laotian General Vang Pao had established a base area at Pa Dong in the mountainous area to the southeast overlooking the strategic Plain of Jars, now held by the Pathet Lao forces. Apparently annoyed by the harassing raids of the Meo against their positions, Pathet Lao artillery on 9 May opened up on the Meo in Pa Dong. Following the artillery "barrages," the Pathet Lao soon laid a ground siege against the tribesmen in their mountainous retreat. On 30 May two US "volunteer" pilots died when their helicopter crashed in an attempt to "land supplies to the besieged Hmong."[106]

By this time President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev had arranged to meet in Vienna to discuss international issues, including Laos, that divided their two nations.[107] At Vienna on 2 and 3 June, President Kennedy reached a consensus on Laos with Premier Khrushchev in two long meandering conversations, although failing to do so on other subjects, especially the questions of Berlin and nuclear weapons. On Laos the two leaders "reaffirm[ed] their support of a neutral and independent Laotian government and of international agreements to assure Lao neutrality."[108]

Despite the agreement, the days of Pa Dong were numbered. On 7 June the Pathet Lao in a combined ground and artillery assault forced the tribesman to abandon their defenses at the base camp there and reestablish themselves at other sites. General Vang Pao later made his new headquarters some ten miles to the southwest of his former base. The US delegation at Geneva boycotted the talks for a few days but returned after a conversation between Ambassador Harriman and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko. By 18 June the *New York Times* reported that the Pathet Lao had captured some nineteen government outposts since the start of the cease-fire on 3 May. Still, as British Foreign Secretary Lord Home mentioned in a meeting with Secretary Rusk in Washington, "the cease-fire had been more of a reality since Padong." The battlefield in Laos appeared to be quiescent for the time being, and the talks in Geneva continued.[109]

In a real sense, the North Vietnamese had obtained their military goals in Laos. From 1960 into 1961, some 12,000 North Vietnamese troops organized into artillery, engineer, and infantry battalions reinforced the Pathet Lao.[110] This does not include the number of North Vietnamese troops who served as advisors and cadre to the Pathet Lao units. Furthermore, several additional North Vietnamese units, including the 325th Infantry Division, participated in the capture of the strategic Laotian town of Tchepone on Highway 9, thirty miles from the border with South Vietnam, just prior to the cease-fire, thus securing a key link on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the major Communist supply and infiltration route into the Republic of Vietnam.[111]

4

A New Emphasis on Vietnam

While the crisis in Laos appeared to be diminishing, it had awakened American interests in neighboring South Vietnam. As has been discussed, most of the new contingency plans for Laos also involved the deployment of troops either to South Vietnam or Thailand or to both. On 4 May the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, J. William Fulbright, hinted to reporters that the administration "was considering the possibility of direct military intervention to counteract Communist threats in South Vietnam and Thailand."[1] Six days later Admiral Burke wrote to Secretary McNamara that while the situation in Laos was the "focal point," it was the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "US forces should be deployed immediately to South Vietnam; such action should be taken primarily to prevent the Vietnamese from being subjected to the same situation as presently exists in Laos, which would then require deployment of US forces into an already existing combat situation."[2] During the same period, General Lemnitzer indicated much the same opinion in a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff during his tour of US forces in Asia: "I believe that we are facing a repetition of the unhappy sequence of events in Laos . . . which can only lead to the loss of Vietnam."[3]

The Vietnam Task Force

By this time the Gilpatric Vietnam Task Force had completed its report on schedule and had presented it at the National Security Council meeting on 27 April. With the Laotian crisis then in full bloom, the report received only cursory treatment. During the meeting, nevertheless, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric was able to provide a summary and explained that it called for a "moderate acceleration" of the already-approved Counterinsurgency Plan. The report recommended a small increase in the MAAG and the already-authorized modest expansions of both the South Vietnamese Armed Forces and the various militias. As the authors of the *Pentagon Papers* noted,

the "emphasis was on stabilizing the countryside, not on pressing Diem for political or administrative reforms." Mr. Gilpatric in his covering memo to the President had also suggested that after the approval of the plan General Lansdale visit Vietnam "to consult with Vietnamese and US leaders and make further recommendations for action." Members of the National Security Council at the meeting expressed interest in the report but suggested that it needed modification in view of the new situation in Laos. President Kennedy directed that Deputy Secretary Gilpatric make the necessary modifications and that the NSC meet again in two days.[4]

On 29 April the National Security Council reviewed the revised "Program of Action for Vietnam." The Joint Chiefs of Staff had endorsed the military portion the day before. For the most part, the body of the report remained the same as the one presented on 27 April, but it now contained a Laos annex. This hastily drawn up draft addendum contained a recommendation for two additional Army of the Republic of Vietnam divisions to defend the border as well as for the deployment of 3,600 US troops to Vietnam. The US contingent would consist of two 1,600-man teams to help train the proposed new ARVN divisions. In addition, another 400 soldiers from the US Special Forces were to assist in training ARVN units for counterinsurgency warfare. At this juncture, President Kennedy approved only the military section of the main report. This included the already-approved 20,000-man increase in the ARVN, a similar manpower increase in the militia, additional military assistance funds, and a 100-man increase in the MAAG in Vietnam. Despite the small numbers involved in the MAAG increase, it was significant because it would be a formal breach of the number of US military personnel allowed by the Geneva Accords. The meeting ended with the President asking Mr. Gilpatric and his panel to make another revision.[5]

The back and forth of the Vietnam Task Force report would continue. On 1 May Deputy Secretary Gilpatric forwarded a revised copy of the "Program on Vietnam" to the State Department for its concurrence. In essence, this version, authored like the other drafts by General Edward Lansdale, was very similar to that submitted to the National Security Council on 29 April. The main difference was that the Laos annex was incorporated into the main body. At the State Department an internal review committee headed by Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs George W. Ball made substantial changes. These included the revamping of both the political and economic sections.[6]

Although the State Department revision retained most of the military recommendations of the Lansdale draft, its modifications tended to tone down any specific commitments to South Vietnam. For example, the original military section not only contained provisions for the possible expansion of the ARVN to 200,000 personnel and the tentative establishment of two additional US training commands as well as a separate Special Forces group, but it also called for the updating of all plans for the possible commitment of US forces to South Vietnam. This included "as a matter of priority plans for the deployment, on short notice, of a Marine brigade plus necessary supporting troops to Tourane [Da Nang] or Nha Trang." At the end of this list of implied unilateral American actions in Vietnam, the State Department authors added the following restrictive clause:

"Action on the foregoing would require prior urgent political consultation with the GVN, Canada, India, our SEATO Allies and Cambodia."[7]

Just as significant was the recommendation to alter the makeup of the interagency Vietnam Task Force. In the State Department text of the document, the task force would be under State Department auspices rather than the Defense Department. According to the State Department's proposal, Under Secretary Ball would become the new chairman of the Vietnam Task Force instead of Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, and Sterling T. Cottrell, the former political advisor to Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, would become the director of the task force. General Lansdale would become the deputy to Mr. Cottrell, instead of project officer of the task force as recommended by the Gilpatric report. The authors of the State Department report also eliminated any reference to a projected visit to Vietnam by General Lansdale. In a strongly worded memorandum on 3 May, General Lansdale urged Secretary McNamara to take the position that the Defense Department "stay completely out of the Task Force directorship as now proposed by State." According to the general, "The US past performance and theory of action, which State apparently desires to continue, simply offers no sound basis for winning as desired by President Kennedy."[8]

On 4 May Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric chaired a meeting of the Joint Task Force on Vietnam, which included Under Secretary Ball as the leading State Department representative. During the meeting, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric announced that the organization questions about the makeup of the task force had been resolved in favor of the State Department position as outlined in the revised task force draft. The only exception was that General Lansdale would be the Defense Department representative on the task force rather than its deputy director. Mr. Gilpatric observed that there was a requirement once more to prepare another version of the task force report before it could be presented to the National Security Council. The committee assigned General Lansdale from the Defense Department and Robert Cleveland, a special assistant in the Office of Southeast Asia Affairs, Department of State, to draft the new revision.[9]

During the course of the meeting, the participants engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about the relationship between the Laotian situation and the possible deployment of US troops to South Vietnam. Deputy Secretary Gilpatric brought up the topic by asking what effect the new Geneva Conference that was scheduled to open would have on plans for possible insertion of US military forces in Vietnam. He feared that at the conference the Communist delegates would attempt to tie negotiations about a cease-fire in Laos to all of Southeast Asia. According to Mr. Gilpatric, this "could result in a freeze of forces into and out of the area." He noted that a US Marine brigade could arrive in Vietnam within twelve hours and could be reinforced by "Army forces in Hawaii over a somewhat longer period of time as requirements demanded." The Deputy Secretary stated that the Defense Department proposed to place this question before the President, but he believed that the task force also needed to address the subject.[10]

At that point the discussion turned to what would be the purpose of the American troop deployment to Vietnam. Walt Rostow, who represented the Office of the President

at the meeting, remarked that "it was essential that we have a maximum degree of clarity both as to the types of US troops which were required in Viet-Nam and as to the precise missions which they would be expected to fulfill." Mr. Rostow voiced the opinion that the United States had three "alternative rationales" for the sending of US forces to Vietnam:

1. A step-up in our previous activities directed against the insurgency movement by involving additional training forces, etc.,
2. Provision of sufficient force to act as a trip wire and
3. Sufficient forces to meet an anticipated major ChiCom invasion.[11]

In response to a question from General Lansdale, Walt Rostow went on to state that in the first rationale involving counterinsurgency he was only talking about a few hundred additional personnel, and these should be deployed gradually. Moreover, he concluded this was quite a "different matter from putting in US combat units."[12]

At this point Deputy Secretary Gilpatric asked Major General Charles H. Bonesteel, III, one of the JCS representatives on the task force, what plans the Joint Chiefs of Staff had made for sending US combat forces into Vietnam. General Bonesteel answered that they "had made an assessment in terms of the Laotian situation, but not specifically" for Vietnam. Mr. Gilpatric then stated that he desired such a Vietnam "assessment."[13]

In answering a query from Kenneth Young, the US Ambassador to Thailand, who sat in on the meeting, General Bonesteel declared that he did not believe it possible to stem completely Communist infiltration into South Vietnam across the 1,500-mile border with Laos. Apparently taken aback by Bonesteel's response, the Ambassador questioned why the United States "should pour hundreds of millions into Viet-Nam if we can't choke off the problem." General Bonesteel replied that the discussion had reached the crux of the matter. According to the Army general, if the United States were serious about the central objective of preventing a Communist takeover of Vietnam, it would require "very sizeable force commitments." In essence, General Bonesteel concluded, "the Chiefs would need as clear a statement of the real national intent as possible in order to give clear policy guidance concerning the commitment of forces."[14]

Deputy Secretary Gilpatric agreed that the task force needed to study "the broad implications and various alternatives" of the possible commitment of US troops to Vietnam. Nevertheless, he suggested that the task force report limit itself to recommendations "necessary to meet the insurgency problem." Replying to Mr. Gilpatric, General Bonesteel remarked that while counterinsurgency in Vietnam was not just a military problem, he was concerned about an over-emphasis on political and economic measures. Moreover, he believed that defeating the insurgents in Vietnam depended upon "a reasonably workable settlement in Laos."[15]

By this time, however, with the apparent cease-fire in Laos and the scheduled opening of the Geneva Conference a little over a week away, any deployment of US troops to Southeast Asia was a sensitive issue. On 5 May the National Security

Council discussed both the situation in Laos and its implications for the possible commitment of US forces to Vietnam. According to Admiral Burke, who represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the meeting, Secretary Rusk stated that he believed the commitment of US troops in Vietnam "could complicate the forthcoming [Geneva] conference." At that point the National Security Council decided that the subject of any augmentation of US forces should be settled in a separate joint State and Department of Defense meeting.[16]

At that meeting Deputy Secretary Gilpatric and Air Force Colonel Robert M. Levy of the Joint Staff represented the Defense Department. At this time, Secretary of State Rusk declared, "we should not place combat forces in South Vietnam." He suggested, however, that the United States could "augment the MAAG, in small increments, with up to 100 additional military personnel." The United States would not notify either the British or the International Control Commission of these additions to the US military group in Vietnam. The new arrivals would "be placed in varied locations to avoid attention." The members of the meeting decided, nevertheless, that the entire subject of the size of the US military presence in Vietnam required "further study and consideration."[17]

The following day, 6 May, the Vietnam Task Force committee completed its final draft and forwarded it for presidential approval. While for the most part this version reflected the changes made by the State Department, it was much more compressed than any of the preceding revisions. The major sections contained largely general statements while the details and rationale appeared in eight appendices.[18]

The revision of the military section downplayed somewhat the need to expand the South Vietnamese Army to 200,000 personnel and the necessity of committing US troops to Vietnam. Instead of suggesting negotiations with the South Vietnamese about enlarging the Vietnamese Army, the report stated that the Joint Chiefs of Staff together with CINCPAC and the MAAG would assess "the military utility of a further increase in the GVN forces." As far as the possible deployment of two US battle groups to South Vietnam with engineering support, the report advised that this was still being studied rather than presented as a firm recommendation. Also under consideration was the immediate deployment of a US Special Forces company of 75 men, the vanguard of a 400-man Special Forces group.[19]

The political and economic section emphasized cooperation with the Diem regime. It observed that President Kennedy's letter to the Vietnamese president had noted his personal support of Diem's "courageous leadership in the struggle against communism." The report took note of Vice President Johnson's upcoming trip to Vietnam, which had been announced officially the previous day. It recommended that the Vice President carry a personal letter from President Kennedy to President Diem outlining "key objectives" to be carried out as a joint US-Vietnam program. Furthermore, it went on to suggest that the incoming US Ambassador, Frederick Nolting, "reappraise the political situation." In this reappraisal, the Ambassador was to obtain an agreement with President Diem regarding "a realistic political program" based on the counterinsurgency plan. Finally, in

the economic sphere, the report called for a "high-level team" to be sent to South Vietnam to develop in consultation with the Ambassador a plan for the best use of combined American and Vietnamese fiscal resources in the country.[20]

On 9 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave their endorsement to the military portions with the proviso that Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp and General McGarr have an opportunity to comment on its implementation.[21] The following day the Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to a request by Deputy Secretary Gilpatric "about the possible commitment of US forces to Vietnam" as suggested in the report. In their reply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended "that US forces should be deployed immediately to South Vietnam; such action should be taken primarily to prevent the Vietnamese from being subjected to the same situation as presently exists in Laos." They also advised that President Diem be encouraged to ask for the American troops.[22]

On 11 May President Kennedy approved the Vietnam Task Force report, subject to possible modification by the National Security Council, but he deferred a decision on the deployment of US troops. On that date, under the signature of McGeorge Bundy, Presidential Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, the White House issued National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) No. 52 containing the President's approval of both the objective and the concept of operations. These were:

> to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam; to create in that country a viable and increasingly democratic society, and to initiate, on an accelerated basis, a series of mutually supporting actions of a military, political, economic, psychological and covert character designed to achieve this objective.[23]

In NSAM 52 Mr. Bundy wrote "in particular" that the President wanted an evaluation as recommended in the plan of the military need to expand the South Vietnamese Armed Forces from 170,000 to 200,000. He further desired to know what the political and fiscal implications of such an expansion would be. The President also required that the Defense Department, under the guidance of the Director of the Vietnam Task Force, undertake a study of the composition and number of American troops that would be "desired in the case of a possible commitment of US forces to Vietnam." As to the Vietnam Task Force, President Kennedy directed its continuation "established and directed by the Department of State" with the former CINCPAC political adviser Sterling Cottrell as its director.[24]

In the NSAM, McGeorge Bundy reiterated the emphasis of the report on support of the Diem regime. He mentioned that the purpose of Vice President Johnson's visit to Vietnam was to "increase the confidence of President Diem and his government in the United States." At the same time, Ambassador Nolting and the Vice President would attempt "to strengthen President Diem's popular support within Vietnam." The new Ambassador presented his credentials to the Vietnamese president on 10 May and would later describe this shoring up of President Diem as the "First Commandant." In any event, Vice President Johnson arrived in Saigon the following day, 11 May, the same day as the issuance of NSAM 52. Eight days later, the National Security Council approved the task force report without any modifications.[25]

The Vice President's Trip to Vietnam

The visit of Lyndon Baines Johnson to South Vietnam was part of a larger goodwill tour of Asian countries. Among the additional nations in his trip itinerary were Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, India, and Pakistan. The Vice President's entourage consisted of his wife, Lady Bird; Jean and Stephen Smith, the sister and brother-in-law of President Kennedy; and what US Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith described as "other minor accoutrements of modern democracy." This included some fifty hangers-on, a communications unit, and two official aircraft.[26]

The Vice President's arrival in South Vietnam symbolized the growing reliance that the US government now placed on the Diem regime to maintain stability in South Vietnam as a buffer against Communism in Southeast Asia. Beginning with Walt Rostow's memorandum of 12 April, the Kennedy administration began planning for the official visit. At the time, the concept was that the Vice President would represent the United States at the inauguration of President Diem on 29 April. This proved infeasible for several reasons, and by early May the trip had expanded into a so-called Southeast Asia fact-finding mission. As Arthur Schlesinger later wrote, the "primary purpose was to reassure" the leaders of Taiwan and Thailand as well as President Diem "that the new American policy toward Laos did not signify a general intention to withdraw from the area."[27] After the initial formalities on 11 May, including a dinner that night hosted by Ambassador Nolting, Vice President Johnson called upon President Diem early the following morning. The Vice President presented Mr. Diem with a collection of volumes from the *American Heritage* magazine as well as a four-page letter from President Kennedy addressed to the Vietnamese leader. In the letter, after the customary diplomatic pleasantries, the American President had outlined "a series of joint, mutually supporting actions in the military, political, economic and other fields." These recommendations, based on those of the Vietnam Task Force, included President Kennedy's approval of military assistance funds to support a 20,000-man increase to the Vietnamese Armed Forces. He also observed that he was prepared to consider other joint efforts as well as a further increase in the Vietnamese force level.[28]

Although the Vietnamese president had received an advance copy of the Kennedy letter, he read it again before commenting. According to Ambassador Nolting, who was present during the meeting, President Diem remarked that he had recommended several years ago the 20,000-man increase in the army as well as US Military Assistance funds for the Civil Guard. The South Vietnamese president then went into a rather long-winded exposition about his nation's history and present situation. Finally Vice President Johnson accomplished the task of getting the discussion back to President Kennedy's letter. The two then went over all fifteen points contained in the text and agreed to draft a joint communiqué.[29]

After a whirlwind tour of Saigon and a dinner that night hosted by President Diem, Vice President Johnson returned the following day for a final courtesy call on the South Vietnamese president. During the course of private conversations with President Diem,

Lyndon Johnson raised the possibility of deploying US combat troops to Vietnam. The Vietnamese president took a dim view of such a move at this time. While not opposed to more US military advisors or training personnel, he categorically rejected American combat units.[30] As President Diem confided to the new US Ambassador to Thailand, Kenneth T. Young, who accompanied the Vice President during his visit, "we should be extremely careful about such a proposal, and [he] pleaded with me that American military personnel—and all Americans—exercise tact and restraint in Vietnam in this critical and delicate period."[31]

The final communiqué that the Vice President and President Diem issued on 13 May made no mention of the combat troop issue. They declared that the United States and the Republic of Vietnam had reached a "large measure of agreement" on the means to accomplish the joint purpose of both countries. The document contained a listing of the measures agreed to in principle, including the expansion of the Vietnamese Armed Forces and US military assistance funding to support the Civil Guard. President Diem had also agreed to the formation of a panel of US and Vietnamese fiscal and economic experts to meet in Vietnam to work out a financial plan to support the newly expanded joint effort.[32] Ambassador Nolting believed that for the most part the visit had accomplished its basic purpose, which was to reassure President Diem and the Vietnamese people of American support. The Ambassador wrote that the results were "all that we could have hoped for."[33]

Despite the apparent harmony between the two leaders, there remained some unresolved questions. Ambassador Nolting observed that the "general expectation" left with the Vietnamese president was that additional aid would be forthcoming. Notwithstanding Vice President Johnson's stress on economic and social measures, the Ambassador thought that President Diem would emphasize the military side. Furthermore, the Vietnamese president had watered down language in the final communiqué that called for more "social, political, and economic liberalization" actions. Ambassador Nolting declared that it was his opinion that rather than Mr. Diem changing his ways, the South Vietnamese president would probably insist on governing "in his own manner."[34]

With the visit of the Vice President and the arrival of Nolting as the new Ambassador, President Diem indicated that he was aware that there was a marked change in the attitude of the United States toward him and his government. On 15 May, in his initial acknowledgement and reply to President Kennedy's letter, he thanked the American President for his "wise and farsighted" proposals. President Diem praised Vice President Johnson for his "gracious gesture" of asking for his suggestions, "particularly as we have not become accustomed to being asked for our own views as to our needs."[35] This last comment was probably aimed at Nolting's predecessor. In fact, as a parting shot at the former Ambassador, the Vietnamese president, just after Durbrow's departure, issued two edicts creating a central intelligence service and an operational field headquarters. He had previously resisted both these actions recommended by the counterinsurgency plan "as a sign of Vietnamese displeasure at the Ambassador's tactics of pressing for political reform at the expense of military necessities."[36]

Upon his return to the United States, Vice President Johnson reported that the situation in South Vietnam was more stable than newspapers and some of the dispatches from Vietnam indicated. Nevertheless, the Vice President stated that conditions in Vietnam were "serious" and required American military and economic assistance but not US combat troops. Among his several conclusions and recommendations was the following passage with, in retrospect, its prescient and ironic cast:

> We should make clear, in private, that barring an unmistakable and massive invasion of South Viet Nam from without we have no intention of employing combat US forces in Viet Nam or using even naval or air support which is but the first step in that direction. If the Vietnamese government backed by a three-year liberal aid program cannot do this job, then we had better remember the experience of the French who wound up with several hundred thousand men in Vietnam and were still unable to do it. And all this, without engaging a single Chinese or Russian. Before we take any such plunge we had better be sure we are prepared to become bogged down chasing irregulars and guerillas over the rice fields and jungles of Southeast Asia while our principal enemies China and the Soviet Union stand outside the fray and husband their strength.[37]

Implementation of the New Plan, May–August 1961

The implementation of the new presidential plan began in fits and starts. On 29 May Professor Eugene Staley, research director of the Stanford Research Institute, accepted President Kennedy's nomination to chair the US Special Financial Group required by the new plan. Together with South Vietnamese experts, this group was to determine the costs of South Vietnam's economic and military needs and the means to meet these expenses.

In the meantime, in June the inconclusive summit meeting between Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy in Vienna, while increasing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union over the future of Berlin, further lowered for the time being expectations of a potential war over Laos. A possible denouement in the Laotian situation, however, only placed a higher value on maintaining the anti-Communist Diem government in South Vietnam. After returning to Washington from his summit with Mr. Khrushchev, President Kennedy expressed to Ambassador Galbraith his concern over Berlin and Vietnam: "There are limits to the number of defeats I can defend in one twelve-month period. I've had the Bay of Pigs, and pulling out of Laos . . . and I can't accept a third."[38]

On 14 June, after his return from Vienna, the President met with the new defense minister of South Vietnam, former Secretary of State for the Presidency Nguyen Dinh Thuan. Walter P. McConaughy, US Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, and Chalmers B. Wood, the executive officer of the Washington Vietnam Task Force, accompanied Defense Minister Thuan. The Vietnamese minister carried with him a letter from his president in response to the one that Vice President Johnson brought with

him to South Vietnam. In his answer to President Kennedy, President Diem asked for additional individual US advisors to train Vietnamese "officers and technical specialists." More significant, the Vietnamese president wanted funds from the United States to support an additional 70,000-man expansion beyond the 20,000 already approved by President Kennedy and the 30,000 being discussed to form two new divisions in the northern border area. This would mean a buildup of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces to a strength of 270,000, as opposed to the 150,000 at the beginning of the year.[39]

After reading the letter, President Kennedy remarked to Assistant Secretary McConaughy that the estimated cost of the equipment for the buildup wanted by President Diem would come to about $175 million over a two-year period. After some general discussion about the course of the struggle against the Viet Cong, President Kennedy queried Mr. Thuan as to how long it would take the South Vietnamese Army to incorporate the 20,000 additional men to reach the newly authorized 170,000-man level. Defense Minister Thuan answered that the ARVN had only enlisted 6,000 men and that the government did not have the liquid funds to mobilize the remaining 14,000. At this point, President Kennedy told Mr. McConaughy to report back on the following day on "how this matter could be resolved."[40]

The President then turned to Diem's request for the support of the additional 100,000 men he wanted. President Kennedy suggested that the South Vietnamese government with its $200 million in Foreign Exchange Reserve should be able to contribute to the support of this expansion. The defense minister countered that the Vietnamese needed to keep that size of a reserve in order to maintain internal economic stability. The President then somewhat changed the subject. He recommended that Mr. Thuan might want to pay a visit to certain influential US Senators who "might be useful in the extremely difficult struggle" in Congress to obtain funding for increased US assistance to South Vietnam. President Kennedy concluded the conversation by indicating to the South Vietnamese minister that he would continue to assign additional advisors to the US MAAG but that this increase would "be done quietly without publicly indicating that we did not intend to abide by the Geneva Accords."[41]

Responding to the presidential concern expressed during the conversation with Defense Minister Thuan about the slowness of the South Vietnamese recruiting effort, Secretary of State Rusk cabled Ambassador Nolting on 16 June informing him that the administration had conducted a "high-level review" of the matter. According to Secretary Rusk, the President's advisors believed that Thuan's claim that his government "simply does not have the liquid assets necessary to pay the local costs of continuing this increase to 170,000" was not based upon fiscal reality. While arguing that President Diem was probably attempting to place "the onus for slow-down on US," the Secretary authorized Ambassador Nolting to negotiate with the South Vietnamese government to "resolve this political issue."[42] Finally, on 29 June, after some continued haggling over the amount of US funding for this increase, the South Vietnamese government accepted the final US offer of $4.5 million and agreed to make up the rest of the cost, an estimated 50 million piasters. (In 1961, one US dollar equaled 72 South Vietnam piastres.)[43]

While the US Embassy in Saigon negotiated with the Vietnamese government about funding the current 20,000-man expansion, President Kennedy wanted to study further the feasibility of the additional 100,000-man increase that President Diem had requested for his military forces. On 21 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the United States approve a force level of 200,000 for the South Vietnamese subject to "a continuing assessment of demonstrated GVN and RVNAF capabilities."[44] However, rather than going to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for his assessment of the further expansion sought by President Diem, President Kennedy turned to General Maxwell Taylor, whom he was about to name as his personal military advisor.

On 26 June, after the Cuban Study Group had completed its work, the President wrote to General Taylor outlining the duties of the new White House position of "Military Representative of the President." In broad terms, General Taylor was to "advise and assist the President with regard to those military matters that reach him as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces." In his letter, President Kennedy emphasized that the "Military Representative" was not to interpose himself between the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but was to "maintain close liaison" with that body and other "statutory advisors" including the National Security Council and the Secretary of Defense. The President expected his representative to provide him with military advice and to assist him "in reaching decisions." As to Vietnam, the President asked General Taylor to review the planning effort "and give me your comments thereon along with your views on how to respond to President Diem's request for a 100,000 man increase in his army."[45]

In a sense, as one historian has maintained, the President's appointment was an attempt to remedy his deteriorating relations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, especially General Lemnitzer. General Taylor realized that the Chairman and some of the other Chiefs looked somewhat askance on his appointment. Having enjoyed good relations with General Lemnitzer when he was Chief of Staff of the Army, General Taylor called on him and told General Lemnitzer that he "would be more of an ally than a source of competition." General Taylor contended that his "close personal relations with the President and his entourage" would assist the Chiefs in getting their advice to the President.[46]

On 29 June General Taylor responded to the President's request for advice on the Diem letter. He suggested that President Kennedy send an interim reply to the South Vietnamese president but defer approval of any further expansion of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. Like the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor considered the 30,000-man increase of the Vietnamese Army to 200,000 a distinct possibility, but he would delay any decision until the Special Financial Group headed by Professor Staley made its report. As to the other 70,000 troops wanted by President Diem, General Taylor recommended that the President ask the Chief of MAAG, CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Defense Department to determine the "ultimate goal to be set for the Vietnam Army."[47]

While General Taylor made his observations to President Kennedy, on 3 July Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, incorporating the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Defense Department response to NSAM 52, agreed "in principle" to the feasibility of raising

the strength level of the Vietnamese Army to 200,000 men. He noted that the additional 30,000 troops were the basis of two more divisions that could be employed against the increasing Communist insurgency in South Vietnam as well as to balance the disintegrating situation in Laos. Mr. Gilpatric, nevertheless, stated that it was the Defense Department position "that US approval of the 30,000-man increment would not imply US acceptance of the 270,000 force level" requested by President Diem.[48]

On the same date and taking the advice of General Taylor, President Kennedy wrote to President Diem. He complimented the Vietnamese president on the more rapid pace of the recruitment campaign to reach the 170,000-man goal since the visit of Minister Thuan to Washington. President Kennedy then turned to the more sensitive issue of the 100,000 additional troops that the Vietnamese president wanted, declaring that his Department of Defense was:

> urgently studying your request for support in a further long term increase to a 270,000 man force. In addition to exploring the usefulness, methods and procedures of such an increase we will both have to give the most careful attention to the large amount of funds which such an increase will involve for our two countries. I hope that the findings of Dr. Eugene Staley may provide helpful guidelines for both our Governments.[49]

After approving the text of the letter to President Diem, President Kennedy spoke to his military aide, Army Brigadier General Chester V. Clifton, and told him that he wanted to know "the military considerations" involved in the South Vietnamese request for the additional 100,000 men. Furthermore, the President commented that the "appropriate officials" should consider dispatching a military team to Vietnam to study the subject. According to President Kennedy, this team upon its return "would be able to supply to the President its informed judgment as to whether the US should assist Diem to increase his army by 100,000." The President was especially interested in learning what portion of the cost of this 100,000-man buildup would be borne by the United States. He observed that President Diem had accepted part of the financial responsibility for the current 20,000-man expansion of the Vietnamese Army. President Kennedy stated that this military team should be in Vietnam before Professor Staley and his Special Financial Group completed their study. The President remarked that he did not believe that General Taylor would be free at this time to undertake the survey.[50] For whatever reason, whether it was the unavailability of General Taylor or the short time fuse, no high-level military team visited Vietnam before the Special Financial Group made its report.

On 14 July, after over a month of consultations in Vietnam between the Vietnamese and US Special Financial Groups, Professor Staley and Vu Quoc Thuc, dean of the University of Saigon Law School and the Vietnamese committee chairman, issued their joint report. They had briefed President Diem on its contents three days earlier and had received his approval. After returning to the United States, Professor Staley presented the report to the Vietnam Task Force.[51]

In their joint report, Professor Staley and Mr. Thuc stated that they based their conclusions on three "basic considerations": first and primary was that for the short term, military and security requirements had precedent over economic and social ones; second was the realization that military operations alone without social and economic programs could not achieve lasting results; and third that it was in the joint interest of both nations that South Vietnam develop a self-sustaining economy and a free society. While making no specific military recommendations, they based their economic proposals on two alternative force levels for the Vietnamese Armed Forces. In the first case, the assumption was that there would be no increase in the insurgency and Laos would remain stable. This situation, according to the report, would still require an increase in 1962 of 30,000 men and a force level of 200,000. According to the second scenario, the Viet Cong would increase their activity and the Communists would gain de facto control in Laos. In this event, the authors of the report called for not only a force level of 200,000 men in 1962 but also a further increase to a force level of 278,000 by 1965.

The costs of the recommendations contained in the joint report were significant. For the military portion of the program from July 1961 through December, the estimated price was $42 million for the United States and 3.7 billion piasters for South Vietnam. For the entire program involving economic, military, emergency, and long-range development aspects, the estimated expenditure was $85.5 million and 6.5 billion piasters for the same period.

At the same time as Professors Staley and Thuc signed their report, General Taylor in Washington also addressed the question of the force level required by the South Vietnamese military. After consulting with General Lemnitzer, who agreed with his viewpoint, on 15 July General Taylor prepared a paper relative to Diem's request for an additional 100,000 troops. Before making any decision on the subject, the President's military representative stated that it was necessary to determine what the mission of these troops would be. According to General Taylor, these fell into three categories: internal security; defense against a conventional attack from North Vietnam; and finally, a defense against Communist guerrilla infiltration through the porous borders.[52]

General Taylor stated that the manpower requirements for the first two cases were relatively easy to predict. The third category, however, presented a more complicated problem. According to the general, a static border infiltration defense necessitated "one set of forces." On the other hand, an offensive cross-border campaign into Laos to cut off infiltration routes and hit enemy bases called for entirely different military resources. In both cases, General Taylor argued that the situation in Vietnam could not be considered in isolation. He wanted American planners to develop a "Southeast Asian politico-military plan assigning missions to national forces, establishing requirements in manpower, equipment and funds for each country and making provision for the means to satisfy the requirements."[53]

As a first step, General Taylor suggested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff develop a Southeast Asia contingency plan that would have three missions:

1. The securing of the Laotian panhandle and parts of the Mekong Valley;

2. The launching of offensive air and guerrilla operations from the panhandle; and
3. The application of military pressure against North Vietnam.[54]

The general insisted, however, that the plans attempt to restrict the use of US combat forces to logistic and air support. He hoped to limit ground combat units to "indigenous" troops: Laotians, Thai, and/or South Vietnamese. General Taylor would only employ American infantry troops necessary "to provide immediate protection to US air and supply bases, and the Special Force trainers needed to support the guerrilla and anti-guerrilla effort."[55]

As General Taylor's paper indicated, there was a growing concern in the Kennedy administration about the interrelationship between the struggles against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam and the Pathet Lao in Laos. General Taylor shared this anxiety not only with the Joint Chiefs of Staff but also with Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson, former US Ambassador to Thailand as well as a member of the first Vietnam Task Force, and Walt Rostow. On 18 July the three men met to discuss the interrelationship "of the various elements of policy in Southeast Asia." They agreed on the necessity of developing guidelines for American diplomatic and military strategy in Southeast Asia as a whole. Under Secretary Johnson undertook this task as well as providing recommendations "for more unified political and military staff work in Washington." Two days later, on 20 July, Walt Rostow forwarded a copy of the memorandum of their conversation to the President. He attached a note to President Kennedy stating that Secretary of State Rusk had assigned Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs John M. Steeves "full time to work on the problem of Southeast Asia as a whole."[56]

Five days later, in a separate memorandum to President Kennedy, Mr. Rostow requested the formation of a Southeast Asia Task Force. The following day, 26 July, General Taylor reinforced the creation of such a "tightly knit" group "to pull these complex issues together." According to the President's military advisor, Deputy Assistant Secretary Steeves was "preparing the basic State position on a Southeast Asia program."[57]

In his argument to the President, General Taylor repeated many of the same points that he had made in his earlier paper. He referred especially to the need for further planning to counter the infiltration from North Vietnam through Laos into South Vietnam. The general noted that in trying to evaluate the validity of the South Vietnamese appeal for a further increase in the Vietnamese Army, he became "increasingly aware of the need for a rational analysis of the need for military forces in Laos and Thailand, as well as in Vietnam." General Taylor observed that, "we need a strategic plan for the entire Southeast Asian area."[58]

On 28 July President Kennedy met with senior advisors to discuss the various options proposed by General Taylor and Walt Rostow as well as an interim report prepared by Deputy Assistant Secretary Steeves, chairman of the newly formed Southeast Asia Task Force. In addition to the above mentioned, Secretary of State Rusk, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, Under Secretaries Johnson and Ball, Assistant Secretary McConaughy, and Sterling T. Cottrell, the director of the

Vietnam Task Force, were also present. Under Secretary U. Alexis Johnson opened the meeting with a review of Steeves' report, which essentially incorporated the views already expressed by Mr. Rostow and General Taylor, as well as the recommendations of the Staley report.[59]

Mr. Johnson first brought up the situation in Laos, which he argued impinged directly on its neighbors. He gave a rather bleak picture of the outlook for that country, stating that the Communists believed that militarily they had the upper hand there and had no desire for the establishment of a neutral government. The Under Secretary had little confidence that the international conference on Laos in Geneva would be able to accomplish anything. While not recommending US withdrawal from the sessions in Geneva, he noted that "in working discussions in the US Government, is the creation of a plan to take and hold the southern part of Laos with combined forces of the Royal Laotian Government, Thailand, Vietnam, and the United States." Furthermore, in the event "of substantial intervention by the Viet-Minh" in Laos, the United States would launch direct air and naval strikes against the North Vietnamese port city of Haiphong and the capital Hanoi. The rational behind the plan was that this might deter the North Vietnamese "by making clear that there are circumstances in which you would take this more energetic course."[60]

At that point President Kennedy interrupted the Johnson presentation with several questions. He was skeptical that the actions against North Vietnamese cities would produce the desired results. Moreover, the President saw no evidence that any careful plan for taking and holding the ground in southern Laos had been developed. Under Secretary Johnson replied that General Taylor was in close consultation with JCS Chairman General Lemnitzer and that the planning effort was proceeding. President Kennedy still had his doubts about the feasibility of operations in Laos. He referred to the earlier Laotian planning effort in April when "optimistic estimates were invariably proven false in the event." The President expressed the need for more "realism and accuracy" in military planning. He also touched on the reluctance of unnamed "respected military figures" and the American people to get involved in Laos. Under Secretary Johnson countered that with "a proper plan, with outside support, and above all with a clear and open American commitment, the results would be very different from anything that had happened before." President Kennedy remained dubious, referring to a conversation in Paris with General Charles DeGaulle, who spoke feelingly "out of painful French experience . . . of the difficulty of fighting in this part of the world."[61]

In all probability the European crisis revolving around the future of US and Allied access to Berlin lay behind the President's reluctance with respect to further involvement in Laos. Three days before this meeting, the President had addressed the subject of Berlin in a national televised speech to the American people, saying that the city had "now become—as never before the great testing place of Western courage and will." President Kennedy called for a $3.25 billion increase in the military budget, an increase in the Armed Forces, a call-up of reserves, and expanded draft quotas.[62] As to Laos, at the meeting on 28 July the President stated that:

> He believed that the negotiations in Geneva should be pressed forward, that we should not get ourselves badly separated from the British, that the American people were not eager to get into Laos, that nothing would be worse than an unsuccessful intervention in this area, and that he did not yet have confidence in the military practicability of the proposal which had been put before him; though he was eager to have it studied more carefully.[63]

Finally, the meeting took up the Staley report and its recommendations. President Kennedy agreed largely with Under Secretary Ball's analysis. In a memorandum to the President, George Ball had written that, despite congressional cuts in assistance funds, he believed "that the critical situation in Southeast Asia warrants priority in proceeding with the program in the report," since it would "demonstrate our own solidarity with South East Asia."[64] At the end of the discussion over the report, President Kennedy stated that he was willing to accept Staley's recommendations, "but without a present commitment of precise amounts of money over a precise period of time."[65]

At the close of the meeting the President returned to a discussion of the military problems in the region. He emphasized the necessity for a "more accurate assessment of the situation in the future." President Kennedy repeated that estimates of the situation should take into consideration the weakness of previous planning assumptions, an oblique criticism of the existing contingency planning. He declared that it was still "his hope that someone well known to him could go out and look at the situation directly." While President Kennedy implied that General Taylor might want to visit the region, the general demurred, stating that he needed "to look first at the problem itself to make clear what facts need to be checked." In any event, the President settled for a final declaration in the minutes of the meeting that he wanted "a recommendation soon as to who might go out and check the important points of fact relevant to . . . [the] plans on the ground."[66]

In the interim, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had not been idle. Two days earlier they had received a copy of the Staley report for their consideration. Because of a short deadline, they confined their comments to the proposed increase in the military forces. On 2 August, after a personal briefing by Professor Staley and on the advice of General McGarr, the MAAG commander, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the immediate approval of the 200,000-man level for the South Vietnamese Armed Forces, effective January 1962. They based their decision not only on the report but also upon General McGarr's estimate that the South Vietnamese military would reach the 170,000-force level at that time. The Joint Chiefs of Staff added the proviso to their endorsement, however, that the proposed 30,000-man increase would be subject to further periodic evaluations to "ascertain the requirement for these forces."[67]

On 3 August 1961 the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to address the subject of possible increases to the Vietnamese Armed Forces. In this case, they responded to a Defense Department memorandum asking for their opinion about President Diem's formal request for a force level of 270,000. After consulting Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, who maintained that the suggested expansion was unnecessary, General Lemnitzer recommended to Secretary of Defense McNamara that the proposal not be approved.

Like the admiral, General Lemnitzer argued "that for the foreseeable future the force objectives for Vietnam of a nine division equivalent force (200,000) is adequate." He allowed, however, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff would reexamine the issue if circumstances required a change.[68]

On the following day President Kennedy officially approved the basic recommendations of the Staley report, including support for the Vietnamese Armed Forces at the 200,000-man level. The next day, 5 August, the President wrote to President Diem informing him of his approval of the plan. Relative to the proposed military increase, President Kennedy declared, "I should like to inform you that the United States will provide equipment and assistance in training as needed for an increase in the armed forces of Viet-Nam from 170,000 to 200,000 men." He qualified this support, however, by stating that when the Vietnamese forces reached the 170,000-man level:

1. That there then exists a mutually agreed upon, geographically phased strategic plan for bringing Viet Cong subversion in the Republic of Viet-Nam under control;
2. That on the basis of such a plan there exists an understanding on the training and use of these 30,000 additional men; and
3. That the rate of increase from 170,000 to 200,000 will be regulated to permit the most efficient absorption and utilization of additional personnel and material in the Vietnamese armed forces with due regard to Viet-Nam's resources.[69]

President Kennedy also remarked that the Vietnamese forces would probably not reach the 200,000 level until the final months of 1962. He recommended delaying any decision about any further expansion above that figure until that time "when the question can be re-examined on the basis of the situation which we shall then be facing." On 11 August the White House published the terms of President Kennedy's approval of the Staley report as expressed in his letter to President Diem as part of NSAM 65, "Joint Program of Action with the Government of Viet-Nam."[70]

While General Taylor and Walt Rostow both believed that it was premature to send a high-level military fact-finding mission to Southeast Asia until contingency planning was further along,[71] the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 14 August sent out their own team to the region under Brigadier General William A. Craig. Craig's mission was to survey the conditions in South Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos as to the feasibility of executing SEATO Plan 5 for intervention in Laos. In Laos itself, the general found the situation chaotic, with loyal Laotian leadership, logistics, training, discipline, and morale all poor or nonexistent.[72]

Back in Washington, the Joint Chiefs of Staff participated with Steeves' Southeast Asia Task Force in revising SEATO Plan 5. Once more, prominent administration officials expressed concern that the situation there was out of control and feared a breakdown in the talks at Geneva that would soon require intervention. Key advocates of this viewpoint were Walt Rostow, U. Alexis Johnson, Generals Taylor and Lemnitzer, and to a lesser extent Secretary of State Dean Rusk. The matter came to a head in a series of high-level meetings with the President at the end of August. Participants, at one time or another, consisted of all the major national security policymakers as well as Attorney

General Robert F. Kennedy and Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman, the head of the US delegation at Geneva.[73]

At the last of these meetings, on 29 August, General Lemnitzer presented the revised SEATO-5 plan. Under this plan a combined force of Thai, South Vietnamese, and US units under an American SEATO commander would move into southern Laos. General Lemnitzer estimated that about 13,000 American troops would be able to occupy key villages along the Mekong River. At that point, Robert Kennedy asked what made the Chairman change his mind, reminding him that in earlier Laotian crisis discussions he had contended that the "Viet Minh could wipe out forces introduced into southern Laos in two or three days." General Lemnitzer replied "that there had been no change in view but that SEATO Plan 5 was a flexible plan and could be the basis for taking action beyond its original concept." The explanation was that in the case of a North Vietnamese attack, the United States would not reinforce in Laos but would strike the Communists from the sea or from outside Laos. President Kennedy "indicated his agreement" with this stratagem.[74]

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara recalled that this meeting on Laos occurred shortly after the Russians started to build the Berlin Wall, cutting off access to the eastern portion of the divided city. He remembered discussing the SEATO plan but telling President Kennedy that, "before making any military commitment in Indochina, he should weigh Laos against other world problems."[75] The President answered, "we were developing a plan, but were not agreeing now to implement it."[76]

Notwithstanding the discussion over possible intervention into Laos, the meeting ended largely in an agreement to defer any military action. The President decided against holding a SEATO exercise in Thailand based upon the Plan 5 scenario but allowed continuing talks with SEATO allies "purely on a planning basis." He also permitted continuing the existing policies of aerial reconnaissance over Communist positions and equipping Meo tribesmen to harass the Pathet Lao.[77]

Ambassador Harriman, nevertheless, persuaded the President to continue to support a political solution to the Laotian problem. He argued convincingly that there had been progress at Geneva, where there was a growing consensus for the establishment of a neutralist government under former Laotian premier Souvanna Phouma. While some of Kennedy's advisors were suspicious of Souvanna's ties with the Communists, Averell Harriman recorded, "the President telephoned me . . . after the meeting in the White House and wanted to make sure that I would make every effort to get an agreement with Souvanna."[78]

Distracted for months by the continuing unrest in Laos, the Kennedy administration, with the promulgation of the presidential program for Vietnam in May and the President's approval of the Staley report in August, had completed the formulation of its policy to defeat the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam. Its implementation had begun with the arrival of Ambassador Nolting and a new emphasis on cooperation and encouragement with the Vietnamese government rather than the pressure tactics employed by his predecessor against President Diem. On his part, President Diem had agreed at

least on paper to certain fiscal reforms and more energetic civic action programs in the countryside. General McGarr reported favorably on Diem's initial reorganization of the Vietnamese command structure, with the establishment of the Field Command and new logistic commands to replace former Military Regions. The Vietnamese Army had also conducted some successful operations during June and July. By 15 August the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces had reached a strength of 157,000 and was on schedule to reach the 170,000-man level by the end of the year.[79]

Still, measurable results of the presidential program were small. The program had required the South Vietnamese president to delegate more authority to both his military and civilian subordinates and called for more decentralization of the government. President Diem, however, because of his temperament and his fear of a coup, continued to retain power largely in his own hands. Security remained a problem. In July, Ambassador Nolting reported the net security situation was no better than it had been the previous two months.[80] By mid-August US intelligence told of a formidable Viet Cong hard core of more than 12,000 men, augmented by several thousand irregulars, with good intelligence and probably good morale. According to the intelligence, the Communists controlled more than half of the Mekong Delta as well as several areas northwest of Saigon.[81] While General McGarr talked about an "enhanced sense of urgency and offensive spirit now present within both the RVNAF and the Government of Vietnam,"[82] White House officials received a more pessimistic account from Theodore H. White, a respected reporter and an old China hand, writing from Saigon in August:

> The situation gets worse almost week by week . . . . The guerrillas now control almost all the southern delta—so much so that I could find no American who would drive me outside Saigon in his car even by day without military convoy.[83]

The danger to South Vietnam was real. Theodore Sorensen's description of President Kennedy's policy posture on Laos probably applied equally as well to Vietnam: a combination of "bluff with real determination in proportions he made known to *no one*,"[84] possibly not even to himself.

5

Continuing Reassessment and the Taylor Mission

The Communists Renew the Offensive

While the South Vietnamese Army and its US advisors believed that they had made significant progress during the summer of 1961 in the counterinsurgency war, the Communists soon put an end to this momentary optimism. In September in Hanoi, the Politburo and the Central Military Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party approved a People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) General Staff recommendation to expand the war in South Vietnam. According to the PAVN official history, the General Staff proposal called for not only increased local recruitment and attacks by the Viet Cong in the south but also the eventual deployment of some 30,000 to 40,000 North Vietnamese troops to South Vietnam, including native southerners who went north in 1954.[1]

Coincidentally, or as a result of the planning effort in North Vietnam, the Viet Cong mounted a major offensive in South Vietnam in September, more than tripling the number of attacks of previous months. The most dramatic incident occurred on 17–18 September when an undetermined number of Viet Cong units overran the provincial capital Phouc Thanh, approximately fifty-five miles north of Saigon bordering War Zone D, a long-time Communist stronghold. In contrast to their usual hit and run tactics, the Communist troops occupied the town for several hours. Showing their disdain for the South Vietnamese government and lack of fear of reprisal, they held a "people's trial" of the province chief and his assistant in the town's market square and then beheaded both men. Ambassador Nolting reported that President Diem considered the dead chief to have been one of his best. By the end of the month, US intelligence estimated VC military strength at 17,000, an increase of 2,000 in a month. In an analysis of the growing boldness

and strength of the Viet Cong, an internal State Department study observed that during September the Communists had "mounted three attacks with over 1,000 men in each." It concluded that "the Viet Cong strategy may be directed at 'liberating' an area in which a 'government' could be installed."[2]

The enemy forces in Laos also continued to worry American intelligence analysts. While North Vietnamese troops in northern Laos appeared to be withdrawing, there was at the same time "Viet Minh movement into Southern Laos bordering on South Vietnam." According to the State Department analysts, "it appears [the] enemy may be accepting stalemate for time being within Laos and giving priority to stepping up offensive action against South Vietnam."[3] This conclusion was supported by the findings of Brigadier General William A. Craig, who visited Thailand, Laos, and South Vietnam on behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to examine the feasibility of SEATO contingency plans.[4] Upon his return on 15 September, he forwarded a sixteen-page report to General Lemnitzer, the Chairman, and personally briefed General Maxwell Taylor and presidential advisor Walt Rostow. According to Mr. Rostow, General Craig emphasized "a build-up of Pathet Lao-Viet-minh forces in Southern Laos and the beginnings of additional pressure on Central Vietnam from that area."[5] General Taylor wrote that General Craig perceived this guerrilla buildup in the Laotian panhandle as a possible harbinger "of an over-the-border offensive against South Vietnam."[6]

On-Going Contingency Planning and President Diem's Increasing Demands

In Washington, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Council, the White House, and the State Department continued to examine the options available to the United States to salvage the situations in both South Vietnam and Laos. On 24 August 1961 General Lemnitzer forwarded a memorandum to Secretary of Defense McNamara discussing the "consequences and effectiveness of certain United States courses of action against North Vietnam." This was in response to an earlier request by the State Department Planning Council about the consequences of a US blockade of North Vietnam. According to General Lemnitzer, "A large proportion of the support for communist aggression in all of Southeast Asia passes through North Vietnam." He observed that the United States could "substantially cut the flow of communist military support passing through North Vietnam, if and when it is decided to commit United States forces openly to this operation." The Chairman warned, however, that such action "would probably generate Communist Chinese overt countermeasures" depending upon the extent to which they were willing to confront the United States. He declared that the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC were studying various tactics that the United States could employ, including covert and unconventional methods.[7]

While President Kennedy on 29 August ruled against any overt intervention in Laos with US troops and continued to seek a political solution, he allowed contingency

planning for SEATO Plan 5 to continue.[8] On 15 September Walt Rostow reported to President Kennedy that General Craig and his group recommended, as a result of their evaluation of the situations in Laos and South Vietnam, "the implementation of SEATO Plan 5 now—or if that is not possible, the execution of preparatory measures such as laying the command and logistic base and moving closer to Laos the foreign troops who would take part." Mr. Rostow related that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were studying the report and that he expected that it then would be forwarded to the White House with some modifications. In a postscript, Walt Rostow added that he was meeting the following day with General Taylor, General Lemnitzer, and Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson to discuss the state of affairs in Southeast Asia.[9] In his written report, General Craig noted that Ambassador Nolting agreed that the immediate requirement was for "positive action in Laos." General Craig also stated that President Diem was willing to accept a US brigade or division in South Vietnam as "school troops." According to General Craig, President Diem definitely wanted American troops on the ground "when the balloon goes up."[10]

For whatever reason, Mr. Rostow did not mention Diem's proposal for US ground troops in his memorandum to President Kennedy. It may have been that General Craig's formal report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been prepared later than his briefing paper. The question then becomes why General Craig did not brief Mr. Rostow and General Taylor about the Vietnam president's change of mind about US troops.[11]

The subject of even greater US involvement in Vietnam soon came to a head. In the meantime, the administration largely omitted any specific reference to the commitment of American combat troops to Vietnam. On 22 September, however, the Saigon Embassy and the US Vietnam MAAG received a joint State and Defense Department message that the recent Viet Cong attacks, together with the continuing "deterioration" of the situation in Laos, might require "emergency actions within 30 days." Without stating the nature of the possible "emergency actions," Washington asked the US Saigon military mission and Ambassador "to request additional materiel and personnel assistance above currently approved programs if required."[12] Suggested items ranged from napalm, small arms, and additional helicopters to defoliants. The emphasis was on "accelerated training" for the ARVN, the Vietnamese Air Force, and the Civil Guard and Civil Defense Forces local militia. Drafted by the Vietnam Task Force in Washington and approved by Deputy Under Secretary Johnson, the two-department memorandum contained the implied assurance that such requests would receive "favorable consideration."[13]

Three days after the joint department directive to Vietnam, President Kennedy addressed the United Nations. In his speech to the General Assembly, the President was concerned with more than Southeast Asia. The Russians still threatened to close East Berlin and also had resumed atmospheric nuclear testing. Just a week before the opening of the session, United Nations (UN) Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold had died in an aircraft crash in the Congo, trying to bring peace to that troubled nation. Even with all the trouble spots that the President faced, he still brought up to the international body the link between the war in Laos and the guerrilla war in Vietnam: "The

very simple question confronting the world community is whether measures can be devised to protect the small and the weak from such tactics. For if they are successful in Laos and South Viet Nam, the gates will be open wide."[14]

Walt Rostow viewed the President's speech as a call for action in the administration as well as in the United Nations. He wrote Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson suggesting diplomatic contingency planning to complement the on-going military planning for Southeast Asia. Mr. Rostow recommended that William J. Jorden, a former *New York Times* reporter who had recently joined the State Department Policy Planning Board and had just completed a fact-finding trip to Laos and South Vietnam, prepare a White Paper outlining Communist subversion in Southeast Asia. According to Walt Rostow,

> Our planning for both an overt break in the cease-fire and for continued ambiguous aggression ought to consider the need for making the case against the Communists in advance by forcing the international community to address itself to the problem of outside intervention in Laos and Viet-Nam.[15]

The presidential advisor concluded: "The object of all this . . . would be to . . . develop our case, and lay the basis for the actions that we ourselves may have to take."[16]

In all probability, by this time Mr. Rostow had seen the memorandum for General Taylor that William Jorden had prepared on 27 September upon his return from Vietnam. While acknowledging his lack of expertise in the area, the former news correspondent wrote that for the last three weeks "the focus of my work in Vietnam was on the problem—the nature and extent of the Viet Cong's infiltration effort with particular emphasis on the evidence of North Vietnamese involvement." Mr. Jorden then described in detail the various land infiltration trails extending from North Vietnam through Laos and/or Cambodia into South Vietnam. He also remarked about the extensive use that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong made of both the coastal waters and the various inland waterways to bring in both supplies and men for the insurgents. Nevertheless, Mr. Jorden cautioned that while the Communists depended upon these infiltration routes for supplies and some personnel: "We delude ourselves if we visualize the Viet Cong effort in the South as primarily a movement of large, organized units across the GVN borders." He noted that there had recently been an increase in Viet Cong unit infiltration, but that the Communists in South Vietnam recruited locally for most of their manpower needs.[17]

As the Washington officials continued to discuss future policy moves and stratagems, President Diem had his own surprise for the Kennedy administration. On 30 September, during a visit by Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, to Saigon, the South Vietnamese President suddenly proposed that the United States and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) enter into a formal bilateral defense treaty. Taken aback, his American guests, who included Ambassador Nolting and General McGarr as well as Admiral Felt, queried President Diem carefully to determine the seriousness of the suggestion. At last the Ambassador told his host that the request raised several delicate questions—not the least of which was that it overrode one of the key provisions of the 1954 Geneva Accords,

Article 19 that forbade the establishment of military alliances or foreign military bases in either of the two Vietnams. According to Ambassador Nolting, President Diem feared that US policy in Laos would create an "exposed flank" for Communist infiltration into South Vietnam. In the Ambassador's opinion, President Diem wanted a "more binding US commitment" than that provided by SEATO.[18]

For the next few days authorities in both Washington and Saigon concerned themselves about what measures the United States should take relative to this new request and to what most viewed as a deteriorating situation in South Vietnam. A few days after his request for a treaty with America, President Diem told his National Assembly that the struggle against the Viet Cong was "no longer a guerrilla war [but one] waged by an enemy who attacks us with regular units fully and heavily equipped and who seeks a strategic decision in Southeast Asia."[19] In Washington, the State Department directed Ambassador Nolting to inform the South Vietnamese president that his request would receive prompt and sympathetic attention, but that Article 19 of the Geneva Accords did present a complication. The State Department, however, informed the Ambassador for his own information that the United States might be able to strengthen its ties to South Vietnam using the SEATO umbrella.[20]

On 3 October a group of influential administration figures who had formed an informal special interagency "Tuesday Morning" planning luncheon group during the summer met to discuss various foreign policy problems. Among the members were Walt Rostow, Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson, and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Paul H. Nitze and his deputy, William P. Bundy. William Bundy, the brother of President Kennedy's National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, kept an unofficial account of the meeting. When it came to Vietnam, the group arrived at a general consensus that events were going badly and that there must be "a major change of course." According to Bundy's notes, the discussion "triggered" Walt Rostow formally to recommend the deployment of SEATO troops to Vietnam. Rostow's proposal, which the Defense Department took "under urgent JCS consideration," would position a 25,000-man force along strategic points of the South Vietnamese and Laotian border.[21]

Not all members of the administration were in favor of further involvement in Vietnam. Two days after the meeting of the Tuesday luncheon group, Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles forwarded his own analyses of the situation in Southeast Asia to Secretary of State Rusk. He argued against a direct military response, declaring that such a move involved placing "our prestige and power in a remote area under the most adverse circumstances." The Under Secretary believed that there must exist an alternative choice besides "diplomatic humiliation" and a "major military operation." Instead, he advocated diplomatic overtures to the Russians for the creation of a neutral and independent belt of nations in Southeast Asia to include Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaya, and South Vietnam. While supported in principle by Ambassador-at-Large W. Averell Harriman, UN Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson, and Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs George W. Ball, the Bowles memorandum received "a relatively negative reaction" in the State Department.[22] Roger Hilsman, who at the time served as director

of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department, later described the Bowles memorandum as "imaginative," but perceived President Kennedy's reaction to the concept "as a farseeing expression of the ultimate goal for Southeast Asia toward which we should work, but it's time had not yet come."[23]

At the same time that Chester Bowles was writing his memorandum, Secretary Rusk cabled Ambassador Nolting and asked him for his "most candid assessment" of the heads of the US Vietnam civilian and military assistance missions. Furthermore, he wanted the Ambassador's "most urgent estimate" of the situation in Vietnam and what "action you consider essential in Vietnam not to succumb to Viet Cong." In his reply, Ambassador Nolting essentially damned both men with faint praise. He called General McGarr, the MAAG commander, "the right man for the job," but then suggested the need for an "independent look and fresh imaginative ideas" that a visit by General Taylor might provide. The Ambassador was even more tepid in his depiction of Arthur Z. Gardiner, the director of the United States Operations Mission. Ambassador Nolting described him as "competent" and "devoted" but also mentioned complaints from South Vietnamese officials about the "slowness and rigidity" of the Operations Mission. The Ambassador concluded his observations of both men by stating: "In brief, if we do not succeed here, I do not think it will be the fault of either McGarr or Gardiner. They understand each other and work reasonably well together."[24]

Ambassador Nolting then tried to answer the best he could the second part of Secretary Rusk's inquiry. He basically declared that he foresaw little improvement in the present situation in South Vietnam unless the "frontier with Laos . . . [was] restored to friendly hands, willing and able to cooperate with GVN in preventing large-scale infiltrations." The Ambassador recommended some partition of Laos but realized that this would be difficult to accomplish. He had believed until the recent Viet Cong attacks in September that South Vietnam was making progress in its struggle against the Communist forces but now considered the South Vietnamese security forces overextended.[25]

Ambassador Nolting concluded his reply with an evaluation of President Diem and Diem's government's chances for survival. According to the Ambassador, two of the senior members of his staff maintained that if President Diem remained at the head of the existing regime, it had little or no chance of winning the war against the Communists or in the long run of preserving the independence of the country.[26] Although admitting that the South Vietnamese president had poor organizational and political skills as well as an inability to delegate, Ambassador Nolting disagreed with his two colleagues. He argued that despite his faults, President Diem was the only "feasible alternative" and that the United States had no choice but to continue its "present policy of all-out support to the present government." It was the Ambassador's opinion that if the Laotian border was protected Mr. Diem had a "better than 50-50 chance of winning on this policy line." If, on the other hand, the border remained fluid, he predicted, "this government will go down, or out, and that this will probably hasten a Communist takeover here."[27]

In the meantime, the Joint Staff continued to study the Rostow proposal as well as another suggestion that the SEATO force be placed in northern South Vietnam just below

the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). This would allow the relief of a South Vietnamese division in static positions along the DMZ to deploy against the Viet Cong. On 9 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff met together with Secretary of Defense McNamara and Deputy Assistant Secretary Bundy. According to the new Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., who had relieved Admiral Burke in August, Mr. Bundy explained that political reasons lay behind the recommended placement of US forces in Vietnam. Admiral Anderson recorded that the Chiefs recognized the political rational and had no objections to sending troops to Vietnam "as long as . . . when actually in Vietnam they NOT be put on [the] border." In response to a request from Secretary McNamara for a "positive recommendation," the Chief of Naval Operations remembered that he told the Secretary, "if we cannot go into Laos, we should go into South Vietnam" under SEATO auspices.[28]

That same day General Lemnitzer provided Secretary McNamara with the formal reply from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In his letter to the Secretary, the JCS Chairman emphasized from the outset that Rostow's proposal to place SEATO forces along the border was "not feasible" for several reasons: the allied troops would be vulnerable to piecemeal attacks; the SEATO troops would not be able to stop completely the Communist infiltration into South Vietnam; the SEATO force would be in poor defensive positions to defeat a direct assault by North Vietnamese or Chinese regular units; and finally such a troop disposition compounded allied logistic and communication support problems. General Lemnitzer also rejected the second recommendation that the SEATO force deploy along the Demilitarized Zone dividing the two Vietnams. He observed that the Communists were not using the DMZ to infiltrate the guerrillas or their supplies into South Vietnam. Furthermore, the Chairman suggested that the North Vietnamese might misinterpret an allied force disposition there as a preparation for an allied attack against North Vietnam, "thus promoting the possibility of communist harassment and destruction of friendly combat and logistic forces concentrated near the parallel, if not escalation."[29]

General Lemnitzer then argued that South Vietnam could not be looked at in isolation but rather in relationship to the defense of Southeast Asia as a whole. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that any defensive concept for Southeast Asia that did not include Laos or a substantial part of that country was "militarily unsound." According to General Lemnitzer, the Joint Chiefs believed the most militarily feasible solution was to confront the Communists in Laos through the implementation of some version of SEATO Plan 5. They recognized, however, that political considerations probably ruled out this option. As a fallback position, the Joint Chiefs recommended the deployment of some 20,000 US or SEATO troops to the Central Highlands in South Vietnam as a first step, to be followed by further reinforcements. They saw such a move as providing some relief for the South Vietnamese forces in their struggle against the Viet Cong. Ending on somewhat of a pessimistic note, General Lemnitzer wrote that while the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that such a move would do little to provide for the "solution of the over-all problem of defense of Southeast Asia, they consider the Plan preferable to either of the two military possibilities" or proposals that they had before them.[30]

Apparently Secretary McNamara or Deputy Assistant Secretary Bundy provided Deputy Under Secretary of State Johnson with a copy of the Lemnitzer letter. At that point, either in conjunction with William Bundy or by himself, Under Secretary Johnson prepared a talking paper that tried to incorporate the essential points of both the JCS and the Rostow proposals. Entitling the paper "Concept of Intervention in South Vietnam," Mr. Johnson described the purpose of his proposal as "an effort to arrest and hopefully reverse the deteriorating situation in Vietnam." It blended the border-closing mission as enunciated by Walt Rostow with the limited one of securing control of the highlands as outlined by General Lemnitzer. In general, the Johnson plan largely paralleled that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff "and assumed the fine points could be worked out later." According to the authors of the *Pentagon Papers*, "it was pretty clear that the main idea was to get some American combat troops into Vietnam, with the nominal excuse for doing so quite secondary."[31]

The NSC Meeting of 11 October and the Decision to Send General Taylor to Vietnam

The White House scheduled for the morning of 11 October a National Security Council meeting to discuss possible US actions in Southeast Asia. Prior to the meeting, General Taylor provided President Kennedy his opinion about some of the agenda points. He attached to his memorandum the State Department analysis of the situation that Deputy Under Secretary Johnson would use as a basis for his presentation. The general observed that the implementation of SEATO Plan 5 Plus, the contingency plan for intervention in Laos, would not by itself, as the President himself had mentioned, prevent the infiltration of Communist troops from Laos into South Vietnam. Furthermore, General Taylor stated that the President should be aware of what air and ground forces would be required if either or both the Laos or South Vietnam contingency plans were carried out. He declared that "in all logic we should have the forces available or in sight for these Southeast Asia plans and, at the same time, be able to meet our obligations to Berlin and NATO." General Taylor warned the President that "our present military structure is not sufficient for both tasks" and that additional forces must be mobilized "or the limitations of our military capabilities in Southeast Asia accepted as a permanent fact."[32]

This session of the National Security Council on 11 October lasted only about an hour and a half, from about 1100 to 1230, but it would have far-reaching consequences for both the United States and Vietnam. In addition to President Kennedy and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, the participants included high-level officials from both the State and Defense Departments, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the United States Information Agency (USIA). Secretary Rusk, Deputy Under Secretaries Johnson and Ball, and Sterling Cottrell attended for the State Department, and Secretary McNamara, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, and General Lemnitzer for the Defense Department.

Director Allen Dulles and his assistant Richard Bissell represented the intelligence community, while the Assistant Director of the USIA, Donald Wilson, spoke for his agency.[33]

The State Department document that Deputy Under Secretary Johnson presented before the National Security Council outlined several proposals that called for a presidential decision. Only two of them, however, required any detailed discussion. The first was whether the United States should continue exploration with its allies for SEATO intervention in Laos and refine further the contingency plan (SEATO Plan 5 Plus) for that purpose. More immediate, however, was the second item for decision:

> Whether . . . to send to South Viet-Nam a very high-level military figure to explore with country team, Diem, and CINCPAC, as well as on the ground, feasibility and desirability from both a political and military standpoint, of the proposed plan for SEATO intervention into South Viet-Nam. Such a person could also make recommendations for additional immediate action short of intervention which might be taken in the present situation.[34]

President Kennedy decided to send General Taylor, with Walt Rostow as his deputy, to head a fact-finding mission to Vietnam. In his memo for the record of the NSC decision, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric wrote that the Taylor mission was to examine the political and military feasibility of "the plan for military intervention." They were also to look at the possibility of an alternate plan for placing a much smaller force either at Da Nang or/and another southern port "for the purpose of establishing a US 'presence' in Vietnam."[35] That same afternoon General Lemnitzer cabled General McGarr that the Taylor mission's task was to "review situation and explore with country team, President Diem and CINCPAC, as well as on the ground, feasibility and desirability from a political and military standpoint of US intervention in Vietnam."[36]

After the National Security Council meeting on 11 October, President Kennedy had lunch at the White House with Arthur Krock, a *New York Times* columnist and longtime friend of the Kennedy family. According to Mr. Krock, the President expressed concern over the situation in Southeast Asia and even doubts about the validity of the so-called "falling domino theory." President Kennedy reiterated his opinion, expressed several years before on the Senate floor, "that United States troops should not be involved in the Asian mainland." President Kennedy then told the reporter that he had just come from a meeting on Vietnam and that the Pentagon favored a "recommendation by the Chiefs of Staff to send 40,000 troops there." The President declared that he did not favor such a move "at this time and therefore was sending General Maxwell Taylor to investigate and report what should be done."[37]

Later that afternoon, President Kennedy held a formal news conference with the White House press corps to announce the Taylor–Rostow mission. In an abortive attempt to end newspaper speculation about the possibility of sending US combat troops to Vietnam, the administration had planned to use the cover story that General Taylor and Walt Rostow were to go on an economic fact-finding trip. In his announcement, however, as the authors of the *Pentagon Papers* observe, the President "did not make the hardly

credible claim that he was sending his personal military advisor to Vietnam to do an economic survey."[38] Instead, he simply stated that the Taylor mission was to "seek ways in which we can perhaps better assist the Government of Vietnam in meeting this threat to its independence."[39]

On 11 October as well, obviously well briefed on the proceedings of the meeting, General Taylor drafted for the President's signature a set of instructions for his forthcoming visit to Vietnam. According to Taylor's initial draft, he was to confer with the "appropriate United States and South Vietnam authorities" and to provide the President with his "views on the courses of action which our government should take at this juncture to avoid a further deterioration in South Vietnam." Furthermore, the general was "to evaluate what could be accomplished by the introduction of SEATO or United States forces into South Vietnam, determining the role, composition and probable disposition of such forces." According to the Taylor draft, he would in all probability find it necessary to "discuss with President Diem and his officials some of the courses of action which we have under consideration in order to elicit their views and to assure their cooperation if we take certain decisions." The draft instructions contained the cautionary statement, "it is important to emphasize that your talks are exploratory and in no wise commit the United States Government to subsequent action."[40]

Even with the last qualification, President Kennedy was to modify substantially General Taylor's draft of his instructions. The President obviously did not want to make any direct commitment at this time to the South Vietnamese Government of the possibility of US combat troops in Vietnam. Rather than any statement that specifically mentioned the employment of US troops, Taylor's directive read only that he was to provide the President his views "on the courses of action which our Government might take at this juncture to avoid a further deterioration in the situation in South Vietnam; and eventually to contain and eliminate the threat to its independence." President Kennedy added that the general "must keep in mind" that his recommendations be based upon the premise that the Vietnamese people and government had the primary responsibility for their own independence. Furthermore, President Kennedy reminded the general that political, economic, and social issues were just as important as the military concerns.[41]

The formal result of the 11 October National Security Council meeting was the issuance of a six-paragraph National Security Action Memorandum three days later. It enumerated the President's decisions, including the sending of General Taylor and Presidential Advisor Walt Rostow to Vietnam. The first three paragraphs focused on political and diplomatic measures. These included the publishing of a White Paper on North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam based upon the William Jorden inspection report. They also called for the development of plans based upon the White Paper for the International Control Commission to act on the North Vietnamese violations. The third paragraph ordered the State Department to prepare plans for the possibility of presenting "the Viet Nam case in the United Nations." This was followed by two paragraphs relating to military initiatives: (1) the deployment of a newly formed antiguerrilla US Air Force "Jungle Jim" squadron equipped with helicopters and fixed-wing transport

and reconnaissance aircraft "for the initial purpose of training Vietnamese forces" and (2) the initiation of guerrilla operations in the Tchepone area in Laos involving "use of US advisers if necessary." The final paragraph concerned the forthcoming visit to Vietnam by General Taylor, which merely declared that he "was to explore ways in which assistance of all types might be more effective."[42]

Newspaper Speculation about the Taylor Trip

As General Taylor prepared to leave for Vietnam, the Kennedy administration attempted to limit press speculation about the purpose of the mission. On 12 October in a note to Ambassador Nolting about the forthcoming Taylor visit, Under Secretary of State Ball wrote that "although some members of the press are traveling to Saigon on same plane as General Taylor, they are in no sense part of or members of his party nor do they have any special privileges or mandate to cover his mission."[43] On the following day General Lemnitzer was even blunter in his instructions about the Taylor visit to Admiral Felt. He mentioned that at a White House meeting that morning the President had expressed concern about newspaper stories speculating that the United States planned to send combat forces to South Vietnam. President Kennedy had declared that there "was too much emphasis" on this matter, and he feared a letdown in South Vietnamese morale if the United States decided against deploying troops. General Lemnitzer allowed, however, that "General Taylor will also give most discreet consideration to introduction of US Forces if he deems such action absolutely essential." The JCS Chairman then cautioned the Pacific commander that "correspondents (including [Columnist Joseph] Alsop) are not part of or in any way related to Taylor mission. They are merely being given a ride to Saigon as a courtesy."[44]

As early as 6 October Joseph Alsop, who had close connections with the Kennedy administration including the President, wrote in his column that "quiet but serious consideration is now being given to sending American troops to South Vietnam."[45] The following day there was a front page article in the *New York Times* with the headline "US Considering Sending Troops to Help Vietnam."[46] On 11 October Mr. Alsop, whom US Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith earlier characterized as "exceedingly martial" on Southeast Asia,[47] returned to the possibility of the deployment of US combat forces in his column. The theme of this article, however, was not the sending of US troops, but rather the "extraordinary puzzling and noteworthy fact that neither the country nor the Capital seems to be particularly excited."[48]

This lack of concern probably was explained in part by the continuing crisis over Berlin, which continued to overshadow the situation in Vietnam in the press. For example, in its 12 October coverage of the presidential press conference the previous day, the *New York Times* emphasized on its front page President Kennedy's remarks "that a month of quiet talks between the United States and the Russians had given him no hope of an early or easy solution in Berlin" and only secondarily General Taylor's

mission to South Vietnam.[49] Another article on the same page related that the United States was about to reinforce its armed forces in Europe with another 10,000 troops.[50] Arthur Krock in his column in the same issue quoted in detail Kennedy's comments on Berlin during their conversation the preceding day while making no mention of the President's remarks on Vietnam.[51] It would not be until 17 October, when Soviet Chairman Khrushchev lifted his threat to sign a separate peace with East Germany by December 1961, that tensions began to ebb. Still, the US Government remained suspicious of Russian motives in Berlin and the newspapers continued to publish accounts of US reinforcements in Europe and confrontations between US troops and East German authorities in Berlin.[52]

Despite its focus on the crisis in Berlin, the administration still monitored very carefully the press treatment of the implications of the Taylor mission to Vietnam. Apparently a news item that appeared in the inside pages of the *New York Times* with a Saigon dateline of 13 October caused some consternation in government circles. According to the article, the South Vietnamese government appeared to have reversed its rejection of the deployment of US combat forces and was willing "to consider such involvement."[53] Ambassador Nolting confirmed the validity of the story in a cable to the State Department on the above date, writing that Defense Minister Thuan had told him that South Vietnamese President "Diem's views had changed in light of worsening situation. Idea was to have 'symbolic' US strength near 17th parallel."[54]

On 15 October *Washington Post* correspondent John Hightower, citing unnamed government officials, reported that President Kennedy was "extremely reluctant to send troops to fight in South Viet-Nam," but was "prepared to consider urgently any recommendation for military intervention which he gets from General Maxwell D. Taylor."[55] The same day the *New York Times* carried a front-page story attributed to an unnamed reporter "special" to the *Times* about a major review of Asian policy. The author of the piece, like *Washington Post* reporter Hightower, quoted "high level officials" who according to the article stressed that "although the President was considering sending troops to South Vietnam ... he had not reached a decision." The story described in great specificity the nature of the Taylor mission, but then claimed that "Military leaders at the Pentagon, no less than General Taylor himself are understood to be reluctant to send organized United States combat units into Southeast Asia."[56]

The authors of the *Pentagon Papers* argue that, given the amount of detail and the manner in which the *Times* handled the article, it was "just about inconceivable that ... [it] could have been given out except at the direction of the President, or by him personally." Moreover, they point out that the suggestion about military reluctance was simply not true in light of the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to a lesser extent those of General Taylor. They then suggest that the President used the article to signal his unhappiness with Diem's request for US troops. He apparently used the article in an attempt to end speculation about the possibility of US combat forces going to Vietnam. While not entirely rejecting the possibility of sending American troops, President Kennedy "did not want to have his hands tied" before he made his decision.[57]

The Taylor Mission

On 15 October General Taylor and his retinue departed Washington for Saigon. Included in the official party were Walt Rostow from the White House, who acted as Taylor's deputy, and Sterling Cottrell from the Department of State, the director of the interdepartmental Vietnam Task Force. The only other State Department official in the group was William Jorden from the Policy Planning Group, who had just completed his report on the situation in Vietnam. Among the military members in addition to General Taylor were two brigadier generals, William A. Craig from the Army and Edward G. Lansdale from the Air Force, and one Navy rear admiral, Luther C. Heinz. Like William Jorden, General Craig, who was attached to the Joint Staff, had just returned from his inspection trip to Southeast Asia. General Lansdale was now Assistant for Special Operations to Secretary of Defense McNamara and still maintained close relations with President Diem. Rear Admiral Heinz was the Director for Far Eastern Affairs in the International Security Affairs Office in the Department of Defense. Five other officers—representing all of the services—completed the military representation. Two civilian members of the Department of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency as well as one representative each from the International Cooperation Agency (the predecessor of the Agency for International Development) and the Central Intelligence Agency rounded out the makeup of the Taylor mission.[58]

Both Presidential Advisor Arthur Schlesinger and Roger Hilsman, who headed the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, years later commented on what they considered the overwhelming representation of the military on the Taylor trip. Mr. Hilsman noted that there was no one from the State Department on the fact-finding group that had comparable rank to Walt Rostow or General Taylor. He argued that Secretary of State Rusk believed Vietnam "was essentially a military problem" and "did not want the State Department to play a prominent role in the upcoming decisions on Vietnam."[59] Arthur Schlesinger basically agreed, declaring that the composition of the Taylor group was a "conscious decision by the Secretary of State to turn the Vietnam problem over to the Secretary of Defense." Mr. Schlesinger surmised that President Kennedy went along with this arrangement because he had "more confidence in McNamara and Taylor than in State."[60]

Mr. Schlesinger and Roger Hilsman were only partially correct in their views of the Taylor mission. Secretary of Defense McNamara had only shown intermittent interest in the Vietnam situation until the recent Viet Cong offensive. He had been more concerned with the reorganization of his department, the Bay of Pigs crisis, and the Berlin situation than with Vietnam. In fact earlier in the year he had acquiesced to a State Department request that the latter take the lead role in the interagency Vietnam Task Force. As late as the high-level discussions in August, Secretary McNamara had argued against intervention in Southeast Asia, citing the strain on US military resources elsewhere. It was not until mid-September that he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "he wanted to make South Vietnam 'a laboratory for the development of organization and procedures

for the conduct of sub-limited war.'" Secretary McNamara even mentioned the establishment of "'an experimental command' directly under the control of his office to do so."[61]

In a sense, the sending of General Taylor to Vietnam was one way President Kennedy could circumvent the bureaucracies in both the State and Defense Departments. In doing so, however, he also diminished the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Taylor remained outside of the military chain of command and reported directly to the President, not to Secretary McNamara or to Secretary Rusk. In a manner of speaking, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in this case worked for General Taylor.

The Joint Staff helped in the preparation of twenty estimates of possible US actions in Vietnam that were placed in folders for each member of the Taylor group. According to a note attached to the table of contents in the folders, action officers at the Department of Defense and Service level as well as the Joint Staff prepared these "preliminary estimates." In a cautionary caveat, the introductory note read that they were completed in a short time frame and that they would be "completely staffed within the next two weeks." At least in the development of the last suggestion relating to covert operations and obtaining intelligence about the Viet Cong, the Central Intelligence Agency also played a role.[62]

The first four of the suggested proposals related to the deployment of US military units to Vietnam. The first pertained to sending an American combat unit to Vietnam to train a South Vietnamese unit, while the second would station an American battalion at Da Nang in northern South Vietnam. In the next two suggestions, the United States would move either an Army combat engineer battalion or Navy Seabees to Vietnam, or assign individual logistic units there. While the authors of these estimates indicated that General McGarr preferred the first of the four options, they also pointed out that it was unlikely that the South Vietnamese would be able to assign one of their units for this training. Furthermore they noted that President Diem had always opposed the positioning of US forces in Vietnam, although they mentioned that recent events may cause him in the future to be more amenable on this subject. Finally, these staff officers could not ignore the fact that the positioning of US units in Vietnam would be a violation of the 1954 Geneva Agreements.[63]

While the next sixteen estimates did not involve US combat ground units, they did provide for a large increase in the US advisory contingent in South Vietnam so that advisors could be placed at the company level with the South Vietnamese Army. Other recommendations included large-scale helicopter support for ARVN ground operations, a stronger emphasis on the training of the Civil Guard and Self Defense militia units, and an extensive airfield and road construction program. There were also proposals to improve the South Vietnamese Navy patrolling capability and to undertake a defoliant spray program. Like the first four estimates, most involved in one way or another a breach of the 1954 Geneva Accords.[64]

With these estimates and suggestions providing the documentary framework for the mission, General Taylor and his party arrived on the evening of 15 October in Honolulu for a planned two-day stopover to discuss with Admiral Felt the options available to

the United States in Vietnam. The following morning the admiral and his staff provided the Taylor mission a detailed briefing on conditions there as viewed from the Pacific Command headquarters. According to Admiral Felt, the Vietnam situation was critical and required US assistance, but he was not sure what the nature of that assistance should be. He listed the pros and cons for the deployment of American combat units to that country, but as he later reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it appeared to him "to add up in favor of our not introducing US combat forces until we have exhausted other means for helping Diem." He tended toward confining American assistance to material aid and limiting any deployment of US troops to logistic support, largely helicopter and possibly engineering units.[65]

Another officer who had a direct stake in the Taylor mission was General McGarr, the US MAAG commander in Vietnam. On 12 October, a few days prior to the departure of the mission from the United States, General McGarr in a personal letter to General Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote a "frank appraisal" of the conditions in Vietnam. While he had just completed an annual report to CINCPAC, the MAAG commander believed there were matters that needed clarification which were better handled outside of official channels. Reflecting on the deteriorating situation in Vietnam, he wanted General Lemnitzer to have his opinion in order to protect the reputation of the US Armed Forces, specifically that of "the Army which runs MAAG Vietnam," and while unstated, obviously his own.[66]

The MAAG commander reviewed his differences with former Ambassador Durbrow but noted he had a relatively smooth relationship with Ambassador Nolting. The general vented his continuing frustration with State Department personnel and other civilian officials in Washington. He described them as writing "primarily for high level civilian consumption to cover State Department with paper in the eventuality that the situation here goes from bad to worse." In particular, he complained about pressure from the Washington Vietnam Task Force, and namely Walt Rostow, to provide a phased counterinsurgency campaign with hard deadlines. While agreeing that such a campaign was necessary, General McGarr believed "this timetable approach to be highly questionable because of the advanced state of the insurgency and because of the lack of adequate forces to counter it." The MAAG general argued that any counterinsurgency plan had to be part of an overall national plan that combined political, economic, and military measures. He faulted both President Diem and the State Department for the failure to create a coordinated campaign such as that as called for in the Counterinsurgency Plan approved earlier by both the US and South Vietnamese governments. The MAAG commander worried that any counterinsurgency effort might be too late in the face of growing enemy strength.[67]

Furthermore, General McGarr expressed concern over the growing influence of a newly established British advisory mission to the South Vietnamese government of President Diem and Defense Minister Thuan. Robert G. K. Thompson, the former permanent secretary of defense in the Malayan Federation who had played a prominent role in the British success against the Communist-led insurrection there, headed this new

group. In the Malayan campaign, the police controlled the counterinsurgency effort, and General McGarr worried that Mr. Thompson would attempt to influence President Diem to use the same type of organization in Vietnam. He had already sent a lengthy cable to General Lemnitzer outlining the disadvantages of a police emphasis as contrasted to the military. He feared that President Diem would use Mr. Thompson to circumvent the newly created South Vietnamese Joint General Staff and the Field Command military chain of command. Even though General Lemnitzer supported the MAAG commander in a memorandum to General Taylor, General McGarr could not help but be concerned about what influence Mr. Thompson might have with both the Washington and the South Vietnamese authorities.[68]

Before arriving in Saigon, the British official had visited Washington and met with both Generals Taylor and Lemnitzer, as well as various State Department officials. According to a message from the State Department to Ambassador Nolting, Mr. Thompson suggested the implementation of several techniques that the British employed in Malaya.[69] Just as significant, Presidential Advisor Walt Rostow and Sterling Cottrell, director of the Vietnam Task Force, both members of the Taylor group, were familiar with Thompson's recommendations. In fact, Cottrell's checklist for the trip included several references to the head of the new British mission in Vietnam, including the development of a "food control program with Thompson."[70]

The presence of Mr. Cottrell and Mr. Rostow in the Taylor party and possible knowledge of Thompson's meeting with General Taylor could hardly give General McGarr a comfortable feeling about the pending visit. Moreover, according to an official Army history, the MAAG commander had "managed to alienate" his immediate superior, Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, as well as President Diem.[71] Indeed, General Taylor and members of his group came to Vietnam with a general feeling that there was a basic need for new directions and possibly new leadership.

The Taylor group came well prepared and with some preconceptions about what they wanted to find in their examination of the situation in Vietnam. In addition to the documented estimates contained in their individual folders, General Taylor assigned to various members a series of questions broken into eight general categories: political-social, military, political warfare, unconventional warfare, covert operations, MAAG and military aid, economic, and research and development. One individual was to be responsible for each category. For example, Walt Rostow had the responsibility for political warfare; General Lansdale for unconventional warfare, and Admiral Heinz for MAAG and military aid. Several of the categories contained leading questions, such as under social-political, "How stable is the Diem Government?" and under covert operations, "What is the state of loyalty of the Armed Forces to Diem?" The general tenor of most of the questions was that there was much room for improvement in both the performance of the South Vietnamese government and institutions as well as the US advisory effort.[72]

On 18 October, the morning the Taylor group arrived in Saigon, President Diem went before the National Assembly to declare a state of national emergency. That noon the president met with General Taylor and his group together with Ambassador Nolting and

other local American officials. In the general discussion that followed, President Diem bemoaned that he had insufficient troops to deploy against the Viet Cong and lacked trained personnel to fill the ranks of the Civil Guard and Home Defense militia to protect the hamlets. Moreover, he claimed that the South Vietnamese did not have the trained cadre to proceed any faster in the expansion of his armed forces. President Diem also rejected as tactically unwise a Taylor suggestion that a more offensive strategy might be more effective, stating that the "Viet Cong find it easy to deviate past GVN units on known trails." He claimed that the Communists had opened up an offensive in the northern and central parts of the country to take the pressure off their forces in the Mekong Delta in the south where the government forces had enjoyed some recent successes.[73]

At this point, General Taylor raised the sensitive question of the possibility of sending US troops to South Vietnam. He asked why the South Vietnamese government appeared no longer to object to the deployment of either American or SEATO forces into his country. President Diem replied that the Laotian civil war and the increased infiltration of Communist guerrilla forces through Laos changed the entire situation. He believed that the Communists were using this infiltration to offset the recent increase in South Vietnamese forces. According to the South Vietnamese president, his people believed that the Communists had internationalized the war with their infiltration and thus would not resent US forces. While not specifically asking for US forces, President Diem asked for helicopter and tactical air support, logistic support, and coastal patrol units. He then remarked that the Vietnamese population feared possible abandonment of their country by the United States if American troops were introduced without a formal commitment, stating "they can be withdrawn at any time." Ambassador Nolting later wrote, "it was not completely clear what Diem has in mind at present time." He believed that the Vietnamese president was saying that he wanted a "bilateral defense treaty and preparation of plans for use American forces (whatever is appropriate)." The Ambassador stated that when asked directly about US troops, President Diem did "not repeat his earlier idea relayed to me by Thuan that he wanted combat forces."[74]

This interview with President Diem hardly led to clarification. General Taylor several times emphasized the need for an overall strategy that combined military, economic, psychological, social, and political measures to combat the insurrection. President Diem attempted to skirt the subject, but when pressured finally claimed that he had a "new strategic plan of his own." When the general and the Ambassador tried to draw the details out of the Vietnamese leader, the president remained vague. Frustrated, General Taylor finally gave up and asked that President Diem provide him with a written copy of the plan.[75] Several years later General Taylor described this meeting in the following words: "It was interminably long . . . and consisted mainly of a monologue by Diem . . . [who] smoked cigarettes incessantly and talked in somnolent tones that sorely tested the powers of attention of his overseas visitors, drowsy from too frequent changes of time zones."[76]

The following day, accompanied by General McGarr, General Taylor met separately with the senior commanders of the ARVN, Lieutenant General Le Van Ty, Chief of the

Joint General Staff, and Major General Duong Van Minh (Big Minh), the Commanding General of the newly created Field Command. General Minh was unusually frank and candid with General Taylor. In response to a question about progress in the war against the Viet Cong, the South Vietnamese commander replied that the situation had grown worse in the last two years. Not only had the Viet Cong increased its strength but the South Vietnamese government was also losing the support of the population. He implied that much of the blame lay with Diem's regime, which remained isolated from the people. General Minh also complained that, despite General McGarr's best efforts to urge unity of command, the military had little control over the Civil Guard and Home Defense militias, which for the most part answered to the province chiefs, who answered only to President Diem. When General Taylor asked General Minh whether he believed that the president's proclamation of a national emergency would result in a marshalling of all of the nation's resources, the South Vietnamese general merely shrugged his shoulders. At that point General McGarr broke in to say that since February he had been urging upon President Diem the formulation of a national plan. The MAAG commander observed that General Minh, together with his deputy Brigadier General Le Van Kim, had about completed the military portion of such a plan. In his final remarks to General Taylor, General Minh mentioned that other Vietnamese officers would also speak candidly, "but only if it could be tête-à-tête or in a very small group."[77]

On 21 October General Taylor visited General McGarr at the MAAG headquarters to be briefed on the overall military situation in Vietnam. The MAAG commander began with a description of terrain and climate features, followed by a statistical breakdown of comparative troop strength and respective casualties of the government and Viet Cong forces. He then described various actions that both the Vietnamese and the US advisory group could undertake to improve the South Vietnamese military. As far as using American combat troops "to fight the Viet Cong," General McGarr believed that they should not "come in at all unless in sufficient strength to tip the balance."[78]

Later in the day General Taylor chaired a conference on intelligence at the MAAG facility. The participants included General McGarr and members of his staff as well as William E. Colby of the Central Intelligence Agency and Mr. Cottrell and Mr. Rostow of the Taylor group. During the general review of intelligence resources in South Vietnam, General Taylor learned that the South Vietnamese had seven intelligence agencies, all reporting directly and independently to President Diem. According to Mr. Colby, President Diem believed that intelligence was "'power' and by not centralizing them under a subordinate he avoids giving that power to someone who might use it against the President." General McGarr broke in and emphasized that there was a "great need for timely dissemination of all available intelligence to the military for effective conduct of operations."[79]

The meeting continued with a description of the difficulty of evaluating the intelligence obtained from both formal and informal Vietnamese resources. The conferees also discussed the workings of an intelligence evaluation center that General McGarr had established to provide "hard targets" for the South Vietnamese "based on special

intelligence and concealed as to source of information." General Taylor reviewed the mission statement for the center and stated "that the US wants to and must know how the war is going from all aspects, and that although EC [evaluation center] mission is important, it does not go far enough."[80]

The conference concluded with a discussion of the Laotian border situation. All agreed that the South Vietnamese defenses there posed only a "sieve" for Communist infiltration. General McGarr mentioned ARVN plans to consolidate several "isolated small posts into . . . large defendable border bases from which ARVN would conduct interlocking patrols." There appeared to be little optimism among the participants that this would be the remedy of the problem. General Taylor ended the meeting by declaring that the review had been profitable, but there still remained the problem "how to institute [an] effective intelligence system for both GVN in countering the VC threat and US in order to be knowledgeable on the overall situation."[81]

Worried about the ease of border infiltration, General Taylor assigned General Lansdale, despite his expertise in counterinsurgency, "to do a study of fortifying the DMZ."[82] According to Roger Hilsman, General Lansdale believed this was a "misunderstanding of guerrilla warfare" as "much to his disgust," he attempted to estimate "the costs and number of men required 'to seal off' the 250-miles of borders of jungles and mountains through which the infiltrators came."[83]

This was not the only task that General Taylor had given to General Lansdale, who also had the responsibility for aspects of unconventional war on this mission. In response to a query from General Taylor about what unconventional warfare techniques would prove fruitful in Vietnam, General Lansdale emphasized personalities rather than techniques and expertise. He explained that he "was struck by the wealth of ideas, abilities, and equipment which the US has put into Vietnam. Yet, the Vietnamese governmental machinery seems to be bogged down, and somehow things simply don't get done effectively enough." General Lansdale believed that the existing policy of "just adding more of many things" including people would prove futile. He believed that the Vietnamese required a "spark," and this could best be accomplished by placing "the right Americans into the right areas of the Vietnamese government to provide operational guidance." The Air Force general elaborated: "This concept does not envision a large group of Americans moving into the whole Vietnamese governmental structure. It is intended only for key spots in the Vietnamese government, where decisive action will pay off the most." He emphasized that such a move required the support of President Diem and that these Americans would be collaborators with their Vietnamese counterparts—"helpers not orderers."[84] It may well be that General Lansdale in this memo was suggesting that he should be the one to head such a mission as the US advisor to President Diem.[85]

In the interim, on 21 October General Taylor and members of his party, escorted by MAAG officers, Embassy staff, and South Vietnamese personnel, began a two-day inspection trip including the strategic Mekong Valley, which had suffered the worst flooding in thirty years. The first day they spent in the north near the Demilitarized Zone, and on the second day they flew over the flooded lowlands of the Mekong in the south. American

officials including General Taylor believed that this natural disaster presented an opening to further American interests. As General McGarr informed Admiral Sharp, the Mekong situation raised the "possibility that flood relief could be justification for moving in US military personnel for humanitarian purposes with subsequent retention if desirable." According to the MAAG commander, both General Taylor and Ambassador Nolting were "evaluating feasibility and desirability" of such a course of action. He concluded his report to Admiral Sharp: "If as result of Taylor visit and recommendations decision is made to support Diem with US troops, this is an excellent opportunity to minimize adverse publicity."[86]

Interestingly enough, General McGarr's observation independently fit in with another recommendation by General Lansdale to General Taylor. In reply to a specific question about pacification progress, General Lansdale answered that the government had failed to break the Viet Cong connection to the population or to create a bond with the people. He emphasized that an integral ingredient in waging counterguerilla or "unconventional warfare" was the formation of a "'brotherhood' of the Vietnamese soldiers with Vietnamese civilians." General Lansdale believed that military civic action was essential in this process. He observed that the Defense Department had made the Army its executive agent for military civic action and that a team of US Army officers had just completed a study of South Vietnamese civic action. The Air Force general related that he was thinking of recommending to Secretary McNamara that "it might be worth while to make Vietnam a major test center for this Army activity [Civic Action]."[87]

By the morning of 24 October General Taylor had returned to Saigon and prepared to visit President Diem. Prior to his appointment with the Vietnamese president, however, he stopped to discuss with General McGarr his proposal for the possible deployment of a mixed US force of combat and support troops to Vietnam for the ostensible purpose to assist in flood relief. From the tenor of the conversation, it soon became apparent that General Taylor had little use for General McGarr's opinions and that the MAAG commander would have limited influence in the future on US policy in Vietnam. According to the MAAG commander's account, the conversation started off on the wrong foot when he argued that there were too few combat units to provide the necessary protection for the support troops that would be involved in the humanitarian tasks. General McGarr claimed that the Viet Cong had gained strength in this sector, and the troops engaged in the relief work would be scattered in some thirty different sites. Furthermore, he opposed Taylor's suggestion that some of the combat troops should be sent to the High Plateau in II Corps, contending that this would further fragment his command. General Taylor then tartly replied that it was McGarr's "job to prevent fragmentation and that he would be disappointed in US troops who were unable to protect themselves."[88]

McGarr's relationship with General Taylor deteriorated even further when the latter and Ambassador Nolting prepared to leave to meet with President Diem. The MAAG commander declared that he would see them then soon at the Presidential Palace. At that point, General Taylor declared that there had been a change of plans and that General McGarr was no longer invited. The MAAG commander protested, stating that as the US

military representative in Vietnam he should attend the meeting. General Taylor simply said, "I do not agree that you should go." Again General McGarr objected, declaring that as the representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Vietnam he should attend. General Taylor replied that it was a personal meeting with President Diem and he did not wish the commander to attend. Seeing the futility in arguing the point, General McGarr merely stated, "It is your decision, general." Later that day in relating the account of his meeting with General Taylor to General Lemnitzer, he wrote, "Mainly, I am particularly concerned regarding local loss of prestige in eyes of GVN."[89]

Seemingly unworried about any "loss of prestige" on the part of the MAAG commander, General Taylor apparently wanted no dissenting voice when he presented his views to President Diem. Walt Rostow of his group and Ambassador Nolting and Robert Mendenhall from the US Embassy were the only ones to sit in on his conference with the Vietnamese president and Defense Minister Thuan that morning. General Taylor laid out for the two what he called his "personal ideas" in the form of a six-point outline. These consisted of the following:

A. Improvement of intelligence.
B. Joint survey of security situation at provincial level.
C. Improvement of army mobility: . . . [which included] making available . . . improved means of transport, notably helicopters.
D. Send blocking [force to limit] infiltration into high plateau . . .
E. Introduction of US Military Forces . . .
F. Actions to emphasize national emergency and beginning of a new phase in the war.[90]

In his report of the meeting, General Taylor declared that President Diem reacted favorably to all of his suggestions, especially to the possible introduction of US forces to assist in flood relief. The Vietnamese leader observed that even his opponents in the government now favored the presence of American troops in the country. According to the US general, "nothing was formally proposed or approved," but all concerned agreed that his outline could form the basis for further cooperation between the Republic of Vietnam and the United States.[91]

On the following day General Taylor had one final visit with President Diem and Mr. Thuan. This time General McGarr and Arthur Gardiner, the head of the US Operations Mission, also formed part of the US delegation, but neither actively participated in the discussion. In the main, General Taylor and the Vietnamese president reviewed some of the same subjects that they had talked about the day before but made no mention of any deployment of US ground troops. President Diem stressed the need for more aircraft, especially helicopters. According to Ambassador Nolting, he and General Taylor took that opportunity "to make clear to Diem" that the helicopters were to be flown by American pilots and were to belong to US units under American command. General Taylor also touched upon the need to develop "political-psychological" measures to rebuild the confidence of the South Vietnamese people in their government as well as to damage the morale of the enemy. After some further talk about such topics as the need for spraying

Viet Cong crops, improving the training of South Vietnamese troops, and the possibility of armored boats to protect the rice harvest in the Mekong Delta, President Diem asked about the possibility of General Lansdale serving again in Vietnam. Without responding to this request, General Taylor concluded his remarks by noting that they had outlined a general concept, but now "life would have to be breathed" into it. President Diem ended the conversation at that point by asking the general to thank President Kennedy "for his interest in Vietnam."[92]

The Taylor Recommendations

Prior to leaving Vietnam, General Taylor informed Washington: "Because of the importance of acting rapidly once we have made up our minds, I will cable my recommendations . . . enroute home."[93] Even before General Taylor departed Saigon on 25 October for Bangkok on the first leg of his return trip, he had forwarded to Washington his conclusion that a 6,000–8,000 man US task force was needed to assist in the flood relief work in the Mekong Valley. That afternoon he had sent a highly classified cable to Secretary Rusk with the designation "Eyes Only" for the Secretary, Under Secretary Johnson, the President, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and General Lemnitzer. General Taylor declared that in his opinion the task force should consist largely of logistical personnel and combat engineers. He thought that this would provide "a US military presence in VN [Vietnam] capable of assuring Diem of our readiness to join him in a military showdown with the Viet Cong or Viet Minh." Furthermore, he argued, the humanitarian aspect of the flood relief mission "avoids any suggestion that we are taking over responsibility for the security of the country." It would also permit the United States the option of withdrawing the troops when the engineering aspect of the mission was completed or of phasing them "into other activities if we wish to remain longer." General Taylor believed that the task force would require an unspecified number of infantry for protection.[94]

Two days after arriving in Bangkok General Taylor cabled Washington to deny that his proposal was a cover for the United States to intervene in Vietnam with combat troops. He insisted that was not his intention:

> The flood [relief] in VN is a real emergency program, capable of giving real assistance to the VN authorities charged with relief measures as well as a military reinforcement to assist in safeguarding the area from a return of the Viet Cong who have fled before the high waters.[95]

The general declared that his concept provided real choices and did not hide anything. General Taylor maintained that it satisfied "Diem's request for troops" with a military and psychological commitment much smaller than that required "to suppress the VC insurgency." He contended that if the latter goal was to be the mission of this task force, they would be talking in terms of three divisions.[96]

Following what he called "guarded" discussions with Thai leaders, General Taylor and his party soon left Bangkok for the Philippines. According to the general he selected Baguio, the country's summer capital, for some seclusion and a conducive atmosphere where he and his associates could complete their written findings. He later wrote: "Former experience had demonstrated the importance of arriving in Washington . . . with a finished report in hand and prepared to give full-time to defending one's case before the president."[97]

Prior to his group's departure for Washington and after the completion of the full report on 1 November, General Taylor forwarded two cables directly to the President providing the essentials of the findings and the rationale of the mission. In the first message General Taylor summarized both his basic conclusions and those of his group. He opened with their conclusions regarding the situation in South Vietnam. They believed the Communist aim was eventually to control all of Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, the Taylor mission found serious doubts among much of the populace about the Diem government's ability to survive, let alone defeat the Viet Cong. General Taylor asserted, "what the US does or fails to do will be decisive to the end result." The general then outlined for the President eight recommendations. These included:

1. Sending of US administrative advisors to assist South Vietnamese government officials;
2. A joint effort to improve all intelligence;
3. A joint survey of the conditions in the provinces to assess the social, political, intelligence, and military factors involving counter-insurgency;
4. A joint effort to free the South Vietnamese Army for more mobile operations and to improve the training and equipping of the militia to take over the defense of static positions;
5. US assistance in the surveillance and control of both the South Vietnamese coast and inland waterways;
6. Reorganization and enlargement of the US MAAG in Vietnam;
7. US expansion of economic assistance to South Vietnam; and
8. A US "offer to introduce into South Vietnam a military Task Force to operate under US control."[98]

While expanding on his rationale for the introduction of US troops in his second memorandum to the President, General Taylor admitted that the move also had many disadvantages. It would place a strain on the already stretched US military strategic reserve. He recognized that much-needed troops would be sent "to a peripheral area of the Communist bloc." Furthermore, the general acknowledged that if this contingent were not sufficient it would "be difficult to resist the pressure to reinforce," leading to a possible bottomless commitment. There also remained the danger that the United States might back into a war on the Asiatic mainland.[99]

Despite all these drawbacks, General Taylor advised President Kennedy that the deployment of the US task force contained more advantages than "risks and difficulties." He maintained that the possibility of any major war in Asia was remote. According to General Taylor, North Vietnam was extremely vulnerable to a conventional bombing

campaign and the United States could use this as a diplomatic lever to pressure "Hanoi to lay off SVN [South Vietnam]." Moreover, because of internal economic conditions, the general believed China would not be "militarily venturesome for some time to come." First and foremost, however, General Taylor supported this infusion of American strength because the present US policy to maintain an independent South Vietnam would not succeed without it. He argued that the number of American troops did not have to be large but had to be numerous enough to have a significant impact on the present situation. Besides assisting in flood relief and bolstering South Vietnamese morale, the task force needed to be able to defend itself as well as provide an emergency backup to the ARVN. Just as significant, these American troops could serve as an "advance party of such additional forces as may be introduced" in the event of the activation of certain CINCPAC and SEATO contingency plans.[100] As General Taylor later explained, he thought it necessary to send the two cables because he knew the "President's anxiousness to get his hands on our recommendations" and wanted to facilitate its review.[101]

On the afternoon of 3 November President Kennedy welcomed General Taylor and his group to the White House, where he greeted them. In a separate meeting with the President, General Taylor presented President Kennedy with the formal report. It essentially consisted of a binder containing three major documents and several appendices. A covering letter, probably drafted by both Walt Rostow and General Taylor but signed only by the general, was Tab A.[102]

In the letter, General Taylor expounded the view that Premier Khrushchev's call for wars of liberation was "a new and dangerous Communist technique" which threatened the existence of South Vietnam. The general warned that in the long run, the United States may have to announce its "intention to attack the source of guerrilla aggression in North Vietnam and impose on the Hanoi Government a price . . . commensurate with the damage being inflicted on its neighbors to the south." At this time, however, General Taylor only urged the President to adopt as soon as possible the recommended emergency program outlined by his group. He closed the letter on a more upbeat note. While he and his group believed that the situation in Vietnam was serious, it was "one which is by no means hopeless." The President's military advisor related that he and the members of his group found the "forces at work in [South] Vietnam . . . are extremely positive in character" and deemed that with US assistance the country could withstand the Communist onslaught.[103]

The remaining elements of the report outside of the numerous appendices were a list of the conclusions and recommendations (Tab B) and a 25-page paper entitled Evaluation and Conclusions (Tab C). Tab B was basically a slightly modified version of the first cable that General Taylor had forwarded on 1 November. As indicated by its title, Tab C contained a detailed elaboration of both Tab A and Tab B. It opened with a description of Maoist revolutionary theory and its adaptation by the Vietnamese Communists. The paper provided an extensive account of Viet Cong strength and weakness, including an Order of Battle. It also attempted to define counterinsurgency warfare and repeated the need for a 15 to 1 ratio for defenders as opposed to the guerrilla forces. In its discussion

of the recommendations, Tab C expanded upon the requirements outlined in Tab B. For example, in clarifying the suggestion for major modifications in the US military structure in Vietnam, it specifically called for the transformation of the MAAG "from an advisory group to something nearer—but not quite—an operational headquarters in a theater of war."[104]

Despite its length and complexity, the general theme of Tab C was consistent with that of both the covering letter (Tab A) and the recommendations in Tab B. Although recognizing that at the moment the Communists had the upper hand in South Vietnam, the authors of the paper held that the Diem government could win the guerrilla war against the insurgents and its allies in North Vietnam with the implementation of the recommended reforms and the suggested restructuring of US assistance. While critical of President Diem and his autocratic and somewhat paranoid administrative tendencies, they praised him as having "extraordinary ability, stubbornness, and guts." They believed that he still had the respect of most of the members of the armed forces and the government, "which gives their grumbling (and perhaps some plotting) a somewhat half-hearted character; and they are willing—by and large—to work for him, if he gives them a chance to do their jobs."[105]

Despite the overall optimistic tone in the main body of the Taylor report, some of the appendices carried a much more pessimistic view. William Jorden, for example, in his report cautioned against too close an identification with the Diem government "as the focus of US policy."[106] Sterling Cottrell, the director of the Vietnam Task Force, was even more negative in his conclusion: "Since it is an open question whether the GVN can succeed even with US assistance, it would be a mistake for the US to commit itself irrevocably to the defeat of the Communists in SVN [South Vietnam]."[107] Even the military representatives on the mission expressed some reservations that the recommendations in Tab C were sufficient. They wrote: "it is the consensus of the military committee that intervention under SEATO or US plans is the best means of saving SVN and indeed, all of Southeast Asia."[108]

After reading the Taylor mission findings, US Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith, one of the President's informal foreign affairs advisors, characterized the report as "curious." He wrote in his diary: "The recommendations are for vigorous action. The appendices say it possibly cannot succeed given the present government in Saigon."[109]

The Presidential Decision

During this period President Kennedy continued to receive conflicting advice about the US involvement in South Vietnam from both within and outside his administration. Most notably, on 2 November Senator Mike Mansfield, the Democratic Majority Leader in the Senate and one of the earliest supporters of President Diem, wrote President Kennedy a three-page warning letter about the pitfalls of sending US troops to South Vietnam. While believing that US support of South Vietnam was important, he argued that

any deployment of US combat forces to South Vietnam "could become a quicksand for us." According to Senator Mansfield, we could not "substitute armed power for the kind of political and economic social changes" that were required. If President Diem had not instituted the necessary reforms during the "past seven years to stop communist subversion and rebellion," then the Senator "did not see how American combat troops can do it today." Mr. Mansfield declared, however, that he would support increased economic and military assistance to South Vietnam as long as the "physical burden of meeting communist infiltration, subversion, and attack [remained] on the shoulders of the South Vietnamese, whose country it is and whose future is their chief responsibility."[110]

On the following day Ambassador Galbraith, who was in Washington because of a state visit to the United States by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, forwarded a "Plan for South Vietnam" in response to a request from the President. In a covering letter, Ambassador Galbraith wrote that Abram J. Chayes, the legal advisor to the Department of State, collaborated with him in the preparation of the paper. Like Senator Mansfield, they opposed the insertion of any US troops to Vietnam. They proposed several political and diplomatic initiatives to preserve South Vietnam rather than any major US military involvement. According to their plan, the long-range objective was "the creation of an independent, economically viable and politically neutral state, rather than a limping American satellite." Through the good offices of the United Nations and Prime Minister Nehru of India, they hoped that a truce in the fighting could be arranged. The United Nations would establish an international observer force that would supervise the peace. Much of their plan was contingent on the ability of the conference in Geneva to reach an agreement for a neutral Laos that would end the infiltration of guerrillas into South Vietnam. The plan also called for an overture to the Soviet Union to convince that nation that it would be in its interest as well as that of the United States to end the fighting in both Laos and South Vietnam.[111]

Circumstances, however, worked against any serious consideration of the plan. McGeorge Bundy, the President's National Security Advisor, told the Ambassador he did not believe there was an occasion when President Kennedy would recommend the use of force. According to Ambassador Galbraith, the President wanted an alternative to overt intervention but felt that "The Indians have not been very encouraging." At a private luncheon with Prime Minister Nehru on 5 November, President Kennedy and the Ambassador "pressed Nehru hard" on whether Ho Chi Minh would assist or if the International Control Commission could do so. They also inquired about the feasibility of a UN observer corps. Mr. Nehru, according to Ambassador Galbraith, remained negative and was "most interested . . . that we should not send in soldiers." Mr. Galbraith also was opposed to the deployment of troops but noted that the United States needed "an alternative with a plausible chance of success."[112]

In the meantime, the Defense Department had begun implementation of some of the air support measures already approved by the President for reinforcing the US advisory effort. On 31 October General Lemnitzer reported to Secretary McNamara that the preliminary actions had been completed except for the "deployment of two US Army

Helicopter Companies with maintenance detachments." The Chairman stated that the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that this "should be accomplished without delay." The Secretary was more than receptive to the request. According to Air Force Brigadier General George S. Brown, his military aide, Secretary McNamara wanted the Joint Chiefs of Staff to take "maximum advantage of the time between now and a decision on this and other actions incident to Vietnam, following General Taylor's report to the President." The implication was clear that the "recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff will be approved."[113]

In their review of the Taylor report, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Defense Department as a whole continued to maintain that any US intervention in South Vietnam should be in sufficient strength to achieve its objective. An analysis by the Defense Department's Office of International Security Affairs of the Taylor mission recommendations concluded that the deployment of a flood relief task force of 8,000 US troops would result in a significant commitment to the Diem regime. The Defense analysts argued that the American force would come under attack and could not be withdrawn without involving a loss of US prestige. In essence:

> the introduction of US troops in South Vietnam would be a decisive act and must be sent to achieve a completely decisive mission. This mission would probably require, over time, increased numbers of US troops; DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] intervention would probably increase until a large number of US troops were required, three or more divisions.[114]

Secretary of State Rusk was also concerned about the extent of the US commitment. While out of town when the Taylor group arrived home, he cabled the State Department on 1 November that he had certain reservations about assisting the Diem government. The Secretary stated that the "critical question" remained "whether Diem is prepared to take necessary measures to give us something worth supporting." He declared that he did not want to place "American prestige . . . [on] a losing horse." Secretary Rusk directed that his Department make a careful review of "all measures we expect from Diem if our assistance forces us to assume de facto direction [of] Vietnamese affairs."[115]

Even more important, President Kennedy remained opposed to any deployment of US ground units to Vietnam. General Taylor stated that President Kennedy during their meeting on 3 November questioned him very closely and was "instinctively against [the] introduction of US forces."[116] Later the President told advisor Arthur Schlesinger:

> They want a force of American troops. . . . They say it's necessary in order to restore confidence and maintain morale. . . . The troops will march in; the bands will play; the crowds will cheer; and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another.[117]

On 4 November the *New York Times* carried the headline on the front page that the "President Is Cool On Asia Troop Aid" with the lead sentence reading that President Kennedy remained "strongly opposed to the dispatch of American combat troops to South Vietnam."[118]

The same day as the article appeared, General Taylor briefed a meeting of high-level administration officials, excluding the President, on the essence of his report. Included among the participants in addition to some members of his mission were Secretary McNamara, Under Secretary Gilpatric, Deputy Assistant Secretary William Bundy, and General Lemnitzer from the Defense Department. Under Secretaries U. Alexis Johnson and George Ball represented the State Department in the absence of Secretary Rusk. After completing his overview of the report and answering questions, General Taylor announced that on 7 November President Kennedy planned to chair another high-level conference. Referring to Kennedy's reluctance about the deployment of troops, the general stated that the President still wanted the conferees' judgment about the quality, implications, and implementation of the proposed assistance program.[119]

At that point there followed a general discussion about the recommendation of the Taylor report to insert the 8,000-man task force into South Vietnam. Secretary McNamara remarked that without the task force, "the recommendations will not save South Viet-Nam; with it, they might." He went on to declare, however, that 8,000 men would not be sufficient, but it signified a US commitment. The Secretary observed that in the event of Communist escalation the United States had six to eight divisions that could be sent to Southeast Asia. Others in the meeting debated the makeup of the task force and the various alternatives where it should be deployed. General Lemnitzer argued that the proposed force would be "thinned out in an area in which it is hard to operate." He urged, "we must commit the number of troops required for success." Secretary McNamara, however, suggested that three questions needed to be answered first: What was the "US objective in South Viet-Nam?" "How far do we want to go?" And "How far do we want to state it publicly?" Finally General Taylor concluded the discussion by stating that the United States must remain flexible and that his recommendations rested upon the President's "directive to bolster the GVN to win their own war."[120]

After the meeting, Secretary McNamara asked Deputy Assistant Secretary Bundy to prepare a memorandum for the President based on the questions that the Secretary had just raised. Mr. Bundy in his draft for McNamara's signature took as the fundamental issue of the Taylor report that the United States should "commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism." Secondly, if this were the case, the focus then became whether the United States should "support this commitment by necessary immediate military actions and preparations for possible later actions." The memorandum essentially answered both points in the affirmative. Using the same arguments that Secretary McNamara had employed in the meeting, Mr. Bundy suggested that the 8,000-man task force recommended in the Taylor report stood less than a 50 percent chance of succeeding. He wrote that, depending upon the reaction of

North Vietnam and/or China, the United States, if need be, could deploy some 220,000 men to Southeast Asia "without serious interference with our present Berlin plans."[121]

Secretary McNamara made some modifications on the memorandum on 6 November, but he did not sign it at this time. He had also forwarded copies of the draft to the State Department and to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a luncheon meeting with General Lemnitzer that day, he apparently thrashed out some doubts that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had about the recommended approach.[122] According to Secretary McNamara, they wanted the 8,000 men to be considered the vanguard of a larger force if required. Furthermore, they wanted some assurances from President Diem about how he would employ the military assistance that he would receive. General Lemnitzer also told Secretary McNamara that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not believe American military assistance to the South Vietnamese would lead to the use of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted the United States at the same time to warn North Vietnam "that action will be taken against it unless [they] stop support of Viet Cong." General Lemnitzer assured the Defense Secretary that there was no requirement at the present time to call upon the Reserves or the National Guard.[123]

The evidence would seem to indicate that Secretary McNamara also received agreement from General Lemnitzer and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to support his draft memorandum to the President. One of the major revisions to Bundy's draft that the Secretary made that day was to change in the second paragraph the phrase "In my judgment" to "The JCS, Mr. G[ilpatric], and I have reached the following conclusions." In this case Secretary McNamara was in hopes that the Defense Department would be speaking with one voice.[124]

In the meantime, the State Department was working on its own memorandum. Their view was influenced in part by a hoped-for breakthrough in Geneva over the Laotian negotiations. Under Secretary U. Alexis Johnson, who drafted the document for Secretary Rusk, obviously either had a copy of the Defense Department draft or conferred with William Bundy. The basic difference between the State Department draft and that of the Defense Department was that Under Secretary Johnson addressed the Laotian situation. He noted that if US combat units were deployed to South Vietnam, "It could have the effect of causing the Communists to break off negotiations . . . thus requiring us also to commit forces in Laos or to abandon that country to full Communist control." Given these circumstances, Johnson's draft proposed the approval of the first seven of General Taylor's recommendations but the deferment of "the decision on the timing of the introduction of combat forces into South Viet-Nam."[125]

The state visit of Prime Minister Premier Nehru and the President's busy schedule on 7 November apparently caused a postponement of the meeting to discuss the Taylor recommendations to the next day. Secretary Rusk on 8 November asked the President to delay this conference as well because those working on the proposals "have too simplified a view."[126] Secretary McNamara on this date as well forwarded to the President his revised memorandum, which now concluded that "we support the recommendations of General Taylor as the first steps toward" keeping South Vietnam from falling under

Communist domination.[127] Despite the sending of the document, Secretary McNamara too was having second thoughts. According to his recollection some thirty years later, he wrote that after he had submitted his memorandum, "I started worrying that we had been too hasty in our advice to the President."[128] The next few days were a period of hurried meetings and conflicting memoranda.

On 9 November Secretary Rusk hosted a large meeting at the State Department. Among the attendees was Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman, back in Washington to report on the Geneva talks. Others in attendance were Secretary McNamara, Generals Lemnitzer and Taylor, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, Assistant Secretary of Defense Nitze and his deputy, William Bundy, Deputy Secretaries of State Ball and Johnson, and Presidential Advisor Rostow. According to notes kept by General Lemnitzer, they reviewed another State Department draft revision of a joint State/Defense memorandum.[129] This document, in contrast to McNamara's, avoided mentioning any immediate deployment of US ground combat forces. Instead, it contained a statement to the effect that if US combat forces were required they would be positioned "in the area south of the 17th Parallel with the mission of being prepared to meet any overt North Vietnamese attack across the Demilitarized Zone and of relieving GVN forces presently deployed in that area for offensive operations."[130]

During the discussion of the memorandum, Secretary Rusk strongly favored reinforcing the MAAG with administrators and advisors but was reluctant to put in "US forces until Diem makes a 100 percent effort in his area." He asked Ambassador Harriman, who joined the meeting late, whether the placement of US troops in South Vietnam "would blow open the Laotian situation." The Ambassador replied that "no real negotiation [would be] possible with [the] Russians" and suggested the holding of a conference before the deployment of any troops.[131] When the rest of the conferees departed, Secretaries McNamara and Rusk remained to work on the memorandum.[132]

On 11 November the two Secretaries had completed their revision of the joint document. This version contained no specific reference to the deployment of ground combat units except in general contingency terms. Moreover, it made a sharp distinction between ground combat units and certain other military organizations. Labeling the former A and the latter B, the paper defined B units as modest in size and necessary to support South Vietnamese military operations. These included helicopter and other air support units, communication and intelligence units, naval patrols, and other such organizations. Secretaries McNamara and Rusk recommended that the necessary B units "be introduced as speedily as possible."[133]

That afternoon President Kennedy reviewed both the joint and the Defense Department memoranda with his senior advisors. In addition to the President, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter P. McConaughy, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence General Charles P. Cabell, General Taylor, Presidential Advisor Walt Rostow, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, Assistant Secretary of Defense Nitze, General Lemnitzer, and the President's brother Attorney General Robert Kennedy comprised the review group. During the course of the

discussion, the President stated that he wanted to avoid any comparisons to Berlin and Laos. He also declared that the sending of troops "would be a last resort." The Attorney General reiterated his brother's emphasis by stressing, "We are not sending combat troops. [We are] not committing ourselves to combat troops."[134]

President Kennedy then began his evaluation of the specific recommendations in the joint memorandum. He deferred any decision on the first point, which called for the United States to commit itself to the objective of "preventing the fall of South Vietnam." The President wondered aloud if this meant a "war with China," and he was not willing to go that far as yet. He approved the second point, which called for the preparation of plans for US troops to assist South Vietnam in both counterguerrilla operations and to defeat an invading Communist army. Most important, President Kennedy approved the third point, which would basically implement immediately the recommendations of the Taylor mission with the exception of sending an Army task force for flood relief. Finally, he accepted the proposal to have Ambassador Nolting obtain an assurance from President Diem that his government would implement the reforms that two US administrations had tried futilely to have him accomplish.[135]

Despite the President's decisions on 11 November, there still remained some confusion. McGeorge Bundy apparently was having difficulty drafting a memorandum for the record of the meeting. He told General Taylor that he had the feeling that the President "[did] not know what he [was] approving."[136] Still, on 13 November the National Security Council circulated a draft National Security Action Memorandum among senior officials and announced a meeting on 15 November of the National Security Council to review the document. Moreover, at the same time the State Department prepared a cable to Ambassador Nolting in Saigon to notify President Diem of the measures that the President had approved. The cable was almost a verbatim rendition of the third and fourth recommendations outlined in the Rusk-McNamara memorandum to the President. Furthermore, it also contained some blunt language, stating that the Ambassador was to inform President Diem that he was expected to "come forth with changes which will be recognized as having real substance and meaning." In addition, Ambassador Nolting was to tell the Vietnamese president "that the concept of the joint undertaking envisages a much closer relationship than the present one of acting in an advisory capacity only. We would expect to share in the decision-making process in the political, economic and military fields as they affect the security situation."[137] In effect, even before the issuance of a formal National Security Action Memorandum, the Kennedy administration was announcing to the Diem government the actions that it was prepared to provide South Vietnam and what it expected in turn from the South Vietnamese in an expanded assistance program.

During the National Security Council meeting on 15 November to discuss the proposed action memorandum, President Kennedy indicated little enthusiasm for the draft. Indeed, he expressed his frustrations with the entire Vietnam question. While Secretary Rusk urged a vigorous effort to carry out the program outlined in the paper, President Kennedy voiced the danger of the United States becoming "involved simultaneously on

two fronts on opposite sides of the world." He stated that he "could even make a rather strong case against intervening in an area 10,000 miles away against 16,000 guerrillas with a native army of 200,000, where millions have been spent for years with no success." Most of his advisors, including Secretaries McNamara and Rusk, General Lemnitzer, and General Taylor, argued that the United States had to take a firm stand in South Vietnam. The President at this point turned the discussion to what the United States should do next in Vietnam rather than whether the country should be involved in Vietnam at all. Noticing that Vice President Johnson had not been able to attend, President Kennedy decided to put off any decision on the proposed NSAM and adjourned the meeting.[138]

Despite the President's reservations, the decision had been made to expand the American commitment to Vietnam. There were no further meetings, but one week later the administration issued NSAM 111 declaring, "The US Government is prepared to join the Vietnam Government in a sharply increased joint effort to avoid a further deterioration in the situation in South Vietnam." Although the NSAM called on President Diem to liberalize his government, it still contained most of the recommendations of the Taylor mission with the notable exception of the deployment of the US task force. While President Kennedy had eliminated all references to plans about the deployment of US combat forces, the NSAM contained the ominous title "First Phase of the Viet-Nam Program."[139] Moreover, the Secretary of Defense had already asked General Lemnitzer on 13 November to prepare plans for the revamping of the US command structure in which "It is understood that such a commander would report directly to the JCS and thence to me for all operational purposes." The implication was clear that the Secretary and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to play a larger role in Vietnam policy in the future.[140]

6

From MAAG to MACV

The issuance of NSAM 111, which incorporated most of General Taylor's recommendations with the major exception of the deployment of US ground troops, implied a larger US commitment to South Vietnam. A period of uncertainty followed, however, in the relationship between the Vietnamese and the Americans. This was compounded by a continuing buildup of US advisors and material assistance. Unresolved questions remained about the nature of the evolving US civilian and military organizations in the country and their relationships not only to the Vietnamese but also to each other. During this transitional period, the Defense Department, led by Secretary McNamara, began to assume a much more dominant role. While General Taylor continued to have influence with the President and the White House Staff, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff began to play a larger part in the nuts and bolts of US Vietnam policy.

A Reluctant Partnership

President Diem was fully aware that the Kennedy administration had hedged its support to his regime. Even before the actual publication of the NSAM, Ambassador Nolting, on 17 November, had explained to President Diem that the US Government conditioned the "proposed joint effort" against the Communist Viet Cong upon Vietnamese reforms "in administrative, political and social fields . . . [that would have real] substance and meaning." President Diem replied sharply that he did not want Vietnam to become an "American protectorate." The American Ambassador answered that the United States had no desire to control South Vietnam but observed that there was a necessity for the Vietnamese to expand and reform their government. According to Mr. Nolting, President Diem indicated some displeasure that the United States had decided against sending any combat infantry troops to Vietnam at present. Ambassador Nolting, nevertheless, believed that the Vietnamese president "took our proposals rather better

than I had expected." The meeting ended with Mr. Diem promising that he would give his answer after taking the American recommendations back to his cabinet for their advice.[1]

Any confidence that the Ambassador may have had about Diem's reaction to the US plan soon disappeared. Three days after his audience with the Vietnamese president, Ambassador Nolting had a rather disquieting discussion with South Vietnamese Defense Minister Thuan. Mr. Thuan, a close confident of President Diem, told the Ambassador that the Vietnamese president impressed him as being "very sad and very disappointed" with the American response to the Communist threat. Mr. Thuan went on to say that his president now hesitated to forward to his cabinet what he considered an unimpressive American promise of assistance. He declared that President Diem wondered whether the Americans were "getting ready to back out on Vietnam as . . . we had done in Laos." Believing that President Diem was concerned about possible loss of control over Vietnamese sovereignty, Ambassador Nolting repeated to Defense Minister Thuan his assurance that the United States would prefer nothing more than that South Vietnam protect itself without the need for American aid. He urged the defense minister to ask President Diem to make specific suggestions, explaining that the US policy was flexible. Ever the optimist, the Ambassador concluded the description of his conversation with Mr. Thuan by declaring, "I think my best tactic is to wait a few days for Diem's response, I do not want to seem to be pressing him to buy our proposals, and I think Thuan will help."[2]

The relationship between the United States and the Vietnamese government deteriorated further during the month. President Diem continued to delay a response to the American offer of assistance against the Viet Cong. Furthermore, the South Vietnamese government-controlled press mounted attacks against the United States. According to one Saigon newspaper, the United States was attempting "to use Vietnam as a pawn of capitalist imperialism."[3] On 25 November 1961 a Reuters' news item appearing in the *New York Times* noted that this was the first South Vietnamese denunciation of United States policy in Southeast Asia in recent years.[4] President Diem had his own grievances against American reporters in South Vietnam, whom he accused of double dealing. According to a CIA report, he "complained that if he did not give an interview to a foreign newsman, the latter criticized him for ignoring foreign newsmen, but that if he did give the interview, the reporter used almost nothing told to him and criticized the length of the interview."[5]

At the same time that the Vietnamese government delayed its response to the American offer, the Kennedy administration continued to have internal disagreements about its commitment to President Diem. For example, Ambassador Galbraith upon his return to India stopped off in Vietnam at the request of President Kennedy to provide his evaluation of the situation there. In a personal cable to the President on 20 November, Ambassador Galbraith wrote, "There is scarcely the slightest practical chance that the administrative and political reforms now being pressed upon Diem will result in real change." Arguing that even "a moderately effective government" could easily suppress the Viet Cong, he pressed for the removal of the Vietnamese president. In another message to President Kennedy the following day, after returning to his post in Delhi, the

Ambassador continued to advocate American support for a change in the South Vietnamese regime. He disputed the idea that victory depended upon Diem's continuance in office, asserting, "It is a better rule that nothing succeeds like successors." While not necessarily calling for an Army coup against the Vietnamese government, Ambassador Galbraith declared that the United States should not be alarmed by a military takeover, believing it "would buy time and . . . [provide for] a fresh dynamic."[6]

Others in the administration were also considering an alternative to supporting President Diem at all costs. The State Department had forwarded to Ambassador Nolting "a closely-held" document which listed the names of South Vietnamese officials who would be acceptable to the United States in the event of the ouster of Mr. Diem. At the same time Robert H. Johnson, of the National Security Council Staff, outlined for the NSC several alternative courses of action for the United States in the event it failed to reach agreement with the present South Vietnamese government. Johnson's memorandum contained at the very least the clear implication that the United States would be the beneficiary of a military coup. He observed, "that all we will probably have to do to ensure that a coup takes place is to indicate clearly, but in an indirect fashion, that we will support a coup effort."[7]

At a National Security Council meeting on 27 November, Secretary of State Rusk and Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson described the impasse. According to notes of the meeting kept by General Lemnitzer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, they believed that the South Vietnamese leader remained suspicious about US motivations and continued to fear coup attempts by some of his generals. On the other hand, there was a growing impatience among American officials for what they considered Vietnamese dawdling in the conduct of the war. At this point, Air Force Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale, who also attended the meeting, offered the opinion that President Diem compared some of the reform measures pushed by the Americans to former French practices of placing Frenchmen or Vietnamese favorable to their policy in influential positions.[8]

There was some conversation about sending General Lansdale back to Vietnam as an "explainer" of the US position when President Kennedy joined the discussion. The President asked the Air Force general if the US Vietnamese policy "made sense." General Lansdale answered affirmatively, but he warned, "there is an opportunity for misunderstanding which should be cleared up." After further discussion, the President declared, "when policy is decided people on spot must support it or get out. There must be whole-hearted support." He then directed Presidential Advisor Walt Rostow and Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson to draft new instructions to the Embassy in Vietnam. President Kennedy then turned to Secretary McNamara and asked him who would be responsible in the Defense Department for Vietnam. Secretary McNamara simply replied, "Myself and L [Lemnitzer]."[9]

Despite the President's call for unity on Vietnam, it was still obvious that opinion in the administration remained divided over supporting Mr. Diem. In a personal letter to a former MAAG commander the following day, General Lansdale expounded his

unhappiness about the situation. He blamed a Washington cabal, possibly centered on General Taylor and Walt Rostow, for believing that the war could not be won against the Viet Cong with President Diem in power. Although the Air Force general acknowledged that both Mr. Rostow and General Taylor denied any such view, he still retained his suspicions about their activities. General Lansdale described the meeting of the National Security Council as an attempt to influence the situation by sending him to Vietnam as President Diem's "personal advisor and, presumably, clobber him from up close." He had rejected the suggestion, stating that it would be a "duty without honor and I'd be dammed if I'd do that." General Lansdale also thought that the "US proposals made it look as though the US was going to act the same way the French have," but believed that he had "jumped back into the act long enough last night to try to straighten out this aspect."[10]

General Lansdale ended his letter by bemoaning the lack of leadership and prospects of success of the present Vietnam policy: "It's pure hell to be on the sidelines and seeing so conventional and unimaginative an approach being tried. About all I can do is continue putting in my two-bits worth every chance I get to add a bit of spark to the concepts. I'm afraid that these aren't always welcome."[11]

General Taylor apparently was relatively cool to some of the proposals of General Lansdale. In a telephone conversation with Secretary of State Rusk, he discouraged suggestions by both Mr. Rusk and Assistant Secretary of Defense William Bundy to send General Lansdale as a personal advisor to President Diem. General Taylor told Mr. Rusk that President Diem would think of General Lansdale as a second ambassador. Apparently these qualms had some effect on President Kennedy. The President had earlier told his naval aide that he wished to discuss with both Secretary of Defense McNamara and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Lemnitzer why General Lansdale was "the only man available?" Some time between 27 and 30 November the President made the decision not to send General Lansdale to Vietnam despite—or probably because of—his close personal relationship with the Vietnamese president. As McGeorge Bundy on 30 November wrote to Secretary McNamara, the question about General Lansdale being the only man available for Vietnam was "probably moot at the moment."[12]

Despite General Lansdale's suspicion about the lack of support for President Diem, the authors of the *Pentagon Papers* correctly observed that there was a strong common element in the two factions in the Kennedy administration of supporters and opponents of President Diem. Such strong proponents of their case as Ambassador Galbraith, who advocated the ouster of the Vietnamese president, and General Lansdale, a warm backer, both agreed that it was futile to push reform upon him. By the end of the month, the US Government was faced with rather a Hobson's choice: "get on with either trying to do better in the war, or get rid of Diem."[13]

At this point in time neither President Kennedy nor his senior advisors were ready to cut their connections with President Diem. While still calling for some reform on the part of the South Vietnamese president, they basically weakened their demands and somewhat lowered the pressure on him. In the cable drafted by Mr. Rostow and Vice

President Johnson that Secretary of State Rusk signed and sent to Ambassador Nolting the night of 27 November, the administration greatly tempered the language used in previous communications to the Vietnamese leader. The Secretary of State told Mr. Nolting that he should arrange a meeting with President Diem and explain to him that the United States wished to clarify some of the points that he believed President Diem had misconstrued. Secretary Rusk specifically mentioned two previous messages, one referring to American "advisers and administrators," which, if read together with a second calling for closer US and South Vietnamese cooperation could be taken to imply a "much greater degree of [American] control than in fact [was] our intent."[14]

In Secretary Rusk's new instructions to Ambassador Nolting, there was neither mention of changes "having real substance and meaning" nor a demand for the Americans to control the "decision-making process." The Ambassador was to tell President Diem that the reference to possible US advisors in administrative positions was simply a response to President Diem's request to General Taylor for assistance in meeting a shortage of trained administrators. The Secretary added, "We certainly have no intention of packing his administration with Americans against his will or "taking over his government." As far as US participation in the decision making process, according to Secretary Rusk the reference in the previous message merely referred to cooperation in security operations that required "a partnership . . . so close that one party will not take decisions or actions affecting the other without full and frank prior consultation."[15]

While trying to placate President Diem, the Secretary stated that there were five criteria that the administration considered "crucial." He enumerated these as: intelligence reform; that President Diem conduct the day-to-day security business through his Cabinet or his Internal Security Council; "clarification of military command channels"; the completion of a security review of the three military zones in South Vietnam; and the establishment of an "effective frontier ranger force." In addition to the above, Secretary Rusk wrote that it was "essential" that President Diem provide some sign of liberalizing his government from "his point of view as well as our own." The Secretary also indicated to Ambassador Nolting that there was a limit to American patience. He directed the Ambassador that if the interview with President Diem proved unsatisfactory he was to "promptly return to Washington for full consultation with respect [to] our future course."[16]

Given these new flexible instructions, Ambassador Nolting was able to come to terms with the South Vietnamese government after some prolonged negotiations. On 1 December the US Ambassador reported some progress in an interview that evening with the Vietnamese president. During a four-hour marathon session with President Diem, which started on a "negative note," Mr. Nolting and the Vietnamese leader reached "a point from which ... we may find [a] meeting of our essential interests."[17] According to Ambassador Nolting, "When we got down to brass tacks, I asked Diem to say what he could and would do under two broad headings: measures to improve GVN efficiency . . . and measures to improve GVN public image at home and abroad." At the end, the two agreed that Defense Minister Thuan, who had participated in the discussion, would continue to meet with the Ambassador to iron out the remaining details.[18]

On 4 December, Ambassador Nolting forwarded to Washington a Memorandum of Understanding that he had concluded with the South Vietnamese President and defense minister. While consisting of only eight major points, the document contained several subordinate clauses. In essence, the Vietnamese promised in return for US material assistance and advisory support to provide more efficiency in waging the war and some show of liberalization of their government. Even with these assurances, such escape phrases as "The fundamental responsibility of the GVN for the conduct of the war will not be impaired" were added to the promise of the Vietnamese to cooperate more closely with the United States in this effort. While promising to consider US suggestions about the democratization of South Vietnamese society, the Diem government reserved to itself "the determination of such steps."[19] The Kennedy administration was not about to quibble with these reservations. As Secretary of State Rusk told Ambassador Nolting, "While Diem has not gone as far as we would like in improving his public image and we will . . . [continue to] press specific matters in this field, we agree that text memo of understanding is sufficient basis upon which to move ahead."[20]

On 7 December President Diem signed the letter (actually drafted by the US State Department) officially asking "for further assistance from the United States . . . to win the war now being waged against us." A week later President Kennedy responded, stating that the United States was "prepared to help the Republic of Viet-Nam to protect its people and to preserve its independence."[21] Thus for better or for worse, the Kennedy administration had committed itself to the Diem regime. As graphically stated by *New York Times* correspondent Homer Bigart, US Vietnam policy had now become "sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem."[22]

Secretary McNamara and the Buildup

Even with all the ado about President Diem, Secretary McNamara had ordered the Defense Department, and especially the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to continue with the already-approved deployment of more advisors to Vietnam and with the planning for the increased buildup of the US advisory effort there. Indeed by mid-November the *New York Times* carried articles about the arrival of American Air Force personnel and observed of Saigon, "This quiet capital of tropical South Vietnam seems suddenly to have developed an unusual attraction for Americans in uniform."[23] Toward the end of the year the authorized strength of the MAAG stood at over 1,900 billets, more than double the number in May, with an expected strength of over 3,000 in the near future.[24]

Since late August the Defense Secretary had been in the vanguard of those in the administration who wanted to expand the US advisory effort, seeing Vietnam as an "experimental laboratory . . . for sub-limited [a euphemism for counterinsurgency] war."[25] On 27 November the Secretary met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and reemphasized "that the Joint Staff and the Services should proceed on the assumption that President Diem's reply . . . for a joint Vietnamese/US effort in South Vietnam will be

affirmative." Not one for half-measures, he told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he wanted semi-weekly status reports every Monday and Thursday with the "complete status on South Vietnam actions (not merely changes in status) with emphasis on things to be done and decisions needed." He also scheduled a meeting on 16 December at Pacific Command headquarters in Honolulu where he and Chairman Lemnitzer would review with Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, and General McGarr, Chief, MAAG, Vietnam, progress of the war and future plans.[26]

One of the first decisions, required immediately, however, was whether to approve the proposed insertion of two Army helicopter companies into Vietnam. As a result of the Taylor mission, the Chief, MAAG, on 25 October had requested the units to support Vietnamese Army operations.[27] While not giving specific permission to station the aircraft in Vietnam, Secretary McNamara directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 17 November to deploy the helicopter companies to the Western Pacific under the guise of a joint exercise code-named "Great Shelf" to avoid possible newspaper speculation.[28] Later in his meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 November the Secretary stated that he wanted them to change the orders for the two Army units with their personnel, aircraft, and supporting equipment now on board the Navy escort carrier USS *Core* and two accompanying freighters to "Destination Saigon," contingent upon President Diem agreeing to accept the US terms for its assistance.[29] On 5 December, after a discussion with President Kennedy, the State Department agreed that the small "armada" should proceed to Saigon.[30]

Stanley Karnow, then serving in Saigon as the correspondent for *Time* magazine, recalled several years later that he was

> sipping coffee with [a] US army press officer on the terrace of Saigon's Majestic Hotel . . . [when on 11 December] the *Core*, turned a bend in the river and steamed toward us. . . . Astonished, I grabbed the officer's arm, shouting "Look at that carrier." He directed a mock squint in the direction of the gigantic vessel and replied: "I don't see nothing."[31]

Mr. Karnow hardly had a scoop on the story. The following day the *New York Times* carried in its back pages an account of the arrival of the helicopters, stating that they were "the first direct military support by the United States for South Vietnam's war against Communist guerrilla forces."[32]

The helicopter units were not the only ones to provide support for the Vietnamese. Since mid-November, with the arrival of the "Jungle Jim" squadron, US Air Force aircraft were also flying reconnaissance and photographic missions.[33] By 14 November the squadron consisted of elements of the 4400th Detachment headquartered at Bien Hoa Air Base about twenty miles north of Saigon with approximately 230 men and a scattering of World War II propeller-driven planes, including eight T-28 trainers remodified for counterinsurgency warfare. Another sixty-seven personnel were located at Tan Son Nhut Airbase bordering the northern city limits of the Vietnamese capital with four RF-101 Voodoo reconnaissance and photographic planes.[34]

At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the US Air Force staff and CINCPAC to study "the feasibility of establishing a limited Tactical Air Control System" in Vietnam. This system would consist of a Joint Operations Center (JOC) at Tan Son Nhut colocated there with a subordinate Control and Reporting Center (CRC). At Da Nang, the Air Force would establish a Control and Reporting Post, which under the CRC would be responsible for "radar control and surveillance" in its sector. In the two northern regional Corps sectors, the plan was to place two Air Support Operation Centers with attached forward air controllers and supported by the Joint Operations Center colocated with each of the Corps headquarters. The desire was to "teach and train Vietnamese . . . provide a structure to apply Vietnamese air capability . . . [and] establish frame[work] for control of US air effort." Moreover, the Joint Staff believed that the "Jungle Jim detachment could handle training Vietnamese T-28 pilots and indoctrination of these pilots in the air to ground support role." The Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated that another 300 personnel would be required to accomplish the above missions.[35] On 4 December 1961 a joint US Air Force and Navy detachment arrived at Nha Trang in South Vietnam "to instruct Vietnamese pilots and maintenance personnel."[36] In its message to CINCPAC about the proposed Tactical Air System, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also referred to the possibility of deploying to the Jungle Jim unit six C–123 Provider transport aircraft for possible defoliation spraying missions.[37]

Defoliation

The entire subject of defoliation arose from Secretary McNamara urging the military to come up with innovative experimentations in counterguerrilla warfare. In reaction to a Department of Defense message of 15 September about priority "for special items," the MAAG commander, General McGarr, came up with a proposed defoliation program. He projected a cost of some $60 to $80 million for purposes of removing jungle cover over Viet Cong infiltration trails and to eliminate certain tapioca groves and rice fields used by the Viet Cong. While the US country team in Saigon slashed the cost estimates to $4 to $6 million, President Diem expressed enthusiastic support for the food denial aspects of the proposal.[38]

After some experimental testing by the South Vietnamese government in early October, Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, expressed some reservations. On 21 October he declared that he was unable to evaluate the effectiveness of the defoliation tests. Furthermore, he stated the results were inconclusive about predicting accurate "results for defoliating large areas." Despite the doubts expressed by CINCPAC, General Lemnitzer proposed on 3 November, based upon a study by the Joint Staff, "implementation of three separate and sequential programs" as outlined by the country team to determine the feasibility of defoliation in Vietnam. He pointed to the fact that such a campaign would employ common weed killers used domestically in the United States. General Lemnitzer, however, observed that such a campaign could lead to charges "of employing

chemical or biological warfare" and should be implemented "only if possible adverse propaganda action is considered acceptable." On 7 November, although favoring approval of the defoliation program, Secretary McNamara stated that he did not believe the United States could make a final decision until it found a way of defusing such accusations "and the working out of the strongest possible defense."[39]

On the following day General Lemnitzer cabled Admiral Felt at Pacific Command that a final decision was pending but had to await working out the problem of potential charges of using biological and chemical warfare tactics. The United States wanted President Diem to assume responsibility for the operation and to make a statement that the spray was "not harmful to humans and livestock." Admiral Felt would have operational control over defoliation operations when it was implemented and the Air Force would provide the necessary aircraft. On 11 November Headquarters Air Force informed CINCPAC that it was deploying six C–123 aircraft to South Vietnam under the overall operational control of the Pacific Command. These aircraft would be "modified with MC–1 spray tanks with spray bar and nozzles under each wing." They would be based at Bien Hoa Air Base as part of the Jungle Jim unit and would operate under the code-name "Farm Gate."[40]

Finally, on 21 November Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric signed off on a letter to President Kennedy recommending approval of a trial testing of defoliation. In his letter he cited the insistent advice of the Vietnam country team for "urgent approval of a program." The Deputy Secretary stated that the campaign would include both food denial and anti-infiltration features. He observed that there was a desire by the MAAG staff in Vietnam to launch a major defoliation experiment in Vietnam's Zone D, a Viet Cong dominated jungled area about twenty-five miles northeast of Saigon. However, Mr. Gilpatric wrote that this was impractical since the South Vietnamese Army did not have the capability to carry out a military operation in this sector at this time. He believed that any defoliation effort needed to be in harmony with realistic military plans. Instead, the Defense Department recommended going "ahead with a selective and carefully controlled program starting with the clearance of key routes, proceeding thereafter to food denial only if the most careful basis of resettlement and alternative food supply has been created, and holding Zone D and the border areas until we have realistic possibilities of immediate military exploitation." Mr. Gilpatric acknowledged that defoliation would probably be used by "hostile powers" to charge the United States with waging chemical/biological warfare, but insisted that the agents only harmed "plant growth."[41]

Three days later, on 24 November, Secretary of State Rusk endorsed the Defense Department proposal. According to Secretary Rusk, defoliant use did "not violate any rule of international law concerning the conduct of chemical warfare and is an accepted tactic of war." He cited the British employment of crop spraying in their counterguerrilla campaign in Malaya. Like Mr. Gilpatric, he admitted that the Communists would probably make the claim that the United States was engaging in "germ warfare." The Secretary maintained, however, that he believed "successful plant-killing operations in Viet-Nam, carefully coordinated with and incidental to larger operations, can be of

substantial assistance in the control and defeat of the Viet Cong."[42] On 30 November President Kennedy approved NSAM 115 authorizing "Defoliant Operations in Vietnam." In essence the President accepted the wording in both the Rusk and Gilpatric memos, including a final clause "that there should be careful prior consideration and authorization by Washington of any plans developed by CinCPac and the country team under this authority before such plans are executed."[43]

International Public Opinion

The concerns expressed by State and Defense Department officials regarding the possibility of Communist charges about the use of chemical defoliants in Vietnam were indicative of the sensitivity of the Kennedy administration to world opinion about its activities in Southeast Asia. The administration was well aware that its recent buildup of the US advisory effort in Vietnam was technically in violation of the 1954 Geneva Treaty. In mid-November Walt Rostow in a private note to President Kennedy wrote, "As anticipated, we are already having some difficulties dealing with questions from newsmen and others on the relationship between our actions and the Geneva Accords."[44] Secretary of State Rusk also expounded on the subject in a cable to Ambassador Nolting. He observed that US policy in relation to the Geneva Agreements was presenting a problem in that it stretched the "accords to a point where credibility of our legal theory and our good faith in advancing it may be cast into serious doubt." The Secretary noted that it would be difficult to explain under normal rotation the sudden raising of the level of advisors from 880 to 3,300. Secretary Rusk did not want to get into an international debate over "a numbers game" and wanted the Ambassador instead to emphasize the violations the North Vietnamese had committed in supporting the Communist forces in both Laos and South Vietnam.[45]

In a private letter to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev on 16 November, President Kennedy had already placed the onus of any violation of the Accords upon the activities of the North Vietnamese. He asked the Soviet leader to use his influence to urge the North Vietnamese to keep "to the strict observance" of their obligations under Geneva, which they were now defying. Otherwise, he stated, it was necessary "for the United States to consider, as we must at the present, how best to support the Government of Vietnam [South Vietnam] in its struggle for independence and national integrity."[46]

As part of a public relations campaign to buttress its policy in South Vietnam, the US State Department finally published, on 8 December 1961, William Jorden's report on the war in Vietnam as an official White Paper with the not-too-subtle title *A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam*. The pamphlet consisted of two parts, with the first part divided into eight chapters with such descriptive headings as "Direction of the Viet Cong by North Viet-Nam" and "Evidence of External Guidance and Support of the Viet Cong." Copies of photographs and documents in the second part supported and amplified the text of the first part. In various meetings with foreign

diplomats, State Department officials used the White Paper to make their case that North Vietnam presented "a clear and present danger" to the survival of South Vietnam and was a threat to the general peace.[47]

In a meeting with British Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore on the previous day, W. Averell Harriman, newly appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, provided the ambassador with an advance copy of the pamphlet and also told him about "US determination to support Viet-Nam and that the dispatch of combat forces was not excluded." Ambassador Ormsby-Gore replied that it was important that the North Vietnamese be made aware of this. A few days later at a NATO ministerial meeting, Secretary of State Rusk declared that "the purpose of the White Paper was to reveal North Vietnam activities and to prove to the Indians and others that it is not simply a question of civil disturbance." While maintaining that the United States had no intention at the time of deploying organized ground forces, it would be sending to South Vietnam "supply aircraft and helicopters with American pilots." He reiterated that the United States was not in violation of the Geneva Accords, "because the relevant provisions have been suspended by the actions taken by North Vietnam."[48]

At this point the Kennedy administration was attempting to use the Indian Government, which was a member of the International Control Commission for policing the Geneva Accords, as an intermediary to the North Vietnamese. After his return to New Delhi from Saigon, Ambassador Galbraith, on 26 November, notified the Department of State that he had learned that the North Vietnamese Government planned to send a special confidant of the North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh to New Delhi. He proposed that he be allowed to have the Indian Government arrange a meeting for him with the Hanoi representative, Pham Ngoc Thach, the North Vietnamese minister of health. Ambassador Galbraith would listen to what Mr. Thach had to say but also take advantage of the situation to express the American "determination [to] maintain independence [for] SVN [South Vietnam]."[49]

In some pique, a few days later the Ambassador wrote in his diary: "The Department predictably said no, noting that it might hurt Diem's feelings."[50] In actuality, while denying Mr. Galbraith permission to meet with the North Vietnamese delegate, Secretary Rusk suggested that the Ambassador at his discretion ask Indian Foreign Secretary M. J. Desai to relay the US views on the situation in Vietnam to the North Vietnamese visitor.[51]

On 7 December, Ambassador Galbraith met with Foreign Secretary Desai and made five essential points: first, the North Vietnamese should stop their activities in the south to prevent any "American military involvement"; second, the United States wanted only peace in the area; third, the Americans had no ambitions in North Vietnam and would not support any South Vietnamese aspirations there; and fourth, this desire for peace, however, "presumes no willingness to have a Communist take-over." Finally, the US Ambassador suggested the recent appointment of Assistant Secretary of State Harriman, "whose reputation, position and firm judgment are so well known," was indicative of the future soundness of American policy in the region. While Secretary Desai offered little optimism for any resolution of the situation, he did ask what Ambassador Galbraith

thought the American reaction would be to a proposal for "a 5 year standstill in the area calling off the infiltration and subversion and using the period to let tensions cool." The Ambassador replied that he thought that would be "all right."[52]

In any event, nothing came of the Thach visit or the Desai suggestion for a cooling-off period. Two days after this meeting the South Vietnamese Government issued a formal statement to the International Control Commission, now chaired by the Indian representative, that "it has requested extraordinary aid from the United States for as long as the North Vietnamese regime pursued its aggression." The US Government supported the South Vietnamese position, declaring that it was "consonant with international law: non-observance of a treaty obligation by one party to that treaty justifies comparable non-observance by the other party until the first party is prepared to observe its obligations." The ICC made a somewhat innocuous reply to the South Vietnamese letter, and it became apparent to US officials that the Commission was not willing to accept the American argument that a breach by one party permitted the other party to void its commitment.[53]

Laos

While the Vietnam situation continued to seethe, the Laotian crisis appeared to be coming to a resolution. On 5 December William P. Bundy, as Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, signed off on a memorandum to General Lemnitzer expressing the opinion that "current progress of the Geneva Conference" could result in a final treaty in a few weeks. According to Mr. Bundy, the United States would then be required "to withdraw all US military forces from Laos," including advisors as well as military equipment and supplies. The Assistant Secretary believed that at the most this would have to be accomplished within sixty days. He told General Lemnitzer that to prepare for this possibility, it was necessary to "begin contingency planning now."[54]

Up to this point the JCS contingency planning for Laos had been for the buildup of US forces rather than for their withdrawal. During previous discussions about Southeast Asia the questions of Laos and Vietnam had been intertwined. As during the discussions about possible intervention in Laos in October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had their doubts about maintaining an independent Laos and South Vietnam short of some sort of US or allied intervention. At that time, General Lemnitzer told Secretary McNamara that he considered "SEATO Plan 5 [relative to Laos], or a suitable variation . . . to be the military minimum commensurate with the situation." He declared that it was the view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "there is no feasible military alternative of lesser magnitude which will prevent the loss of Laos, South Vietnam, and ultimately Southeast Asia."[55]

Despite an agreement on 8 October 1961 at Geneva for neutralist Souvanna Phouma to resume the premiership of Laos, the Joint Chiefs of Staff remained skeptical about any negotiated settlement with the Communists. They did not respond officially to Bundy's request until the beginning of January. At that time, General Lemnitzer wrote: "The

withdrawal of US military personnel and equipment from the current Royal Lao Government (RLG), prior to the verified withdrawal of counterpart communist assistance could have a far-reaching impact on the future of Southeast Asia." He then added that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had "serious reservations regarding the premature withdrawal of US military assistance from the RLG." In a follow-up memorandum to Secretary McNamara the next month, the Chairman added that they believed that US military personnel should be retained with the Laotian government as long as possible. When it was time to leave, the US advisors should "withdraw administratively with minimum publicity." At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Royal Army retain its military assistance program (MAP) equipment. They also suggested that the US advisors in Laos be attached to the MAAG in Thailand and that the United States maintain stocks of military equipment and supplies there that could be inserted into Laos if necessary.[56]

As General Taylor later observed, Laos presented an almost impossible dilemma for the Kennedy administration. The choices appeared to be limited to military intervention or negotiation of an international agreement at Geneva for a possible neutral Laos. President Kennedy chose to take the latter course, but he was not above using the cover of the SEATO alliance to maneuver US military units in the Pacific as a prod to the negotiations. Unlike most of the Joint Chiefs, General Taylor, as the Special Military Advisor to the President, supported the administration's policy for Laos in the belief that the "introduction of US forces [there] should be avoided at all costs."[57]

The "Thanksgiving Massacre"

While the situation in Laos would flare up in a few months, the main focus remained on Vietnam. In Washington, basic changes occurred in the State Department while Secretary McNamara proposed wide-ranging alterations in the US military organization in Vietnam. The shakeup first took place in Washington. In a surprise announcement on 26 November, the Sunday of the Thanksgiving weekend, President Kennedy announced the resignation of Chester Bowles as Under Secretary of State, the number two position in the department. George Ball, the former Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, replaced Bowles. Later called "the Thanksgiving Massacre," ten senior positions in the State Department's Washington hierarchy underwent modification. Among the most significant, besides the Ball appointment was the selection of former Ambassador-at-Large Harriman to be the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, as well as the transfer of Walt W. Rostow from White House advisor to be Counselor of the Department of State and chairman of its Policy Planning Council.[58]

James Reston, a favorite columnist of President Kennedy, wrote in the *New York Times* that the changes were "primarily personal" and did not indicate any "basic differences over foreign policy." He insisted that "they were basically a readjustment of personalities to correct hurried political appointments made a year ago, to strengthen the State Department and to bring it closer to the White House."[59]

Although the changes may have been "primarily personal," they also had policy implications. With the appointment of W. Averell Harriman, the man largely responsible for the negotiations over Laos at Geneva, as Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, President Kennedy made clear his support for a compromise solution rather than a confrontation over that embattled nation. Because of Bowles' open dissent with the administration over the Bay of Pigs invasion and his concern about the growing militarization of US policy in South Vietnam, his resignation had been predicted for several months.

On Vietnam policy Chester Bowles also stood alone among the senior administration officials. In a draft memo to President Kennedy dated 30 November, while still advocating economic assistance to the Diem regime, he recommended placing pressure on North Vietnam through India and possibly the Soviet Union for the "establishment of a 'neutral and independent' Southeast Asia, including Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos with free elections in Vietnam within five to ten years provided the present Communist pressure against Vietnam is ended." The former Under Secretary even suggested that the "CIA, the Pentagon, and State should be asked to prepare a fall back position to which we could withdraw if the situation in Vietnam should collapse before these or other moves become possible." He did not send this memo until several months later.[60]

In contrast to Chester Bowles and George Ball, Walt Rostow had played a large role in the administration's Vietnam policy. He had been the White House special advisor on Vietnam issues and basically was the co-author of the Taylor report.[61] While obtaining an important position in the State Department, his relative distance now from the presidential decision-making power limited his influence over Vietnam-related matters.

McGeorge Bundy, the President's National Security Advisor, probably provided the impetus for the resignations and sudden turnover in the administration. In a conversation with Secretary Rusk and in a memorandum to President Kennedy a little over a week before, he argued the need for better management both in Washington and in the field over Vietnam. In the discussion with Secretary Rusk, Mr. Bundy stated that the President wanted someone in Washington who was responsive to his policy and did "not get that sense from most of us." He proposed that Mr. Harriman be brought back to serve as the President's person in the State Department. The Secretary declared that he needed Mr. Harriman in Geneva and that U. Alexis Johnson "would loyally carry out any policy." Mr. Bundy demurred, contending this wasn't "the same as having your own man—Alexis isn't that dispassionate—or that much of an executive." In his memorandum to President Kennedy, he concluded, "Averell is your man, as Assistant Secretary [of State for Far Eastern Affairs]." In replacing Walter P. McConaughy, the then incumbent in that position, Mr. Bundy advised that it be done "in the context of a general game of musical chairs." He then proceeded to provide a list of proposed names and positions, including moving Averell Harriman to Washington, the replacement of Chester Bowles with George Ball, and transferring Walt Rostow from the White House to the State Department. In any event, Mr. Bundy ended his memo to the President with the remark, "Secretary [Rusk] won't do this [make the personnel changes] till you tell him to."[62]

In this memorandum, McGeorge Bundy also recommended changes in the field in Vietnam. He observed that he had discussed with Secretary of State Rusk the possibility of transferring Ambassador Nolting from Saigon. Secretary Rusk had strongly defended the Ambassador, stating that he had "Diem's confidence." Mr. Bundy told the President that he still remained unconvinced and advocated replacing Frederick Nolting with George McGhee, at that time counselor and chairman of the State Department's Policy Planning Council. According to the National Security Advisor, Mr. McGhee, who had previous experience in Greece during the civil unrest there in the late 1940s, would "tell you, if he thinks it won't work after a good look."[63] In the end President Kennedy decided to go along with his Secretary of State in the matter, and Ambassador Nolting remained in his post. George McGhee stayed in Washington and replaced George Ball as Under Secretary, but for political affairs rather than economic affairs.

Proposed Changes in the US Military Organization in Vietnam

One area where Mr. Bundy and Secretary Rusk agreed was on the need for a change in the military organization in Vietnam. They both wanted a four-star general and believed that "no routine four-star . . . will do."[64] Actually Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had initiated a call for a transformation in the MAAG, Vietnam, nearly three months earlier. At the same meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late August in which he compared Vietnam to a laboratory, Secretary McNamara informed them that he wanted "to establish an 'Experimental Command' in South Vietnam." Moreover, on 5 September 1961, in a memorandum signed by his general counsel, Cyrus R. Vance, the Secretary confirmed his intention to establish such a command. This caused consternation among the Joint Staff. Colonel R. H. Moore, the assistant plans officer, in a talking paper for General Lemnitzer wrote that there were members of Secretary McNamara's personal staff who believed the "present command structure is too cumbersome to fight a cold war situation as exists in Vietnam."[65]

According to Colonel Moore, they wanted to "bye-pass the theater commander" and establish an "operational entity" in the Secretary's office. Instead, Colonel Moore declared the Joint Chiefs of Staff should propose that any such new command should continue to operate through CINCPAC and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff should retain "implementing authority." Colonel Moore predicted that "the desires of the Secretary's staff will prevail" unless the Chairman intervened and discussed the matter with the Secretary personally.[66] Lieutenant General Earle G. Wheeler, the Director of the Joint Staff, strongly backed Colonel Moore and urged General Lemnitzer to meet with Secretary McNamara in order to "prevent an adverse decision as a fait accompli."[67]

The entire subject lay dormant for a period until the President and the National Security Council began to examine how to implement the Taylor recommendations on Vietnam. Two days after a meeting on 11 November in which the NSC considered various

Vietnam contingencies, Secretary McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to study the feasibility of new command relationships, including that with the Ambassador. In a memorandum to General Lemnitzer he declared that he "would appreciate" from the Chiefs "recommendations, together with a draft order" which would provide in South Vietnam a US "command structure . . . under which a senior . . . commander would assume responsibility for all [American] activities . . . relating to counterinsurgency." Furthermore, Secretary McNamara wanted this commander to "report directly to the JCS and thence to me for all operational purposes."[68]

In effect, the Secretary wanted General Lemnitzer to leave Admiral Felt, the Pacific Command commander, out of the direct chain of command relative to Vietnam. He did, however, direct General Lemnitzer and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to recommend the relationship of the new commander to CINCPAC and their interaction with one another. Moreover, Secretary McNamara sought from the Joint Chiefs of Staff their suggestions about the relationship of the new command with the Ambassador and with the US Operations Mission in Vietnam. He declared that he would handle personally "the necessary discussions with the State Department." Finally, he desired suggestions from the Joint Chiefs of Staff as to the general officer who should head the new command.[69]

General Lemnitzer reacted quickly upon the receipt of the Secretary's memorandum. In a hurried message to Admiral Felt, the Chairman quoted the essentials of McNamara's directive and asked the admiral to send as a "matter of urgency exclusive to me your preliminary views as to how such a concept should be implemented."[70]

Admiral Felt also wasted little time in responding. In a lengthy and involved message, he forwarded his thoughts about the proposed command. First, he observed that in establishing any new command, there needed to be "ground rules and concepts under which the ground commander would operate." The Pacific Commander then delineated several circumstances that would require a new organization. These included the following two scenarios: a reaction to a direct Communist cross border attack or a determination to expand the training and logistic support of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. Admiral Felt opined that if the situation involved the deployment of either combat or logistic US units, the command relationships were relatively simple and straightforward. He suspected, however, that this was not the situation. The admiral believed that what Secretary McNamara really wanted was "to have a commander on the ground in SVN who, in addition to giving advice and assistance to the RVNAF, is able to devote adequate time and attention to overall aspects of the counterinsurgency tactics and operations, selling to the GVN his military plans to systematically liquidate the VC." Admiral Felt concluded that, given the "size, composition and functions of the force, and on the assumption that an overall commander in SVN is considered necessary . . . it may be expedient to establish a CINCPAC subordinate Unified Command."[71]

He, however, demurred from any idea of placing this unified command directly under the Joint Chiefs of Staff. CINCPAC declared that any advantage from such centralization "would be greatly outweighed by the disadvantages." He argued that South Vietnam could not be separated from the Southeast Asia peninsula and the greater

Asian land mass. Furthermore, from a military point of view, the admiral pointed out that all of the existing "US and SEATO contingency plans for the area are inextricably tied geographically and operationally to CINCPAC strategic plans." According to Admiral Felt, the only feasible command structure in the event of any Communist overt aggression in this sector was one that was coordinated by the Commander in Chief, Pacific.[72]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the views of CINCPAC on command relations, despite a countervailing proposal from the Joint Staff. Acting upon Secretary McNamara's directive for an order that would rearrange the command structure in Vietnam, the Joint Staff on 16 November presented to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a draft that would establish "a joint command with headquarters in Saigon." Under this draft order, this new command would have operational control of all US forces in Vietnam but would coordinate planning with CINCPAC. The Pacific Command would retain control over all US forces in areas adjacent to Vietnam and would also be responsible for coordinating logistic support with the command in Saigon. In a covering memorandum of the proposed order for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the J–5 or Plans officer warned, however, that by "establishing a separate command which by-passes CINCPAC, who under the Unified Command Plan has responsibility for the entire South East Asia Area, there will result a splitting of command responsibility for a critical area of communist activity."[73]

Like the J–5, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had no wish to disrupt the overall chain of command in the Pacific. They feared that such an attempt could possibly end up in an interservice imbroglio, since a Navy admiral traditionally headed Pacific Command while the proposed independent command in Saigon would be under an Army general. On 22 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a revised draft. In this version, the United States, upon the exchange of letters between President Kennedy and President Diem, would establish a subordinate Unified Command, called United States Forces, Vietnam, still under an Army general, but directly accountable to CINCPAC. In effect, this proposal incorporated the same points that Admiral Felt had made in his message to General Lemnitzer on the subject. The revised draft, however, supported an expansion of the new commander's authority relative to the Ambassador and to some of the other US agencies in Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted the commander of the proposed US Forces, Vietnam, to control not only all military activity but also all economic and intelligence assistance in South Vietnam that related to the counterinsurgency effort. This would impact directly upon the relationship of the US military commander with his counterparts in the CIA and in the US Operations Mission in South Vietnam. In an effort to enhance the prestige of the US commander, and citing a presidential order, their memorandum to Secretary McNamara called for the status of the new commander to "be coequal with that of the US Ambassador." Furthermore, before implementing these changes, including the formation of the new command, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted some firm commitment from President Diem "on the program of joint effort that the United States is proposing" and secondly "clearly defined United States objectives that will be pursued in South Vietnam."[74]

On 22 November General Lemnitzer forwarded the JCS recommendations to Secretary McNamara for the restructuring of the military command in South Vietnam. At the same time he sent a copy of the memorandum to General Taylor.[75] In a letter to the President five days later, General Taylor wrote that "Considerable discussion is taking place over the kind of organization required in South Vietnam to administer the accelerated US program there." He noted that both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department had been analyzing the situation. According to General Taylor, the changes in organization could follow several different command structures. He, however, favored what he called the "Normal Model." Using this format, the existing system in Vietnam could be easily modified to expand the role of the MAAG with the US commander authorized to communicate either directly with the Defense Department or through CINCPAC. General Taylor thought that it was best to stay more or less with the existing system "as long as that program is essentially an intensification of past actions." He believed it inconsistent at that time to structure the command on the "Berlin" or "Korean" examples, which would "suggest that we are clearing the boards for a show-down," which he maintained was not at present the case.[76]

At the same time that General Lemnitzer had forwarded his recommendations to Secretary McNamara, he also provided a copy to Admiral Felt in Hawaii. In addition, he asked the Pacific commander to "be prepared to establish a subordinate unified command." In his reply, the admiral outlined his planned structure, which would include component commands of US Army, Air Force, and possibly naval forces assigned to Vietnam. However, he would delay forming a naval component command as the only US forces in the current plans were the imminent arrival of the Army helicopter squadrons and the already established Air Force Jungle Jim squadron. While Admiral Felt described the mission of the proposed US Forces, Vietnam, in much the same terms as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, his claims for the authority of the new commander were less. Although the existing MAAG would be under his command, there was no demand to control both the US intelligence and economic assets relative to the counterinsurgency. In fact the only mention was that the commander would "coordinate" the US military intelligence activities in Vietnam and that there currently existed within the MAAG "proper communication and coordination" relative to the military assistance and development program administered in part by the US Operations Mission in South Vietnam. In reference to the Ambassador, Admiral Felt only stated that the new commander would represent CINCPAC in his relations with the Embassy.[77] Navy Lieutenant Commander Worth Bagley, General Taylor's aide, described Admiral Felt's proposed command structure for Vietnam as "your 'normal model' with an on-the-spot CINCPAC representative superimposed, but without the 'Korea model' responsibilities."[78]

Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, were by now advocating a major overhaul of the command organization in Vietnam. Upon receipt of the JCS recommendations, the Secretary had quickly approved its general terms. He then turned to his Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Strategic Affairs, William Bundy, to convince other US agencies, especially the State Department, to

agree to the projected changes. On 1 December Mr. Bundy reported to Secretary McNamara on the progress he had made. According to the Assistant Secretary, he had discussed the Defense Department's proposal with representatives from State, the Agency for International Development (AID), and the CIA. He believed that the differences between Defense and AID and CIA would be relatively easy to resolve. Quoting an AID official, Mr. Bundy suggested that the objections of these two agencies with the document could be overcome by "substituting coordinate for the words 'supervise and direct.'" This was not the case with the State Department. He had met with Deputy Assistant Secretary U. Alexis Johnson, who was opposed to any change in the name of the command and furthermore believed "that it was not essential that the officer selected have a 4-star rank." The State Department view was that appointment of a US "'Commander' would amount to an irrevocable and 100% US commitment to saving South Vietnam."[79]

Assistant Secretary Bundy recommended that if the State Department continued to hold to this position, Secretary McNamara should personally "take up the matter with Secretary Rusk (perhaps with a name in hand)." The Secretary of Defense was to urge Secretary Rusk to accept the title "Commander" as well as the four-star rank for that officer. If that was not possible, Mr. Bundy advised that the Defense Department issue a "charter" that included the JCS text but modified to meet the proposals of both the CIA and AID. As to the rest, the document would adhere largely to the more "specific points of Admiral Felt's cable, as the best possible solution now obtainable."[80]

Secretary McNamara accepted in part Mr. Bundy's counsel. On the same day that President Diem officially asked for US assistance, 7 December, Mr. McNamara sent a "Dear Dean" signed "Bob" letter to Secretary Rusk that essentially included the JCS draft concept with the CIA and AID modifications. He stated that the proposal was to elevate the "status of the senior US military man in Vietnam to that of 'Commander, US Forces Vietnam.'" Referring to the Diem-Nolting agreement that ended the recent impasse between the Vietnamese President and the Kennedy administration, Secretary McNamara argued that there was a need to mark the change in relations and the proposed increase of US aid by the "elevation of the senior military man." He compared the proposed new command to those in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, all of which were subordinate area commands under CINCPAC. The Defense Secretary observed that according to a presidential executive order, "an area 'military commander' is not under the Ambassador's command, but retains his direct line of authority via the JCS to me and thence to the President." The revised draft retained the statement that "the status of COMUS Forces Vietnam will be co-equal with that of the Ambassador."[81]

In his closing remarks, Secretary McNamara indicated that he hoped to obtain an answer from the State Department before he departed for Honolulu and his scheduled meeting on 16 December at Pacific Command headquarters with Chairman Lemnitzer, Admiral Felt, and General McGarr. Before this meeting, however, both Secretaries Rusk and McNamara were to attend a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ministerial conference in Paris. In the interim, State and Defense Department officials continued

to negotiate informally on the wording of a statement that could be forwarded to the President on the command relations.[82]

As the negotiations between the Defense and State Departments progressed, General Taylor and Walt Rostow kept President Kennedy up to date. Mr. Rostow, however, had a rather cynical view of their importance. Although believing in the need for new blood in the US military organization in Vietnam, he sent the President a final memorandum in his White House advisory capacity stating that he considered the disagreement between the State and Defense Departments on structural command changes irrelevant. According to him, what was needed was a "younger Van Fleet," a reference to Army General James A. Van Fleet, who had headed the US Joint Military Mission in Greece during that country's struggle against its Communist insurgents after World War II.[83] While offering no specific opinion on the subject, General Taylor merely wrote, "There is no agency short of the President with the responsibility and authority to scrutinize the interdepartmental actions taken and to direct corrective action when such is necessary."[84]

Notwithstanding Mr. Rostow's and General Taylor's comments, on 12 December Under Secretary Ball in Washington forwarded to Secretary Rusk in Paris a proposed reply for the Secretary to give to Secretary McNamara before the Defense Secretary departed for Honolulu. Although signed by George Ball, Deputy Assistant Secretary U. Alexis Johnson had actually prepared the draft, which had been cleared by Assistant Secretary Harriman among other State Department officials. According to Mr. Johnson, he had consulted with Assistant Secretary Bundy of the Defense Department and General Taylor before preparing this answer.[85]

In this version of its response, the State Department observed that the US military responsibility in Vietnam remained as an "advisory and supporting" role to the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, rather than an operational one. This being the case, the State Department suggested that the term US Military Assistance Command would be more in keeping with the mission than US Forces, Vietnam, which implied a US operational combat function. Moreover, the State Department document denied Secretary McNamara's contention that Vietnam was an area command and therefore the presidential executive order was not applicable to the relationship between the Ambassador and the President. Nevertheless, the State Department officials recognized the need for the senior US commander to control military operations and to have free communication with the Pacific Command. Secretary Rusk was to close his letter with the suggestion that he looked forward to "discussing this question further with you in the light of the results of your visit to CINCPAC with the view of promptly recommending to the President decisions that will enable us more effectively and vigorously to pursue our objectives with respect to Viet-Nam"[86]

While the record remains sparse on what transpired between the two Secretaries in Paris regarding the command situation in Vietnam, Secretary Rusk did give Secretary McNamara a copy of his letter. According to General Lemnitzer, the secretaries agreed that upon McNamara's return to Washington, the two of them would decide the issues over the proposed new command and its relationship to the Ambassador without benefit of staff. Although for the time being the differences remained unresolved between their

agencies, the two secretaries were confidant that they could reach a meeting of minds on the subject.[87]

Significantly, the Chairman implied to General McGarr that the Joint Chiefs of Staff actually were lukewarm about changing the command arrangements in Vietnam. He declared that it was his opinion and that of the other Chiefs that once the decision was made not to deploy combat troops to Vietnam, they had serious doubts about the desirability of a fundamental change in the US organization. In fact, once the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that "higher levels in US Govt" wanted to alter the command arrangements, they hedged their recommendations with the phrase "if it is decided to change the command structure in Vietnam."[88]

The Situation in Vietnam

In Vietnam, both General McGarr and Ambassador Nolting were unhappy with the discussions in Washington about command relations. The MAAG commander hoped to have a hearing on his views of the subject at the forthcoming Honolulu Conference.[89] Ambassador Nolting, on the other hand, expressed his opposition to the proposed changes directly to the State Department.

On 25 November the Ambassador protested the arrival of an advanced echelon of the 2nd Air Division in Vietnam that while it was subordinate to General McGarr in Vietnam, it also reported to the 13th Air Force for possible operations outside of Vietnam. According to Ambassador Nolting, this command suddenly materialized without his knowing about it, and he wanted to be sure that any air operations from Vietnam would be cleared through him.[90] Secretary of State Rusk reassured him that the appearance of Air Force Brigadier General Rollen H. Anthis with an advance command group of the 2nd Air Division was not the establishment of a new command. According to the Secretary, CINCPAC was still studying the details of the relationship between the 2nd Air Division and the Air Section of the MAAG. Furthermore, Secretary Rusk related that as the President's representative in Vietnam, Ambassador Nolting retained "responsibility for and authority over all US operations in Viet-Nam, over Viet-Nam and originating in Viet-Nam."[91]

The Ambassador was much more perturbed, however, by the Defense Department proposals for the reorganization of the entire command structure in Vietnam. Commenting on Secretary McNamara's 7 December letter on this subject, he took strong exception to creating what he considered an area military command in Vietnam. Ambassador Nolting wrote Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs Johnson that he was thoroughly convinced that in setting up such a command organization in Vietnam, "we will not only risk poor coordination, but we will almost inevitably build into our effort a disproportionate emphasis, in resources and planning as well as appearance, on a military solution to the problem of Viet Cong insurgency in Viet-Nam." He stated that although military force "was an indispensable element" in the war against the Viet Cong, it was as much a political and economic struggle, which effort would be overshadowed by the military.[92]

Despite Ambassador Nolting's and General McGarr's unease with the Washington proposals, their most vexatious concerns remained their relationship with President Diem. The Vietnamese leader continued to delay any delegation of authority, and his cooperation with both the US Embassy and the MAAG continued to be haphazard. Moreover, President Diem was not above playing his colleagues, both American and Vietnamese, against one another. As General McGarr had feared, the presence of Robert G. K. Thompson in the British advisory group in Saigon and his possible influence upon the Vietnamese President helped to muddy the waters even further.[93]

Shortly after his arrival in Vietnam, Mr. Thompson, a counterinsurgency expert and one of the architects of the British victory over the communist in Malaya, presented President Diem on 27 October with his analysis of the war against the Viet Cong and what to expect from the communists in the next six months. He predicted that the VC would concentrate on extending their control in rural areas and on destroying the government infrastructure in the Mekong Delta. Furthermore, they might even proclaim a "people's republic" in some mountainous stronghold as well as try to cut "government land communications to the north." The communist campaign would be aimed in part at drawing government forces into the hither lands and away from the population. The British advisor criticized South Vietnamese government policy as having "little appreciation that this is a struggle to win the hearts and minds of the people and not just a battle to kill armed communist terrorists." Mr. Thompson argued that the South Vietnamese did not need to expand the army as much as to increase its local forces and police who had more "rapport with the local population."[94]

While General McGarr disagreed with the thrust of the Thompson report about the ratio of police to Army troops, this would not have caused a furor. President Diem, however, apparently sympathetic to some of Thompson's views, asked Mr. Thompson to provide him with a plan for gaining control of the Mekong Delta. The British advisor complied with the request and on 11 November presented to the Vietnamese president an operations plan for the region. His concept was based very much on his earlier evaluation of the war focused on the need to obtain the loyalty of the people rather than upon merely "killing insurgents." Mr. Thompson would replace "search and destroy" sweeps with "search and clear" operations. He selected a target area in the Mekong Delta that was relatively free of Viet Cong forces where the government could provide protection. Until the villagers organized their own security forces, ARVN and paramilitary troops would defend what would be called "strategic hamlets." The heart of the proposal was that given the assurance of personal safety, the populace could take advantage of government-sponsored social and economic measures to improve their quality of life. The III Corps headquarters, reinforced by irregular troops and civilian specialists and operating under the aegis of the National Security Council and President Diem himself, was to have overall direction.[95]

According to Mr. Thompson, his plan:

> should lead by stages to a reorganization of the government machinery for directing and coordinating all action against the communists and to the production of an *overall strategic operational plan* for the country as a whole defining responsibilities, tasks

> and priorities. At the same time it will lead to the establishment of a static security framework which can be developed eventually into a National Police force into which can be incorporated a single security intelligence organization for the direction and coordination of all intelligence activities against the communists.[96]

The insertion of Robert Thompson into the Vietnam situation came at a very awkward stage for General McGarr. He had been working for months with the South Vietnamese General Staff, especially with General Minh, to develop a "Geographically Phased National Level Operation Plan." In doing so he had been beset with frustrations. From Hawaii, Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, had complained about his slow progress. In October Admiral Felt had cabled him, "I cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of seeing an overall RVNAF campaign plan."[97] A little over a week later the admiral described General McGarr's planning efforts as "an endless treadmill." He believed the MAAG commander was attempting "to develop tactical plans before having a sound strategic concept." General McGarr was suggesting deep-jungle battalion operations to obtain further intelligence on enemy forces before making his plans. Admiral Felt called this putting "the cart before the horse." The Army general argued that he could not produce plans with targets, schemes of maneuver, and time-phased operations until he had more intelligence on the Viet Cong. CINCPAC responded that he wanted an outline of the plan that the MAAG was recommending to the South Vietnamese.[98]

On 8 November 1961 General McGarr forwarded his revised "Geographically Phased National Level Operation Plan." Much like Mr. Thompson, General McGarr emphasized the need for such a "plan for the coordination and conduct of counterinsurgency effort." He also spoke about the necessity of separating the people from the VC. Moreover, the McGarr plan called for employing political, economic, military, and psychological measures in "successive geographical areas to establish popular support, security and governmental control while at the same time maintaining constant pressure on the Viet Cong in other areas of Vietnam."[99]

Still, there were significant differences between the MAAG and the British approaches. While Mr. Thompson would make the Mekong Delta his primary target, the MAAG commander would have delayed any major operation there for another two years. The MAAG plan targeted as its first objective Zone D, a heavily Viet Cong infiltrated area extending northeast of Saigon to the Cambodian border. This divergence of objectives was symbolic of the chief disparity between the two. Where General McGarr's emphasis was on cleansing the thinly inhabited Zone D of VC forces that could threaten the South Vietnamese capital, Mr. Thompson stressed that the primary concern in counterinsurgency warfare should be the preservation of political stability in the populous countryside. The British advisor argued that focusing upon Zone D was a "step in the wrong direction."[100]

Given the criticisms of his superiors and his difficulties with the South Vietnamese, it was only natural for General McGarr to take umbrage at what he considered British interference. He compared Mr. Thompson to a "doctor called in for consultation on a clinical case, actually performing an amputation without consulting the resident physi-

cian—and without being required to assume the overall responsibility for the patient."[101] On 18 November he wrote to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Admiral Felt laying out his disagreements with the British advisor. He argued that while the delta was important, he believed that the Viet Cong were attempting to create a second front in the highlands and that "a shift of priority may be necessary." General McGarr stated that he was concerned about the Thompson recommendations because of the influence and reputation that the British advisor had in both Saigon and Washington. He concluded his criticisms with the statement that "certain of Mr. Thompson's opinions in the military field are diametrically opposed to US positions and plans of long standing."[102]

Ambassador Nolting strongly backed up the MAAG commander. In a sharply worded cable addressed to the State Department on 30 November, he declared that the "Thompson Mission is badly off rails from standpoint US-UK coordination." While not denying that the recommendations "may have some intrinsic merit," the Ambassador believed their end result was to "complicate our task of bringing about essential reforms in GVN military and administrative structure." He described Mr. Thompson as having violated an understanding between the US and British Embassies by submitting his plan directly to President Diem "without prior consultation with US and without real effort to ascertain thrust of our plans or programs for counterinsurgency." Moreover, according to Ambassador Nolting, Mr. Thompson was supposed to confine his advice to matters of intelligence and "civil aspects of counterinsurgency effort." Reporting on a meeting with the British, the American Ambassador wrote that Mr. Thompson defended his action by stating that he had no choice but to respond to a direct request from President Diem. Furthermore, according to Thompson, General Taylor during his visit in October had asked him for his full views on the counterinsurgency.[103]

According to Ambassador Nolting, his greatest concern was with the Thompson proposal that III Corps, operating directly under the Vietnamese National Security Council, would be the controlling headquarters of the Mekong Delta operation. The Ambassador stated that this violated the Vietnamese Army chain of command. He observed that General McGarr had persevered in establishing the Field Army Group under General Minh, which was supposed to coordinate all operations and now would be bypassed. Furthermore, President Diem had asked Mr. Thompson to prepare a similar plan for the area north of Saigon. Ambassador Nolting concluded that "Fundamentally, [the] problem is that we are convinced that unless we can bring Diem to delegate authority we shall never get [an] effective counterinsurgency effort in this country, no matter what sort of paper plans we may have." Like General McGarr, the American Ambassador believed that Thompson's plan appearing when it did caused needless complications.[104]

Despite Ambassador Nolting's strong support of General McGarr's complaints against Mr. Thompson, Admiral Felt was far less critical. The admiral reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the unhappiness of both the MAAG commander and the Ambassador. He observed, however, that when a third party proffers assistance, it usually wants to offer advice as well. As to the substance of Thompson's report and General McGarr's criticism, Admiral Felt believed they were "matters of professional opinion and cannot

be categorically declared to be right or wrong." He stated that Thompson's opinions deserved consideration, but then he concluded "the operation in South Vietnam has been the subject of so many worthy professional opinions that the publication of each new one tends to add to the confusion and degrade the decisions and actions of the persons on the ground."[105]

In Washington, Mr. Thompson had some influential supporters. One of the most important was Roger Hilsman, the director of the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Although an academic, Mr. Hilsman was a West Point graduate and during World War II had been a leader of a local guerrilla group in Burma during the Allied campaign against Japan in that country. Given his experience, he became one of the leading theorists on counterinsurgency warfare in the Kennedy administration. In a memorandum to Secretary of State Rusk on 11 November that was forwarded to the White House, Mr. Hilsman referred to a preliminary study being prepared by his bureau about the implications of the new communist tactics. According to Mr. Hilsman, the report contained a conclusion very similar to that of Mr. Thompson:

> the most effective way of meeting a guerilla threat like that of the Viet Cong is not with regular troops, but rather by a sophisticated combination of civic action, intelligence, police work, and constabulary-like counter-guerilla forces that use a tactical doctrine quite different from the traditional doctrine of regular forces.[106]

For the time being, however, the fracas among the principals in Vietnam over the Thompson memo was over. At the end of November Ambassador Nolting chaired a meeting with the British ambassador that included both General McGarr and Robert Thompson. The American Ambassador told the British that he would have to tell President Diem that the United States disagreed with the command arrangements outlined by Mr. Thompson in his plan. He reported that the two Englishmen appeared to accept his reproofs "with good grace and reiterated their desire to cooperate closely with US and by implication to play [the] role of junior partner in this enterprise." However, the American Ambassador suspected that "Thompson is thoroughly annoyed." The meeting, nevertheless, ended for the time being the ruffled feelings between the US and British missions in Vietnam.[107]

In the meanwhile, General McGarr continued his efforts with General Minh to develop a plan to enter Zone D. Admiral Felt remained unhappy with the overall MAAG planning effort. On 28 November he cabled General McGarr after examining the latter's reports that "They constitute a series of actions . . . coupled with doctrinal concepts, procedures and instructional vehicles, most of which . . . will be highly suitable for tactical situations arising under any military plan implemented, but they do not satisfy [the] requirement for [a] full-fledged campaign plan."[108] A few days later in a conversation with Ambassador Nolting on 3 December, President Diem startled the American Ambassador by suggesting that General McGarr assist General Minh in the planning of an offensive operation in Zone D. The Ambassador believed that the Vietnamese President knew that the MAAG commander had "been doing just that for many months."[109] Finally, on 6

December the admiral provided General McGarr with a plan drawn up by the CINCPAC staff for a campaign in Zone D that the Army general was to try to "sell . . . to General Minh as a plan he can use as his own."[110]

This planning effort came to naught, caught in an impasse between General Minh and President Diem. On 14 December, when General Minh came to brief President Diem on the proposed Zone D operation, the Vietnamese president rejected the command arrangements. Agreeing with his American military advisors, General Minh had placed the Zone D Task Force under his Field Army Group so that the Corps commander could concentrate on a pacification campaign. President Diem's brother Nhu and several Diem officer loyalists even went so far as to accuse General Minh of wanting the task force under his control to make a coup against the government. General Minh told General McGarr that he "feels like [an] 'officer without portfolio.'"[111] This was to be one more problem that awaited the Secretary of Defense Conference on 16 December in Hawaii.

December Honolulu Conference

Immediately after the conclusion of the NATO meeting in Paris, Secretary McNamara with his Washington entourage departed for Hawaii to confer with his field commanders about Vietnam. He had been planning this conference since the end of the previous month. On 28 November he had sent messages addressed jointly to Admiral Felt and to General McGarr informing them that he wanted to meet with them in an "intense one-day session" on 16 December at PACOM Headquarters in Honolulu. Secretary McNamara mentioned that it was his intention to continue meeting with them on a monthly basis. In his message, he reiterated his comments that he had previously made to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that regardless of the political situation in Vietnam the US effort in that country must go "ahead full blast . . . on all possible actions short of large scale introduction of US combat forces." The Defense Secretary concluded:

> What we must do is wring the last ounce out of present possibilities and I feel that we have sometimes been slow, both here at DOD and in the field, in devising and carrying out feasible actions. Cost considerations particularly should be secondary in your search for new approaches.[112]

In addition to Secretary McNamara, Admiral Felt, and General McGarr, the attendees at the meeting on 16 December included the Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Lemnitzer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Bundy, and Ambassador Nolting. Secretary McNamara had mentioned the possibility that General Taylor might participate. Whether to avoid undermining the status of General Lemnitzer or for some other undisclosed reason, General Taylor did not make the trip.[113]

Secretary McNamara brought an eight-point agenda to the meeting. He wanted to review Viet Cong operations since October and to obtain some prediction of what course they would take in the next six months. The Secretary also desired some description of

South Vietnamese Army operations during the same period to counter the enemy. He wanted to know the ARVN plan of operations for the next six months. Furthermore, the agenda contained a question as to "whether the position of the Viet Cong had on balance become stronger or weaker" during the past three months. Another item was the status of US plans together with "CINCPAC's concept of the campaign plan ... and the prospects for the development of a GVN overall plan." Among the other discussion points were the needs of both the advisors and the South Vietnamese in carrying on the war against the communists. Included in the list for discussion was the type of command relationships that would be required if the United States established the new US Forces, Vietnam, command.[114]

The meeting began at 0800 and lasted over nine hours with only a few limited interruptions for food and other necessities. One of the first decisions was to approve the agenda with the single exception of the item concerning command relations.[115] Secretary McNamara indicated that that decision would be made by Secretary of State Rusk and himself.[116] The Secretary then opened with the statement that he saw the mission of his visit as determining how to improve the situation in Vietnam. He wanted to know what people in the field needed and emphasized that "we have great authority from the President."[117] According to a CINCPAC representative, "we could have practically anything we wanted short of combat troops."[118]

At the end of the long day, the conferees agreed to increase US support to the Diem government with few reservations. According to one of the participants at the meeting, Secretary McNamara responded to an observation about the difficulty of working with President Diem by saying that:

> Diem was the only man we had, that he had some basis for being suspicious because of all the coup talk, and that if we concentrated on fundamental military specifics he thought we could get Diem to cooperate. We had to work with him; we couldn't expect to change people. He felt that while reforms were necessary, they take a long time and we need some specific action within the next 30 days.[119]

The basic results of the conference included several decisions. Secretary McNamara approved an immediate increase of 393 US military personnel to augment the US and South Vietnamese communication and intelligence networks.[120] Furthermore, at the suggestion of General Lemnitzer, the conferees recommended that five US military advisors should be assigned to South Vietnamese Army units down to and including the battalion level. Secretary McNamara also emphasized the need to improve the training of the Vietnamese militia, both the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps. He declared that the South Vietnamese "can't wait until 1963 to complete program." He proposed that the MAAG and the South Vietnamese government provide "more trainers, [a] shortened and intensified training period, [and] more training sites."[121]

As far as the US Jungle Jim squadron, the Secretary ruled that it "should be exploited on all types of missions to include dropping bombs and firing *within* South Vietnam." The only condition was that at least one South Vietnamese national must also be in

the aircraft.[122] Secretary McNamara also required additional regular reports on the status of the Vietnamese Army to include strength, training, and readiness figures. He also corrected an announcement that US naval personnel would help man Vietnamese small naval craft patrolling the Mekong in the delta region. American sailors would only assist in naval craft patrolling coastal waters, not the inland rivers. The conference also suggested that the MAAG have the Vietnamese revise the "proposed sweep in War Zone D." There was a general consensus that the plan was too "highly sophisticated for a first campaign" and depended "too heavily on the success of defoliant operations." Finally, General Lemnitzer recommended that the South Vietnamese should use part of its 5,000-man Ranger force to patrol the Vietnamese-Laotian border. At this point, Secretary McNamara "refused to discuss Laos indicating that Government decisions had been taken there and there was nothing further we could do for the moment. In Vietnam however there are many things we can and must do." During the conference, Secretary McNamara announced his "intention to have such a meeting each month for the next three months" to review the progress being made in Vietnam.[123]

Continuing Discussions about Vietnam Command Structure

While the Secretary had avoided any discussion of changing command relations during the meeting, much to the chagrin of General McGarr, he did have private conversations with both Ambassador Nolting and Admiral Felt on the subject. In a covering letter to Secretary McNamara about the December meeting, General McGarr mentioned almost as an aside, "Naturally I am most interested in the proposed reorganization and ultimate command arrangements here, which you will recall were not discussed due to time limitations."[124] The MAAG commander was more candid in a personal letter to General Lemnitzer, expressing his opinion that the "'man on firing line' should be allowed to participate in these discussions."[125] In an apparent attempt to mollify General McGarr, the Chairman praised his stewardship of the MAAG and then provided the weak alibi that he had planned to speak to him after the meeting "but as you know, our party left almost immediately for take-off and there was no possibility for such a get-together." The Chairman then informed General McGarr that the Ambassador had discussed the situation with Secretary McNamara. Ambassador Nolting repeated to the Secretary the objections that he had previously voiced to the State Department and stated that it was apparent that the two Secretaries "did not have a meeting of minds."[126]

Two days after the conference, Secretary McNamara tried to reach this "meeting of the minds" in Washington during a morning meeting with Secretary of State Rusk. Believing that they had reached an agreement, Secretary McNamara that afternoon provided the Secretary of State with a memorandum outlining the essential points. The first three pertained to the responsibilities and title of the proposed new commander. He was to be "Commander, US Military Assistance Forces—Vietnam" and to have "direct

responsibility for all US military operations" there and would have the ability to discuss these and South Vietnamese military actions with the Vietnamese leaders including President Diem. Furthermore, on military matters the commander would have direct access to CINCPAC and through him to both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense. According to the memorandum, Ambassador Nolting was responsible for political and basic policy matters. Finally, both the Ambassador and the commander were to keep one another informed of their activities.[127]

Secretary Rusk responded almost immediately and took exception to two facets of the note. First, he objected to the title "US Military Assistance Forces—Vietnam." Rusk disapproved of the word "Forces," believing that it connoted "organized military units considerably beyond those we presently have in mind." Secondly, while agreeing with the relationship between the Ambassador and the general as described by Secretary McNamara, he apparently believed there was a certain vagueness that needed to be addressed. He wanted some continuing discussion between one of the Defense Secretary's "colleagues" and Assistant Secretary Harriman concerning "any dangling points which need attention. Even though they might be minor in the total context, there is great advantage in our having complete clarity in the interest of harmonious and efficient operations in the field."[128]

About this time as well, Ambassador Nolting reported to Secretary Rusk on his conversations with Secretary McNamara, Assistant Secretary Bundy, and Admiral Felt about the forthcoming proposed command changes. He declared that he was "more convinced than ever that, in circumstances existing now in VN, division of US authority and responsibility would be a grave error and would jeopardize accomplishment of US objectives." The Ambassador commented on the draft letter that Secretary Rusk gave to Secretary McNamara in Paris. He stated that he agreed with most of the points in that letter, but did "not think . . . [it] is precise enough in defining responsibilities and command and inter-agency relationships in Viet Nam."[129]

Despite the Ambassador's reservations, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara arrived at a joint agreement to present to the President for his consideration. In effect, the agreement remained much the same as that outlined by Secretary McNamara after their previous meeting, with two exceptions. The revision changed the title of "Commander US Forces, Vietnam" to that of "Commander, US Military Assistance Command Vietnam," as recommended by Secretary Rusk. A second change still acknowledged the Ambassador as responsible for basic policy and political matters but added the phrase that "the Senior US Military Commander will consult with him" on such topics. If there were any differences of opinion, either the commander or the Ambassador could appeal to Washington for a final decision.[130]

In his covering letter, the Defense Secretary recommended that Lieutenant General Paul D. Harkins, now Deputy Commander, US Army, Pacific, be given a fourth star and become Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV). He described the 57-year old Harkins as "physically active" and as the designated "Field Force Commander for the SEATO forces . . . thoroughly familiar with Vietnam." According to Secretary McNamara, "the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider him an imaginative officer, fully

qualified to fill what I consider to be the most difficult job in the US Army."[131] General Harkins served as chief of staff to General Taylor when he commanded the Eighth Army in Korea and later on the Army staff when Taylor was Chief of Staff. General Taylor may have influenced the appointment. According to General Harkins, General Taylor told him: "Paul, you better be ready to get your fist in the dike, there is going to be a flood over there."[132] Still the most likely reasons were probably those enumerated by Secretary McNamara, that General Harkins, as deputy commander of the US Army forces in the Pacific, was familiar with Vietnam, SEATO, and Southeast Asia in general.[133]

The selection of General Harkins was not greeted with acclamation by everyone in the White House. McGeorge Bundy, the national security advisor, wrote to President Kennedy that he personally viewed with "some alarm that Secretary McNamara does not seem to have a personal judgment of General Harkins." Mr. Bundy observed that both General Taylor and even Secretary McNamara had stated "that the only way of getting a really new look in the Army is to reach into the age group of men between 35 and 45." He believed that "this recommendation moves in the opposite direction." Moreover, the national security advisor declared that he thought the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted a four-star general so as to give "them an unembarrassing way of relieving General McGarr." While not asking the President to reverse the decision of his Secretary of Defense, he advised the President that before making the appointment he or Secretary McNamara should meet with General Harkins.[134]

On 3 January 1962 President Kennedy held a high-level meeting at Palm Beach, Florida, concerning the US command structure in Vietnam with his senior security officials including Vice President Johnson, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, General Taylor, and General Lemnitzer and three of the four Joint Chiefs. Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis Lemay was ill, so he was represented by his deputy. In addition the President also invited General Harkins to attend. At the meeting, President Kennedy approved the terms of reference agreed to by Secretaries McNamara and Rusk relative to the change of command as well as the appointment of General Harkins to head the new US Military Assistance Command. President Kennedy cautioned the participants to keep secret for the time being the new assignment for General Harkins. In agreeing to the changes in the command structure, the President warned against becoming "further involved militarily in that area." Furthermore, President Kennedy insisted upon "the importance of playing down the number of US military personnel involved in Vietnam and that the US military role there was for advice, training and support of the Vietnamese Armed Forces and not combat."[135]

Despite the President's approval of the terms of reference between the Ambassador and General Harkins as Commander, USMACV, Ambassador Nolting and others in the State Department still wanted a more precise definition placed in the agreement. According to General Lemnitzer, one of the reasons for withholding the announcement of the changes was to wait until Ambassador Nolting reviewed the document.[136] The Ambassador arrived in Washington on 5 January as part of a preplanned visit to discuss the changes with the President and to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Com-

mittee on the US commitment. After nearly a week of formal calls and briefings within the State Department, on the morning of 12 January the Ambassador met with the President, accompanied by General Taylor and Assistant Secretary of State Harriman. Secretary of State Rusk joined the meeting later. During the conversation, Ambassador Nolting argued that the terms of the agreement should contain phrasing that forthrightly stated that the Ambassador should have "overall authority in Vietnam." In any event, the President had received a document authored either by Ambassador Nolting or possibly in Harriman's Far Eastern Affairs bureau that in the first paragraph contained the statement that all of the US agencies in Vietnam would act as a task force "under the chairmanship and overall direction of the Ambassador." The President handed this new document to General Taylor for his recommendations.[137]

According to General Taylor, he soon became the mediator between the State and Defense Departments.[138] He observed that Ambassador Nolting basically wanted to insure three specific points. These were: first, language stating that the Ambassador was the senior US representative in the country; second, that the senior military commander was a member of the unified US task force that answered to the overall direction of the Ambassador; and third, an acknowledgement that the senior military commander had "direct responsibility" and "operational command" of all US military personnel and units in Vietnam. Secretary McNamara, on the other hand, while willing to concede points one and three, was not willing to acknowledge the placement of the military commander under the "overall direction of the Ambassador." According to General Taylor, Secretary McNamara feared that this would unnecessarily blur military responsibility. The Defense Secretary would, however, require the military commander to inform the Ambassador of his plans in advance so that in the event of disagreement the Ambassador could appeal to Washington.[139]

On 13 January 1962 General Taylor provided President Kennedy his thoughts about the impasse. The general stated that after looking into the matter he discovered that Ambassador Nolting's paper "was a complete rewrite of a carefully drawn agreement worked out personally by Secretaries Rusk and McNamara." Secretary McNamara, according to General Taylor, did not consider it "feasible to re-open this issue in its entirety" at this time. General Taylor observed that Secretary McNamara and the Ambassador would both be attending the second Honolulu Conference of Vietnam commanders at PACOM headquarters, which was scheduled for 15 January, only two days away. General Taylor believed that Secretary McNamara "will recommend to you [Kennedy], with Rusk's concurrence, that the agreed directive be promulgated with the understanding that it will be reviewed after a short test period." General Taylor stated that his own opinion was that there were not "any great issues at stake, provided Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins behave like the sensible people I believe them to be."[140] In fact, the Ambassador and Secretary McNamara both flew to the Honolulu meeting on the same aircraft and discussed the command structure both on board the plane and at the conference. In Ambassador Nolting's words, they reached "what is perhaps an agreement on words, but, I am afraid, not a meeting of minds."[141]

New Initiatives, January–8 February 1962

The Second Honolulu Conference, which opened on 15 January, allowed the Secretary of Defense to review the changes that had occurred with the buildup of US advisors since the December meeting and what progress the Vietnamese had made in the war. It was also an opportunity to stress the importance of new initiatives in counterinsurgency and pacification.

Besides agreeing to increase the advisory effort, the Kennedy administration in January had taken a reinvigorated interest in antiguerrilla warfare in general with a focus on Vietnam in particular. Much of this renewed emphasis was based upon a spurt of writings on counterinsurgency theory, including those of Robert Thompson and Roger Hilsman. In early January General Taylor circulated among several prominent members of the Kennedy administration, including the President, another paper that he received from Mr. Thompson relating to his Mekong Delta plan.[142] President Kennedy himself as especially impressed with a series of articles on countering the Soviet support of "wars of liberation," a euphemism for revolutionary subversion, that appeared in the January issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, especially one authored by Roger Hilsman.[143] According to Mr. Hilsman, he met with the President on 10 January to discuss the article. Shortly afterwards, General Taylor called to inform him that he was to attend the January Honolulu conference on Vietnam.[144]

In the interim, President Kennedy on 11 January sent a formal memorandum to Secretary of Defense McNamara declaring, "I am not satisfied that the Department of Defense, and in particular the Army, is according the necessary degree of attention and effort to the threat of Communist-directed subversive insurgency and guerrilla warfare." He then directed Secretary McNamara to take several steps. The President wanted a general officer assigned to the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army who would have direct responsibility for counterguerrilla warfare. He also ordered a similar billet, also under a general officer, to be established in the Joint Staff. Among other measures, the President wanted a report in early February on the progress of an inventory of counterinsurgency assets and requirements as well as Secretary McNamara's recommendations. President Kennedy concluded: "in preparing to meet 'wars of liberation' I should like the Department of Defense to move to a new level of increased activity across the board."[145]

At about the same time, the President took action to centralize counterinsurgency measures government-wide. Expressing his unhappiness with US progress in this area, he asked General Taylor to head a special task force and to prepare an implementing order. In the resulting NSAM establishing the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency), General Taylor defined its mission as "to assure unity of effort and the use of all available resources with maximum effectiveness in preventing and resisting subversive insurgency and related forms of indirect aggression in friendly countries." In addition to General Taylor as chairman, the Special Group's membership included Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Deputy Under Secretary of State Johnson, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, the Director of the CIA, and the

Administrator, Agency for International Development. In a special annex to the NSAM, the President assigned to the group "cognizance" of counterinsurgency in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand.[146] General Taylor, at the request of the President, directed Mr. Hilsman not only to attend the Honolulu Conference but also to visit Vietnam afterwards and prepare a strategic concept for South Vietnam counterinsurgency operations to present to the Special Group.[147]

The renewed emphasis on pacification in Washington had its impact on the Honolulu Conference. Arriving in Honolulu shortly before midnight on 14 January, Secretary McNamara at 0800 the next morning began the marathon meeting, which would last eight to nine hours before he departed for Washington that evening. Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins both participated in the sessions, as did General McGarr and Admiral Felt. While the agenda for the conference contained thirteen discussion items ranging from the status of US advisors to defoliant operations, the emphasis was on providing security in the hamlets and strengthening the local militia.[148]

General McGarr, who had met with President Diem just before leaving for the conference, reported that the South Vietnamese president worried that his American advisors were too impatient. According to President Diem, the Americans were "pushing the young GVN too hard and too fast."[149] The Vietnamese president also had his differences with General McGarr about where the South Vietnamese should place their priorities in attempting to secure and clear a threatened area. The senior American advisor wanted to launch operations both in War Zone D and in Binh Duong Province. He viewed Binh Duong as a prime test area for a pacification campaign, while seizing the enemy occupied Zone D was important "due to US interest in a significant military victory as an indication of concerted military action and as a psychological stimulus to the Vietnamese people." President Diem was less optimistic than the General. He viewed the Zone D operation warily, concerned that it "might merely close the string on an empty bag." Furthermore, he believed that such sweeps solved nothing unless there remained in place a strong government presence.[150]

At Honolulu, Secretary McNamara supported President Diem's position. He underscored the "importance of holding on to areas that have been cleared militarily." The conferees agreed to scrap the idea of the operation in Zone D since "it did not lend itself to the concept of clearing with the ARVN and holding" using civic action teams and local militia. They decided that General McGarr should "work up a plan for clearing and holding an area where permanent results can be achieved."[151] A logical choice was Binh Duong Province, near the approaches to Saigon. Although only ten of its forty-six villages were relatively secure from the Viet Cong, it had the "groundwork for a sound government infrastructure."[152]

In addition to the discussion about future operations, the conference made several other decisions relative to US assistance to the South Vietnamese. Given the obvious focus by the administration on counterinsurgency, both Secretary McNamara and General Lemnitzer pressed for the expansion of the two South Vietnamese militia organizations, the Civil Guard and the Self Defense Corps. In fact, Secretary McNamara placed a higher priority on the increase of these forces than he did on the ARVN. For

the regular forces, the Defense Secretary was more anxious about the quality of their training than their numbers. While complimenting all concerned for the rapid movement of US personnel and materiel into Vietnam, he wanted an even faster deployment of US advisors to assist in the improvement of all the Vietnamese forces, including the fledgling Vietnamese Navy and Air Force. In other matters of importance, the conferees decided to continue experimentation with defoliation operations in South Vietnam, to expand public information operations to counter what they considered press stories hostile to the Diem government in US newspapers and news magazines, and to decline a possible offer of assistance to South Vietnam from the Republic of Korea. On the last item, Secretary McNamara explained that the United States "would have to pay for this, and we might as well pay the Vietnamese to do the job themselves." On the other hand, the conference was willing to accept a small number of Australian advisors prepared to serve under the US MAAG in Vietnam "if it were politically wise." The meeting ended with an agreement to hold another conference at the PACOM headquarters in February to once more review the status of American assistance to Vietnam.[153]

As he planned, Roger Hilsman departed Honolulu for South Vietnam. According to Mr. Hilsman, he found Honolulu "routine," but South Vietnam was not. In Vietnam he discovered that the senior US helicopter commander was "a West Point classmate." Taking advantage of the opportunity, Mr. Hilsman persuaded his knowledgeable friend to fly him over the Mekong Delta, the coastal regions, and the forbidding terrain of War Zone D with its jungles and mountains. He contrasted these informative trips and his conversations with his comrade to the stale "usual round of formal briefings and high level" discussions that generally greeted the visiting dignitary from Washington."[154]

On 21 January Mr. Hilsman witnessed one of the largest ARVN operations to that time in an area some seventeen miles west of Saigon near the Cambodian border. In the operation, acting upon rather good intelligence of the presence of a strong concentration of VC forces near the border, the South Vietnamese launched a multi-battalion assault. The ARVN forces included four battalions on board river boats to reach the objective sector and a parachute battalion that was to make a combat jump into the target area. The plan also called for pre-attack air strikes by US Jungle Jim aircraft to soften the area and to protect the paratroops when they were vulnerable while drifting down into the air-drop zone. Mr. Hilsman acknowledged in his account that for the most part the operation "was well and efficiently executed." The problem was that the Viet Cong were nowhere to be found on that first day. Villagers reported that the enemy had been in their villages the night before but had slipped away before morning. To compound matters, one of the US aircraft strafed by mistake a Cambodian village, resulting in the killing and wounding of several of the inhabitants, an international incident that caused a furor in Washington. Moreover, the bombing and strafing runs in the drop zone resulted in the deaths of five South Vietnamese villagers, including three children, according to a *Life* magazine photographer who accompanied the paratroopers. The South Vietnamese continued the operation the following day, netting 5 dead VC, 20 prisoners, and 60 suspects.

Still, according to Mr. Hilsman, it appeared "obvious" that the operation "was not only fruitless but that it helped to recruit more Viet Cong than it could possibly have killed."[155]

Upon his return to Washington, Mr. Hilsman reported orally first to General Taylor, who told him, "The President should get the full story straight from you, not second-hand. And don't pull any punches either." In their discussion with the President on 29 January, Mr. Hilsman again provided his description of the Vietnamese operation. He later remembered that the President stated, "I have been President for over a year, how can things like this go on happening." President Kennedy then asked General Taylor to look into the matter "without making the author of the report too unpopular with the Joint Chiefs."[156]

In actuality, Mr. Hilsman several days later gave an oral presentation to a joint meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department about his fact-finding trip to Vietnam. At the meeting he stated that he "was distressed over any concern of the JCS which might have arisen as a result of his oral presentation to the President. He certainly had not intended any reflection on anyone and had not known of the matter." He also admitted, in response to a question from Admiral Anderson, the Chief of Naval Operations, that he had only been in Vietnam for five days. For the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lemnitzer accepted his explanation.[157] Apparently under pressure from Department of State and Defense Department officials, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had reluctantly issued a cautionary letter on air operations.[158] In a message to General McGarr, Admiral Felt directed the MAAG commander that "You and your chief of air section should take immediate steps to ensure that sound intelligence and reporting provides basis for launching strikes." Furthermore, he wanted General McGarr to "make it clear to me" and Washington "readers that positive control is being exercised."[159]

In his formal report to General Taylor and the Special Group, Roger Hilsman stressed the need for a more responsive counterinsurgency campaign. According to Mr. Hilsman, "the struggle for South Vietnam, in sum, is essentially a battle for control of the villages." In devising a strategy against the communists, he maintained, "this struggle cannot be won merely by attempting to seal off South Vietnam from the North. It must be won by cutting the Viet Cong off from their local sources of strength, i.e., by denying them access to the villages and the people." Impressed with Robert Thompson's "Delta Plan," Mr. Hilsman devoted nearly half of his document to a detailed exposition of the British experience in Malaysia and the validity of the "strategic village" concept. According to Mr. Hilsman, the implementation of this plan would bring in a stratagem "designed to eliminate the Viet Cong from successive areas through a progression of steps, and to provide the villages with a security framework and a solid socio-political base to ensure that this elimination is permanent."[160] Coincidentally on 3 February, the day after Mr. Hilsman submitted his report, the South Vietnamese Government announced its Strategic Hamlets Program as national policy.[161]

Five days later the US Government formally announced the formation of the USMACV with General Harkins as its commander. The relationship between General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting still continued to be blurred. Ambassador Nolting

remained unhappy, and on 17 January he addressed a letter to the President, through State Department channels, suggesting that the command directives still needed to be altered. The Ambassador complained that he still had no idea how the relationship between him and General Harkins would work and believed that these still required clarification. He offered the President his resignation if his views did not correspond to those of the administration.[162]

Secretary of State Rusk, however, refused to forward Ambassador Nolting's protest to President Kennedy. In a communication to the Ambassador, Secretary Rusk insisted that there was no need for a "piece of paper." According to the Secretary, there was "no doubt you are Senior US Representative in Viet-Nam, responsible for coordination and supervision of US official activities there." Secretary Rusk concluded, "it is still my view that insistence on point, in absence of any actual misunderstanding, would almost certainly destroy very relationships which are critical to success in Viet-Nam."[163] Interestingly enough, General Lemnitzer, in conjunction with the JCS directive, instructed General Harkins in assuming his new command that "insofar as DOD and the JCS are concerned, your terms of reference are those which were agreed to by Secretaries McNamara and Rusk and which were approved by the President when Sec Def, JCS and Harkins visited Palm Beach in early January." Nevertheless, General Lemnitzer enjoined General Harkins that he use these attributes "most discreetly, particularly in your contacts" with Ambassador Nolting. An Army historian remarked upon the fragile nature of the MACV relationship with the Embassy, noting that the "unity of effort within the American mission depended finally on personal rapport between the Ambassador and the MACV commander."[164]

While there appeared to be relative harmony between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense on Vietnam, vital differences existed between them beneath the seemingly calm surface. On 13 January General Lemnitzer, in a memorandum to President Kennedy about the strategic importance of Southeast Asia, reiterated the so-called "Domino theory." He then declared that if the present advisory effort failed in Vietnam, "the Joint Chiefs of Staff see no alternative . . . [but for] the introduction of US military combat forces along with those of the free Asian nations that can be persuaded to participate."[165] Secretary McNamara forwarded the memorandum to the President with a covering note stating that he did not agree with the assessment of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[166]

Until the public announcement of the establishment of MACV on 8 February, the US press had made almost no speculation about the possibility of a change in the US command arrangements in Vietnam. This was probably due to the insistence of the Kennedy administration upon secrecy for its Vietnam policy. James Reston in the *New York Times* commented, "The United States is now involved in an undeclared war in South Vietnam. This is well known to the Russians, the Chinese Communists, and everybody else concerned except the American people."[167]

7

A New Beginning

Hopes and Doubts

Even with the formation of the new US command in South Vietnam, the Joint Staff in Washington worried about the stability of the South Vietnamese government and the continuing viability of the American advisory role. During the discussions about the restructuring of the advisory effort in early 1962, Colonel Robert Levy, a member of the staff, prepared a talking paper for General Lemnitzer. Colonel Levy outlined the responsibilities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for "Current Actions and Requirements in Viet-Nam." He stated that in late November, following the Taylor Report, Secretary McNamara had assigned to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the task of coming up with the plans and the wherewithal for carrying out the first phase of the US Vietnam advisory buildup.[1]

In his paper Colonel Levy enumerated American accomplishments since that time to increase the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese military. These included the deployment of US helicopter squadrons and fixed-wing transports to South Vietnam, as well as additional advisors. Moreover, an aerial reconnaissance and photography unit had joined the Jungle Jim squadron in Vietnam and the Pacific Command was about to establish a Tactical Air Control System there. According to Colonel Levy, there remained only two pending decisions—approval of a specific defoliation campaign and the reorganization of the US command in the country.[2]

Despite the rapid influx of US advisors and equipment into the Republic of Vietnam, Colonel Levy expressed uneasiness about the ability and/or the intentions of the Diem regime to meet its obligations. Colonel Levy drew attention to the divisions in the South Vietnamese military and the obvious distrust that the South Vietnamese president exhibited toward Major General Duong Van Minh (Big Minh), his senior field commander. According to the American staff officer, President Diem had not carried out the series of

reforms that he had promised in his agreement with Ambassador Nolting in December. President Diem still failed to delegate authority for fear of a coup, and Colonel Levy posed the question whether the establishment of the new American command under these conditions "could prove ineffective and embarrassing."[3]

A few days later the Joint Staff incorporated much of the Levy paper in another memorandum to prepare the Chairman for a meeting with President Kennedy. This document reiterated the steps that the United States had taken to bolster the South Vietnamese. It noted that the present advisory staff in South Vietnam had reached a strength of 1,204—an increase of over 350 since December. The staff paper projected that the MAAG would add another 2,000 advisors by the end of June and that the entire US military strength in Vietnam would then total 5,536 personnel, an augmentation of nearly 3,000 since January.[4]

Still, like the Levy paper, the new memorandum also ended on a tentative note. While generally praising the US advisory effort, it described the defoliation effort as bearing "all the earmarks of gimmicks that cannot and will not win the war in South Vietnam." Most of the criticism in this talking paper, nevertheless, related to the Vietnamese governmental structure. It cited as the foremost goal the defeat of the communist forces in South Vietnam but observed that this depended upon several factors, including military, social, and economic reforms. According to the staff document, "the concentration of power in the hands of the President, Ngo Dinh Diem, and a small clique headed by his extremely influential and powerful brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu," impeded the attainment of these objectives. It concluded with the foreboding possibility that "all of the recent actions we have taken may still not be sufficient to stiffen the will of the government and the people of SVN sufficiently to resist Communist pressure and win the war without the US committing combat forces."[5]

On 13 January 1962 in two separate letters, one addressed to President Kennedy and the other to Secretary McNamara, General Lemnitzer repeated the themes in the two talking papers. In the letter to the Defense Secretary, General Lemnitzer confined his comments largely to the needs of the Vietnamese armed forces. He suggested that the South Vietnamese Armed Forces authorized strength remain at approximately the 200,000-man level, to include the nine-division regular army.[6] The Chairman, however, urged the establishment of 5,000 additional billets to meet such special needs as dog handlers, support of light aircraft, cadre personnel for the junk and river forces, and the augmentation of the Vietnamese military school system. According to General Lemnitzer it was the consensus of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the main objective of the US military advisory effort was "to persuade the GVN to: (a) train, organize and utilize properly their existing military and paramilitary resources; (b) develop a counter-insurgency campaign plan; (c) implement clearing actions on a province by province basis; and (d) retain control over cleared areas."[7]

Although, in his letter to the President, General Lemnitzer wrote about the broader strategic interests of the United States in terms of the Domino Theory, he also mentioned his unease about the situation in South Vietnam. The Chairman observed that President

Diem had promised to undertake several reforms, but that the danger of a military coup against the regime still remained. General Lemnitzer feared that "If Diem goes, we can be sure of losing his strengths but we cannot be sure of remedying his weaknesses." The general advised that President Kennedy must convince the South Vietnamese president that the latter required "advice as well as assistance in military, political and economic matters." Although insisting that the United States continue to back President Diem, General Lemnitzer warned that the South Vietnamese government could be allowed "no further procrastination." It was in this context that the Chairman suggested the possibility of US troop deployment to prevent a Communist takeover of South Vietnam. Two weeks later Secretary McNamara in his covering note to the Lemnitzer letter told the President that it was not necessary to take any action on the Chairman's recommendations at the present time.[8]

Resistance on the Home Front

In its explanation of its Vietnam policy, the Kennedy administration also reflected uncertainty. On 7 February, a day before the Pentagon announced the formation of the new US command in Vietnam, President Kennedy in his weekly news conference spoke about the "'increasing ferocity' of the war in South Vietnam." At the same time, the President indicated that the administration would limit open discussion about the US advisory effort, stating, "We don't want to have information [released] which is of assistance to the enemy." President Kennedy stated that a public relations policy would "have to be worked out with the government of Vietnam which bears the primary responsibility."[9] Citing unnamed government "officials," Jack Raymond of the *New York Times*, however, observed that "the reluctance of the United States Government to divulge and explain publicly the extent and ramifications of its commitment in Southeast Asia" was based upon the possibility of provoking the Communists "into raising the ante."[10]

Despite the attempt of President Kennedy and his advisors to downplay the expanding role of the United States in Vietnam, it soon became the subject of partisan debate. On 13 February the Republican National Committee accused the President of being "'less than candid' on the extent of the United States support for South Vietnam's battle against Communist insurgents." The committee questioned "whether the United States was 'moving toward another Korea which might embroil the entire Far East.'"[11] When asked about the Republican charge, President Kennedy denied any attempt to deceive the American people. He described the US involvement in Vietnam since 1950 and his attempts to keep the Members of Congress informed of the new threat posed by the intensification of the war by the Viet Cong in the past year. He claimed that "we have had a very strong bi-partisan consensus up to now, and I am hopeful that it will continue in regard to the action that we are taking." As far as the US involvement in Vietnam was concerned, President Kennedy stated that while increasing US assistance to the Diem regime there, "we have not sent combat troops." As an aside, however, he mentioned

that the US advisors there "have been instructed that if they are fired upon they are, of course, to fire back, to protect themselves, but we have not sent combat troops, in the generally understood sense of the word."[12] Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs W. Averell Harriman made much the same statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, declaring that the United States had "no present plans for commitment of American combat forces."[13]

Both President Kennedy and Mr. Harriman's responses failed to quiet the Republican criticism. On 17 February Senator Kenneth B. Keating, Republican of New York, asserted that "a made-in Washington smokescreen [on Vietnam] obscures what is going on, in terms of American commitment and American involvement." The Democratic Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator J. W. Fulbright of Arkansas, defended the administration, stating that the congressional committees had received full briefings. The Chairman accused the Republicans of "playing politics." According to Senator Fulbright, they took the position that "if you don't do anything you are soft on communism, but if you do, you are violating the Constitution."[14]

Taking no chances, the administration attempted to shore up its position with the Senate. On 17 February Sterling Cottrell, head of the interagency Vietnam Task Force, prepared a memorandum for Assistant Secretary of State Harriman summarizing the administration's arguments for its Vietnam position. Caught up in a tight scheduling sequence, Averell Harriman, who had not yet been officially confirmed, was about to attend the Secretary of Defense's Honolulu meeting on 19 February and on the next day was to appear once more before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington. To buttress the Assistant Secretary's planned testimony to the Committee on the 20th, Mr. Cottrell reiterated the so-called "Domino Theory" that the US advisory presence in Vietnam was necessary to prevent all of Southeast Asia falling under Communist domination. He maintained, nevertheless, that the United States was providing only logistic and training support in Vietnam. Mr. Cottrell remarked that "we have not publicly gone into details on numbers and kinds of equipment because of military security and because of possible charges of violating the Geneva Accords."[15]

According to Mr. Cottrell, the establishment of the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was necessary because the US effort had gone beyond the advisory and now included helicopter and communication support. He continued to insist, however, that the new American headquarters was not a combat command, declaring it was a "Vietnamese war, and they are doing the fighting."[16]

As scheduled, on 20 February Assistant Secretary Harriman testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meeting in Executive Session. While generally receptive to Mr. Harriman's remarks about the Vietnam War, some of the Senators still had reservations about the administration's Vietnam policy. One of the leading critics was Wayne Morse, the Democratic Senator from Oregon. He agreed to present his questions about Vietnam in writing. In his letter dated 21 February, the Senator posed some sixteen queries ranging from the constitutionality of the actions of the President relative to Vietnam to "the cumulating evidence that the Government of Viet-Nam is not

an effective government, that it is a corrupt government, and that it is a government that will probably fall at some time in the absence of US support."[17]

Although it would take the State Department three weeks to respond to the Senator, the administration took some quick steps in an attempt to shore up its position with Congress. On the 21st President Kennedy, accompanied by Vice President Johnson and Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, met in a closed meeting with the congressional leadership of both parties. Secretary McNamara, just back from the Honolulu meeting on Vietnam, briefed the Senators and Congressmen on the situation there. He did not mention, however, that the US Air Force in Vietnam, the Jungle Jim ("Farmgate") unit, was flying combat missions. President Kennedy and Secretary McNamara emphasized the need to avoid any "official acknowledgement" of the size of the American advisory commitment in order not to raise any problems with the International Control Commission. The Vice President asked the Republicans if they had any suggestions because the administration wanted a bipartisan policy on Vietnam. After a short pause, Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois, the Republican Minority Leader, spoke up and mentioned the Republican National Committee criticism, but declared, "in essence the Republicans fully supported the President's position." He volunteered to explain to his colleagues that the official silence on Vietnam was necessary to avoid "censure by the ICC."[18]

The February Honolulu Conference

As indicated above, Assistant Secretary Harriman on 19 February joined Secretary McNamara in attending the third Vietnam Honolulu Conference. On the aircraft taking them to Honolulu, the two apparently discussed the command relationship between Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins. Secretary McNamara agreed with the thrust of the 20 January letter that Secretary Rusk had sent to the Ambassador saying that the Ambassador was the "Senior US Representative in Viet-Nam, responsible for coordination and supervision of US official activities there." In Honolulu, Mr. Harriman relayed this information to the Ambassador, and Secretary McNamara did the same to General Harkins. Moreover, the Defense Secretary told General Harkins that he should "disregard" the "terms of reference" that were contained in his directive from CINCPAC in that they were now superseded.[19]

During the one day conference the participants in addition to Secretary McNamara, Assistant Secretary of State Harriman, Ambassador Nolting, and General Harkins included the Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, General Lemnitzer, and Admiral Felt CINCPAC as well as several subordinate commanders and officials. In general, the meeting reviewed the scheduled deployment of the US support units, the progress of the war, and projections concerning the training and improvement of the Vietnamese forces.[20]

An area of particular interest was the status of the establishment of the Provincial Survey Teams and overall civic action progress. In an earlier joint State and Defense Department meeting, General Lemnitzer had expressed concerns about the slowness of

the US Operations Mission in Vietnam relative to civic action programs. Furthermore, he noted that there were no US civilian personnel among the Provincial Survey Teams. He was told at the time that was because President Diem had only agreed to the establishment of the teams if they confined themselves to military and intelligence activities.[21]

At the Honolulu meeting, General Lemnitzer and other Defense Department representatives cited the need for civilian economic representation on the survey teams as well as more expeditious action on the part of the US Operations Mission (USOM) in Saigon.[22] The director of the Vietnam Task Force, Sterling Cottrell, had already informed Washington officials that they were "actively studying means for putting USOM Saigon on a war footing."[23] In Honolulu, Ambassador Nolting appeared to be "moderately receptive to these criticisms," but he also expressed his reluctance about pushing President Diem on these matters.[24]

The conference also took up two other controversial topics: the question of close-in air support by the Jungle Jim squadron and the use of defoliation techniques. The State Department had reservations about both. At Honolulu, Assistant Secretary Harriman spoke with Edwin W. Martin, the political advisor to Admiral Felt, about both these issues.[25]

According to Mr. Martin, Averell Harriman stated his concern about the air target selection process and feared that innocent people would be killed, thus alienating the local population whose loyalty the government wanted to obtain. During the conference, Air Force Brigadier General Rollen H. Anthis, the commander of the 2nd Air Division, described the procedures that the South Vietnamese had established for calling in air strikes. General Anthis, however, "acknowledged that all target information came from the Vietnamese and that the United States could not determine as a fact the validity of target information." Secretary McNamara advised that there were three general rules governing the Jungle Jim air operations: "1. Minimize risk of loss of US personnel; 2. Avoid trespassing beyond South Viet-Nam's borders; and, 3. Conduct operations only when there is a net advantage." The participants agreed that all US air strikes would have to receive the approval of both General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting.[26]

The subject of defoliation was perhaps even more volatile. Possibly a critical *New York Times* article by Horace Bigart in early February on general spraying with the provocative title "A DDT Tale Aids Reds in Vietnam" caused the reaction in Washington. In Bigart's account, US DDT spray poisoned a village's cats, which resulted in rats devouring "crops that were the main props against Communist agitation."[27] During the discussions on the use of defoliants in Honolulu, Admiral Felt and his staff were generally lukewarm toward the entire project. According to Mr. Martin, the admiral's political advisor, the impetus for the program came from Defense Department Research and Engineering personnel with strong backing by the South Vietnamese government and especially from President Diem. Mr. Martin noted that from the CINCPAC viewpoint, "it was apparent that the technical information available on the results [of the spraying campaign] was inadequate and that management of the whole project had been somewhat confused by the autonomous workings of the R and D [research and

development] people." Nevertheless, for the time being the decision was to proceed with "only limited spraying in order to determine the operational usefulness of defoliants under various conditions."[28]

One remaining problem was the amount of access to give to US reporters in Vietnam. A new US official press policy was to prohibit reporters from accompanying US personnel on helicopter or other type of military missions. In fact, they were not to enter areas "where they might report in detail on what US military men are doing." Carl Rowan, the State Department Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, in a memorandum argued that such a policy was self-defeating. He pointed to a spate of recent articles such as those by Jack Raymond in the *New York Times* and in *US News & World Report* suggesting the administration was trying to keep the press from reporting the truth about the war. Mr. Rowan acknowledged that he agreed with the policy of not disclosing US tactical maneuvers to the enemy but argued that the guidelines were "too broadly restrictive" and ineffective. He noted that the experienced reporters in Vietnam had ways of working around the restrictions and that "*we will create a completely hostile press and insure that the newsmen will write just the things we hope to prevent.*" Instead, his recommendation was to give "the Ambassador the authority to determine what military operations, if any, newsmen might witness."[29]

Ambassador Nolting in a separate note made much the same case as Mr. Rowan. The Ambassador stated that he was in "trouble" with the US reporters in Vietnam because he had not allowed them on a military helicopter nor allowed them to visit the US carrier that had transported some of the aircraft to Vietnam. He had "thought we were making some progress with US correspondents here and am concerned at their present attitude." Like Mr. Rowan, he suggested that he be given permission "to decide on local correspondents' requests to cover field operations."[30]

In the State Department hierarchy, only Assistant Secretary of State Harriman openly voiced any opposition to easing these restrictions. The head of the Vietnam Task Force, Sterling Cottrell, supported the Ambassador's request in a memorandum to Carl Rowan. According to Mr. Rowan, "Harriman said burn this." Writing on the memo, the latter [unclear to whom "latter" refers] stated that he disagreed with its tenor, but wanted Mr. Rowan to read it. He then jotted down his opinion: "our press will build this assistance to Vietnam as our participation in this war—a new war under President Kennedy. . . . The Press do not belong on these aircraft but can be kept fully informed by briefings in Saigon by our military or Embassy."[31]

Despite these misgivings by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, President Kennedy agreed on 17 February at a meeting with Carl Rowan to approve a more liberal press policy in Vietnam. Secretary McNamara and his deputy, Roswell Gilpatric, had both concurred in the State Department proposal.[32] In fact, Secretary McNamara at the earlier Honolulu meeting in January had indicated his support of a more open policy. He declared at that time that the way to counter bad press was to make information available to reporters.[33] At Honolulu on 19 February, Assistant Secretary Harriman and Secretary McNamara consulted with Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins on

the suggested changes. According to the new rules, the Ambassador would have "over-all authority for handling of newsmen, in so far as US is concerned. He will make decisions as to when newsmen [are] permitted to go on any missions with US personnel, when approved by US military commander."[34] Simply put, this meant "where General Harkins says they are not to go, they won't."[35] Furthermore, the guidelines included the following statement: "This is not a US war. . . . Important that we constantly reinforce idea that this is struggle in which tens of thousands Vietnamese [are] fighting for their freedom, and that our participation is only in training, advisory and support phases."[36]

The February Honolulu meeting, like its predecessors in December and January, largely confirmed the estimates already made in Washington and Saigon about the size and missions of the South Vietnamese forces and their American advisors. The conferees agreed with General Harkins on the need for four US Army helicopter companies in Vietnam to support the Vietnamese forces. They also looked to new techniques to obtain better information about the North Vietnamese forces. One requirement was for better direction-finding equipment to uncover hidden communist radio sites in and near Vietnam border areas. Plans were well under way for the continuing buildup of both advisors and South Vietnamese forces. Although there was no immediate thought of expanding the regular Vietnamese Army, the Diem government planned to add 21,422 personnel during the current fiscal year, largely to the Civil Guard (CG) and to the Self Defense Corps (SDC). The projected size of the American advisory force was to reach 3,400 by the end of April. In fact, about 900 advisors were scheduled to arrive in March, which coincided with the end of the first advisory training cycle at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.[37]

In the aftermath of the Honolulu conference there was an increased administrative demand on subordinate headquarters and eventually on the field. Immediately upon returning from Hawaii with General Lemnitzer, Secretary McNamara met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At this meeting on 20 February, the Defense Secretary instituted an elaborate reporting procedure. Secretary McNamara wanted both oral briefings and written reports about the implementation of the new military programs in South Vietnam. Both were to start with "a sophisticated intelligence report." These would "include a complete appraisal of enemy (Viet Cong) and friendly (RVNAF-CG-SDC) relative strengths; will analyze and evaluate enemy and friendly activities; and will include an estimate of future enemy actions." The Secretary listed nine other activities that required detailed information. These embraced such topics as aviation, deployment of units, coastal control and surveillance, "special intelligence activities," as well as "Defoliation and Crop Destruction." According to the memorandum of the meeting, crop destruction and defoliation was to be controlled "through regular military command channels."[38]

On 22 February, in response to the new reporting requirements, Admiral Felt provided the Joint Chiefs of Staff with a detailed appraisal of the war being waged against the communist forces in South Vietnam. He opened his extended message with what he called "three basic facts" about the nature of the war in Vietnam. According to Admiral Felt, the first and most important consideration was that "the communists are presently forcing us to fight on their terms." The other two elements followed from the first: the

unconventional nature of the war tended to sap both the political and military strength of the government forces, and the communist guerrilla tactics placed the government forces at a disadvantage by often negating the value of their more sophisticated weaponry.[39]

In the body of the message, the Pacific commander painted a rather stark picture facing the South Vietnamese government. He pointed to the fact that despite the growing combat effectiveness of the South Vietnamese regular forces, the communists had expanded their numbers. Admiral Felt observed that since December 1961, US and South Vietnamese intelligence sources showed a 2,000- to 5,000-man increase in active communist forces, believed now to consist of 20,000 to 25,000 troops. The admiral noted that while the government controlled the urban area, the communists had a fairly free reign over the border region with Laos and Cambodia. Moreover, the Viet Cong had demonstrated a growing strength throughout Vietnam. In his analysis of the war, CINCPAC concluded that the South Vietnamese forces were placing pressure on the communists, but that more than military measures were needed to defeat the enemy. According to Admiral Felt, "final success will come only when people can be alienated away from Viet Cong and given adequate protection/security."[40]

The New Command

This was the situation that faced General Harkins when he returned to Saigon and his new command. He had been in Vietnam less than a week when he had attended the February Honolulu conference. However, the general was no stranger to Southeast Asia. He had served as Deputy Commander, US Army Pacific, and had commanded the joint task force based in the Philippines that was formed during the Laotian crisis in the spring of 1961. According to US and SEATO contingency plans, he would have assumed command of any large troop deployment to Vietnam or any of its neighboring countries. Another factor in his favor was that he had a close relationship with General Taylor.[41]

General Harkins several years later recalled that his first impression of Vietnam was the tight security in Saigon: "you couldn't do anything. All the windows had steel blinds on them, and all the curtains were pulled down." He remembered that even his residence had closed steel shutters. The general believed that his first orders were: "Let's put some light on the subject so we can see out." According to General Harkins, one of the greatest needs was to expand the US intelligence effort because the Vietnamese did not have the personnel to do so on their own.[42]

Despite all of the message traffic and conversations about the command relationship between the Ambassador and the MACV commander, a certain deliberate vagueness existed on the subject. As Secretary of State Rusk advised Ambassador Nolting, "It is my judgment that you will be in a stronger personal position in carrying out your overall responsibility if discussions of terms of reference are allowed to rest on present understanding rather than enter again into attempt to find new 'constitutional language.'"[43] Even with Secretary Rusk's attempt to soothe injured feelings, there still remained a

certain tension between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department on the matter. Press stories that appeared in *Stars and Stripes* and the *New York Times* about Ambassador Nolting being in charge of all policy matters in Vietnam, including military affairs, added fuel to the issue. According to an angry letter that General Lemnitzer drafted to Secretary McNamara, such accounts built up the role of the Ambassador at the expense of the MACV commander. He reported that at the Honolulu conference General Harkins had told him that certain members of the Embassy staff were responsible for these accounts. General Lemnitzer asked that such background press briefings be "stopped forthwith." The Chairman never sent the letter but discussed the subject with Secretary McNamara at the next meeting between them.[44]

Even with this rocky beginning, Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins soon developed an excellent working relationship. General Harkins later stated that he and Frederick Nolting "just got along—just hand and glove." Like the Ambassador, General Harkins worked hard to maintain close relations with President Diem. He was proud that he was one of the few Americans with whom President Diem conversed in English. The MACV commander recollected that he, Ambassador Nolting, and the Vietnamese president often traveled together in the same plane on inspection trips.[45]

Perhaps more complicated than his external dealings with the Embassy and the South Vietnamese government was General Harkins interaction within his own command. As the senior military commander in Vietnam, he had operational control of all US military functions in Vietnam. This included the Air Force "Farmgate" elements, the Army helicopter companies, and the MAAG. General McGarr retained control of the MAAG under General Harkins for the time being. The MACV commander was "CINCPAC's single US spokesman in South Vietnam for US military policy, planning and contemplated force employment." He also was the senior US military advisor to the South Vietnamese government, including the regular South Vietnamese Armed Forces as well as irregular militia and counterinsurgency groups.[46]

As an Army history concludes, "MACV thus functioned in two separate but interrelated capacities." First it was a unified subordinate theater command under CINCPAC with responsibilities extending throughout Southeastern Asia. In the second case, USMACV Commander (COMUSMACV) had responsibilities toward the South Vietnamese Government in his capacity as the senior US military advisor in Vietnam. These two disparate functions created a competition for the attention of General Harkins. As in his relationship with the Ambassador, lines of command with both his subordinates and his superiors were often unclear and confusing. General Harkins himself several years later stated that "The whole setup of command and control . . . was too complicated."[47]

The Attack on the Palace

On 27 February the Diem regime and the United States suddenly encountered new complications. They faced an immediate crisis that threatened not only the survival

of the South Vietnamese government but the very life of the Vietnamese president. On that morning about 0715, two mutinous pilots took off from Bien Hoa Airbase in their AD-6 aircraft and bombed and strafed the Presidential Palace and grounds for nearly a half-hour. The palace guard and nearby troops opened up with antiaircraft and automatic weapons, soon joined by the guns of a small Vietnamese naval craft anchored offshore. Within a half-hour, other Vietnamese fighter aircraft entered the melee. Ground fire shot down one of the attacking planes and troops captured the pilot. The other pilot avoided capture by flying into Cambodia and asking for political refuge there.[48]

While several buildings sustained damage, President Diem and his family mostly escaped unscathed. The president and his brother Ngu Dinh Nhu and his wife Madame Nhu took refuge in an underground shelter. Madame Nhu was the last to arrive, having waited until she got dressed. She sustained some minor wounds to her face and arm from broken glass. According to President Diem she was most worried that her facial cuts would leave scars. Another brother, the Archbishop of Hue, Ngo Dinh Thuc, who was in a small chapel in a new wing of the palace, was unable to leave, but he also emerged unhurt. According to Ambassador Nolting, the attack resulted in four persons killed and thirty or forty more wounded, with several people in the Cholon sector of Saigon wounded as a result of spent antiaircraft fire falling to the ground.[49]

General Harkins several years later remembered that he looked out from his hotel room at the time and could see the palace was burning. Upon hearing later in the day that President Diem had survived the attack uninjured, the general visited him that afternoon. Diem told him that the South Vietnamese had captured one of the pilots, stating that the man should not have been commissioned because the President had "put his father in jail years ago."[50]

In Washington, the attack on the palace awakened the perennial fear about the viability of the Diem government. Assistant Secretary of State Harriman cabled Ambassador Nolting about an old contingency plan in the event of a coup against the Vietnamese president. This plan, drafted in October 1961, suggested, "*the United States should be prepared to quickly support the non-Communist person or group who then appears most capable of establishing effective control over the GVN.*"[51] The plan included discussion of various scenarios, even mentioning the names of acceptable successors to President Diem. Mr. Harriman advised Ambassador Nolting that he believed the plan was "still valid" and that if he did not hear anything to the contrary he could conclude that the Ambassador held the same opinion.[52]

President Kennedy also worried about the ramifications of the attempt on President Diem's life. On 1 March he met with Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to Army Brigadier General Chester Clifton, the President's military aide, President Kennedy wanted the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a contingency plan in the event that current US military assistance to South Vietnam failed to halt the Communist-led insurgency. Secretary of Defense McNamara suggested that the need was "for the introduction of US forces *before* the loss of the total interior of South Vietnam, if such a catastrophe were about to overtake us." The President replied that he desired that the

planning take into consideration "the timing of a decision for US action and the factors that go into such a decision."[53]

In notes of the meeting kept by General Lemnitzer, the Chairman recorded that the participants discussed a "Draft of a plan to assist VN" and "Air Targets in North Vietnam."[54] The Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a message to Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, entitled "Harassment of North Vietnam."[55] As early as November 1961, the admiral had provided Walt Rostow a list of operations that US forces could undertake against North Vietnam. These included reconnaissance flights, air strikes against roads and railroads, small amphibious raids, the mining of Haiphong harbor, as well as to "attack singly but progressively key military targets in North Vietnam." According to Admiral Felt, all of these actions "could be graduated dependent on the politico/military objectives which are determined for us."[56] Apparently the Pacific Commander sent a revised list of targets and actions in response to the new request by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[57]

Despite the flurry of contingency planning and concerns of both Vietnamese and American officials, the attack on the palace proved to be an isolated incident and apparently involved only the two pilots. As a precaution, however, on the night of the attack President Diem ordered the grounding of all Vietnamese Air Force planes. In a meeting with Ambassador Nolting, President Diem told about a visit that he had made the next day to Bien Hoa, the home base of the two mutinous pilots. In response to a query from the Ambassador about the loyalty of the Air Force, the Vietnamese leader answered, "although most of the airmen were young, worked hard and liked to dance and play hard, they were not generally men of ill-will." In a conversation with the fighter group commander and his senior officers, they assured him "of their grief over the incident which had dishonored them but disclaimed any knowledge of disaffection, subversive propaganda or other suspicious activities."[58]

While lifting the grounding of the aircraft on 1 March, the Vietnamese president still restricted his fighter/bombers from carrying munitions larger than 20 millimeters. According to President Diem, Brigadier General Nguyen Khanh, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff, cautioned him to move slowly while the Vietnamese Air Force continued its investigation of the attack on the palace. At the same time General Khanh and President Diem asked Ambassador Nolting if US Air Force aircraft could take over the close air support missions flown by the Vietnamese. The American Ambassador informed the Department of State that he, General Harkins, and Assistant Secretary of Defense William Bundy, the last in Vietnam on an inspection tour, "fully supported Farmgate aircraft, with combined US-GVN crew, [to] be used on combat training operations in close support of ARVN operations planned to begin March 1 and continuing several days."[59]

As the limitations on the Vietnamese Air Force continued, the US authorities grew restive. General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting called upon President Diem and "expressed concern over continuation of restrictions, emphasizing not only military handicaps but awkward position in which United States Government was placed." They stressed that although the US mission was to assist the South Vietnamese, "it was not

a US war." After some hedging by President Diem, the South Vietnamese government on 15 March finally authorized its AD-6 aircraft to employ in addition to 20-mm cannon fire, "rockets, napalm and anti-personnel bombs."[60]

According to Roger Hilsman, the head of the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the employment of the Farm Gate aircraft had caused a certain amount of embarrassment for the United States. Mr. Hilsman, who at the time was in Vietnam, observed that it was impossible to keep these operations secret from the US press: "there are just too many Americans and Vietnamese involved in this particular operation in South Viet-Nam and I think that the solution lies not in trying to keep it hidden but into using farm gate correctly." He argued that instead of flying the Farm Gate operations for close air support missions, the Vietnamese wanted to employ them in interdiction missions: "Diem and the South Vietnamese think it is great stuff and are continually calling for strikes on the basis of the flimsiest kind of intelligence." US Air Force advisors provided accounts of Viet Cong guerrillas after such raids evacuating all of their casualties but laying "out in the middle of the street the women and children killed by our air strikes" to be found by returning villagers.[61]

The March Honolulu Conference

In the wake of the attack on the Presidential Palace and the resulting increase in US Air Force participation in flying air support for the South Vietnamese, on 22 March Secretary of Defense McNamara chaired again his monthly Honolulu meeting. Among the participants were Admiral Felt; General Lemnitzer; General Anthis, the 2nd Air Division Commander; General Decker, the Army Chief of Staff; as well as Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins. High on the agenda was the role of the Jungle Jim (Farm Gate) unit in Vietnam. Secretary McNamara specifically asked General Anthis about the continuing necessity for American pilots to fly Jungle Jim aircraft after the Vietnamese pilots completed their training. According to General Anthis, it was "very important" that they do so to gain more experience in counterinsurgency operations as well as the need for monitoring "Vietnamese proficiency." Secretary McNamara then suggested the need to plan for more close air support operations in June with the end of the training period and the addition of more aircraft at that time. Ambassador Nolting, however, advised about the need to take into consideration the political implications "before stepping up air operations beyond the current level." This ended the discussion on Jungle Jim for the time being.[62]

Another topic of concern was the employment of helicopters in Vietnam. Concerned about the vulnerability of these aircraft to communist ground fire, General Decker wanted them armed. Admiral Felt, on the other hand, believed that fixed-wing air support and South Vietnamese ground weapons were adequate for fire support. He, moreover, feared that the on-board machine guns would interfere with the stability of

the rotary aircraft. To resolve the problem, Secretary McNamara asked General Decker to investigate the matter further and report the findings directly to him.[63]

Other points of discussion at the meeting included the military assistance program in Thailand, defoliation, and the renewed emphasis on pacification and the implementation of the strategic hamlet concept. Relative to Thailand, which remained at the center of US contingency planning for Southeast Asia, General Lemnitzer had proposed that the United States support an expansion of the Thai airborne force. While Admiral Felt had some reservations about its "urgency," he agreed to review the requirements of the increase, including supporting airlift. On defoliation, Secretary McNamara declared that he would ask for "Washington concurrence" to delegate some authority to the South Vietnamese for a limited "crop denial" campaign.[64]

On the subject of pacification, the meeting discussed both the recently approved strategic hamlet plan and the requirements for the supporting militia. Although President Diem in early February had announced the Strategic Hamlets Program as national policy, it was not until 16 March that he formally signed the implementing order. While based on Thompson's Delta Plan with its emphasis on fortified hamlets, the presidential directive was more diffuse than Thompson's original concept. In contrast to Thompson's emphasis on a few provinces in the Mekong Delta, President Diem in his order extended the priority areas to several sectors throughout the III Tactical Zone.[65]

At the Honolulu conference, Ambassador Nolting reported that Ngo Dinh Nhu, the President's brother and unofficial political and security advisor, advocated the immediate designation of strategic hamlets in all of the provinces and that they be erected as soon as possible. The Ambassador expressed his concern that this objective may be overly "optimistic in terms of the projected availability of troops to provide required protection." At this point General Harkins stated that the required training for all the Self Defense Corps and the Civil Guard was scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. Secretary McNamara then asked what percentage of the Self Defense Corps was adequately equipped and armed. No one at the meeting offered an answer to the question. Ambassador Nolting commented that the South Vietnamese government's reluctance "to issue weapons to the SDC reflected some doubt as to the loyalty of those troops." The Secretary replied that the South Vietnamese could not afford to allow "50,000 to 60,000 SDC remain unarmed or ineffective (with old French arms)." He asked General Harkins to investigate the situation. At the end of the session, Secretary McNamara announced there would not be a meeting in Honolulu during April.[66]

After the Honolulu conference, Chairman Lemnitzer departed Hawaii for an inspection visit of US forces in Southeast Asia. After a short stopover in Thailand, the general arrived on the afternoon of 27 March at the Tan Son Nhut Airport near Saigon. During a hurried press conference at the airbase, he declared that the United States was ready to "provide whatever was necessary" to assist the South Vietnamese government to "win the battle in Vietnam." When asked about the war from a Washington perspective, he replied that in both Washington and Hawaii there existed some "encouragement" about progress but "winning the battle is going to take some time."[67]

Operation SUNRISE

Although the Chairman remained in Vietnam for only a little over two days, his itinerary included a visit to a strategic hamlet in the long heralded and recently launched campaign Operation SUNRISE.[68] Both the January and February Honolulu conferences had discussed this major pacification effort in Binh Duong Province. At the January meeting, the conferees directed that General McGarr prepare a contingency plan for the province. During the February session the conferees agreed to the MAAG commander's resulting plan, codenamed "Sunrise" and dated 8 February. The plan called for three phases: a reconnaissance and planning phase prior to D-Day; a military phase to last thirty days after the launching of the operation; and a consolidation phase that would include the gradual withdrawal of the regular Army units and their replacement by Civil Guard and local village militia.[69]

Actually the operational concept had its origins in a "Rural Reconstruction campaign" in that sector and two neighboring provinces the previous August that had uneven success. Although only ten of the forty-six villages in Binh Duong were considered secure, the Vietnamese and the American advisory group believed they had built the governmental framework to continue the operation in the province. In any event, although not named, this campaign under the 7th Division commander, General Huynh Van Cao, continued through February with an attempt to establish certain model "strategic hamlets." In a meeting with Ambassador Nolting, however, President Diem expressed his impatience:

> "with the slowness of the program." The Vietnamese president observed that some of the villagers did not want to move into the fortified hamlets and that he authorized General Cao "to use severe methods, where necessary." He provided as one example the case where "after several warnings, villages had been burned in order to force people to remain in the regroupment areas."[70]

Despite the continuing efforts to move villagers into the strategic hamlets in Binh Duong, it was not until 22 March that the South Vietnamese Army "officially" launched Operation SUNRISE. The area of operations, about thirty-five to fifty miles north of Saigon, centered on the Ben Cat Road and took in three newly established strategic villages. It encompassed much of the northern sector of the province and also cut across the VC infiltration network into the communists' War Zone D base area.[71]

Operation SUNRISE did not get off to an auspicious start. *New York Times* correspondent Homer Bigart wrote about a visit to the operational area together with a large group of American observers from USOM and the military advisory group. He described a scene of dejected villagers uprooted by troops sitting in a makeshift stockade under temporary shelters. Many of them had most of their household goods with them but others had little time to collect their belongings before the soldiers "applied the torch" to their former homes. Under the Strategic Hamlet Program in Operation SUNRISE, the Vietnamese Army had moved some 220 families from isolated hamlets in Viet Cong

controlled or insecure areas of Binh Duong Province into this more protected sector. One US major who helped to plan Operation SUNRISE admitted, "This is no Disneyland," but pointed to the benefits that villagers would receive, including cash compensation, health benefits, education for their children, a home site and some land, and protection from the Viet Cong. The new village, however, at this point existed largely on paper and the people remained in this primitive site in an abandoned rubber plantation. Still, the government had provided for plenty of food and water and had dug latrines. As one of the American officials remarked, there was also "a minimum of barbed wire to 'avoid a concentration camp atmosphere.'"[72]

On 31 March both General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting, in a meeting with Roger Hilsman, expressed their doubts about the feasibility of the campaign. They worried about the vulnerability of the strategic hamlets in this sector, which still contained a strong Viet Cong presence. According to Mr. Hilsman, General Harkins told him that he and the Ambassador "were pressing President Diem to cancel this operation," but there was a certain "awkwardness" since General McGarr originally had proposed the operation. The concern of all three men in the meeting "was that the Viet Cong would try to make an example of these villages and so discredit the Strategic Village concept throughout South Viet-Nam."[73]

There was also skepticism about the operation in Washington, especially in the State Department. This, however, was largely triggered by Homer Bigart's account of the operation mentioned above that appeared on the front page of "The Week in Review" section of the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*. Moreover, illustrating the article were several cartoons about increased American involvement in the war. One of the most biting depicted a South Vietnamese villager speaking to a US military advisor conducting a military training lecture in the hamlet with the caption: "When we throw the invaders out, will you help us throw our rulers out."[74]

In a blistering message to Ambassador Nolting drafted in part by Assistant Secretary of State Harriman but signed by Secretary of State Rusk, the State Department expressed its growing concern:

> over constant implications in press generally of US participation and direction, rather than purely support and training of Vietnamese against Viet Cong. Elements of international press and critics of our present policy continue to emphasize "growing US involvement" the "moral responsibilities" and other similar concepts, implying Vietnamese situation is becoming more of a US rather than a Vietnamese war. Even names of operations, such as Sunrise, Farmgate, suggest US rather than GVN planning.[75]

Ambassador Nolting defended the American participation in the operation as best he could. In his reply to the State Department addressed to Assistant Secretary Harriman, the Ambassador mentioned that he had met with all the senior members of the "country team" and stressed that the US role was "advisory and supporting." He had "reemphasized that this did not involve US direction, control, leadership, or responsibility for Vietnamese struggle." He then argued that American participation in Operation

SUNRISE was largely proper and according to the ground rules laid out by the State Department in its message. He also answered the criticism about the naming of the operation, stating that the Vietnamese had invented the name by using the term *Binh Minh*, which translated into "Sunrise" in English.[76]

The Ambassador indirectly criticized Mr. Bigart by declaring that the Embassy had "made headway in enlisting cooperation of majority US press corps here, but there are still certain exceptions." He then went on to say that the reporter had unintentionally misrepresented the facts by confusing a dedication ceremony in Cu Chi village with Operation SUNRISE.[77] However, in fact Mr. Bigart had not confused the Cu Chi dedication with the SUNRISE operation. In a second article in the same issue of the *New York Times*, he specifically identified the Cu Chi opening as "not connected with Operation Sunrise."[78] Ironically, the Ambassador had recently intervened with President Diem to prevent the South Vietnamese government from withdrawing the press credentials of both Mr. Bigart and Francois Sully of *Newsweek* magazine.[79]

This friction between the Saigon press corps and American officials in both Saigon and Washington would become a regular feature of the US experience in Vietnam. According to a State Department Circular sent to all US embassies in Asia on 11 April, Secretary Rusk observed that the press overplayed the American role in Vietnam. He directed that US spokesmen make the point that "it is [a] Vietnamese war. They are fighting it and retain full responsibility for it. US role is limited to assisting them in maintaining independence."[80] The reporters however, would continue to concentrate on the role of the American advisors.

Continuing Deployments and the Arrival of Marine Helicopters

While Operation SUNRISE continued through April the American command expanded in Vietnam. In April the US total authorized military strength in the Vietnam command reached 3,400, with several billets over strength. The greatest increase was in the number of individual field advisors to the South Vietnamese military. According to a Defense Department statistical table, the number of US Army field advisors to the Vietnamese Army and militia totaled 1,351. This figure did not include some 800 Special Forces troops attached to special CIA-controlled South Vietnamese commando forces. Additionally, the table did not reflect the numbers in the US Marine, Navy, and Air Force advisory units. US Navy advisors to the fledgling Vietnamese Navy coastal and river units as well as logistic support personnel numbered about four hundred fifty. The Marine detachment in the Naval Advisory Group consisted of some eighteen advisors and a small administrative staff to support the relatively new and expanding Vietnamese Marine Corps.[81]

During the previous month the US Air Force had reinforced its Farm Gate advisory unit with four F–102 Night Fighters. The impetus for this move was the reported radar

sighting of unidentified aircraft dropping supplies to possible VC units in the Pleiku region of the Central Highlands. The result was not only the arrival of the additional aircraft but also a change in the air rules of engagement for US forces. At the request of both the State and Defense Departments, the President on 26 March authorized US forces "to intercept Communist aircraft over South Vietnam." This authorization, however, remained secret. If the US aircraft shot down any North Vietnamese or communist aircraft the US command was only to announce that the intruder plane had crashed. General Harkins was to insure that whenever an American fighter took off to engage an unidentified aircraft the South Vietnamese Air Force launched one of their T–28 fighter planes to be in the same vicinity so that it could receive "credit for the kill." There were no further sightings of possible enemy aircraft violating South Vietnamese air space. CINCPAC eventually replaced the four jets with four propeller-driven AD/A–1 Skyraider aircraft modified to carry radar for "routine night defense."[82] By the end of the year the number of US Air Force personnel in Farm Gate would reach 2,429, more than double its strength at the end of 1961.[83]

In April a fourth American helicopter unit, a Marine medium helicopter squadron (HMM–362), arrived in Vietnam. On the morning of 15 April the first flight of the squadron's twenty-four aircraft took off from the helicopter carrier USS *Princeton* (LPH–5) and landed at the small former Japanese airstrip at Soc Trang in the Mekong Delta.[84] According to both South Vietnamese commanders and their American advisors, "heliborne airmobile operations" provided "the best means for rapid concentration" against Viet Cong units and "the achievement of complete or near complete surprise."[85]

The insertion of the Marine squadron, however, was a deviation from the planned buildup of Army helicopter units in Vietnam. The Army plan had called for a total of four Army helicopter companies in Vietnam by mid-April. In fact, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved on 2 March a CINCPAC request for the fourth Army company to be assigned to the Soc Trang base. The Army then alerted its 33rd Light Helicopter Company for an 18 April deployment date from its home base at Fort Ord, California, to Vietnam.[86]

At that point, despite some interservice differences, a series of events followed that caused the Joint Chiefs of Staff to substitute the Marine squadron for the Army company. It started with a relatively innocent suggestion by the US MAAG in Vietnam for the Marine Corps to attach nine of its helicopter pilots to the Army helicopter companies in Vietnam. In turn, General Harkins recommended the proposal to Admiral Felt, CINCPAC. The admiral then asked his senior Marine commander, Lieutenant General Alan Shapley, Commanding General Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific (CGFMFPAC), for his comments. General Shapley, in turn, ordered his subordinate commander, Major General Carson A. Roberts, Commanding General, Aircraft, FMFPAC, to prepare a study of the matter. After his examination, although supporting the idea of Marine aviation participation, General Roberts had misgivings about assigning Marine helicopter pilots to an Army unit that flew aircraft unfamiliar to them. Instead, backed by General Shapley and Admiral John H. Sides, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, he offered a Marine squadron with its own aircraft as a substitute for the Army unit.[87]

Given these countervailing opinions, Admiral Felt approached General Harkins about deploying the Marine squadron to Vietnam. He argued that if the Marines were sent to Da Nang, they would be operating in an area assigned to them in the Vietnam contingency plans. The admiral also observed that the heavier and larger Marine HUS Seahorse helicopters were more suited for operations in the higher terrain around Da Nang than the lighter H–21 "Flying Bananas" of the Army helicopter units. Another salient point was that the Marines would bring ashore their own logistic support from the Navy and would only require minimum assistance from MACV.[88]

After extensive discussion, including a personal visit to Saigon by Admiral Felt, General Harkins agreed to deploy the Marine unit. Perhaps the most convincing rationale for the MACV commander was the fact that the Marine squadron could be in Vietnam on 15 April, three days before the Army unit would even leave the US Pacific Coast. General Harkins declined, however, to assign the Marine squadron to Da Nang, noting that the Army helicopter unit already there was involved in extensive support of an ongoing Vietnamese Army operation in the northern provinces. He maintained that the Marine unit should land at Soc Trang and exchange areas with the Army unit at Da Nang after the end of the northern operation.[89]

Admiral Felt concurred, and on 14 March he sent a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommending sending the Marine unit. In his communiqué, Admiral Felt expressed his appreciation to the Department of the Army for its readiness to dispatch a helicopter company to Vietnam but stated that he and General Harkins deemed that it was "more desirable" to transfer the Marine squadron from the Seventh Fleet to Vietnam. He emphasized that the squadron would be in place on 15 April after the conclusion of a SEATO exercise. The Pacific Commander also mentioned that General Harkins at a later date would station the squadron in the I Corps because of the lift capability of its HUS aircraft and its designation as the "deployment area for them" in the event of implementation of contingency plans for Vietnam and Southeast Asia.[90]

On 19 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the changes despite opposition from the senior Army commander in the Pacific.[91] In fact, ironically, the Marine Commandant, General David M. Shoup, who already had doubts about the US military commitment to Vietnam, reluctantly concurred in the transfer of the Marine unit and then only when he was assured that the move would not interfere with Marine aviation long-range deployment plans.[92] Finally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that the "future deployment of helicopter units will be considered when additional requirements are required."[93]

The arrival of the Marine helicopters on 15 April involved more than the Marine squadron and included its support elements. The Marines organized the unit at Soc Trang under a task force structure, formally called TF 79.3.5, code-named "Shufly." Shufly consisted of three distinct parts: a small headquarters commanded by Colonel John F. Carey, the former Chief of Staff of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing; the helicopter squadron, HMM–362, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Archie J. Clapp; and its support element, a detachment of Marine Airbase Squadron-16, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William J. Eldridge, Jr. All told, officers and men in Shufly totaled 534, as compared

to the approximately 450 in the three US Army helicopter companies. The addition of the Marine unit would bring US advisory strength in Vietnam to nearly half of the over 11,000 US military personnel that would be in Vietnam at the end of the year.[94]

The Washington Scene

As the buildup in Vietnam continued, the Washington structure for the Vietnam War remained rather diffuse. President Kennedy continued to direct his policy through a series of informal interagency committees and trusted advisors. Within this system Secretary McNamara, who maintained tight control over the Defense Department including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, became by default the chief architect of the US effort in Vietnam. According to the President's brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Secretary McNamara functioned as the strongman of the Cabinet, "due to the fact that the State Department and Rusk virtually gave up."[95]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, nevertheless, continued to have the main responsibility for the scheduling of the buildup, including both men and materiel. They served as the conduit between the field and the Defense Department. They approved and modified recommendations from both General Harkins and Admiral Felt. For the most part, Secretary McNamara accepted with only minor modifications their advice on the details for the expansion and organization of the US forces in Vietnam. He also used the Chiefs as his eyes and ears, since all of them, including General Shoup, the Marine Commandant, made inspection visits to Vietnam.

More than three decades later the former Defense Secretary admitted that the administration reports, including his own, "on the military situation [in Vietnam] were often too optimistic." He indirectly blamed his military advisors, and especially General Harkins, the MACV commander, for the too rosy scenario of the South Vietnamese military capability. Robert McNamara asserted that the military failed to monitor adequately the level of progress—or rather the lack of progress—in the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. Unable to evaluate a war without battlefronts, the military and he used traditional quantitative measurements such as number of prisoners and comparative casualties provided by the South Vietnamese to gauge the course of the war. According to the Secretary, the US military and he, in part, viewed the war "primarily as a military operation when in fact it was a highly complex nationalistic internecine struggle."[96]

Supposedly the oversight of the Washington war policy was to be provided by the interdepartmental Vietnam Task Force headed by Sterling J. Cottrell of the State Department. This oversight responsibility was limited and largely consisted of informing the Vietnam country team of Washington concerns and keeping high-level officials apprised of the situation in Vietnam.[97] Mr. Cottrell also attended most of the Honolulu meetings chaired by Secretary McNamara. Furthermore, he addressed the problems that the administration had with the press. In a message that he drafted for Secretary Rusk, Mr. Cottrell claimed that American and foreign correspondents were incorrectly reporting

the war in Vietnam. According to his message, these reporters implied that the United States supported President Diem rather than the Vietnamese people. Furthermore, they wrote that the American role was a partnership rather than one of support and advice. Mr. Cottrell denied that US advisors were in an offensive combat status and that the war was turning into an American one. Finally, he claimed that the US assistance to South Vietnam was not in violation of the Geneva Accords, but only a "response to North Vietnamese aggression."[98]

At the beginning of April Mr. Cottrell presented what amounted to a report card on the status of both the advisory effort and the South Vietnamese response. Using the 4 December agreement between President Diem and Ambassador Nolting as his reference, he evaluated the progress in each of the steps listed in the document. For example, on the objective to allow the "GVN to take and maintain the offensive against the VC," Mr. Cottrell wrote: "Achieved. General Harkins reports good morale, offensive spirit, and operations." In general, he maintained that the Vietnamese showed progress across the board with the notable exception of developing democratic institutions except for some minor reforms. Sterling Cottrell also had one other major caveat: "By too much publicity and military zeal we may be impairing GVN responsibility."[99]

One month later Cottrell would make another somewhat mixed update on the Vietnam situation after a trip to Southeast Asia. At that time, in an appearance before the Special Group on Counter-Insurgency, he optimistically declared that "In the strategic hamlet concept, together with a quick military reaction, we have found the right formula." On the down side, however, he perceived more confusion "in the interrelationship between US advisers and Viet-Nam opposite numbers in military units than he had previously thought." Moreover, Cottrell concluded "we have reached bottom in South Vietnam and that he is not sure whether we have made the upturn yet."[100]

As stated in the previous chapter, President Kennedy in January had directed the establishment of the Special Group on Counter-Insurgency under General Taylor because he was unhappy with the progress made in this area. The group had specific authority to monitor counterinsurgency efforts in Thailand and Laos as well as Vietnam. To ensure high-level administration attention, the committee met regularly and included senior members of the National Security establishment.[101]

Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric and General Lemnitzer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, represented the Defense Department on the Committee. In addition, at the request of the President, Secretary McNamara ordered the Joint Chiefs to appoint to the Joint Staff a general officer responsible for counterinsurgency. General Lemnitzer assigned Marine Major General Victor A. Krulak to the newly created billet of Special Assistant for Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities. In this capacity, he reported directly to the Director of the Joint Staff and to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Among his duties was to assist General Lemnitzer in his responsibilities as a member of the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency). According to Krulak this group headed by General Taylor "gives us the mechanism to face consolidated aggressive power with consolidated quick-reacting power. I believe the Special Group scheme is the counterinsurgency answer—at the

Washington level."[102] Yet as an Army historian observed, many of President Kennedy's counterinsurgency experts advocated a "super agency" in Washington that would parallel the American counterinsurgency organization in Vietnam. His history argues that both the Vietnam Task Force and the Special Group for Counterinsurgency "proved to be inadequate substitutes for such a superagency."[103]

War Clouds Loom over Laos

Despite the growing buildup in Vietnam, other security matters in the spring of 1962, such as differences with Russia over Berlin and nuclear testing as well as the question of Laos, tended to overshadow for a time the insurgency threat of the Viet Cong to the Diem regime. By March, Kennedy administration policymakers began to fear that the situation in Laos was unraveling and that the peace talks in Geneva would be for naught. Despite a commitment to recognize Souvanna Phouma, the neutralist leader as Prime Minister, the Laotian factions continued to disagree about the makeup of the proposed cabinet. General Phoumi Nasavan, the head of the rightist bloc, continued to hedge on any agreement and even had reinforced with Royal Laotian troops an isolated outpost at Nam Ha in northern Laos. Occasional limited flare-ups between the Royalists and the Communist Pathet Lao troops continued during this period. At the March Honolulu meeting General Lemnitzer and Admiral Felt even proposed full support of Phoumi and his Army and the possible implementation of SEATO Plan 5 relative to Laos.[104]

At this point the Kennedy administration decided against any move into Laos. Assistant Secretary Harriman visited Laos and tried to place pressure upon Phoumi to come to some form of agreement. The United States continued to support a negotiated settlement in Laos and avoided at this time any overt action against the Communists. This would come to an end on 5 May when the Pathot Lao easily overran Nam Ha and forced Phoumi's troops to flee in disorder. This time, President Kennedy ordered the partial implementation of Plan 5, with the deployment of a Marine force to Thailand. This would have repercussions for both Vietnam and Laos.

8

The Continuing War in Vietnam and the Laotian Interlude

The April Debate about the Course of the War

As the Kennedy administration continued its buildup of the advisory effort in South Vietnam, the entire question of US involvement in Vietnam once more came under review. Two senior US Ambassadors provided the impetus in separate correspondence with President Kennedy. In the first instance, on 4 April 1962, Chester Bowles, the former Under Secretary of State and now Ambassador-at-large, sent President Kennedy a 54-page memorandum upon his return from a fact-finding trip to the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. As far as the situations in Vietnam and Laos were concerned, Mr. Bowles reiterated mainly the same views that he had expressed earlier in October and November. Essentially the Ambassador called for a series of negotiations with the Soviets that would lead to the establishment of a bloc of neutralist nations in Southeast Asia that would include both Laos and South Vietnam. Mr. Bowles argued that in Laos the United States should continue its policy of supporting Souvanna Phouma and the negotiations in Geneva. Ambassador Bowles, however, disagreed with accelerating American assistance to the existing South Vietnamese government. He believed that the South Vietnamese government under President Diem would never be able to defeat the Viet Cong insurgency and that the best that could be hoped for was a sort of "an uneasy fluid stalemate with the Viet Cong."[1]

In their dissent from this view, the Joint Chiefs of Staff commented that Bowles' suggestions would be disastrous for US policy in Asia. They recommended instead that the administration carry out its present course of action "vigorously to a successful conclusion."[2]

While Bowles' influence in the Kennedy administration had diminished since the so-called "Thanksgiving Massacre," the second set of recommendations for the President came from the US Ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith. For some time Mr. Galbraith had acted as an informal advisor to the President on foreign policy issues outside of his official duties. During a ten-day period in late March and early April 1962, Ambassador Galbraith was back in Washington, ostensibly to testify before the Senate Foreign Affairs Relations Committee. In his acerbic manner, the Ambassador described his testimony as occupying "one morning and hardly worth the trip." The Washington visit, however, provided him an opportunity to gauge congressional opinion and, more important, to exchange views with the President and senior administration advisors. On 1 April Mr. Galbraith and Arthur Schlesinger of the President's staff were dinner guests of the Kennedys at their country home in Virginia. According to Ambassador Galbraith, he and the President had a wide-ranging discussion that evening including such diverse subjects as the European Common Market, Massachusetts politics, and "South Vietnam as usual." President Kennedy asked the Ambassador to meet with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara before he left for his post.[3]

Ambassador Galbraith in his conversation with the Defense Secretary two days later found Mr. McNamara to be "deeply sensitive to the dangers that I foresee in our involvement in Saigon." In a personal letter to President Kennedy before he departed for India, the Ambassador wrote that he and Secretary McNamara were "in basic agreement on most matters and for the rest I think Bob appreciated having some arguments from my side of the fence." Mr. Galbraith also reported that he had a couple of "long discussions" with Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Averell Harriman. In his covering letter for an attached memorandum, he stated that the latter document reflected "our combined views." While acknowledging that the attachment was "of no breathtaking novelty," he wanted the President to meet with "Governor Harriman at some early date" after reading it.[4]

In his memorandum—incidentally dated 4 April, the same date as the memorandum from Mr. Bowles—Ambassador Galbraith added a further dissenting voice to the administration's Vietnam policy. He counseled against being identified too closely with the Diem regime, which could result in the United States becoming "the colonial force in the area . . . [to] bleed as the French did." The Ambassador suggested that the President should seek a "political solution" and that the United States support in South Vietnam "any broadly based non-Communist government that is free from external interference." He alerted President Kennedy to the fact that the International Control Commission headed by India was about to report flagrant violations of the Geneva Treaty both by the Democratic Government of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and by the Diem government in the South aided and abetted by the United States. Ambassador Galbraith advocated that the United States use the report as a gambit to begin negotiations with either the Russians or even possibly the North Vietnamese to end the war in South Vietnam with the Viet Cong.[5]

The Galbraith recommendations received much more serious consideration than the Bowles proposals. The President discussed the former on the following day with

Assistant Secretary Harriman. In this meeting, which included Assistant Presidential Security Advisor Michael V. Forrestal, who had replaced Walt Rostow, Mr. Harriman declared that he agreed in part with Galbraith's conclusions, but "he had difficulty with others." He supported the Ambassador's suggestion that US military participation in Vietnam should be minimal. He showed President Kennedy a draft dispatch that chided US Ambassador to Vietnam Frederick (Fritz) Nolting for press reports about statements by US advisors concerning US leadership and involvement in South Vietnamese operations. The President immediately approved the draft, which was to be signed by Secretary Rusk. Mr. Harriman also agreed with Ambassador Galbraith that the United States should attempt to use the ICC report to explore the possibility of bringing about negotiations. He objected, however, to any "neutral solution" for Vietnam. Moreover, while believing that President Diem "was a losing horse in the long run," the Assistant Secretary argued that the United States had no other choice at the present time. He stated that US policy was to support the government and people of South Vietnam and not Mr. Diem personally. The President directed Assistant Secretary Harriman to prepare a draft of possible instructions to Ambassador Galbraith for the Indian government to explore the possibility of the North Vietnamese agreeing to a mutual withdrawal of forces with the United States from South Vietnam. President Kennedy then declared that he wanted the United States "to be prepared to seize upon any favorable moment to reduce . . . [its] involvement, recognizing that the moment might yet be some time away."[6]

During the month of April the question of possible negotiations to settle the Vietnam question continued to roil within the administration. In the Defense Department, General Lemnitzer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, addressed a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara adamantly opposed to any suggestion about reversing the existing policy. The Joint Staff prepared a suggested reply to the Galbraith memorandum for the Secretary. Haydn Williams, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, forwarded the proposed response to Secretary McNamara. In his covering note for the draft, Mr. Williams observed that Assistant Secretary Harriman considered Galbraith's memorandum to the President "a private communication" and therefore there was no need for the State Department to take any formal action. Nevertheless, Sterling Cottrell, chairman of the Vietnam Task Force, had reviewed the attached Defense Department draft and his "comments [were] considered."[7]

The Joint Staff draft, like the Lemnitzer letter to Secretary McNamara, took strong exception to Galbraith's recommendations. It began by stating that the administration's new policy measures in South Vietnam had not been in effect "long enough to demonstrate their full effectiveness." The document repeated the refrain from the previous JCS response to Ambassador Bowles: "Any reversal of US policy could have disastrous effects, not only upon our relationship with South Vietnam, but with the rest of our Asian and other allies as well."[8] It quoted from a recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) to support its argument that:

> the long-range Communist Bloc objectives in Southeast Asia are to eliminate US influence and presence and to establish Communist regimes throughout the area.

> Although the Communist powers have some differences . . . they have thus far maintained a basic unity of ultimate objectives and a high degree of policy coordination with respect to Southeast Asia.[9]

The authors of the draft then went on to contradict what they considered fallacies in Galbraith's premises. They maintained that despite certain weaknesses in the Diem regime, the South Vietnamese government had recently shown some progress in mobilizing its populace to support the war effort. Moreover, they rejected any comparison "between the present US and past French roles in Vietnam." Based on the viewpoint that the failure of the South Vietnamese to defeat the Communist insurgency would lead to the loss of all of Southeast Asia, the authors declared that such a result was "unacceptable" to the interests of the United States. Interestingly, Secretary McNamara did not sign the memorandum, declaring that he had talked to Ambassador Galbraith and that a reply was unnecessary. The Defense Department informed the White House to that effect.[10]

Ambassador Galbraith continued his arguments in support of a possible diplomatic solution to the Vietnam quandary in a dispute with Ambassador Nolting. On 16 April, in a dispatch to the State Department, Mr. Nolting had voiced his fervent opposition to an international conference suggested by Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia. He believed such a meeting would result in a call for the neutralization of South Vietnam. Basically, the American Ambassador contended that such a conference would result in the destabilization of South Vietnam and the fall of the Diem government. According to Ambassador Nolting, there was "no point whatsoever in convening a new international conference on Vietnam involving Communist regime in North Vietnam since it is violating basic purpose of Geneva Conference of 1954—re-establishment of peace in Vietnam." He maintained that if any part of Vietnam should be neutralized it should be the North.[11]

Back in his post in New Delhi and an addressee on the cable, Ambassador Galbraith immediately challenged Mr. Nolting's assertions. Directing his comments to Assistant Secretary Harriman, Mr. Galbraith acknowledged that South Vietnam was outside of his "official range of concern" but stated that he believed it to be "our most dangerous problem." He dismissed Ambassador Nolting's contention that negotiations would undermine the South Vietnamese government and the morale of the people, declaring, "If we must fear losing our position vis-à-vis a government as utterly dependent on our military and charitable support as that of Diem our diplomacy is in a sorry condition."[12]

While respecting Mr. Harriman's judgment as to timing, Ambassador Galbraith argued that an international conference could possibly alter the debate from a search for a military solution to a diplomatic one. Observing that the "search for diplomatic solutions is the business of diplomacy," the Ambassador emphasized that both sides had violated the 1954 Geneva agreements. He suggested that a conference would focus world public opinion on the problem, which he believed would restrain both sides and lay behind the prevailing cease-fire in Laos.[13]

On 1 May, the Vietnam debate came to an abrupt end for the time being. On that date President Kennedy presided over a meeting of senior advisors that included National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell

Gilpatric, the President's military advisor General Taylor, Army Chief of Staff General George Decker, Assistant Secretary of State Harriman, and Director of the Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research Roger Hilsman. General Decker and Assistant Secretary Gilpatric sat in on the meeting in place of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Lemnitzer and Secretary McNamara, respectively, who were attending a NATO meeting in Greece. Mr. Hilsman, who kept notes of the meeting, wrote that Mr. Gilpatric brought up Galbraith's memorandum, which he described as a call to "negotiate a coalition-type, neutralized South Viet-Nam." According to Hilsman, he and Harriman "vigorously opposed this recommendation and the President decided against it."[14]

Once More Laos

The subject of Laos was probably the wrong comparison for Ambassador Galbraith to make to support his case for negotiations over Vietnam. From the beginning of the year the Kennedy administration policymakers began to fear that the situation in Laos was unraveling and that the peace talks in Geneva would be for naught.[15] Despite a commitment to recognize the neutralist leader Souvanna Phouma as prime minister, the Laotian factions continued to disagree about the makeup of the proposed cabinet.

As late as mid-December 1961, wary US Defense Department officials still had expected the Geneva conference to conclude soon with the announcement of the formation of a Laotian government of national unity.[16] Notwithstanding American anticipations and diplomatic threats to withhold economic payments to the Royalists, General Phoumi Nasavan, the head of the rightist bloc, continued to resist any compromise. He told one member of the American Embassy in Laos that "he saw no use in having American support if all it meant was surrender to the enemy."[17] For all practical purposes negotiations between the three factions in Laos came to a standstill with the departure of Souvanna Phouma for Paris.

Despite continuing violations by both sides, the informal truce negotiated the previous May between the Pathet Lao and the Royalists had more or less held. General Phoumi had regained confidence in the strength of his own forces and during December even had recouped some of his territorial losses. By the end of the year the Laotian Army was engaged in clearing operations in both northern and southern Laos. In the northwest corner of Laos, the Royalists were extending their hold on an isolated outpost at Nam Tha to both the east and the west.[18]

According to US intelligence estimates, the Royal Army had made a great improvement since its near collapse the previous spring. American analysts believed that Phoumi's forces "would have a slight edge if fighting were resumed on a pattern comparable to that prior to the cease-fire."[19] Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, in January 1962 reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he considered that the Laotian Royalists "should be able to hold their own" against the present Communist forces in Laos. He added the proviso,

however, that "overt introduction of organized [Communist] forces across the Laotian border would add a new dimension to the situation."[20]

By this time there was a growing breach in Washington between the State and Defense departments about US policy in Laos. Under the leadership of Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs W. Averell Harriman, the State Department pushed for greater pressure on General Phoumi to come to an agreement on the formation of a new government.[21] In the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff dissented. On 5 January, General Lemnitzer in a memo to Secretary McNamara took exception to press reports from Geneva heralding the possibility of a completed agreement between the opposing forces. The Chairman observed that several key issues were still in dispute, and he doubted their quick resolution. He believed that the Communists had not "abandoned their goal of communist domination of Laos."[22]

The main thrust of the JCS document, however, was an argument against current American policy. According to General Lemnitzer, US diplomatic and military assistance endeavors in Laos "have been, and continue to be, at cross purposes in some respects." He argued that US diplomatic restraints and demands upon General Phoumi, "though well intended, are having the effect of undermining the prestige, determination, and effectiveness of the legal pro-Western government and its armed forces." The Joint Chiefs of Staff contended that there was no reason for the United States to "seek a peaceful settlement at all costs," and that the Royal Government could "and should negotiate from a position of strength."[23]

Although not necessarily endorsing the Chairman's views on the political situation in Laos, on 12 January Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric forwarded General Lemnitzer's letter to President Kennedy. He observed, however, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff's military assessment was in line with that of the most recent US intelligence estimates in Laos. Mr. Gilpatric then remarked that "we can take advantage of time effectively to further improve the situation." His basic recommendation was that the Laotians consolidate their present positions."[24]

Four days later Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Paul Nitze maintained Defense Department pressure on the White House for some alteration to the present policy. He too mentioned the perceived improvement in the Laotian military during the previous year which "convinced . . . [him] that a change in the current US objective in Laos is fully warranted—perhaps even mandatory." According to Mr. Nitze, the best solution was for the United States to support a suggestion by the American country team in Laos that would keep Souvanna Phouma as prime minister but with two deputy prime ministers, General Phoumi and Prince Souphanouvong, the leader of the Pathet Lao. While Souvanna would maintain his office at Luang Prabang, Phoumi would head an "administrative center" in Vientiane. Similarly, Souphanouvong would establish his "administrative center" at the Pathet Lao headquarters in Khang Khay. Mr. Nitze held that this proposal, while not ideal, would fulfill most American aims. It would also allow, in the event that the Geneva talks failed, a de facto partition of the country that would not necessarily be inimical to American national interests in Laos.[25]

Despite the Defense Department objections, President Kennedy supported Assistant Secretary Harriman's efforts to place pressure on General Phoumi to reach agreement with Souvanna Phouma in the makeup of a new government. In a cable to Ambassador Winthrop Brown in Laos on 27 January, Under Secretary of State George Ball informed him that "it has been concluded highest level that final showdown with Phoumi can no longer be deferred." Under Secretary Ball observed, however, that instructions in his note were to be carried out only if discussions "do not produce agreement by Phoumi to cooperate to our satisfaction."[26]

By this time Communist military successes on the battlefield had broken the bubble of optimism about the great improvement in the Royalist forces. The Pathet Lao undertook several offensive actions, with the most significant occurring near Nam Tha in northern Laos. At Nam Tha the Laotian Communist forces, reinforced by North Vietnamese units, wiped out the previous gains of the government troops and surrounded the garrison. In his analysis of the action, Admiral Felt observed that he did not believe that the enemy forces had any intention to take the town of Nam Tha. According to the Pacific commander, the Communists were responding to the offensive moves of the government forces in the Nam Tha sector. When the Royalist troops approached sensitive strategic areas, the admiral maintained that the enemy answered with "their Sunday punch," the use of North Vietnamese regulars.[27] Brigadier General Andrew J. Boyle, the Chief of the US Military Assistance Group in Laos, was more alarmed, stating that he was "not so concerned that Laotian Government forces failed, as that was predictable in light of the enemy buildup, but . . . disturbed because RLG commanders and troops . . . have 'already put on track shoes and have been ready to break and run at first indication of VM [Viet Minh] presence.'"[28] Under Secretary of State George Ball concluded that the recent fighting provided "incontrovertible proof of FAR's [Forces Armées Royal] fundamental weakness as compared with PL/VM [Pathet Lao/Viet Minh] strength."[29]

This fighting forced the Americans to revise their intelligence estimates about the comparative strength and combat readiness of the Phoumi and Communist forces. What was especially worrisome was the increasing role played by the North Vietnamese. On 11 January US intelligence sources credited enemy strength to total 34,000 personnel. This included 19,000 Pathet Lao; 6,000 troops under Kong Le, loyal to Souvanna Phouma; 4,000 Montagnard tribesmen; and some 5,100 North Vietnamese divided between 3,500 combat troops and 1,600 serving as cadre to Pathet Lao units. The Laotian government forces were more than double that of the Communist forces. The Royal Laotian Army numbered 51,500 regulars, reinforced by 11,000 local defensive troops and 9,000 Meo tribesman.[30]

Despite the apparent numerical advantage the Phoumi forces enjoyed, the Communist troops during the January skirmishes appeared to have the upper hand. In a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 January, Admiral Felt attributed their success to the presence of battle-hardened North Vietnamese soldiers on the battlefield. According to Admiral Felt, the soldiers of the Royal Laotian Army viewed the North Vietnamese as "ten feet tall." Moreover, the admiral argued, the North Vietnamese had

recently infiltrated at least two regular battalions as well as additional cadre into Laos. According to the Pacific commander, he now believed that there were a minimum of 7,400 North Vietnamese troops (5,000 in regular units and 2,400 cadre) in the country. In fact, he declared that "an estimate as high as 10,000 is not unreasonable."[31]

Four days later a National Intelligence Estimate by US intelligence agencies in Washington basically confirmed Admiral Felt's numbers, showing a total of 9,000 North Vietnamese soldiers in Laos (6,000 in combat units and 3,000 as cadre or in support). Both the new Estimate and CINCPAC's message also credited the Communist forces with greater flexibility and better equipment in both armor and artillery than the government's troops. The intelligence analysts acknowledged that their previous report of 11 January was in error when it contained the statement that the Laotian Royal Army would have the edge in any resumption of the fighting. Admiral Felt in his message concluded that "under present military situation we must anticipate that Viet Minh forces need only to attack strongly at given points to propel FAR units into ground-giving retreats."[32]

Both Admiral Felt and the intelligence analysts in Washington expressed concern about the plight of the Laotian Army. In his report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the admiral commented that the government forces had no significant reserve. He noted that in Nam Tha the isolated garrison would "require early and substantial reinforcement from [a] less active area to hold what they have." According to the NIE, the Communists were in position to "seize and hold certain key positions now held by government troops." Furthermore, if the enemy were "reinforced by additional combat units from North Vietnam, they could quickly overrun the remainder of Laos."[33]

Despite their success on the battlefield in January, the Communists made no attempt to launch a full-scale offensive. In the Nam Tha sector, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese regulars consisted of about five infantry battalions with 120-mm mortars in support. While lobbing the occasional mortar into the government infantry positions and the small airstrip there, the enemy made little attempt on the ground to take the compound or surrounding town. In the meantime the Royalists reinforced the defensive garrison. By 7 February five infantry battalions and support units including artillery were in position at Nam Tha to hold the town. From 21 January to 7 February, the government had suffered casualties of only one dead and seventeen wounded.[34]

In the meantime, the Kennedy administration looked to Geneva and obtaining some agreement among the Laotians to form a unity government. At the same time, the United States continued its efforts to bring General Phoumi and his nominal prime minister, Prince Boun Oum, to compromise on their objections to the makeup of Souvanna Phouma's proposed cabinet. As a first measure, the US administration withheld its January assistance payment to the Laotian Government.[35] Following the January fighting around Nam Tha, Assistant Secretary of State Harriman stated at a high-level interdepartmental meeting on 6 February that he was still operating "under a directive by the President to seek disengagement in Laos."[36]

During the next three months the American government continued its efforts to bring about reconciliation between Souvanna Phouma and General Phoumi or failing

that to isolate Phoumi. In effect, the United States was attempting to strengthen the hand of Souvanna Phouma and the so-called neutralist forces. While attempting to place pressure upon General Phoumi by withholding its economic monthly payment to the Royalists, the United States was reluctant to cut back on its military advisory support to Laos.

On 21 February President Kennedy met with bipartisan congressional leadership to explain American foreign policy including the situation in Laos. He asked Assistant Secretary Harriman, Secretary McNamara, and General Lemnitzer to update the congressional delegation on the latest twists and turns of events there and possible American courses of action. Mr. Harriman declared that he believed the Soviet Union was bargaining in good faith at Geneva. He observed that there were limits, however, in what the negotiations could accomplish. The Assistant Secretary noted that each of the three factions in Laos had its own military forces and that the establishment of a coalition government there would be difficult to achieve. He then stated, nevertheless, that it was obvious that Souvanna Phouma was not a Communist and was sincere in his efforts to form a coalition with the other factions. Whether he would be successful in his endeavor, according to Mr. Harriman, was "something that we cannot predict will happen with certainty." At that point President Kennedy interrupted to agree that US policy was based upon the hope for successful negotiations at Geneva. However, he argued that the only reason that the Communists had not overrun Laos previously was "the threat of US intervention."[37]

After General Lemnitzer and Secretaries McNamara and Rusk outlined both the military and political options available to the United States, several members of the congressional delegation asked pointed questions. It became very apparent that there was little support among the congressional leaders for any intervention in Laos by regular units of the US Armed Forces. Congressman John W. McCormack, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, voiced the view of most of the legislators there at the meeting when he observed that while South Vietnam might be important to US national interests, "it would be disastrous to become committed in Laos." Senators Richard Russell, Chairman of the Armed Forces Committee; J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee; Majority Leader Mike Mansfield; and Minority Leader Everett Dirkson all expressed similar sentiments. In fact, Senator Dirkson told President Kennedy that despite previous reservations about the administration's Southeast Asia policy in a party publication, "it was clear that the Republicans fully supported the President's position."[38]

US Contingency Planning for Southeast Asia

In his presentation to the congressional leaders at the meeting, General Lemnitzer had outlined SEATO Plan 5. According to the Chairman, it would require 40,000 troops, about one half consisting of US forces, to occupy five strategic towns along the Mekong River. The concept was for the SEATO forces to relieve the Royal Army from static defensive positions and free it to mount mobile operations so that it could

take the offensive against the Pathet Lao. Despite claiming considerable improvement in the Royalist armed forces, General Lemnitzer admitted that they were no match for the Pathet Lao reinforced by North Vietnamese regulars. Moreover, the enemy forces, supplied with new tanks and artillery, now outgunned the Royalists. The question thus remained how effective a SEATO intervention based upon Plan 5 would be in the event of a serious enemy offensive in Laos.[39]

Since the crisis in Spring of 1961 in Laos, the Defense Department, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department, and indeed the entire National Security hierarchy including the President and his senior advisors, had examined and reexamined the military contingency planning for Southeast Asia. SEATO Plan 5 had remained the core of any US intervention in Laos. Admiral Felt, the Pacific commander, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff would maintain throughout the following months that Plan 5 or some variation of it was the only one that contained "an agreed concept for operations involving specific forces under a preplanned command arrangement."[40]

In mid-August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had formed a special assessment group under Army Brigadier General William A. Craig to explore "possible resumption of full-scale hostilities in Laos." After an inspection tour of South Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos, the Craig team returned to Washington in September. They found a lack of leadership in the Laotian Army and a chaotic logistic system. General Craig described General Phoumi as a "driving force . . . [but] a poor organizer who does not know how to delegate." The team believed that the situation in Laos was critical and, moreover, they recommended that the United States take the initial steps "now, to implement SEATO Plan 5, or a suitable variation to permit the multinational forces concerned to be in the desired positions before the end of the rainy season."[41]

At the same time, the Kennedy administration had continued to formulate revisions to the SEATO plan. As early as 31 August, Secretary of State Rusk had proposed to the President that the United States undertake talks with its SEATO allies and possibly with South Vietnam to enlarge the plan. The Secretary argued that if the Communists renewed offensive operations, the objective of the allies under the expanded concept would be the expulsion of Communist forces from all of southern Laos and the Mekong River line, including the Luang Prabang area. He observed, however, that to achieve this mission, Plan 5 would require Thailand and South Vietnam, and possibly the Philippines, Pakistan, Australia, and New Zealand, to commit additional forces. President Kennedy gave the go-ahead to continue with the planning, but he rejected a second proposal to conduct a training exercise in Thailand under this expanded concept.[42]

Following up on this proposal, Secretary Rusk sent messages to the US Ambassadors to Thailand and South Vietnam as well as other SEATO allies to investigate the possibility of making these changes to the plan. One of the main objectives of this maneuver was to increase the involvement of Asian nations both in the military planning and in addressing the Laotian problem. Under this projected revision of Plan 5, the Thais would provide about 10,000 men and the South Vietnamese, 5,000, although South Vietnam was officially barred by the 1954 Geneva Treaty from belonging to SEATO.[43]

The responses from the leaders of Thailand and Vietnam, however, were hardly encouraging. General Sarit, the Thai premier, told US Ambassador Kenneth Young that an enlarged Plan 5 was "satisfactory" as "a concept without commitment." Given this tepid reaction, Ambassador Young decided not to mention the 10,000-man figure to the Thai leader.[44] While more enthusiastic about possible SEATO military intervention in Laos, President Diem's response was even more discouraging as he stated that "he had no troops to spare" for such an operation.[45]

The answers from the SEATO allies were mixed. The French government, not unexpectedly, denied out of hand that there was a military solution to the Laotian situation.[46] On the other hand, the British Chiefs of Staff gave a more nuanced reply. They agreed that "there would be military advantage to increasing the size of a SEATO force in an intervention in Laos." These benefits would include protection of the flanks of the allied units and also securing both the Thai border and lines of communication. The British, however, also pointed to several negative aspects of the plan. Namely, they doubted that even with these reinforcements, including the South Vietnamese, that the allies had sufficient troops to clear the Pathet Lao from southern Laos. Moreover, the British feared that such intervention might result in counter actions by the North Vietnamese and Communist Chinese.[47]

The Australians basically echoed some of the British Chiefs' views of the expanded SEATO Plan 5. Their general staff stated that the current plan "would be unlikely to achieve its objectives in the existing situation." They also agreed that the expanded plan was "militarily more realistic." Somewhat more optimistic than their British counterpart, the Australian staff believed that the Laotian Royalist Forces together with the SEATO reinforcements "could secure southern Laos up to the 17th Parallel," and could "hold their own" north of that line. The Australians, like the British, wondered about the reaction of the Laotian Communist neighbors, China and North Vietnam. The Australians declared that they were opposed to any intervention unless the SEATO alliance was "willing and able to meet also the heavier burdens that would be involved in substantial commitments over and above the forces now proposed to be deployed." The US Joint Staff told the American Joint Chiefs that it too "was in general agreement with the Australian views."[48]

At the same time the Kennedy administration explored expanding SEATO Plan 5, they also studied other military alternatives to that plan, which even in its expanded version depended upon "an overt resumption of hostilities." Both the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff worked on a plan based upon the premise that Communist aggression in Laos would be subtler than a flagrant violation of the cease-fire. The thought was that the Communist forces, through minor breaches and skirmishes, sabotage, infiltration, and general subversion, would eventually undermine the Royalist Army. In this alternate plan, largely drafted in the State Department and then submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their input, the administration attempted to address this latter situation. While doing this, the objective of the United States in Laos remained to reach agreement in Geneva with the Communists and with Souvanna Phouma on a

neutral Laos. In the event the Communists remained uncooperative, the political goal of any intervention would be "limited to the restoration to the RLG control of most of Laos" except the Communist-controlled northern sections of the country. In effect, the mission of this plan was the de facto partition of Laos with the goal of denying the Communists a free access to South Vietnam.[49]

After drawing up the initial draft of the plan, the State Department asked the Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide "the concept of military actions in support of the political objective." In their analysis, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed implementing "a SEATO Plan 5 plus" that would involve over 104,000 men. These would include some 5,500 US military, over 11,000 Thai, 4,400 Commonwealth, 1,400 Pakistani, 2,700 South Vietnamese, and 79,300 Laotian combat troops. In addition, they suggested a requirement for 18,300 support and reserve forces (11,000 US and 7,300 non-US) to be stationed in Thailand. These troops did not include US naval task forces or a 6,000-man SEATO general reserve in their parent countries that possibly could be called upon. The Joint Chiefs of Staff observed that all of the US forces considered in this plan were presently assigned to the Pacific Command and could probably "be deployed into Laos . . . [within] 12 to 96 hours."[50]

According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US, South Vietnamese, and Thai units would be the vanguard of the allied force. The follow-on Commonwealth and Pakistani troops would deploy to Laos in the next echelon, which could range from seventy-two hours to two weeks after the initial troops. If these units were not available, additional American forces would take their place. As in most of the SEATO-5 plans, the allied forces would occupy the main population centers along the Mekong River in Laos. Initially, they would remain in these areas while the United States called upon the United Nations for the international community to take some action to remedy the situation. Failing any attempt by the UN to resolve the crisis, the allied command in Laos then would move the Thai troops into western Sayaboury Province to protect Luang Prabang. The South Vietnamese units would operate in eastern Laos inside the common border with their country. According to the concept, the United States would attempt to forestall any major intervention by North Vietnam through a "massive deterrent" of air power. Although the hope was to confine any combat to Laos, the plan addressed additional contingencies if the North Vietnamese mounted an offensive within Laos or if Communist China entered the conflict. If these events occurred, the mission would change from the defense of Laos to the defense of Southeast Asia.[51]

On 3 October General Lemnitzer forwarded to Secretary McNamara an "outline program for limited holding actions in Southeast Asia," apparently based in large part on the above plan. The authors of the outline assumed the failure of a political agreement, increasing Communist military pressure on Laos, and that the United States would elect not to carry out SEATO Plan 5 or a variation thereof. Given this context, the American aims would be to delay further Communist expansion, to maintain "fluidity of military situation to hinder further hardening of Communist area and positions," and to impress upon the Communist nations, especially the Russians, that "the scope of our actions were limited."

At the same time, the American Joint Staff suggested that the United States could carry out certain measures to support its Laotian policy, such as deploying an infantry battalion for training in Thailand or stationing an infantry battalion in South Vietnam.[52]

In forwarding this plan, General Lemnitzer wanted the Secretary to know that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had serious reservations about this policy. He observed that the State Department had drawn up both the assumptions and the objectives of the plan. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that these created a self-defeating situation, basically conceding the initiative to the enemy. According to the Chairman, it gave "our friends no hope" and undermined the "US military effort in the Far East." He informed the Secretary that although the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not object to the use of this plan for briefing President Kennedy, they "recommended strongly that the President be advised of their views."[53]

Not everyone within the Defense Department shared the Joint Chiefs of Staff's opinions about a more hard line policy in Laos. In response to the Chairman's memoranda, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric doubted the rationale behind any US troop intervention in that troubled nation. His "fundamental question . . . [was] the feasibility and desirability of undertaking an operation" that might involve US divisions that might be required for the continuing crisis in Berlin. He suggested that President Kennedy might very well judge the plans on the "risks of getting into a serious two-front situation."[54]

In answering Gilpatric's concerns, General Lemnitzer explained that "over a period of time" the Joint Chiefs of Staff had studied this problem and had projected several possible options applicable both to Laos as well as to all of Southeast Asia. They believed that several of these proposals called for "certain military actions short of US intervention that might have retrieved the situation." In a bleak assessment, General Lemnitzer stated that now "the time was past" when such measures "could reverse the rapidly worsening situation." He repeated the mantra that "execution of SEATO Plan 5, or a suitable variation thereof was now the minimum commensurate with the situation" and argued "there was no feasible military alternative of lesser magnitude which will prevent the loss of Laos, South Vietnam, [and] ultimately Southeast Asia." If the crisis in Europe erupted, the Chairman contended that the United States would have to mobilize but "could not afford to become preoccupied with Berlin to the extent that we close our eyes to the [critical] situation in Southeast Asia."[55]

General Maxwell Taylor presented the dilemma facing the United States in a memorandum to President Kennedy. He observed that "while a decision to plan is not a decision to implement . . . we should have the forces available" to carry out the requirements of these Southeast Asia plans as well as meet the US responsibilities in Europe. At this time, General Taylor did not believe the administration had sufficient forces on hand to achieve both missions. According to the President's military advisor, the choice remained between mobilizing additional forces or accepting the present limitations on American military power in Southeast Asia.[56]

As indicated in the messages of General Lemnitzer and General Taylor, the causes behind this flurry of contingency planning for Southeast Asia were the continuing

unsettled state of affairs in Laos together with the growing deterioration of the military situation in South Vietnam. The President scheduled a meeting of the National Security Council on 11 October to study the choices available to him in Southeast Asia. At this juncture, the Kennedy administration decided to focus upon Vietnam as its major priority in Southeast Asia, probably because the contending Laotian factions agreed three days earlier in principle that Souvanna Phouma should resume the premiership of the country. The United States in the meantime would continue its diplomatic efforts through the Geneva Conference to reach a political agreement on Laos. On 13 October 1961 National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy issued NSAM 104 on Southeast Asia enumerating the six decisions that President Kennedy had approved at the meeting. Only one of the six specifically applied to Laos. It merely stated that the United States should "initiate guerrilla ground action, including use of US advisers if necessary, against Communist aerial resupply missions in the Tchepone area." Even this action in a sense related to Vietnam in that this area was a key part of the Communist Ho Chi Minh infiltration trail through Laos into South Vietnam. The final decision of the 11 October meeting was the sending of General Taylor and Walt Rostow to Vietnam with instructions to report back to the President their findings there. The NSAM, however, concluded with a vague paragraph stating: "The President also agreed that certain other actions . . . concurred in by the agencies concerned, but which do not require specific Presidential approval, should be undertaken on an urgent basis."[57]

On the day after the issuance of the NSAM, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned Admiral Felt in Hawaii to refine certain contingency plans, specifically his Operational Plan 32–59.[58] CINCPAC Plan 32–59 underlay the basis for any US "unilateral action" in Southeast Asia. Just as important, it also, in its different stages, covered "action up to and including action with Communist China" as well as being the foundation for the various SEATO plans, including SEATO Plan 5.[59] In response to this request, the Pacific commander modified his plan 32–59 (Phase II Vietnam) and gave it "a SEATO label." This plan would be carried out in tandem with SEATO Plan 5 in Laos.[60]

During the next few months the contingency planning for Laos continued in fits and starts. By the end of November Admiral Felt's Pacific Command headquarters had submitted another proposed change to SEATO Plan 5 for Laos. The planners recommended that a third task force, code-named Force Charlie, be added to Forces Alpha and Bravo. In the event of implementation, Task Force Charlie would consist of two US Army battle groups, which would be responsible for the southern sector of Laos from Seno south to Pakse. Force Bravo, now consisting of three battalions—one from the United Kingdom and the other two from New Zealand and Australia, respectively—would take over the central sector. The remaining group, Force Alpha, was to consist of two US Marine battalion landing teams, reinforced by two Thai Army battalions and one Pakistani Army battalion. Alpha would hold the northern sector from Vientiene south to Thaknek. On 26 December 1961 the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the new CINCPAC plan for presentation to the SEATO council.[61]

At the beginning of 1962, with apparent agreement in sight at Geneva to resolve the Laotian conflict, US planners reversed their efforts. From planning the insertion of US combat forces, they turned to the problems involved in withdrawing the American advisors and Special Forces teams already in Laos. While looking to reduce the US military group in Laos, CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff did so reluctantly. General Lemnitzer observed in early February that the US military advisors should remain with the Laotians as long as possible. Moreover, he recommended that when they were withdrawn they be reassigned to the US Military Assistance Advisory Group in Thailand. There they would be in position to return to Laos if the situation required.[62]

While continuing planning for the possible withdrawal, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also argued the need for a more coherent strategy in Southeast Asia. On 5 February Admiral George W. Anderson, the Chief of Naval Operations, submitted a memorandum entitled "Military Courses of Action in Support of United States National Objectives" to the rest of the Chiefs. Basically Admiral Anderson wanted the Joint Staff to undertake a study of possible contingencies in Southeast Asia to determine the US military objectives there. The Joint Chiefs of Staff referred the memorandum to a staff special study group for Southeast Asia established the previous autumn, officially called the Joint Strategic Survey Council, under Air Force Major General J. Stanley Holtoner.[63]

Prior to providing an answer to Admiral Anderson's question, the Holtoner Committee on 24 February presented a talking paper to General Lemnitzer for a meeting with the President relative to Laos. In this meeting, the committee recommended that the Chairman should emphasize that the overall US objective in that country was to deny Laos "as an avenue of infiltration into South Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia." Furthermore, the committee recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff have the Joint Staff undertake "active planning and preparation . . . toward measures necessary to at least secure" these approaches.[64]

On 9 March the committee presented its formal response to the Anderson query. It reiterated its previous recommendations and in fact suggested an even more aggressive policy in Laos. The study group observed that if the United States had to act on its plans, the objective should extend beyond securing the Laotian approaches to its neighbors but rather "to consolidate Laos under friendly control." As to the political situation, the committee agreed that the United States should support a "Souvanna" government in Laos that was "truly neutral." While recognizing that such a regime would probably not be able to prevent Communist infiltration into South Vietnam, the group observed that the United States had few counter means at its disposal short of striking at the source in North Vietnam. Instead, they advised that the United States should increase "the tempo and extent of its existing actions in South Vietnam." In the event that the Communist element came to dominate the Laotian government, the committee believed that the United States should provide "all-out support, to include the introduction of United States/SEATO combat troops. The objective would be the consolidation of all Laos." According to the study group, SEATO provided the best means to counter Communist insurgency throughout Southeast Asia, but "SEATO must

be recast into an organization of action." On 20 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that they had received the report.[65]

A few days later General Holtoner circulated to General Lemnitzer and the Joint Staff an account of the "field trip" that he had made to Southeast Asia during February. He emphasized that there was a need for the Joint Staff to change its focus from individual countries in the area to that of the region as a whole. According to the general, despite the social and geographic differences existing among the various nations there, "the Communist effort . . . transcended national boundaries and took advantage of the fragmentation." He then turned to the subject of US policy in Laos. General Holtoner argued that "Laos was the strategic key to the entire area." He then went beyond the recommendations provided in the study group report by suggesting that the Communists had no interest in a "neutral government" and that the United States should end its "pressure on Phoumi to give way on formation of a coalition government." General Holtoner, however, admitted that the basic military problem in the Royalist forces was "inadequate leadership" and that this was especially true in the operations near Nam Tha.[66]

While the struggle for Nam Tha simmered, General Boyle, the commander of US MAAG in Laos, continued the contingency planning for the withdrawal of his group from Laos. On 28 March Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, directed the MAAG commander to prepare an addendum to his plan that would take into consideration a possible deterioration of affairs in Laos, requiring the return of the US advisors. Admiral Felt directed that General Boyle, in coordination with the Chief of the Joint US Military Advisory Group (CHJUSMAG) Thailand, establish in that country, a cadre of MAAG personnel from Laos. If the situation arose, the MAAG in Laos could then be reestablished with sufficient equipment "in the shortest possible time."[67]

In the meantime, during the high-level March Honolulu meeting on Vietnam, hosted by Admiral Felt at his headquarters, Secretary McNamara also discussed the situation in neighboring Laos with his senior military commanders in Southeast Asia. General Lemnitzer and Army Chief of Staff General Decker represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to Admiral Felt's intelligence, the Pathet Lao, reinforced by North Vietnamese regulars, were not only in position to capture Nam Tha but also to take over such cities in northern and central Laos as Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Paksane, and Thakhek. The Pacific J–2 believed that the Communists could accomplish this in fourteen to thirty days. As far as Nam Tha was concerned, General Lemnitzer observed that General Phoumi now had five battalions there, which could be more effectively employed further south.[68]

Secretary McNamara mentioned three policy alternatives: for the United States to keep on supporting General Phoumi without pressure; threaten him with the possible removal of US advisors; or introduce American or SEATO troops under some form of Plan 5. At this point, Admiral Felt declared that he believed that if negotiations broke down the United States "should sit tight and maintain support as first move."[69]

If the Communists broke the truce at that juncture, the Pacific commander advocated that the United States prepare to intervene. He would move an American force

commander and his headquarters together "with air strength at least to Udorn in Thailand." According to Admiral Felt, Lieutenant General John L. Richardson, Deputy Commander, US Army Pacific, would become the task force commander if it was a SEATO operation. If solely an American expedition, Marine Major General Robert E. Cushman, the commander of the 3rd Marine Division, would assume the command. As outlined in Plan 5, the next step would be to insert ground troops "to hold the river towns." He was in hopes that other SEATO nations "would join in the action, particularly the Commonwealth Brigade."[70]

Most of the senior officers at the conference agreed with the scenario that the CINCPAC laid out. Admiral Felt observed that unless the United States gave its full support to the Royalist Army, the Pathet Lao would easily occupy northern and central Laos and that "Phoumi could not hold even southern Laos without substantial help from us." General Lemnitzer, however, expressed his doubts that the administration would change its policy and agree to insert either US or SEATO units into Laos at present. He supported the PACOM commander's recommendation to hold back "so long as the cease-fire continues." General Lemnitzer contended that the best stratagem was to "make the Communists initiate hostilities." If this occurred, however, the Chairman maintained that "the best we could hope for was to hold a line running from the 17th Parallel on the east diagonally northwest, holding Thakhek if at all possible."[71]

The commander of US Air Forces, Pacific, part of the Pacific Command, General Emmett O'Donnell, dissented from both General Lemnitzer's and Admiral Felt's views about a gradual response to the Communist threat. He especially disagreed with Admiral Felt's contention that if US forces deployed to Laos, the "Viet Minh would not fight Americans." According to General O'Donnell, the most likely reaction was for China to move aircraft south to where the Communists "could 'take out' Vientiane and also clobber the main points in the Panhandle." The Air Force commander stated that his recommendation was "that we should go all out from the first, and not go in in bits." Admiral Felt countered that a US naval task force would be in position to provide air protection against aircraft flying from these Chinese bases. Despite this flare-up, all of the senior military officers at the meeting were in agreement in their support of General Phoumi and the Royalists and in their opposition to a withdrawal of the US MAAG in Laos.[72]

The US Political Offensive

Despite the concerns of most of his military, President Kennedy continued to adhere to his policy for a neutralized Laos. After his meeting with the congressional leadership, he approved a recommendation by Assistant Secretary Harriman that William H. Sullivan from the State Department and Michael Forrestal of the White House Staff make a fact-finding trip to Southeast Asia. As personal representatives of the President of the United States, they were to accentuate American determination to reach a political solution to the Laotian quandary.[73]

For the moment, the greatest hindrance to the formation of a central government under Souvanna Phouma remained General Phoumi's objections to the proposed cabinet. During their visit to Laos Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Forrestal had three meetings extending over two days in mid-March with the Laotian general. In their first conversation, General Phoumi argued vehemently against joining the government and against the American policy. He repeated these arguments during a formal dinner that evening that included several senior Laotian generals. The next day, however, the Laotian leader conceded during the third talk with the two Americans that he might have to rethink his stance. He understood that the consequences of refusing to accept the American policy "would be a withdrawal of all military support and that this could occur in [the] fairly near future." General Phoumi stated that he would have to consult with others and would give his answer in a few days. The visit ended with him agreeing to meet with Assistant Secretary Harriman later in the month in Bangkok when the latter would be in Thailand.[74]

Phoumi, however, backtracked upon this agreement. He told the American Embassy in Laos that both the King and the Cabinet were opposed to his "'clandestine missions' . . . with representatives of another government." The Laotian strongman suggested that if Harriman wanted to see him, the latter should come to Laos.[75]

Upon arriving in Bangkok on 21 March to discuss the situation in Laos with both Thai Prime Minister Thanarat Sarit and Phoumi, Assistant Secretary Harriman was naturally upset with the new development. In a cable to Washington, he agreed with a State Department assessment that "Phoumi has thrown down the gauntlet in refusing to see me. . . . " The Assistant Secretary stated that his plan of action was to meet with Sarit to ascertain the latter's views on the present state of affairs. In any event, Harriman argued that he did not wish to "become involved [in] any program seeing Phoumi jointly with Sarit unless I have prior satisfactory understanding with Sarit." He was in hopes that Sarit and he would be able to "work out some compromise which would involve my going [to] Vientiane for purpose seeing King, thus saving Phoumi's face but still retaining essential elements of dignity for US Gov't."[76]

Although Marshal Sarit was a cousin to Phoumi, he readily concurred with Harriman's plans to bring Phoumi to the negotiating table. Sarit stated that he did not understand the motives behind the latter's "flat refusal" to come to Bangkok. Despite the fact that the Thai Prime Minister had originally proposed the idea of the Bangkok meeting, he now believed there was little chance that Phoumi would talk to "Harriman and himself together." The Assistant Secretary, however, insisted that he and Sarit meet jointly with Phoumi in order to avoid any "'double-faced' tactics." Sarit and Harriman proposed that the two of them confer with Phoumi on 24 March at Nong Khai, a Thai city near the Laotian border. The Lao leader would then accompany the American to Vientiane where Harriman would have an audience with the King and a discussion with the entire Royal cabinet.[77]

Not unexpectedly Phoumi readily agreed to the meeting at Nong Khai with the American Assistant Secretary and the Thai Prime Minister. Phoumi nevertheless stated that while willing to negotiate he would not compromise on the makeup of the cabinet.

Observing that prospects for any agreement "were not bright," Harriman asked Washington for authority "to bring specific pressure" on the Royalist leader to bring forth some sort of concession.[78] At this point, however, the Kennedy administration was not ready to threaten the cessation of military assistance to the Royal government.[79]

Harriman's doubts about the outcome of the negotiations with the Royalist hierarchy were validated. Although strongly supported by Sarit, he was unable to convince Phoumi to concede any points on the makeup of the proposed cabinet under Souvanna. Finally after much urging by both Sarit and Harriman, the Laotian Royalist leader agreed to "place the question before his associates." The remainder of Harriman's efforts to broker the stalemate was also unproductive. He wrote Washington that his audience with the King was "hardly worth reporting."[80] The session with the entire cabinet proved to be as unfruitful. Harriman related that at the end he "told them that in my opinion and in opinion [of] all their friends, they, individually and collectively, were taking on responsibility of driving their country to destruction." On this note of pessimism, Harriman ended his visit to Laos.[81]

Both William Sullivan and Michael Forrestal had joined Harriman in his negotiations with the Laotians. While the Assistant Secretary and Forrestal returned to Washington at this juncture, Sullivan continued the US effort to bring about some understanding between the two sides. He made arrangements to visit Souvanna Phouma in the Pathet Lao stronghold at Khang Khay in the Laotian Plain of Jars. According to the American envoy, the place had a "Hemingway flavor of [a] guerrilla . . . [encampment] peopled by hard eyed little soldiers." Sullivan believed that Souvanna was willing to make some minor adjustments for some sort of "troika" arrangement in the proposed government if Phoumi would make similar adjustments in his position. Prince Souphanouvong, the Pathet Lao leader, however, who was also present, was less forthcoming. Sullivan reported that the latter refused to commit to any specific position and argued that all differences should be settled in meetings of the three Laotian princes. Souvanna, meanwhile, was planning to leave Laos for Paris to attend a wedding of his daughter there in the near future.[82]

According to Sullivan, it was difficult to calculate the course of events in Laos. He believed that for the "foreseeable [future] US relationship with Phoumi will be hot and cold." On the other hand, the reaction of the Pathet Lao was unclear. The American official noted that the French and Indian representatives in Laos believed that the "Commies are willing [to] step aside" and allow the Americans to "pressure Phoumi into negotiations." On the other hand, Prince Souphanouvong showed much bluster and spoke about the possibility of launching a "punitive" offensive against Phoumi before the rainy season hampered his logistical support. Before departing Laos for Washington, Mr. Sullivan counseled Harriman that the Kennedy administration should keep US Ambassador Winthrop Brown at his post in Vientiane. He observed that General Phoumi identified Ambassador Brown with the US "policy of peaceful reconciliation" and his own "personal albatross." By retaining Ambassador Brown, the US demonstrated its unhappiness with the present refusal of the Royalist regime to soften its bargaining stance.[83]

In Washington, the administration turned towards a harder stance against Phoumi and his cohorts. As Michael Forrestal, on 2 April, stated in a debriefing of the Harriman mission at a White House daily staff meeting, "all our heavy artillery appeared to have failed in moving Phoumi." Forrestal mentioned that Harriman believed that Phoumi might soften his position in two or three weeks. According to the minutes of the meeting, however, the Assistant Security Advisor "very carefully failed to associate himself with this estimate." Still Harriman, himself, recommended preparing Congress and the general public for the implementation of stronger measures against the Phoumi regime, including the stopping of some military supplies and the possible withdrawal of US "White Star" Special Forces teams now in place at some forward Laotian positions.[84]

As the impasse with the Laotian Royalists continued into mid-April, President Kennedy prepared once more to brief the congressional leadership on the situation in Laos. A couple of days before the scheduled meeting, both Roger Hilsman of the State Department and Michael Forrestal of the White House Staff discussed with the President the various options open to the United States in its Laotian policy. Mr. Hilsman observed that the President's main quandary was to discover a means whereby he did not have the Hobson's choice of "losing Laos or intervening with American troops." Wishing to avoid such harsh alternatives, Roger Hilsman prepared an intelligence estimate entitled "Continuation of 'Mild' Pressures on Phoumi: A Short-Term Estimate." In the paper he basically argued that at least for two or three months the United States could continue its "mild pressure" policy without a Communist military reaction even if General Phoumi remained recalcitrant. Assistant Secretary Harriman ensured that Secretary Rusk had a copy of this estimate before the congressional briefing.[85]

At the meeting on 17 April, the President received again the concurrence of the congressional leadership in his Laotian policy. The administration would continue its relatively "soft pressure" on General Phoumi but would begin to take further steps. President Kennedy apparently accepted the advice of Assistant Secretary of State Harriman, who suggested that the United States give the Royalist leader until 7 May to begin negotiations with Souvanna Phouma. If General Sarit by that time could not convince his cousin to compromise, the United States should begin the withdrawal of the most forward of the US "White Star" teams attached to the Royalist Army. According to Mr. Harriman, the implementation of this withdrawal would not have much of an impact on the actual military prowess of the Royal forces and would "not deprive the FAR of the 'sinews of war,' only of advisors whose advice is not always followed." Moreover, such a move would remove American troops from the battle area and avoid "our intimate involvement in a likely defeat if such operations were started." Two days after the congressional briefing, the administration issued NSAM 149, entitled "Withdrawal of Certain Military Units from Forward Positions in Laos, "which directed the Secretary of Defense to begin the planning for such a contingency.[86]

For a brief period, this new pressure on General Phoumi appeared to be working. On 1 May General Sarit announced to US officials in Thailand that he had obtained from both Boun Oum and General Phoumi assurances that they would reopen negotiations with Souvanna Phouma and Prince Souphanouvong.[87]

The Fall of Nam Tha and the New Crisis

The hope that this would result in a break in the deadlock was a fleeting one. On the following day Communist forces occupied the hamlet of Muong Sing, a key supply center for the Nam Tha base. Four days later, on 6 May, the Pathet Lao launched a full-scale assault on the base itself. Against the advice of his US advisors, General Phoumi had continued to reinforce this isolated base. According to press accounts, the Communist forces opened up with a heavy artillery barrage, followed by several ground assaults from various directions, with the main infantry attack from the northwest. A US helicopter evacuated the twelve-man American advisory group at Nam Tha. An American officer was quoted as saying that the Laotian Royal Army defenders "staged 'a pretty good fight'" before giving up the base.[88] Brigadier General Boyle, the US MAAG commander in Laos, later told Secretary McNamara and General Lemnitzer that "the Laotian private soldier involved in the Nam Tha fighting gave a reasonably good account of himself, but that the officer and NCO leadership was gravely deficient, and that the pusillanimous example was set at the very top."[89]

While the Royalist troops may have given a good account of themselves at Nam Tha, the retreat was a complete rout. In five days the remnants of the 5,000 men at Nam Tha had fled nearly 100 miles south to the town of Houei Sai on the Mekong River. They abandoned this last stronghold before Luang Prabang on 11 May, with nearly 500 stragglers crossing the river and seeking asylum in Thailand.[90] Ambassador Brown had cabled from Vientiane that the "collapse of the FAR on their retreat from Nam Tha has left the whole of northwest Laos open to PL."[91]

In Washington, the Kennedy administration was caught unawares by the sudden outbreak of fighting in Laos. On 2 May, when the Pathet Lao captured Muong Sing, three senior advisors—Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Lemnitzer—were in Athens, Greece, attending a NATO Council of Ministers conference on nuclear policy. When Nam Tha itself fell, Chairman Lemnitzer recalled some twenty years later, he and Secretary McNamara received an urgent telegram from President Kennedy informing them "the Pathet Lao had broken the cease-fire moratorium in Laos." Telling them that the Communist troops were now "on the banks of the Mekong," the President ordered them not to return to Washington immediately, but "to come back by way of Bangkok, Saigon, Tokyo, and take a look and see what the situation was."[92]

During the interim while Secretary McNamara and General Lemnitzer were still away from Washington, President Kennedy consulted with his remaining advisers. With the attack on Nam Tha on 6 May, Under Secretary George Ball, then Acting Secretary of State in place of the absent Rusk, telephoned the White House at 10:30 in the morning with reports of the outbreak of fighting. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, who talked to Ball, told him to call President Kennedy in Palm Beach, Florida. Bundy had already sent some earlier dispatches to Florida but had not yet heard from the President. Fifteen minutes later the Acting Secretary spoke to the President. While not having any

more information about the situation in Laos, he informed Kennedy of steps the State Department had made to have the Russians and British use their influence to bring about another truce. The President expressed concern that American advisors might have been at the base and about newspaper reports that Chinese troops were involved in the assault. Kennedy informed Ball that he would return to Washington that afternoon.[93]

Before leaving Florida, however, the President spoke again with Washington, this time with McGeorge Bundy. Kennedy, Bundy later observed to Ball, was "very concerned about the public aspect of this thing. . . . " According to Bundy, the President gave detailed instructions to members of his staff relative to official commentary on the Laotian situation, which they were to coordinate with the State Department. In fact in his discussion with Under Secretary Ball, President Kennedy remarked ". . . there will be a lot of people yelling for us to do one thing or another."[94]

In his conversation with Ball, Bundy warned against such news items that appeared in the *New York Times* comparing the fall of Nam Tha to Dien Bien Phu, which he described as "sheer nonsense." As far as the report of Chinese troops, Ball declared that according to the account it was supposedly from American sources and he wondered "whether an American would know a Chinese from a Vietnamese. . . . " Bundy and the Under Secretary agreed that they did not want "to get too high level in our comments. . . . It is much better that all are briefed along the same line and feed it out as it comes in."[95]

Upon arriving back in Washington, Kennedy apparently sent his messages to Secretary McNamara and General Lemnitzer ordering them to Thailand and Vietnam to obtain what information they could about the situation in Laos. At the same time, Secretary Rusk departed Paris to attend a meeting of the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, and United States) Council in Australia to discuss the situations both in Vietnam and in Laos. This was to be the first session of this group since October 1959.[96]

At the same time, President Kennedy continued to consult with his White House staff and held a series of hasty meetings with various members of his administration. On the 8th, he met with Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, Generals Taylor and Army Chief of Staff Decker, as well as with National Security Advisors Bundy and Forrestal. The President directed that the United States continue its efforts to involve the Russians in bringing about an end to the renewed fighting in Laos. He also mentioned that Ambassador Brown in Laos should tell Phoumi, the Royalist leader, "what happened at Nam Tha was exactly what we had told him to expect as a result of his intransigence in the negotiations." Kennedy made it clear "that our military people in the area took the same line. . . . "[97]

President Kennedy continued to be concerned about how the public would perceive the crisis. He ended the meeting on the 8th by requesting the preparation of a memorandum for the press conference that he planned to hold the following day. Kennedy suggested something to the effect that the United States had warned Phoumi, the more he "delayed negotiations for a coalition government, the more dangerous the situation would become." Furthermore, the President also indicated that "he might indicate that if the situation in Laos developed . . . we would have to reconsider our military posture in the area."[98]

Actually, at his press conference on 9 May, the President made no reference to Laos in his prepared statement. Instead he opened the conference with a defense of his pending tax bill and it was not until the seventh question that the subject of Laos finally came up. At that point, in possibly a planted question, a reporter asked whether the breach of the cease-fire would require the US Government to change its policy in that country. The President replied that the United States was concerned that the longer the negotiations continued to flounder the more dangerous the situation became. He observed, however, that the Nam Tha attack was a clear violation of the cease-fire and that the US Government was doing its best to resolve the situation in hopes that the Russians would use their influence with the Laotian and Vietnamese Communists. The President admitted that the present state of affairs was hazardous but so would be sending in US troops. He was in hopes of a peaceful resolution, but "this is not a satisfactory situation today." Interestingly, out of nineteen questions asked during the news conference, this was the only one pertaining to the crisis.[99]

On the same day as the press conference, the intelligence community provided the President and the administration their assessment of the situation in Laos following the fall of Nam Tha. The intelligence analysts believed that the entire attack was carried out solely by Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops. They observed that there was no evidence of "neutralist" forces under General Kong Le, who was loyal to Souvanna Phouma, having taken part in the assault, and they discounted entirely the rumor that Communist Chinese troops participated. In their estimate of the military situation, the analysts wrote that the abandonment of Nam Tha by the Royal forces left all of northern Laos open to Communist domination. They rated the combat effectiveness of the retreating government troops as "practically nil." According to the report, while the attack was a "flagrant violation of the truce," the authors did not believe that the Communists were mounting a general offensive but would rather await developments, particularly the reaction of the United States. While surmising that both the North Vietnamese and the Chinese governments "encouraged the renewed military activity against a ripe target of opportunity," the analysts believed "that the Soviets still prefer a political settlement in Laos."[100]

On the morning of 10 May Mr. Forrestal forwarded to President Kennedy a discussion paper on Laos prepared in the State Department for a White House meeting that the President had called for that afternoon. In his covering memo, the White House advisor informed the President that the military situation in northern Laos continued to deteriorate and that the State Department paper recommended the movement of a naval task force to the Gulf of Siam. The idea was to "impress the Russians and Chinese with the seriousness with which we view the situation." In addition, it also suggested that the United States deploy an Army battle group of 1,000 men already in Thailand for a SEATO exercise to the Laotian border. As long as there was no threat to the Communist base in northern Laos, the premise was that the Communist nations including China did not want to "accept any significant risk of US intervention." The document insisted, nevertheless, that the United States was still committed to a negotiated settlement that would result in a neutral Laos and a government of national union.[101]

At the meeting that afternoon the participants included: the President; still Acting Secretary of State, Under Secretary Ball; Assistant Secretary Harriman; General Taylor; and General Decker, still sitting in for the Chairman. In addition, Soviet expert Charles E. (Chip) Bohlen, a former Ambassador to the Soviet Union; Roger Hilsman, the main author of the State Department paper; John McCone, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; and McGeorge Bundy and Forrestal from the White House rounded out the attendees.[102]

The President opened the proceedings with a review of the above memorandum and reports from George Ball, Averell Harriman, and Roger Hilsman on the latest breaking news from Laos. In the general discussion that followed, Bohlen argued against a further approach to the Russians as unproductive, in that several meetings had already been held with Soviet officials. In fact, the President's brother Attorney General Robert Kennedy had lunch the previous day with Russian Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, who claimed that the attack on Nam Tha was "understandable," given the failure of Phoumi to negotiate and by his reinforcing the government positions there. The Ambassador maintained, nevertheless, "Premier Khrushchev has not changed his policy of achieving an independent and neutral Laos."[103]

During the meeting on the 10th, Roger Hilsman emphasized some of the points that he had already made in the State Department paper. His main thrust was that the United States needed to demonstrate that it "would not stand idly by" to such provocations as the assault on Nam Tha. He warned, however, against any action that would inflame the situation so as to evoke the "Viet Minh or Chinese into large-scale counter-action." In response President Kennedy complained about the "unfortunate dearth of hard information" and wanted an improvement in US field intelligence. He also declared that he did not want to take any action until Secretaries Rusk and McNamara and General Lemnitzer had returned from their missions and he had received their reports. The President decided, however, that as a "preparatory move" units of the fleet be deployed into the Gulf of Siam. In response to a query from Kennedy, General Decker estimated that it would take 48 hours for the advance echelon of the fleet (two attack aircraft carriers) to reach the coastal region of Thailand nearest to Bangkok.[104]

While the minutes of the meeting do not indicate any differences, Roger Hilsman recalled that General Decker objected strenuously to any movement of troops. According to the State Department chief intelligence officer, the military representatives at the meeting still reflected what he called the "Never Again" view from their Korean War experience: namely, that the United States should use "all-out force in Asia or none at all." Specifically, they were against what Hilsman characterized as "the politically tailored recommendations" contained in the State Department memorandum that he had prepared. He later wrote that General Decker came in with "the damnedest collection of mush and softness I have seen in a long time," maintaining that it was all right to move the fleet, but not the troops. Moreover, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted to reverse the pressure placed on General Phoumi to negotiate and attempt again to rebuild the Royalist Army. Mr. Hilsman believed that, given the differences between the State Department

and the military, President Kennedy decided to approve the deployment of the fleet but wait until Secretary McNamara returned to settle the remaining questions.[105]

In his memoir of the Kennedy years, Hilsman remembered that he and Harriman returned to the State Department together. During the ride back, they discussed the decision made by the President and the "more we talked the more worried" they became. Their primary concern was that the Soviet Union might view the movement of the Fleet without troops as a sign "that we had written Laos off." The two believed that given this possibility "it might well be better not even to start the Seventh Fleet in the direction of Thailand until the more fundamental decision had been made." Harriman had another appointment so they decided that Hilsman should call the President and voice their doubts. Accordingly, he did so and convinced the President to rescind the order. Kennedy, however, called back within the hour to state that he had reversed himself again upon the reception of new information relating to former President Eisenhower's views on the Laotian situation.[106]

President Kennedy was still very anxious about both the domestic political and the international ramifications of any US intervention in Southeast Asia. He was well aware that former President Eisenhower was in Washington on 10 May and holding his first press conference there since leaving office. Generally limiting his criticism to Kennedy's domestic program, General Eisenhower even praised to the reporters his successor's "growing firmness" with the Soviet Union. He even supported the present administration's policy in Vietnam. On Laos, however, the former President expressed "reservations" about the proposed coalition government stating that was "the way we lost China."[107]

Even more alarming, in an informal conversation with CIA Director John McCone that same afternoon, Eisenhower remarked "in an off-the-cuff . . . manner" that if the United States sent troops into Laos, the administration should provide "whatever support was necessary . . . including—if necessary—the use of tactical nuclear weapons." Hearing about this comment, Kennedy related that the former President had mentioned to him the previous month that "he might make a public statement under some conditions." While not wanting Mr. Eisenhower's views to be publicized, he also saw some advantage in that if the United States chose to send troops to Laos, "having Eisenhower say it, would make it easier." Thus given the possibility of having General Eisenhower's support, President Kennedy once more gave the order to move the fleet into the Gulf of Siam. According to Hilsman, Kennedy told him "Let the fleet go ahead. But try to impress on everyone the importance of avoiding a leak to the press."[108]

Any hope for keeping this information from the press was soon dashed. On the morning of 12 May *New York Times* diplomatic reporter Max Frankel published a front-page story with a dateline of 11 May with the headline: "Accord is Sought: Kennedy Acts to Force Rightists to Join a 3-Faction Regime." The first paragraph contained the statement that the President "will order a show of United States force in the Southeast Asian waters near land-locked Laos." Several paragraphs later on the second page was buried the statement that "tentative plans call for some moderate naval and troop movements that would draw attention to United States power . . . without implying a

threat to join in the Laotian fighting."[109] According to Roger Hilsman, in an attempt to reverse US policy, it was obvious that hard liner supporters of Phoumi in the Pentagon wanted to demonstrate that the administration had abandoned the Laotian leader and that the naval maneuver was merely a sham "show of force." Hilsman maintained that the President was particularly irritated in that the *Times* Pentagon correspondent Jack Raymond needed only three telephone calls to his sources in order to feed the details of the story to Frankel.[110]

In the interim, on 11 May General Decker in his capacity as Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded a memorandum to Secretary McNamara, who had just returned, advocating a complete reversal of administration policy toward General Phoumi. He argued that the attack on Nam Tha and the resulting Communist offensive was a "complete departure from the earlier Communist strategy of limited but constant encroachment." General Decker stated that the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended "that a reappraisal of the US policy in Laos is urgently required."[111]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted the United States to take the following initiatives: demand an on-site investigation of the incident by the International Control Commission and the withdrawal of the Communist forces from Nam Tha; place diplomatic pressure on the Soviet Union to stop their assistance of the Pathet Lao; resume "financial assistance" and increased military assistance to the Royalists; "remove current restraints on Phoumi's freedom of military action" and also provide air support to his troops; enlist Thai and other allied assistance in training the government troops; deploy the present US battle group then in Thailand to the Thai-Laotian border, engaging there in "joint US-Thai training exercises"; and interdict covertly with either US or other aircraft the Communist airlift into Laos. General Decker added that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not concur with the State Department proposal at the previous day's meeting with the President "that immediate steps be taken designed to undermine Phoumi's prestige and political influence." Finally, according to the Army Chief of Staff, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that if the Communists did not restore the previous "cease-fire line in a reasonable length of time . . . the only alternative to prevent Communist domination of Laos rests in the implementation in substance of SEATO Plan 5 with such SEATO members as [are] willing to participate."[112]

Apparently Secretary McNamara had his doubts about the viability of General Decker's recommendations. In several places he wrote his concerns in the margins of the memorandum. At one point he inserted "target what?" On the possible alert and deployment of forces, he asked, "No. of US, describe implementation." Relative to the possible activation of SEATO Plan 5, he observed, "they rec[ommend] #5 & how do they appraise ChiCom & NVN capability."[113]

Already, according to one source, the Defense Secretary had indicated some displeasure with the contingency planning. During a briefing session in Saigon during his visit, Secretary McNamara asked the senior officers present what would be the US reaction if the Communists in Laos pushed to the Mekong River. Both General Lemnitzer and Admiral Felt attempted to answer. General Lemnitzer proposed implementing SEATO

Plan 5, occupying key cities on the river, while Admiral Felt advised air strikes. At that time, fearing a wider war, Secretary McNamara rejected the two suggestions.[114]

Meanwhile, after returning to his headquarters in Hawaii from visiting Australia and Vietnam, Admiral Felt had issued orders on 11 May for the helicopter aircraft carrier *Valley Forge* with a Marine BLT on board to steam for the Gulf of Siam. He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to approve the landing of the Marines at Bangkok and subsequent redeployment to the Thai Udorn Airbase, only approximately thirty-five miles south of the Lao administrative capital of Vientiane. Reporting that the ship had departed Subic Bay in the Philippines, the Pacific commander estimated that the *Valley Forge* would arrive off Bangkok with the Marines sometime around 15 May. Admiral Felt argued that the arrival of the Marines "should have a strong political impact which is desirable." The admiral also observed that the insertion of the Marine battalion and helicopter squadron "greatly improves reaction time in the event that SEATO Plan [5] is implemented."[115]

With the Pathet Lao capture of the Mekong River port of Houei Sai on 11 May, President Kennedy scheduled a special meeting for the next morning. The agenda would include a discussion of the remaining available options and would hear from General Lemnitzer and Secretary McNamara, both of whom arrived late that night from Southeast Asia. The general remembered that he was awakened by a telephone call at 0630 on 12 May to tell him about the meeting. He had planned to attend the Thayer Award ceremony at West Point honoring General MacArthur, who was to be the recipient and main speaker at the US Military Academy. According to the Chairman, he telephoned General William C. Westmoreland, the Academy superintendent, to express his regrets that he could not attend.[116]

In the morning meeting both General Lemnitzer and Secretary McNamara reported on their impressions of the situations in both Laos and Vietnam. Apparently the lack of sleep and the strains of the long plane trip back from Southeast Asia resulted in some embarrassment for the general. According to one participant in the meeting the general used a large wall map of Asia and a pointer to illustrate his remarks. Instead of pointing to the Mekong River separating Laos and Thailand, however, his indicator rested on the Yellow River in China. At that point, Roger Hilsman, who was no respecter of age or rank, immediately jumped up and publicly corrected the Chairman.[117]

As General Lemnitzer remembered several years later, he and Secretary McNamara were in agreement about what needed to be done. The two believed that the "United States simply couldn't stand by and do nothing." General Lemnitzer argued that the Mekong River between Laos and Thailand afforded no obstacle to the Communist forces and that the Thais "had no reasonable capability to stop infiltration into northern Thailand."[118] In a briefing paper prepared for the meeting with the President, the Joint Staff had observed that the broad concepts of either SEATO Plan 5 or, if the United States acted unilaterally, CINCPAC Operational Plan 32–59 Phase II (Laos) "as now written are valid and need not be modified at the present."[119]

After Secretary McNamara and the general finished their accounts, there followed a general discussion concerning the repercussions of the fall of Nam Tha and the resulting

disastrous retreat of the Laotian Royalist garrison. According to the minutes, "the President took no decisions" and adjourned the conference, asking the participants to return that afternoon.[120]

In the second session that day, the Secretary and the general outlined the CINCPAC plan to deploy the Marine BLT and Marine helicopter squadron in Thailand and to alert the Army battle group already in country. General Lemnitzer recalled in his interview that President Kennedy agreed to the plan after listening to heated opposition from several of the other conferees at the meeting.[121] The minutes indicated that the President basically approved the details but then cautioned "that he was authorizing only precautionary dispositions of military forces, and that no landings or other military action in Thailand should be taken with respect to the situation until more information was available on the actual situation in Laos."[122]

In the handwritten notes that General Lemnitzer took at the time, he outlined the specific decisions that the President made that day: "1. Send forces into Thailand; 2. Alert certain forces in US to replace units in Pacific; 3. Start time running by placing units Pacific on [alert]; 4. Set up a [new] command." This new headquarters, US Military Assistance, Thailand, would also be under General Harkins, who would retain his responsibility and title as COMUSMACV. Under General Harkins would be Lieutenant General John L. Richardson, Commanding General, US Army Pacific, and now to command as an additional duty Joint Task Force 116, replacing Marine Major General John L. Condon, Commander of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.[123]

That evening General Lemnitzer sent the following warning order to Admiral Felt: "Contingent upon completion necessary diplomatic arrangements concerning which you will be advised . . . you are directed . . . 'Offload Valley Forge BLT and helos Bangkok and move to Udorn [Thailand].'" Admiral Felt was also ordered to deploy the Army "battle group (-) 27th Infantry" closer to the Thai-Laotian border. General Richardson and "necessary elements [of] his staff" were also to make their headquarters in Thailand after the arrival of the additional US forces. In their directive, the Joint Chiefs of Staff outlined the interim mission as "to give clear indication US intentions carry out commitments assist in defense Thailand, precautionary impact these actions on situation in Laos, and to position US forces for faster reaction time for possible further actions subject to future decisions." The JCS directive authorized Admiral Felt "to initiate movements as outlined herein provided that no forces enter Thailand."[124]

On Sunday, the following afternoon, President Kennedy chaired another meeting of his senior advisors about the crisis. After receiving a briefing on the events of the last twenty-four hours in Laos, the President asked Secretary Rusk to obtain permission from the Government of Thailand for the US troop deployments there. He also wanted an intelligence estimate on the reaction of other SEATO members to a request for cooperation relative to the planned US action in Thailand. Observing that the United States had no confidence in General Phoumi, the President emphasized, "we cannot and will not intervene in Laos on his behalf." Finally, he asserted his desire "to retain the element of reversibility in all military actions."[125]

As much as the military outcome of the crisis, President Kennedy remained concerned about the political ramifications both internationally and at home. At the meeting on 13 May, he directed Secretary McNamara to inform the congressional leaders of both political parties of his intention to order American military units into Thailand.[126] Prior to the meeting, he had sent CIA Director John McCone together with General Lemnitzer to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to brief former President Eisenhower about the situation in Southeast Asia. According to Director McCone, the former President placed "greatest importance on maintenance of Laos" and that if Laos was lost, "all Southeast Asia would be lost." Furthermore the CIA Director reported that Mr. Eisenhower approved "the placing of [US] Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force units in Thailand" at the present time. Moreover, the former President stated that he would "try to influence the political leadership of his party from entering into public debate on the question." Perhaps most important from the Kennedy administration's perspective, former President Eisenhower "made it quite clear he would not at this time privately or publicly urge moving US combat troops into Laos."[127]

As far as the American press was concerned, President Kennedy insisted that government spokesman leave open the question of US military intentions. According to Roger Hilsman, the President issued press guidance that had a two-fold purpose: to emphasize the seriousness that the administration viewed the situation, but at the same time provide a signal that the US policy of a neutral Laos remained the same. According to Kennedy, he wanted to create an "attitude of 'veiled ambiguity.'"[128]

This press policy apparently influenced the *New York Times* account the following morning. In his front-page story, Max Frankel wrote that a government spokesman mentioned the White House meetings held over the weekend as having no special significance except "to keep the President informed of the latest developments." Frankel then went on to discuss the mission of the Marine Battalion Landing Team of 1,800 men ordered into the Gulf of Siam. He understood that negotiations were underway in Bangkok to put them ashore in Thailand. If the Marines were to land in the next few days, "the main purpose . . . would be to demonstrate Washington's commitment to Thailand's defense and to place some troops closer to landlocked Laos." US officials still described the Seventh Fleet maneuvers as precautionary.[129]

Frankel, however, stressed in the article as well the diplomatic overtures that the United States made to the Soviet Union to use its influence with the Communist forces in Laos to restore the cease-fire. He referred to talks between the British and American Ambassador with Soviet officials in which the latter reiterated that the Soviet Union was still committed to a "neutralist coalition for Laos" as soon as the "Rightists demonstrated acceptance of the agreement."[130]

Besides this relatively open diplomacy, President Kennedy also had opened a secret personal informal channel to Soviet Premier Khrushchev. This special connection, established a year earlier during the Berlin crisis, was between his brother Robert and Georgi Bolshakov, officially a public relations officer but believed to be a top NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) agent in the Soviet Embassy.[131] On 12 May,

former Ambassador Bohlen apparently changed his mind about the futility of further discussion with the Russians on the Laotian question and suggested President Kennedy "send a personal message to Khrushchev through your special channel."[132] According to Robert Kennedy, he called upon Bolshakov and told him that his brother had believed the promises the Russians had given regarding ending the hostilities in Laos. The President "felt now he had been double-crossed" and the Attorney General assured the Russian agent that this was a "personal message to Khrushchev." It would be several days before the Soviet leader responded to the American message.[133]

In the interim, President Kennedy continued to meet with his advisors to follow up on his Sunday decisions for the probable insertion of US military forces into Thailand. On 14 May the next day, at an "off the record" meeting that included Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Assistant Secretary Harriman, CIA Director McCone, and Generals Taylor and Lemnitzer, the President approved Secretary McNamara's detailed plans for the move of the Marine, Air Force, and Army units to bases in Thailand.[134]

Both the State and Defense Departments had agreed upon the size and makeup of the troop deployments. Joint Task Force 116 under Lieutenant General Richardson would consist of the Army battle group already in Laos, an Air Force fighter squadron, a Marine fixed-wing aircraft squadron, and the Marine battalion landing team and its supporting helicopter squadron on board the USS *Valley Forge*. The total force would number between 5,000 and 6,000 personnel. This would include a 1,000-man reinforcement to the Army battle group as well as 500 additional logistic support personnel.[135] The Marine force was to move into the Thai Udorn area and the Army brigade was initially to redeploy from its base near the Thai city of Korat in central Thailand to the Ubon Air Base in southeast Thailand across the MeKong from the city of Pakse in southern Laos. While approving the insertion of the Marines at Udorn, the Thai Government refused permission to move the Army battle group to Ubon. It was to remain near Korat.[136]

At the same time as he authorized these additional deployments to Thailand, the President laid out guidelines for the public announcement of his decision. He wanted to delay a public communiqué until after he had discussed the situation with the congressional leadership and the State Department had informed the leaders of US SEATO allies. President Kennedy declared "the purpose of putting forces into Thailand was to allow the United States to take whatever action might be necessary" under its obligations to the SEATO alliance, "yet no formal SEATO action was contemplated." He then asked Secretary McNamara "if the actual military orders should be held up to avoid leaks." The Defense Secretary replied that "he believed the orders could go out with no leaks to the press."[137]

While the Kennedy administration delayed the release of its official press communiqué about the planned landing of the Marines until after the presidential briefing of Congress on 15 May, the *New York Times* that morning contained two front-page stories about the Laotian crisis. Although the lead story related to the probable return of Souvanna Phouma from Paris to Laos, small bold headlines read "Kennedy Will See Congress Leaders Today—Marines Due to Land in Thailand." In the secondary article

by E. W. Kenworthy, which appeared mostly on page 4 of the paper, he quoted official government officials explaining that "the military moves . . . were preliminary. They have the double-purpose of warning the Soviet Union of the risks of major conflict if the pro-Communists seek to take over Laos and of reassuring Thailand that the United States would meet its obligations to defend her." In a related article on page 4, the *Times* Saigon correspondent Homer Bigart wrote that on the 14th, General Harkins "returned [to Vietnam] from a surprise visit to Bangkok, where he is reported to have discussed emergency plans involving possible deployment of United States combat troops in Southeast Asia." Bigart also mentioned that "as the ranking American officer in this part of [the] world, Harkins would assume responsibility for coordinating plans to halt the Communist drive in Laos."[138]

In his briefing of the congressional leadership of both political parties on the morning of 15 May, President Kennedy and his senior advisors provided a detailed description of the background to the present crisis, the intelligence on the situation, and specific details of the planned movement of US forces and the various diplomatic initiatives. In his opening remarks, the President declared his disquiet about the deteriorating situation in Laos and the possible effect it might have on Thailand. He declared that he called "this meeting . . . to explain moves decided upon . . . [to meet] our commitments" to the Thai government. Secretary McNamara then described the Nam Tha defeat and the resulting ineffectiveness of those Royalist units that had participated in that battle. CIA Director McCone then declared that at the present time the Pathet Lao controlled all of eastern Laos and were in position to take over several of the cities on the MeKong, if they wished. Director McCone then observed, however, that he "did not expect an all out military move until Communists had assessed US intentions." The Director also observed that although outnumbered by the Royalists, "the Communists were more effective fighters, better led and possessed a greater will to fight." At that point General Lemnitzer asserted, "that the Pathet Lao were stiffened by Viet Minh troops, and that this in his judgment made the difference." In response to a question by Senator Richard Russell, the Chairman of the Senate Armed Forces Committee, the JCS Chairman explained that the Communist troops in general were not better equipped than the government troops, "but in certain specific cases they might have an advantage."[139]

At this point, Secretary Rusk reported on the diplomatic aspects of the crisis. According to the Secretary of State "it was not clear that Nam Tha meant the breakdown of the cease-fire." He believed that Phoumi now wanted to continue negotiations "and seemed more reasonable than before." The Secretary, nevertheless, warned that it was "quite possible nothing will come out" of such talks. While the Russians apparently remained committed to Geneva, "the extent of Moscow influence on Peiping and Hanoi is not clear." Rusk then declared that we needed now to reassure the Thai government "and it is largely for this reason that we are now recommending some build up in the forces in Thailand."[140]

Secretary Rusk then asked Secretary McNamara to continue with the presentation of the planned troop deployment to Thailand. The Defense Secretary then explained at

some length the details of the planned troop deployment to Thailand. He observed, "this build-up of force would lead to a total level of about 8,000 Americans." In the midst of this explanation, Republican Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin asked the question about what role the US SEATO allies would play in these activities.[141]

At this time, President Kennedy decided to address the Senator's query. Although Secretary Rusk had mentioned in his presentation that the administration planned to seek assistance from certain SEATO countries, the President responded, "in this whole area our difficulty had been a shortage of Allied support." He declared that when earlier the US could find no firm backing from its allies, his administration "moved toward negotiations." Phoumi's lack of cooperation, however, complicated the situation further. Kennedy believed that the Royalist strongman "appeared to wish us to be pulled into a fight." At the present time, the President stated that "we could not expect much help from anyone. . . ." He mentioned that the Pakistanis "had problems, the French were obviously unwilling, the British might be more helpful." The President then added that "[SEATO] Plan 5 is no longer valid because of the attitude of the British and the French and the military impotence of the RLG." Finally, the President promised, "he will not order US military forces into Laos without further exhaustive study and consultation with congressional leaders."[142]

The rest of the meeting largely involved providing responses to the questions of the Congressional leadership. Senator Wiley wondered if the "concentration on Laos might not mean that we were being sucked into a divisionary play." He wanted to know if "we were focusing on the right problems?" Secretary Rusk answered simply that the US "should be watchful on all fronts" and briefed the Senators on the latest status of the Berlin negotiations with the Russians. Armed Services Committee Chairman Russell asked "why American intelligence was not clear if there had been any Chinese Communist Battalions" involved in the attack on Nam Tha. In reply, Director McCone declared, "there was simply no evidence available to the Americans of any such Chinese Communist battalions, in spite of Thai reports to this effect." General Lemnitzer reassured the Congressional leaders that there were plans "to remove the MAAG and other American personnel in Laos in event the country is overrun." When specifically asked "what we would do 'if it caves in Laos,'" President Kennedy answered, "we would then try to hold in Thailand." The meeting ended at 1000 and the White House publicly announced that the President had ordered the landing in Thailand.[143]

Later that day Assistant Secretary Harriman addressed members of a newly established administration interagency task force on Laos headed by William Sullivan. The task force consisted of representatives of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the CIA, and the White House Staff, as well as the State Department. Outlining the policy of the United States in Thailand, Mr. Harriman observed that "these forces would have no commitment outside Thailand," and furthermore "there would be no SEATO command." According to Mr. Harriman, President Kennedy wanted "as many SEATO flags in Thailand as possible," despite any doubts he may have expressed about the willingness of US allies to participate.[144]

At approximately 0650 local time, 17 May, two of the three ships of the Navy Amphibious Ready Group carrying US Marine BLT 3/9 and Helicopter Medium Squadron (HMM) 261with its complement of Sikorsky HUS-1 (Sea Horse) single rotor helicopters entered Bangkok Harbor. The helicopter carrier USS *Valley Forge* with HMM–261, however, remained anchored outside the harbor since the water there was too shallow for the large draught of the carrier. The first vessel to arrive at dockside in Bangkok was the attack transport USS *Navarro* with the majority of the Marine battalion on board, with the remainder on the Landing Ship Dock (LSD) USS *Point Defiance*. In contrast to most amphibious landings, the Marine infantry did not land in assault craft but merely marched down the temporary steps leading from the ship onto the dock with full packs and carrying their rifles. There, the US Ambassador, the commander of the USMAAG in Thailand, and the Chief of Staff of the Thai Armed Forces were waiting to greet the troops. According to a reporter on the scene, one Marine, when asked how long he expected to stay in Thailand, replied, "As long as we are needed."[145]

Coincidentally on that same date, Robert Kennedy apparently had a visit from Mr. Bolshakov in Washington. According to the Attorney General in a telephone conversation with Dean Rusk that day, "someone came in . . . and made several points." The mysterious visitor stated "the problem as they saw it in Laos was Phoumi and we should make a major effort in that regard." He went on to declare "there was a strong personal message for the President that Khrushchev is very anxious to have a peaceful solution in Laos and is in complete agreement with their understanding reached in Vienna. As far as [Khrushchev] is concerned [the understanding] still remains."[146]

This visit may have been why the administration the following day played down the rather harsh statement that Premier Khrushchev made in Bulgaria. According to press accounts, the Soviet leader "was firm in his prediction that the United States forces would become involved in a shooting war." *New York Times* correspondent Ted Szulc reported that US officials considered "Khrushchev's comments on the landing of American troops in Thailand as more sound than fury."[147]

On the day of the landing in Thailand, during his weekly press conference the President addressed US policy in the region. In response to a question as to whether the US landing in Thailand would involve the US in open warfare in Southeast Asia, President Kennedy answered that he hoped it would lead to the formation of a national coalition in Laos. He insisted that the United States went into Thailand to protect that nation and at the request of its government. The American President then pointed to some hopeful signs that indicated the crisis could be solved without any further involvement of outside powers. He observed that after the fall of Nam Tha there had been no further breaches of the cease-fire elsewhere in Laos. Perhaps as significant were indications that the Laotian leaders had resumed conversations about the possibility of a coalition government.[148]

The President also was less pessimistic than he had been in his discussion with the congressional leadership about assistance from the SEATO alliance. When he mentioned that the legal basis for the US intervention was its obligation to SEATO, a reporter asked him if the other nations of SEATO believed they had the same responsibility. President

Kennedy replied that the allies had been asked to participate and that so far "there has been a favorable response from several of them."[149] In actuality, on 18 May Marshal Sarit, the premier of Thailand, told his cabinet that all the nations of SEATO except for France had offered token forces. According to Thai sources, Marshal Sarit turned down the offers, saying that the Thai Army with the American troops were sufficient to protect the country's border with Laos. The Marshal observed, however, that he "considered the troop offers 'a wonderful gesture' on the part of the SEATO countries."[150]

By 18 May the bulk of the Marine contingent had arrived at the Udorn Airbase. Marine Attack Squadron 322, equipped with the Douglas A–4 Skyhawk small bomber aircraft, landed about noon at the Thai airbase. That day as well, US Air Force transports flew most of the Marines of BLT 3/9 and much of their equipment from the Bangkok Airport to Udorn. An Air Force squadron consisting of twenty F–100 Super Sabre fighter bombers were already in position at Takhili Airbase in Thailand north of Bangkok. In addition, HMM–261's pilots flew their HUS Sea Horse helicopters from the deck of the *Valley Forge* to Udorn with one refueling stop at Korat. On 19 May, General Richardson opened his JTF–116 headquarters at Korat and later a rear headquarters in Bangkok. Throughout the rest of May and into June, US logistic troops and an additional Army battalion reinforced the task force. While the Marines remained under the overall command of General Richardson, they established a subordinate command—the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade—under Marine Brigadier General Ormand R. Simpson.[151]

Renewed Contingency Planning

In Washington during this time, the Kennedy administration continued its internal debate about its various options in Laos, and specifically about the employment of its armed forces. Much of the discussion revolved about the continuing deterioration of the military situation in Laos. Despite the arrival of US troops in neighboring Thailand, American officials in Laos expressed concern about Pathet Lao strength in Sayaboury Province in Laos near the Thai border. They also observed that although the three leaders of the Laotian factions planned to hold talks, US diplomats now feared that the Communist leaders rather than General Phoumi would be the main obstacle to a peaceful settlement.[152]

By 23 May the US intelligence agencies had prepared a draft of a new Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE 58–5–62), "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US Actions With Respect to Laos." The intelligence community based its analysis on suggested parameters given to them by the newly formed Laos Task Force, led by William Sullivan. The analysts believed that although North Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and Communist China might differ over means, the three basically had the same aims in Laos. While this might change in the event of open conflict between China and the United States, the Soviets were not willing in the interim to lose their influence in either Laos or North Vietnam to the Chinese. The analysts provided various scenarios

ranging from a return to the cease-fire and renewed talks to open warfare involving both Chinese and American forces. CIA Director John McCone would later tell President Kennedy that the intelligence estimates indicated "that each increase in our effort in Laos . . . would be met by an escalation in the Communist effort."[153]

Perhaps as significant as the intelligence estimate itself were the options that the Sullivan committee presented to the analysts for study. According to the first, or Option A, the United States would increase its assistance to the Laotian government to the same level as that to the South Vietnamese government. Under Option B, the Kennedy administration would reinforce its forces in Thailand until the troop level reached 20,000. The remaining options, C, D, and E, involved the commitment of US troops in Laos itself. Under Option C, American and Thai troops together with those of "willing SEATO members" would occupy Royalist areas "with a clear indication that there would be no offensive action against Communist-held positions." Both Options D and E presupposed a Communist offensive against the remaining cities held by the Royalists. Under Option D, a combined SEATO force including US and Thai troops would launch a counterattack to secure southern Laos. In Option E, the allied forces in addition to securing southern Laos would attempt to recapture Sayaboury Province.[154]

On 24 May the President held a special meeting on the Laotian situation to discuss the entire gamut of both the political and military choices open to the administration. Among the participants in addition to the President were Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, CIA Director McCone, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, Generals Taylor and Lemnitzer, and presidential national security advisors Bundy and Forrestal. According to General Taylor, Secretary Rusk asked that a memorandum prepared by William Sullivan on the political planning for Laos be tabled for the time being. In that paper, Sullivan had commented on the status of the proposed meeting of the three Laotian princes the timing of which remained uncertain because of conflicts in travel dates. The Royalist leaders, General Phoumi and Boun Oum, were both in Manila, but apparently had agreed to give the neutralist leader Souvanna Phouma both the Defense and Interior ministries.[155]

Despite the probability of peace talks among the participants, President Kennedy observed that he wanted contingency planning to continue for Laos. He was specifically interested in two major sectors of the country. The first was the "investing and holding by Thai forces with US backup of Sayaboury Province." The President nevertheless insisted that he did not want any Thai forces to advance into this Laotian Province unless there was "a breach of the cease-fire in Laos and such a breach must be so defined by the United States." Moreover, he ordered that the planners should estimate "the military value of the Mekong River in Sayaboury Province as a defensive barrier in relation to the cost of taking and holding it."[156]

The second area of concern was the "panhandle of Laos from Thakhek to the southern frontier." This was to be held or recaptured with Thai and/or South Vietnamese troops, possibly reinforced by US forces. The President directed that the United States undertake this planning unilaterally without consulting either the Thai or the Laotian governments and military commands. Furthermore, he wanted the initial planning effort

completed by the end of the month. Finally, the President asserted that he would maintain the US forces in Thailand "as long as they serve a necessary purpose."[157]

On 31 May the Joint State and Defense Department Laos Task Force under Mr. Sullivan reported out a modified contingency plan for possible intervention in Laos. In a sense the State and Defense Departments reached a semi-truce rather than resolving their differences. As Michael Forrestal observed to McGeorge Bundy, the task force members readily agreed among themselves that in the event of a presidential decision to intervene in Laos, US and "available SEATO forces would occupy the major [Mekong] river towns from Vientiane to Pakse" and possibly later the panhandle. Mr. Forrestal, however, explained, "the points on which there is disagreement at the staff level have thus been postponed."[158]

The following day Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson, in a memo to Secretary of State Rusk, expounded further upon the differences between the Defense and State representatives on the task force. While both concurred that it might be necessary to occupy the panhandle, they differed in "degree, but an important degree" on when to make this move. The Defense representatives would allow only a few days for the reestablishment of the cease-fire. If this failed to occur, "they would move immediately toward occupation of the panhandle." The State Department members wanted to wait and allow for a possible de facto partition of the area.[159]

According to the plan submitted by Mr. Sullivan, the task force recommended that the initial forces committed to any campaign for the occupation of the Mekong River cities in Laos consist of the 5,000 Marines and soldiers already in Thailand. These could be reinforced by another 5,000 troops from the Pacific Command. An additional 9,000-man supporting force would be assigned to Thailand. The plan assumed that the Thai government would contribute two or three battalions and possibly another 6,000 troops would be provided by SEATO allies.[160]

On 2 June Secretary McNamara hosted in the Pentagon an interagency conference to discuss the proposed contingency plan before sending it forward to the President. Included among the participants were Secretary Rusk, General Taylor from the White House, Task Force Committee Chairman William Sullivan, Assistant Secretary of State Harriman, and General Lemnitzer from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At this meeting both Secretaries Rusk and McNamara voiced serious misgivings about the proposed concept. In his comments, the Secretary of State expressed concern about the need for air support and an adequate number of troops to prevent "a succession of Dien Bien Phu's." He also remarked on the possibility of the need to attack North Vietnam in order to avoid not only the example of Dien Bien Phu but also that of Korea.[161]

Secretary McNamara's main objection was to the size of the suggested force to occupy the Mekong cities. He believed that the planners grossly underestimated the number of troops that would be required. The Secretary argued that 40,000 men would be the minimum required for the mission, although the bulk would serve in Thailand as a ready reserve. Assistant Secretary Harriman attempted to accommodate to Secretary McNamara's reservations. He suggested that although a US force might have to occupy

the Mekong Valley for some time to accomplish the nation's political goals, it was not inconsistent "with the need to have readily at hand adequate troops to protect those in the valley in case they got into trouble."[162]

Finally, both Generals Taylor and Lemnitzer expressed their opinions about the planning effort. General Taylor warned against undertaking "the occupation of large areas which might lead us to a massive guerrilla pacification campaign." He emphasized that the primary US objective in Laos was to protect both Thailand and South Vietnam. Moreover, in his view, if "the Laotian Army will not fight, there is no purpose in intervening to save Laos." For his part, General Lemnitzer suggested a different course of action. He believed that the overall issue was the "security of Southeast Asia and that the main threat to that security was North Vietnam." He recommended, instead of intervention in Laos, "an amphibious operation . . . designed to cut across North Viet-Nam and seal off all the infiltration routes into Laos and South Viet-Nam." The Chairman stated that the Joint Chiefs of Staff "considered such an action . . . less dangerous than the massive occupation of the Laos Panhandle."[163]

The meeting ended somewhat inconclusively, but with a more or less general consensus that while Laos had little importance by itself, its Mekong Valley "was important for the defense of Southeast Asia." There was also some agreement that US military intervention in Laos would occur in six progressive phases: a buildup of troops; the insertion of forces into the Mekong Valley; US air action; the securing of the panhandle; US air action against North Vietnam; and finally an amphibious landing in North Vietnam. The meeting ended with the establishment of another joint State-Defense committee to draft a new memorandum to send to the President.[164]

The new committee completed its task by 4 June and submitted copies to both departments. Although neither formally approved the document, Secretaries McNamara and Rusk forwarded a draft to the White House for the President's information. The new contingency planning report was more detailed than the first and contained important changes. The most significant were to increase the number of troops to occupy the Mekong Valley to the 45,000-level (although the bulk of these would remain outside Laos initially) and to enumerate the phased gradual response outlined in the meeting. In essence, in the event of a breakdown of negotiations in Laos and Geneva, the authors of the draft recommended that "a major reinforcement and strengthening of US forces in Thailand should proceed as rapidly as possible, but with minimum publicity." What remained unresolved was the length of time any occupation force would remain in the Mekong Valley before it was deemed necessary to expand the operation into the entire panhandle.[165]

Despite the seeming compromise between the State and Defense Departments as contained in the proposed new joint statement, the Defense Secretary and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not satisfied. Secretary McNamara drafted a letter to the President on 4 June that took exception to the joint statement. He believed that the authors overstated the value of the "Mekong River Areas." Noting that the denial of the north-south road to the Communists did very little to shut down the enemy infiltration

through eastern Laos, the Secretary declared that the basic value of US troops in the Laotian Mekong Valley was as "an interesting politically useful opening gambit." His major criticism remained his belief that it would be necessary to move very rapidly into offensive operations in the panhandle of Laos. According to the Defense Secretary, this would require the bulk of the 35,000 troops in reserve to be already in position in Thailand for rapid deployment into Laos. Even if this were the case, Secretary McNamara believed there might be a need for further reinforcements. He concluded by underscoring "the point that even if we defeat organized forces in the Panhandle, we would not have eliminated, although we might sharply reduce, the Communist supply route to South Vietnam."[166]

Secretary McNamara never signed the letter, and it is doubtful that it was ever sent. President Kennedy, however, was probably very much aware of the Secretary's views. After the meeting on 2 June, both Secretaries Rusk and McNamara met with the President.[167] Two days later General Taylor provided President Kennedy a detailed account of the meeting, including Secretary McNamara's doubts about a "military solution for securing the Panhandle" in Laos. Furthermore, General Taylor stated, he himself believed that any ground operation in Laos ran the "clear risk of bogging down into endless counter-guerrilla fighting."[168] In any event, at the request of the Defense Department, the President postponed for the time being a White House meeting scheduled for 4 June that was to consider the proposed joint State-Defense Department statement.[169]

In the interim, Defense and State Department officials continued to discuss and debate the value of occupying the Mekong Valley versus moving rapidly into offensive operations in the panhandle. On 6 June, writing for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lemnitzer proposed to Secretary McNamara that the contingency plan statement be more positive and shift its emphasis from responding "to enemy efforts to suggesting offensive actions we could initiate."[170] On the same date, Michael Forrestal of the White House National Security Staff observed to McGeorge Bundy that the "logistics people in JCS" were arguing that the force levels of 20,000 to 25,000 logistic and reserve troops for possible offensive operations were much too low. Mr. Forrestal voiced the suspicions of many in the administration by declaring that there appeared to be "a growing tendency for Defense to argue itself into position from which the only conclusion is that we should take no action at all." He believed that Defense officials and the Joint Chiefs of Staff refused "to examine lesser steps on the grounds that all lesser steps lead inevitable to a major conventional ground engagement in Laos which is not practical." This view was echoed by many of the senior State Department officials, including Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson and Roger Hilsman but with the major exception of Secretary Rusk.[171]

The State and Defense Departments remained at loggerheads over the wording of the contingency plan statement for the next few days until an agreement to form a coalition government among the Laotian princes on 11 June cleared the air and made the need for an immediate decision less pressing.[172] The following day senior members of both departments, the CIA, and White House Staff met in Secretary Rusk's conference

room. Secretary McNamara conferred privately with the Secretary of State prior to the meeting. In opening the full session, Secretary Rusk declared that "the two political objectives in Southeast Asia" were the creation of a conducive atmosphere for negotiations and the provision of "psychological evidence that the United States intended to draw the line against Communist aggression." The Secretary then observed that there was a difference of opinion between his department and the Defense Department over US plans for defending the Mekong River Valley in Laos.[173]

At this point, Secretary McNamara replied that he and the Joint Chiefs of Staff shared this "concern" but believed "it was unwise militarily to introduce US forces for the purpose of occupying that valley." In a conciliatory gesture, the Defense Secretary stated that, nevertheless, his department "was prepared to go ahead with contingency planning which would take into account the sort of military and political objective which the State Department contemplated." He believed this might be "helpful to the President if and when he had to make a decision." Secretary McNamara asserted, however, "there appears to be no need to request the President to make a decision at this stage."[174]

After further discussion, the Defense Secretary noted that the Joint Staff was working on four contingency plans in the event of a rupture in the cease-fire: air strikes against Communist positions, occupation of the Mekong River Valley, occupation of the valley together with an offensive to take the rest of the panhandle, and finally "an occupation with an advance to take over a lesser portion of the panhandle." He mentioned that the Defense Department was "not currently pursuing the plan for an amphibious operation at Vinh." Basically the impasse between the two departments was over—or rather, covered over.[175]

The following day, almost as an anticlimax, the President finally chaired the week-delayed meeting on US contingency planning. He basically approved the decisions made at the State Department the day before. The Defense Department would develop four contingency plans: "1. air operations in Laos and North Vietnam; 2. defensive ground operations in Laos; 3. offensive ground operations in Laos, including holding the Vientiane salient and holding and recapturing the Panhandle; 4. a less extensive offensive type of operation designed to hold the Mekong Valley area as proposed by State." In addition, President Kennedy agreed with the proposal to build up the logistical facilities in Thailand for possible operations in Laos to include installing fuel pipelines, extending the Thai railroad network, and expanding airfield capacity in the country. Secretary McNamara estimated the work would require 1,500 to 1,700 US logistical and construction personnel and would cost approximately $20 million out of Defense Department appropriations. For political reasons, the administration would label this effort civic action or economic assistance to Thailand.[176]

The Aftermath

The Laotian crisis for the time being, however, was over. After some initial bickering, the new government headed by Souvanna Phouma took office on 23 June. The next

day it proclaimed a cease-fire throughout Laos. On 6 July, the Laotians issued a formal declaration of neutrality to the newly reconvened conference on Laos at Geneva. On 23 July, representatives of the assembled nations there, including Secretary Rusk of the United States, signed a "Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos" and a twenty-article protocol. Essentially all foreign troops, including Vietnamese and American, were to leave Laos and foreign military assistance was to end.[177]

With the establishment of the new government, the Kennedy administration was in some hopes that there might be a settlement of the entire Southeast Asia question. Upon hearing the news, Premier Khrushchev had sent President Kennedy a telegram exclaiming "Good news has come from Laos." He then declared that the example of Laos could ease "other international problems which now divide states and create tension in the world."[178]

At about the same time, Robert Kennedy received another visit from Georgi Bolshakov with a message from Khrushchev asking if the United States would remove US troops from Thailand. Robert Kennedy relayed this message to his brother, the President, who answered that the Marines would be out in sixty days. According to the Attorney General, the Soviet leader sent another message thanking the President, stating that "this meant a great deal" to him.[179] By 31 July, the last Marine combat unit had departed Udorn. The Army units soon followed.[180]

Any optimism, however, that the Kennedy administration held that the Khrushchev overtures or the signing at Geneva of the accords on Laotian neutrality could be transferred to the situation in South Vietnam was soon to be dashed. At Geneva on 22 July, the day before the formal signing of the Declaration of the Neutrality of Laos, Assistant Secretary Harriman and William Sullivan met with the Foreign Minister of the North Vietnamese government, Ung Van Kiem. After a few niceties, Harriman bluntly told Kiem that the United States planned to carry out the agreements to the letter in Laos including removing all military personnel and hoped that the Vietnamese would do the same. While hedging whether there were any organized North Vietnamese military units in Laos, the foreign minister stated that the Vietnamese would adhere to the agreement. When it came to the subject of South Vietnam, Assistant Secretary Harriman suggested that if the North stopped its direction and support of the guerrilla effort in the south, the United States would remove its forces from the country and the "status envisaged by the 1954 Agreements could be reestablished. . . . " Furthermore, the United States would then be willing to explore other resolutions to the situation. Kiem denied any involvement in the war in the South and asserted that it was "a popular revolt against the Diem regime and American intervention is trying to suppress it." William Sullivan in frustration later described this conversation with Kiem as follows, "We got absolutely nowhere." Neither the United States nor the North Vietnamese were willing to concede any points at this juncture.[181]

While the cease-fire in Laos would hold for a time, both the United States and the North Vietnamese remained suspicious of the other's activities. The North had no intention of foregoing its Ho Chi Minh Trail in eastern Laos, which supported its infiltration

of supplies and troops into South Vietnam. For its part, the United States continued to build up its advisory cadre to Diem's regime. To a certain extent, the contingency planning that it had developed for the Laotian crisis would foreshadow future American involvement in Vietnam.

9

The Ongoing War

Geneva and the War in Vietnam

The entire US policy in Laos had been intrinsically linked to the US involvement in South Vietnam. Any optimism, however, that the Kennedy administration held that the Khrushchev overtures or the signing at Geneva of the accords on Laotian neutrality could be transferred to the situation in Vietnam was soon to be dashed. At Geneva on 22 July 1962, the day before the formal signing of the Declaration of the Neutrality of Laos, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Averell Harriman and William Sullivan met with the foreign minister of the North Vietnamese government, Ung Van Kiem. After a few niceties, Mr. Harriman bluntly told Foreign Minister Kiem that the United States planned to carry out the agreements to the letter in Laos, including removing all military personnel, and hoped that the Vietnamese would do the same. While hedging whether there were any organized North Vietnamese military units in Laos, the foreign minister stated that the North Vietnamese would adhere to the agreement.

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The McNamara Trip, May 1962

In their May visit to Southeast Asia, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara and General Lyman Lemnitzer were as much concerned with the situation in South Vietnam as that in Laos. During their brief four-day tour of the region, they spent the bulk of their time in South Vietnam. After a short stopover in Thailand and discussion with General Thanarat Sarit, the Thai premier, they arrived in Saigon on 9 May. In a press conference that day, Secretary McNamara told reporters that there were no plans to bring in US combat troops, but he apparently hinted that the Laotian situation "could alter his thinking."[2]

On the following day the Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, accompanied by General Paul D. Harkins, the MACV commander, and Ambassador Frederick Nolting, toured by fixed-wing transport and helicopter the length and breadth of the country. In total, they covered some 1,400 miles from the 17th Parallel in the north to the Mekong Delta in the south. This included a flyover of Route 9 below the Demilitarized Zone separating the two Vietnams. Their itinerary involved visits to the Operation SUNRISE area, three strategic hamlets, ARVN units with American advisors, and the training center for the South Vietnamese Civil Guards in the village of Song Mao near one of the strategic hamlets. In late afternoon Secretary McNamara and his party were to meet with President Diem in the mountain resort town of Dalat, which the South Vietnamese president made his summer capital to escape the heat of Saigon.[3]

The schedule for the visiting delegation remained tight for the rest of their time in Vietnam. There was to be a formal dinner hosted by President Diem as well as meetings with senior Vietnamese and American officials. Both Admiral Felt, the commander of US forces in the Pacific, and General Harkins had joined the McNamara group and participated in the discussions. Before his departure on 11 May, the Secretary held a press conference with the Saigon press corps.[4]

In both this press conference and his official account, Secretary McNamara remained largely upbeat. He told the assembled reporters that he was "tremendously encouraged" by what he had seen and heard. The Defense Secretary praised the efforts of the American advisors in their assistance to the Vietnamese military. He believed that the Vietnamese people were more secure from the Viet Cong. Mr. McNamara declared that in his inspection of the strategic hamlet project he "had found nothing but progress and hope for the future." He doubted the need to expand the US advisory effort beyond the present authorized number. General Lemnitzer reinforced the Secretary's optimism, remarking that the Vietnamese militia, including both the Civil Guard and the Self Defense units, were showing more confidence and losing fewer weapons. Upon returning to Washington, Secretary McNamara repeated his positive message: "Progress in the last eight to ten weeks has been great." In his formal report of the trip, he reiterated his belief "that the strategic hamlet program promises solid benefits and may well be the vital key to success of the pacification program."[5]

Despite Secretary McNamara's show of confidence that the South Vietnamese had made considerable progress against the Viet Cong, he also had his doubts. President

Kennedy's military advisor, General Maxwell Taylor, later wrote that while the Secretary of Defense upon his return spoke publicly about "a feeling of great encouragement," in private he expressed the opinion that "it would take years to defeat the Communists."[6] The American press corps in Vietnam glimpsed some of Secretary McNamara's qualms about the actual advances the Vietnamese were making in providing security in the countryside. *New York Times* correspondent Homer Bigart wrote about the unhappiness of the Defense Secretary with the defensive capability of the Vietnamese militia in one of the strategic hamlets. The local authorities had put on a demonstration in the hamlet to show off the ability of the local militia to repulse an enemy attack. Despite the mock-heroics of the defenders, the Secretary expressed his displeasure to learn that the village had no radio and that it would take a messenger on foot about four hours to bring in reinforcements. According to Mr. Bigart, Secretary McNamara told his entourage, "This is certainly something we can easily do—provide a radio communications network at low cost."[7]

On a larger scale, Mr. Bigart learned from his sources that the Secretary criticized in his meetings and dinner with President Diem the slowness of the Vietnamese in implementing the planned pacification campaign in the Mekong Delta. Moreover, the American delegation complained about political interference with the Vietnamese military chain of command. The United Press noted that when the Secretary arrived back in Washington, he remarked that South Vietnam faced a war of "not months, but years."[8]

Secretary McNamara's official report characteristically consisted of a detailed statistical review of the situation in Vietnam, supported by six appendices. For example, in his assessment of the Strategic Hamlet Program he remarked that there were 14,000 hamlets in Vietnam, of which 1,579 "have been organized as strategic hamlets with an additional 1,230 planned for this calendar year." He placed an equal emphasis on the benefits of the hamlet program and on what he considered its shortcomings. Among the advantages were the provision of security for the villages, limiting extortion of the populace by the Viet Cong, providing improved economic conditions for the villagers, giving better education and medical treatment, and perhaps most important impeding the capability of the Viet Cong to move freely and mingle with the people. Despite the potential of the Hamlet program, the Secretary's list of its five limitations tended to negate any progress. These included a lack of adequate orientation for the resettled population, a shortage of trained administrators, poor construction procedures, a shortage and lack of communication equipment in several of the hamlets, and finally "insufficient training and equipment for local defense forces." Secretary McNamara ended his report on a more or less positive note, arguing that many of these problems were being addressed and that "in a broader sense there was an atmosphere of restrained optimism in every area visited . . . that victory is clearly attainable . . . [and] hopefully, it will not take fifteen years fully to consummate it."[9]

In a sense, the Secretary's findings complemented those of other recent visitors to Vietnam. Sterling Cottrell, the head of the administration's Vietnam interagency task force, reported to the Special Group on Counter-Insurgency that in Vietnam he found

support for the Strategic Hamlet Program, but more confusion than he had previously thought to exist in the personal interaction between the American advisors and their Vietnamese counterparts. On 9 May, a few days later, Walter Stoneman from the Agency for International Development, who also had just come back from an inspection trip to Vietnam, expressed equally mixed feelings about progress in Vietnam. He told a meeting of the Vietnam Task Force under Cottrell that the US Operations Mission in Vietnam had improved its access to information in Vietnam, but at the same time uncovered "a clearer realization of GVN disorganization and ineffectiveness." According to all accounts, the situation in Vietnam remained in a state of flux.[10]

Reorganization in Washington

In Washington, the Kennedy administration continued to modify and monitor its counterinsurgency policy, especially in Vietnam, through a series of interagency task forces. At the pinnacle of this amorphous structure was the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) chaired by General Taylor, which President Kennedy had established at the beginning of the year. To ensure high-level administration attention, the committee met regularly and included senior members of the National Security establishment. In fact, when Sterling Cottrell reported to the Special Group upon his return from Vietnam, his audience included Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, CIA Director McCone, Army Chief of Staff General George H. Decker, General Taylor, and Marine Major General Victor A. Krulak representing the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[11]

General Krulak attended the meeting in his capacity as Special Assistant for Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities for the Joint Staff. Secretary McNamara had appointed him to the newly created position in mid-February 1962 after he relinquished his command of the Marine Recruit Depot, San Diego. Considered by many as one of the Marine Corps' most innovative officers, General Krulak was not one to shun the limelight. According to the Marine general, he first met President Kennedy in the Pacific when as a lieutenant colonel he commanded the Marine Parachute Battalion and the future President commanded a PT boat. In March 1962 President Kennedy invited General Krulak, newly established in his position with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Army Major General designate William B. Rosson, serving in a similar position with the Army Staff, to the White House. At this meeting the President stressed that counterinsurgency "was the most pressing war at hand or in prospect."[12]

General Krulak's responsibility involved, among other tasks, assisting General Lemnitzer in the latter's duties as a member of the Special Group. On 17 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman appeared before the group to report on progress in the Vietnam War as well as on his personal impressions from his recent trip with Secretary McNamara. In his presentation General Lemnitzer spoke about the experimental defoliation program in Vietnam. He referred to some difficulties in previous tests because of "incorrect strength of the defoliant and to improper use of the nozzles." General Lemnitzer argued

that "these factors" could be rectified and indicated that a "decision might well be requested to continue with such operations." The general also stated that there might be consideration given even to crop destruction in certain Viet Cong areas. At this point, CIA Director John McCone warned against using such agents in Montagnard areas, where the population was supporting the South Vietnamese government.[13]

General Lemnitzer continued on a positive note relative to his observations on the situation in Vietnam. He believed that there was an improvement in the South Vietnamese village communications network but admitted there was "a gap . . . between the central village and its component hamlets." The general remarked upon the excellent relationship between General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting and that in general there was marked progress in the training of the Vietnamese militia as well as in the Strategic Hamlet Program. Attorney General Kennedy interrupted at this juncture to ask how the Chairman reconciled his positive picture with the rather gloomy view depicted by Homer Bigart in that morning's *New York Times*. General Lemnitzer answered simply that he was unable to make the reconciliation. The Attorney General then suggested, perhaps sardonically, that the Chairman "might wish to send a note to the President, pointing out Bigart's inaccuracy, if this proves to be the case."[14]

The brief contra-temps between Robert Kennedy and General Lemnitzer was not that unusual in the proceedings of the committee. According to one unfriendly critic of the Kennedy brothers, the Attorney General attended almost all of the weekly committees and often took on the role of a prosecutor "zealously and relentlessly cross-examin[ing]" a witness. Whether or not Robert Kennedy's rationale behind his tactics was to "install fear" into government officials that his *big brother* was also watching them is irrelevant. What was significant was that the incident highlighted the complexity of the US counterguerrilla effort in South Vietnam as well as the difficulty to monitor from Washington what progress, if any, was being made.[15]

With the renewed Laotian crisis, the Kennedy administration continued to revise its oversight structure for Vietnam. This caused a small rupture within the executive branch on the makeup of the task forces. In the State Department, Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson was suggesting by mid-June the formation of a new interagency task force for Southeast Asia that would be separate from the existing Vietnam Task Force headed by Sterling Cottrell. Upon learning of this proposed maneuver, Commander Worth H. Bagley, the naval aide to General Taylor, on 13 June expressed his concern that this would dilute the authority of the Special Group (CI). Commander Bagley told the general, "I sense State may be running with this ball too quickly and that there is a need to stop and look at the concept of Task Forces." According to Commander Bagley, the tasks of any new task force and its relationship to the Special Group needed to be clearly defined. He feared that if this did not occur, the task force would merely "become a passive forum." In sum, the Navy commander recommended to General Taylor that the Vietnam Task Force in Washington be subordinate to the new Southeast Asia Task Force, which should be headed by a high-level official of the senior sponsoring agency. This official in turn would report on counterinsurgency matters to

the Special Group (CI). Commander Bagley even proposed that, given the situation in Southeast Asia, it might be appropriate that the "Defense [Department] should chair this task force" rather than the State Department.[16]

While there was no specific reference to the Bagley memorandum, three days later, 16 June 1962, the President issued an NSAM extending the counterinsurgency responsibility of the Special Group (CI) to eight more nations—Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Iran, Ecuador, Colombia, Guatemala, and Venezuela—in addition to South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand.[17] On 21 June, Secretary of State Dean Rusk ordered the restructuring of both the Southeast Asia and the Vietnam Task Forces. He directed the replacement of the old Vietnam Task Force under Mr. Cottrell by a new Southeast Asia Task Force chaired by Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Averell Harriman. Sterling Cottrell would then become Mr. Harriman's deputy for the task force. Like the old Vietnam Task Force, its makeup would consist of representatives from the State and Defense Departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Agency for International Development, the US Information Agency, and the CIA.[18]

Under the new Southeast Asia Task Force would be two working groups: a Vietnam Working Group headed by Chalmers B. Wood, Cottrell's former assistant, and a new Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Burma Working Group. As noted above, Burma and Cambodia were two nations added to the Special Group's counterinsurgency responsibilities. While the task force remained under State Department auspices, Secretary Rusk's implementing directive stated that it was "to keep the Special Group (CI) informed of all activities related to its sphere of jurisdiction."[19]

Earlier in the year, General Krulak had declared that the Special Group (CI) "gives us the mechanism to face consolidated aggressive power with consolidated quick-reacting power. I believe the Special Group scheme is the counterinsurgency answer—at the Washington level."[20] Yet as an Army historian, Graham A. Cosmas, observed, many of President Kennedy's counterinsurgency experts advocated a "super agency" in Washington that would parallel the American counterinsurgency organization in Vietnam. His history of the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, argues that the Special Group for Counterinsurgency "proved to be inadequate . . . for such a super agency."[21]

Mid-Year Assessment

By the end of June the newly formed Southeast Asia Task Force under Assistant Secretary Harriman presented its assessment of the situation in Vietnam as part of its first overall report on the region. It opened with a relatively positive statement to the effect that the South Vietnamese government efforts in the counterinsurgency war against the VC was "making progress," but with the caveat that it was "still too early to predict assured success." The task force also concluded that the Strategic Hamlet Program was "moving forward" and noted that the South Vietnamese Army had launched two "search and hold" operations, which appeared "to promise good results." There had

also been some success in cutting government bureaucracy, especially in the issuing of identity cards and providing radio communications for some 670 villages.[22]

At the same time, the task force report contained several observations that hardly promoted confidence in the South Vietnamese government and its army in their counterguerrilla campaign against the Viet Cong. The authors of the report observed that the country's rural areas were "still being eroded faster than . . . being reinforced." According to the document, the communist forces, although suffering losses, seemed "not to have been seriously hurt." Moreover, the task force maintained that "the VC apparently retain[ed] the aura of invincibility" and still had the ability to mount battalion-sized attacks simultaneously. In fact, during the first five months of 1962 the enemy had averaged 124 attacks per week, with a high total for the year of 174 on the week ending 4 June. Still, there was reason for some optimism toward the end of the month in that this number had been reduced to 101 and 91 respectively for the weeks ending 11 and 18 June.[23]

On 1 July 1962 Sterling Cottrell presented the final report of the old South Vietnam Task Force, which had been replaced by the new Vietnam Working Group. The former director observed that despite the efforts of the United States to enhance President Diem's political appeal in South Vietnam, his popular support had actually declined.[24]

Although not mentioned in Cottrell's account, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informally had discussed this subject in mid-June with some senior State Department officials, including Under Secretary Johnson. At this meeting, Chief of Naval Operations George W. Anderson asked the Under Secretary for his thoughts on what would be US policy "if Diem should pass from the scene." Mr. Johnson referred to guidance that had been sent to Ambassador Nolting the previous October giving the Ambassador a great amount of discretion in the matter. At the present time, the administration policy would be to support Diem's senior advisor Nguyen Dinh Thuan or Vice President Tran Van Tho to be his successor. According to the Under Secretary, no matter who replaced Diem, the realistic view would be that the military would be the "base of power" in the regime. He nonetheless contended that the United States would recommend that any new government, if at all possible, would have "a civilian complexion with emphasis on the constitutional aspects." Both Mr. Johnson and Ben Wood, the head of the new Vietnam Working Group, insisted that any change of government in South Vietnam would require rapid action by the US Government to prevent a Communist takeover. They insisted that Ambassador Nolting had full authority to act and did not "need a quarterback in Washington."[25]

While Mr. Cottrell made no reference to the possible change of government in Vietnam, he outlined some sixty-eight areas in which he evaluated US and South Vietnamese progress in the war against the Communist insurgency. Among these subjects were: possible bilateral relations between the United States and South Vietnam; assisting the Vietnamese to obtain assistance from other foreign nations; possible commitment of US forces to Vietnam; an increase in the size of the Vietnamese Army; border control techniques; developing a rehabilitation program for VC prisoners; covert action; long-range planning; informing the President of matters that require his attention; introduction of

Jungle Jim Squadron into Vietnam; initiation of guerrilla ground action against Communist aerial supply missions in the Tchepone area; providing increased airlift; providing reorganization for an increased US role; the ability of the Vietnamese government to place the nation on a war footing; overhaul of the Vietnamese military organization; developing more contacts between GVN officials and the people, as well as an amnesty program for VC defectors.[26]

In general the result of these evaluations was a mixed bag. For example, Mr. Cottrell observed that the matter of formal bilateral relations with the Government of Vietnam had been shelved because of the belief that a formal treaty would violate the Geneva Accords and that the "ongoing joint programs constitute an adequate bilateral 'arrangement.'" He also noted that the planned US sponsored guerrilla operations in the Tchepone area against Communist resupply efforts had been suspended because of its possible effects on the new Geneva negotiations on Laos. On the subject of possible US troop intervention, Mr. Cottrell again presented a somewhat ambiguous account. He noted that the United States had suspended the examination of the "diplomatic setting for commitment of US forces to VN." In a following section, however, the report contains the statement that contingency planning continued for the "full examination of size and composition of forces required in case of commitment [of] US forces [in] VN."[27]

While somewhat critical of some of the South Vietnamese effort, the report generally praised the US participation, especially the military advisory effort. It referred to the fact that the United States had deployed 9,069 military personnel to Vietnam, which included eleven Special Forces teams. MAAG advisors were operating in every province in South Vietnam, and US helicopter pilots and aircraft "had sharply increased ARVN mobility and reduced reaction time." At this point there were eighty American-manned helicopters operating in Vietnam. The US Air Force Jungle Jim Squadron now numbered sixteen fixed-wing propeller-driven aircraft including four C-47 transports. The squadron, ostensibly assigned to train the Vietnamese in air-ground support, carried out a variety of tasks including air strikes, photography, air reconnaissance, defoliation, and special intelligence missions. In rounding out his account, Mr. Cottrell stated that his task force had furnished the White House with regular status reports and that he appeared personally "bi-weekly at meetings of the Special Group (Counterinsurgency)."[28]

Both the Cottrell and Southeast Asia Task Force reports described as a political and psychological victory over the North Vietnamese the three-nation ICC report in June on violations of the 1954 Geneva agreements. In this document, the Indian and Canadian members, over the objections of the Polish delegate, stated that the North Vietnamese had breached the accords by "sending armed men and supplies into South Vietnam." While praising the ICC findings, Mr. Cottrell and the authors of the Southeast Asia Task Force report failed to disclose that the ICC also had charged the South Vietnamese Government with breaking its commitment to Geneva "by receiving increased military aid from the United States and by establishing a 'factual military alliance' with the United States."[29]

Despite the ICC reprimand, the North Vietnamese Government had no intentions of discontinuing its support of the Communist insurgency in the south. In their 1994 revised history, PAVN historians observed that in February 1962 the Politburo expanded on its decision in September of the previous year to deploy eventually thirty to forty thousand troops into the south, beginning with mostly former southerners who had moved north. In the February decision, the Politburo "issued clear orders for our full-time forces in South Vietnam to take the offensive by fighting battles designed to destroy enemy manpower." In June the North Vietnamese high command amended these directives, stating "their most immediate instructions were to intensify military operations and coordinate these operations with the political struggle in order to preserve and expand our forces and to disrupt the enemy plan to set up 'strategic hamlets.'" Thus by mid-year both the North Vietnamese on one side and the South Vietnamese with their American advisors on the other viewed the strategic hamlets as the strategic center of the war.[30]

The July Honolulu Conference

In July, notwithstanding the various restructuring of the Washington task forces, Secretary McNamara once more took the lead in the development of US Vietnam policy. While he first supported the establishment of the new Southeast Asia Task Force, the Defense Secretary soon saw it as duplicating other oversight functions and perhaps overshadowing the existing focus on Vietnam.[31] As Secretary McNamara later wrote in his own retrospective of his tenure in office, he had "always pressed our commanders very hard for estimates of progress—or lack of it."[32] In any event, in July he reinstituted his periodic Honolulu Conference on progress in the Vietnam War with his major military field commanders and senior Pentagon officials, including members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff.

In contrast to previous meetings in Honolulu in which Secretary McNamara emphasized the US advisory buildup, he now stressed the eventual withdrawal of the US advisors and limitations of the American effort. The pressure was to be on the Vietnamese to take over and become more self-reliant. According to the Secretary's deputy, Roswell Gilpatric, President Kennedy had made it obvious to him and to the Defense Secretary "that he wanted to not only hold the level of US military presence in Vietnam down, but he wanted to reverse the flow."[33]

The July Honolulu meeting itself opened on 23 July, the same day as the signing in Geneva of the new Laotian agreement, with the usual recitation by General Harkins, the MACV commander, of the general progress of the South Vietnamese military and government. Covering the period since Secretary McNamara's visit to Vietnam, the MACV commander, ever the optimist, generalized "there is no doubt that we are on the winning side." He predicted that with the continuation of the present program the Viet Cong activity would begin to decline in the near future. General Harkins then proceeded to give a statistical rundown of the Strategic Hamlet Program; describe improvements

in South Vietnamese communications, intelligence gathering, and ability of the Army to make contact with the VC; and report the continuing advances in patrolling the South Vietnamese inland waterways. The general then requested the arming of helicopters to provide "suppressive fire" for landing zones. He also wanted to proceed with additional defoliation and possible crop destruction missions to expose enemy movement as well as to destroy Viet Cong food resources.[34]

According to an official news release, while in Hawaii Secretary McNamara described the progress of the war in the following glowing terms:

> The South Vietnamese are beginning to hit the Viet Cong insurgents where it hurts most—in winning the people to the side of the government. . . .
> The Vietnamese armed forces are carrying the war to the Viet Cong with greater initiative and frequency. The sign posts are encouraging and we are looking now to sustaining this momentum.[35]

Secretary McNamara took advantage of the second agenda item, the training and equipping of the Vietnamese military establishment, to stress his desire to reduce the level of US support. According to the minutes of the meeting, after General Harkins finished his positive appraisal, Secretary McNamara observed that despite "tremendous progress" the United States had concentrated "on short-term crash-type actions." He now wanted General Harkins and his staff to "look ahead to a carefully conceived long-range" training and equipping program that would involve the "phase out of major US combat advisory and logistics support activities." The Defense Secretary then asked the MACV commander for his estimate of the time it would take to get rid of the VC as a "disturbing force." General Harkins replied that he believed that it would take one year after the South Vietnamese Armed Forces and militia were "fully operational and really pressing the VC in all areas."[36]

Given that assumption and the fact that the Strategic Hamlet Program was behind schedule in wresting control of villages from the Communists, Secretary McNamara estimated that it would take three years "to bring the VC in [South Vietnam] under control." The Defense Secretary warned that any further delay may very well result in difficulty in retaining "public support for our operations in Vietnam" and that "political pressure will build up as US losses continue to occur." He suggested to General Harkins that he "must assume the worst and make our plans accordingly."[37]

After completing his agenda, Secretary McNamara assigned several participants to investigate or take action on several matters that had come up during the meeting. For example, he directed General Krulak to develop a plan for the Defense Department to assume responsibility from the CIA for the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program consisting of US Special Forces advisors and South Vietnamese Montagnard tribesmen in a border surveillance and village protection mission. In addition, the Secretary asked his public affairs officer, Assistant Secretary Arthur Sylvester, to work with CINCPAC and MACV press representatives "to get good material into the press" concerning the Strategic Hamlet Program. He asked Vice Admiral Herbert D. Riley, the

Director of the Joint Staff, to investigate the feasibility of arming some of the helicopters with new "flexible gun kits" to provide suppressive fire. One problem that remained unresolved was the extent to which the US command would employ defoliation to destroy the jungle cover protecting the VC infiltration trails. General Harkins had proposed "crop spraying" in areas that some of the Montagnard tribesmen had abandoned when they moved to strategic hamlets. Secretary McNamara was reluctant to approve the proposal because of the possibility of international political condemnation. He referred to the just concluded agreement on Laos and to the sensitivity of raising the crop destruction issue at this time. The Secretary declared that any decision on the subject would have to be made in Washington.[38]

General Harkins, of course, was to begin immediately the long-range planning for turning the war over to the South Vietnamese. Ironically, at the same time that Secretary McNamara wanted to reduce the US involvement in Vietnam, he was making decisions at Honolulu that for the most part expanded the war against the Viet Cong.

A Realignment of the Joint Chiefs

Almost simultaneously with the meeting at Honolulu, President Kennedy announced an overhaul of the US military high command. On 20 July the White House released a statement that General Maxwell Taylor, the President's personal military advisor, would become the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff upon the reassignment of General Lemnitzer. At the end of his two-year term as Chairman on 30 September, General Lemnitzer would replace retiring Air Force General Lauris Norstad as the United States Commander in Europe. Continuing this high-level game of musical chairs, the administration named General Earle G. Wheeler, Deputy Commander in Chief of the United States European Command, to be the new Chief of the Staff of the Army, succeeding General George H. Decker. There were other personnel changes as well, but the main point was that for the first time in his administration all of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the exception of Marine Commandant General David Shoup (who legally was not a full member), would owe their selection to President Kennedy.[39]

The fact that President Kennedy had appointed neither Generals Lemnitzer nor Decker to a second term was not a surprise to official Washington. Hanson Baldwin, the military affairs correspondent of the *New York Times* with close ties to the Armed Services, observed that many high officials in the Kennedy White House blamed the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the Bay of Pigs failure. He noted after that unhappy event, "the President and other high-ranking Administration figures criticized the Joint Chiefs of Staffs, sometimes caustically."[40] Moreover, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had disagreed very strongly with the US policy in Laos, and Kennedy administration officials questioned their commitment to counterinsurgency warfare. One former Kennedy advisor, Walt Rostow, described the relationship between President Kennedy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Lemnitzer period as "a nightmare. It was just awful."[41]

While obviously President Kennedy had very little rapport with General Lemnitzer, he did not want to create any brouhaha over his relief. The general had an excellent reputation within the military community. As Hanson Baldwin wrote: "General Lemnitzer is first and foremost a soldier. He is not flashy, but sound. He takes praise and blame in his stride." Moreover, as the press noted, there was the need of the administration to fill the vacancy of General Norstad, who was held in high regard by the US NATO allies, with a prominent US military figure. According to Baldwin's sources within the US military establishment, the Kennedy administration had originally moved General Wheeler, the former Director of the Joint Staff, to the European Command in March 1962 with the intention of having him succeed General Norstad. In his article on the coming command shifts, Mr. Baldwin observed that several "informal protests" by some of the European NATO members caused the President to "quietly put aside" Wheeler's name and transfer General Lemnitzer from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the NATO position.[42]

Apparently this set of circumstances led President Kennedy to replace General Decker with General Wheeler as Army Chief of Staff. According to historian H. R. McMaster, General Decker had lost the confidence of Secretary McNamara and the President when he suggested that the United States could not win a conventional war in Southeast Asia.[43] Another defense specialist, Lawrence J. Korb, in his study of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, credited Decker's "lack of dynamism," the fact that he was a holdover from the previous administration and his role in the Bay of Pigs debacle, as additional reasons for his failure to receive "the normal two-year extension" to his term.[44]

Although President Kennedy now had his "own team" on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it did not necessarily mean a complete turnaround in the President's relationship with his senior military leadership. After all, his appointment of General Curtis E. LeMay in July 1961 to replace General Thomas H. White as Air Force Chief of Staff was hardly one to bring harmony to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General LeMay, who had served as Assistant Chief of Staff of the Air Force and was a former commander of the Strategic Air Command, was hardly a shrinking violet when it came to advocating the primacy of air power. He emphatically disagreed with General Taylor's concept of limited war and believed that both the new Chairman and Secretary McNamara "didn't fully brief the Chiefs on what was going on." General LeMay argued that the Kennedy administration failed to consult with the Chiefs, who very often remained in the dark on policy issues. As far as Vietnam was concerned, the Air Force Chief maintained, "I never could understand . . . what the goal was, what we were trying to do."[45]

The appointment of General Taylor, a retired officer, as Chairman did not sit well with many among the senior military. According to Hanson Baldwin, many of them believed that the selection of a retired officer for the post was "unwise" since it displayed "a lack of confidence" in those still on active duty and furthermore delayed future promotions for those junior to General Taylor. They remembered all too well that when he served in the Eisenhower administration as Army Chief of Staff General Taylor was often at the center of controversies ranging from disputes over "massive retaliation" versus "flexible response" to the reorganization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff organization.[46]

The question of the status of the Joint Chiefs of Staff remained a sensitive issue. The fact that President Kennedy had first appointed General Taylor to be his personal advisor was hardly a vote of confidence in the senior military body. Furthermore, in his advocacy of reforming the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor had proposed the complete separation of the Service Chiefs from the joint structure. Instead, he suggested the appointment in their place of a single Defense chief of staff. This chief of staff would preside over a new council consisting of either senior retired officers or those about to retire. As could be expected, this concept received little support from either the Chiefs or leading members of Congress serving on the Armed Forces Committees.[47] In fact, on 31 July, eleven days after President Kennedy announced the appointment of General Taylor to be Chairman, General Lemnitzer specifically declared before a group of student summer interns in the Pentagon his disagreement with General Taylor's concept of the single Defense chief of staff. He called it "contrary to our way of life" and stated that such decisions should "repose in the Secretary of Defense and the President and not in a single military chief."[48]

General Taylor himself attempted to avoid the issue of the makeup of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Forces Committee in August, he told the Senators that although he stood behind everything he wrote in his book, the situation was now different.[49] The general amplified his views on the subject at a news conference a couple months later after he had been sworn in as Chairman. At that time, referring to the views in his book, he declared "I am not arriving, blueprint in hand, as a crusader for change." In fact, he stated that he was not even sure that the opinions voiced in the book were "still valid today."[50] One thing General Taylor definitely did not want was another general in the White House to serve as the President's military advisor. Several years later he related that when President Kennedy asked him whom he recommended to take his position, he replied, "Nobody."[51]

Even with his most recent appointments, including that of General Taylor, there remained a divide between the military and both President Kennedy and his civilian advisors. Generally, President Kennedy had a poor opinion about the judgment of many of the senior military leaders in the Pentagon. On 31 July 1962, in an informal conference with Secretaries McNamara and Rusk and senior National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, the President half jokingly commented unfavorably on the abilities of both the diplomatic corps and the military hierarchy. While stating that generalizations always had exceptions, he used a Spanish word for part of the male anatomy, remarking that too many State Department Foreign Service officers seemed to lack that attribute. On the other hand, President Kennedy suggested that too many officers in the Defense Department looked "as if that's all they've got. . . . I know that you get all this sort of virility over at the Pentagon and you get a lot of Arleigh Burkes: admirable, nice figure, without any brains."[52]

Such sentiments certainly did not help to make for a healthy civilian-military relationship. The new Kennedy appointments to the Joint Chiefs of Staff still left a gap between the two groups. As Roswell L. Gilpatric, Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy administration, recalled, his boss Secretary McNamara was "high" both on

General Taylor and Marine Commandant David Shoup. According to Mr. Gilpatric, Secretary McNamara also "thought generally well of 'Bus' Wheeler." General Wheeler may have come to the early attention of the Kennedy people when as Director of the Joint Staff in 1960 he briefed then-Presidential candidate Kennedy on national security developments. Mr. Gilpatric indicated that both Secretary McNamara and the President had much more negative feelings about General LeMay, the Air Force Chief of Staff, and the outspoken Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Anderson.[53] Notwithstanding his seemingly close relations with John Kennedy, General Taylor admitted several years later that his interaction with the President was much less when he became Chairman than when he served as his personal military representative.[54] The military-civilian divide would remain and extend into the next administration.

Defoliation and Crop Destruction

During the interim, there had arisen a dispute between the Defense and the State Departments about a possible crop destruction campaign that the South Vietnamese wanted to establish in former Montagnard lands. At the end of July General Lemnitzer, writing for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a memorandum to Secretary McNamara, endorsed the proposal by both General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting for the "Vietnamese to conduct a trial program of chemical crop destruction in eight target areas." According to the JCS Chairman this experiment, if successful, would permit the South Vietnamese Armed Forces "to launch and sustain on its own a crop destruction program on an operational basis." General Lemnitzer emphasized that even in this test South Vietnamese personnel in their own helicopters would carry out the spraying with no direct US assistance except for limited technical advice. In concluding his memorandum, the Chairman observed, "President Diem has consistently supported the use of herbicides, particularly for crop destruction."[55]

While not directly responding to General Lemnitzer, on 1 August Secretary McNamara recommended to President Kennedy the use of herbicide operations to denude certain mangrove areas in the Mekong Delta that the Viet Cong used to cover their movements. He mentioned that previous testing during the spring had shown the best results against such terrain cover. The Defense Secretary declared that American crews in C–123 transport aircraft with South Vietnamese observers on board would do the spraying. Secretary McNamara insisted that any propaganda disadvantage of the program had already occurred in the spring and that the United States could now "use herbicides without causing a serious new international incident." He made clear, however, that this spraying was quite distinct from the recommendation "to initiate crop destruction activities in Vietnam, now under discussion."[56]

At the same time, the State Department was taking a much more negative position on the possibility of launching a crop destruction campaign in Vietnam. Assistant Secretary Harriman's deputy, Edward E. Rice, asked the State Department's Intelligence and

Research Bureau to study the proposal and the possible impact it would have on the war. In response, Bureau Director Roger Hilsman reported that there definitely would be repercussions but "under certain conditions the benefits . . . might be even weightier." Mr. Hilsman concluded that such conditions did not exist at the present time, but that the program might be fruitful at a later time "after the Viet Cong have been isolated from the peasants and have been driven into well-defined areas of concentration."[57] Edward Rice in a separate memo to Assistant Secretary Harriman was even more definite in his opposition to the plan, stating that he was "firmly opposed to letting crop destruction be tried out."[58] Mr. Harriman himself had stated that his disquiet with the proposal "was that the US, a food-surplus country, would suffer in the Asian opinion forum by being associated with an operation denying food to segments of an underdeveloped country."[59]

Even in the State Department, however, there was some opposition to the prevailing notion that the United States should reject any food destruction campaign. One of the chief dissenters, Chalmers Wood, the director of the newly established Vietnam Working Group, acknowledged to Ambassador Nolting that the prospects for the proposal were not good. Still, he hoped to present a paper to the President giving "State's disapproval," but the paper "will at least contain the pros and cons of this project." He also mentioned referring a copy to CIA officials in hopes that that agency would support the effort.[60]

On 8 August, as expected, Secretary McNamara recommended to President Kennedy that he approve the request for US support of the proposed Vietnamese crop destruction operations. Secretary McNamara referred to the discussion at the Honolulu Conference on the subject and stated that after "extensive evaluation," he was satisfied that crop destruction, even in sections of one province, could provide a substantial military advantage.[61] The following day President Kennedy issued NSAM 178 approving the destruction of mangrove swamps in nine selected areas of the delta. The document pointedly stated that the approval only applied to the "nine selected portions of the delta area." It also mentioned "that every effort be made to avoid accidental destruction of the food crops in the areas to be sprayed."[62]

While the White House continued to ponder the question of crop destruction, Secretary Rusk recommended that the President disapprove the existing proposal. Despite the Secretary's final recommendation, it was clear that both Mr. Hilsman and Mr. Wood influenced Secretary Rusk's rationale. The letter contained strong reasons for either approving or rejecting the spraying. In fact, a case could be made that given only this memorandum, the evidence for conducting the crop destruction was the stronger of the two. For example, the memorandum mentions as one of the advantages the fact that crop destruction had already been used effectively in counterguerrilla warfare. The British had employed aircraft successfully in Malaya and South Vietnamese aircraft had been dropping napalm for several months on Viet Cong crops. Secretary Rusk then observed that "Napalm damages the soil for several years, defoliants do not." In his last paragraph, he echoed Hilsman's observation that given the present military situation and possible political repercussions, the time was not yet ripe for a crop destruction campaign.[63]

The following day the subject came up at a meeting between State Department representatives and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Lemnitzer asked Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson what was the State Department position on the crop destruction proposal. Under Secretary Johnson answered that "State had not agreed to it" and mentioned that the Department's memorandum had been given to Henry S. Rowen, the Defense Department Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs. At that point, Mr. Rowen, who was at the meeting, gave a copy of the memorandum to General Lemnitzer, who had not yet seen it. Mr. Johnson declared that he believed Secretaries Rusk and McNamara would have to meet and settle the matter. The JCS Chairman disagreed, stating that it would have to be decided at a higher level. After some heated discussion, General Lemnitzer acidly commented, "it is strange that we can bomb, kill, and burn people but are not permitted to starve them."[64] The question over the spraying would not be settled for another month.

The Second Taylor Visit to Vietnam

During the month of August General Taylor made his preparations for taking over his new assignment. As mentioned previously, the general appeared before the Senate Armed Forces Committee on 8 August and the following day the full Senate unanimously voted his confirmation as Chairman. With the approval of the President, he decided to visit three of the major US commands in the United States and Central America. This included the Atlantic Fleet Command at Norfolk, Virginia; the Strike Command at Tampa, Florida, newly formed to handle sudden international crises; and the Caribbean Command in Panama City, Panama. According to the White House announcement, the trip would "provide him with 'personal orientation' in preparation for the assumption of his duties."[65]

Upon his return, General Taylor would embark at the end of the month on an extended tour of the Pacific and US allies in Asia, including South Vietnam. This trip would be a whirlwind affair. Leaving Washington on 31 August, the general would have stops in Hawaii, Japan, Okinawa, Korea, and Taiwan before arriving in Saigon on 10 September.[66]

Three days prior to General Taylor's arrival in Vietnam, General Harkins, the MACV commander, and the US Chief of Mission at the Embassy, William C. Trueheart, met with President Diem to set the stage for the visit. At this meeting General Harkins presented the broad outline of the plan that he had devised to carry out Secretary McNamara's instructions to bring the VC war under control within three years. He suggested to President Diem that it would require four successive stages: "the formulation of the plan, preparation, the explosion, and then the follow-up." The MACV commander emphasized that the planning was still in the beginning conceptual phase and required much more detailed attention. He remarked on the need for a clear single chain of command from the President through the Vietnamese Joint General Staff down to the operating forces through a series of regional command centers.[67]

General Harkins believed that the plan would be ready for implementation in early 1963. In reply to a question from President Diem, the American general argued that within one year of the implementation of the plan the government forces would be able "to achieve victory," even though Secretary McNamara thought it would take three years. President Diem agreed that "in principle" the plan had validity, although it was somewhat over ambitious. He thought that the three-year period was more realistic. The South Vietnamese president also wondered if General Harkins had considered how the enemy would react. The American general responded "that his philosophy in war was not to worry about the enemy but, rather, to let the enemy worry about him." President Diem remained somewhat dubious but gave General Harkins his approval to continue with the planning effort.[68]

The meeting ended as it opened with a discussion of the pending visit of General Taylor and US assistance to the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. General Harkins was fulsome in his praise of the progress that the Vietnamese had made since General Taylor's last visit to the country in October of the previous year. He then promised President Diem new armored reconnaissance vehicles and mentioned the deployment soon of two new US helicopter companies. Included in their inventory were fifteen armed HU1A helicopters that could provide aerial support and suppressive fire for landing and ground operations. General Harkins and President Diem agreed that the new offensive should work in concert with the Strategic Hamlet Program.[69]

President Diem then asked General Harkins what subjects they should bring up with General Taylor. The American commander reminded the Vietnamese president that General Taylor was on a world tour to prepare himself for his new position as Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. They then decided that a discussion of Vietnamese ground operations and the border situations with both Cambodia and Laos would prove fruitful. The two also agreed that there should be "an exchange of views on press relations." For some reason, before the Americans left, President Diem questioned General Harkins about newspaper speculation on General Taylor's views on "conventional vs nuclear forces in Europe." According to the minutes, the American general assured President Diem that the incoming US Chairman believed in a balanced force including both nuclear and conventional forces.[70]

As indicated, General Taylor's stay in Vietnam was brief. He arrived on the night of 10 September and on the next day attended a three-hour briefing by General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting's staff members. That afternoon, accompanied by both General Harkins and Mr. Nolting, he met with President Diem's younger brother and special advisor Ngo Dinh Nhu. The visiting general told Mr. Nhu that he was much impressed with the progress that had been made in Vietnam since his previous visit. In his remarks Mr. Nhu emphasized the Strategic Hamlet Program, which he headed. The Vietnamese minister stated that in his opinion this program would result in the Viet Cong being expelled from the villages. He described the concept as one of phases: first came security for the people in the hamlet, then political indoctrination, and finally the offensive against the enemy guerrillas. The Vietnamese leader foresaw some 16,000 hamlets, with one third

established by the end of the year. At the end of the discussion, Ngo Dinh Nhu expressed his belief that "a revolution for democracy could not be implemented without a war. The people of Vietnam were becoming more and more aware of the fact that this was their war and that, with it, they would gain democracy, new ideas, political and social freedom—in fact a complete reversal of values."[71]

Following this meeting Generals Taylor and Harkins and Ambassador Nolting met with President Diem. During their conversations with Mr. Nhu, the President's brother had not mentioned the problems that the Vietnamese government had with the American press. President Diem, however, brought up the subject as soon as his guests sat down. He argued that the American correspondents had little ability "to form a valid estimate" and their pessimism was the "result of failure to keep [the] entire picture in mind at all times." Ambassador Nolting deftly changed the subject when he referred to what he called "a recent objective story" by Robert Shaplen in the *New Yorker*. The rest of the meeting largely revolved around the progress that President Diem believed had been made in the war against the Viet Cong since the general's visit the previous year, with special emphasis upon the Strategic Hamlet Program.[72]

The entire matter concerning the news media had come to a head with recent accounts that had appeared in the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* magazine. Homer Bigart, who had completed his tour in Vietnam, authored the *Times* piece, while Francois Sully wrote the one for *Newsweek*. Both reporters had difficulty with the government authorities in March when the US Embassy had intervened to dissuade the South Vietnamese from expelling the two. In his article with the headline "Victory in South Vietnam Considered Remote," Mr. Bigart's basic argument was that much of the blame rested on the shoulders of President Diem and his brother Mr. Nhu who frustrated US officers with their "whimsical meddling . . . in the military chain of command."[73]

Mr. Sully's piece, entitled "Vietnam: The Unpleasant Truth," which appeared about a month later, quoted Bernard Fall, an academic expert on the French war in Vietnam, to the effect that the Americans had merely trained the Vietnamese Army to fight an unconventional war with conventional tactics. He also referred to an interview with an anonymous South Vietnamese general who blamed President Diem for destroying the Vietnamese chain of command. Perhaps even more damning, the *Newsweek* editors inserted an accompanying photograph of a group of South Vietnamese militia women sponsored by Nhu's wife with a caption reading "The enemy has more drive and enthusiasm." Madame Nhu immediately took umbrage in an open letter printed in the Vietnamese-government controlled press calling the magazine article an insult to Vietnamese women and demanding the expulsion of the author.[74]

While equally irked by Mr. Bigart, the Diem government could do little to get back at him, but it could and did expel Mr. Sully despite an official complaint by Ambassador Nolting. Dissatisfied with the US Embassy's efforts, six of the Saigon press corps, including David Halberstam, Bigart's replacement at the *Times*, sent a sharply written protest to President Diem. All of this occurred just before General Taylor's visit and was probably the rationale for Diem's outburst at his meeting with the general. Although the

US officials supported Sully's case against the Vietnamese, there probably was a sense of relief in the departure of both reporters from Vietnam. David Halberstam, still bitter over the incident several years later, wrote in his best-selling account of the Vietnam War that when he and his colleagues asked William Trueheart to intervene in the case, the latter replied "that it was not a great question; after all, Sully was a *pied noir*," a derogatory phrase for poor French colonists in Algeria. Mr. Halberstam called the term the equivalent of "calling an American a redneck."[75]

General Taylor agreed with the prevailing US official opinion that the press corps in Vietnam had been very much less than objective in their reporting on the Diem government. On the day after his meeting with Diem, he sought out several of the more junior US advisors assigned to South Vietnamese Army units. Concerned about the latest ruckus with the press, he asked them specifically about their personal relationships with South Vietnamese officers. According to the general, they all stated that they "like what they're doing" and had no problems with their Vietnamese counterparts. Probably referring to the Sully article, which he believed implied an antagonism between the Americans and the South Vietnamese officers, General Taylor later told President Kennedy, "I would say based upon my observations and many discussions it just isn't so."[76]

Ironically, on 12 September David Halberstam, the *New York Times* correspondent and one of the signers of the letter to President Diem protesting the expulsion of Sully, wrote a rather glowing account of Taylor's visit to a Montagnard village in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. According to the article, the tribesmen proved to be "expert counter-guerrilla fighters who are carrying the attack to the Viet Cong." Mr. Halberstam observed that the US Special Forces advisors "were enthusiastic about the Montagnards fighting abilities." He quoted one US Special Forces officer declaring, "They are about the best guerrilla fighters I have ever seen. They have a terrific instinct for this." Almost as an afterthought, the *Times* correspondent mentioned that General Taylor also visited a strategic hamlet in the central coastal region.[77]

On the following day Mr. Halberstam covered the general's farewell press conference. General Taylor told the press corps that he was optimistic about the progress made in the military struggle against the Viet Cong, but that economic and social problems "required a good deal of work to be done." The general nevertheless believed the South Vietnamese government had made great strides and "discredited reports that there had been frequent tension between the Vietnamese and their American advisors." He then declared he was "very pleased" with the progress in the Strategic Hamlet Program. General Taylor noted that 5,000 hamlets were now either fortified or in the process of being fortified, progress that he called a "very impressive" accomplishment. The general declared that his "overall impression" was "of a great national movement, assisted to some extent of course by Americans, but essentially a movement by Vietnamese to defend Vietnam against a dangerous and cruel enemy."[78]

General Taylor left that day for Cambodia. After a short stay there and in Thailand, he continued on to Indonesia where he met with President Sukarno and finally returned to Washington on 20 September. In his formal report to the President, entitled

"Impressions of South Vietnam," General Taylor once more reaffirmed that the South Vietnamese had made much progress since his trip the year before. He believed the most significant change was "the snowballing of the strategic hamlet program." The general mentioned the improved training of the ARVN regular forces and the Civil Guard and Self Defense militias as a result of the US advisory effort in Vietnam. He also saw as a hopeful sign the movement of some Montagnard tribesmen out of their mountain homes in Viet Cong dominated areas to new government-sponsored resettlement hamlets. Finally, he pointed, "for what they are worth," to the improving statistics relative to "comparative casualties, in the reduced loss of weapons to the enemy, and in the freeing of a larger segment of the population and of the national territory from VC domination."[79]

The report still, however, contained several caveats. General Taylor observed that it was obvious that the Viet Cong received "important reinforcements in men and materiel" through the porous borders of Cambodia and Laos into South Vietnam although the exact numbers remained unverifiable. He remarked that the only counter forces to this infiltration were the newly formed Civilian Irregular Defense Group teams composed largely of Montagnard tribesmen. The general also expressed concern over the growing number of various "para-military" groups the Diem regime had established. While granting that there existed rationale for each of these organizations, he thought their sheer number presented a problem. General Taylor argued that perhaps they should be consolidated and more centrally controlled.[80]

The incoming Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff also expressed concern over the slow progress that the Vietnamese were making in developing a coordinated national plan for military operations against the Viet Cong. Referring to the recent July Honolulu Conference and Secretary McNamara's direction to General Harkins to develop a three-year plan to end the Communist insurgency, he mentioned the MACV commander's "concept of a national levee en masse of loyalist forces to attack simultaneously the VC strongholds throughout the country." If as Generals Taylor and Harkins believed President Diem really accepted the MACV outline plan and it appeared feasible, General Harkins then would incorporate it into the overall three-year plan.[81]

General Taylor reserved his strongest criticism for the Saigon press corps. He declared that the American reporters in Vietnam were "uninformed and often belligerently adverse to the programs of the US and [South Vietnamese] Governments." He recommended that the administration assist both MACV and the Embassy to "improve the press coverage . . . and to obtain the support of publishers" to provide "responsible reporting." General Taylor admitted, however, that the South Vietnamese government could do much more "in improving the Saigon environment for the press in order to gain such support."[82]

Five days after he returned from his extended trip to the Far East, General Taylor attended a meeting on the region at the White House that included not only President Kennedy and himself but also several senior officials. Among the attendees were Deputy Assistant Secretary William Bundy, General Lemnitzer, and Secretary McNamara from Defense; Assistant Secretary Harriman and Under Secretary Johnson from State; and

Michael Forrestal and Robert Komer from the White House and National Security Council staff.[83]

The discussion relating to Vietnam took up only a small portion of the meeting. For the most part, General Taylor repeated much of the material contained in his written report, including his impressions of the American press. The one subject that came up that he had not addressed was crop destruction and defoliation. As a matter of coincidence Nguyen Dinh Thuan, a leading member of the Diem bureaucracy who had multiple titles but mainly headed the Ministry of Defense, was on an official visit to Washington and had brought up the subject in a conference with President Kennedy earlier that day. According to the President, the Vietnamese official wanted President Kennedy to approve the use of pesticides "in test runs" against crops in clearly VC strongholds. President Kennedy promised that he would give him an answer by the end of the week. At the meeting with his advisors, the President reiterated that he believed "we ought to answer him one way or the other." He then asked for the advantages and disadvantages of implementing the program. The discussion that ensued was in effect the repetition of the arguments that Mr. Harriman and Secretary McNamara had presented in their dueling memoranda earlier in the month. Finally President Kennedy declared that they should tell General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting that "we are now leaning ... towards permitting this program" but that they had certain questions that they wanted answered relating to the impact on the population.[84]

On the following day, 26 September, Ambassador Nolting came back with a detailed and apparently convincingly argued message presenting the merits of the proposed crop destruction campaign. The Ambassador maintained that both he and General Harkins had made a "careful study" over several months and both agreed to a "limited crop destruction operation in Phu Yen Province." The cable emphasized the restrictions on the proposed spraying operation and its advantages in reducing the Viet Cong food supply. While admitting that the operation might have an effect on the available food for some of the Montagnards, Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins maintained that the government could compensate and feed the affected tribesmen. The Ambassador concluded his argument by declaring: "Without carrying out test operation we will never be able fully confirm efficacy this weapon." He listed the guidelines for the proposed tests. These included limiting target selection to only clearly identifiable VC areas and restricting US personnel to providing only technical and operational advice.[85]

Less than a week later President Kennedy approved the limited crop destruction test "under the conditions and terms set forth by the Embassy." In a memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, Michael Forrestal maintained that President Kennedy

> did so over the mild objections of Averell [Harriman], Roger Hilsman and myself; but with the strong approval of Secretary McNamara, General Taylor, the field and just about everybody else you could think of. I believe his main train of thinking was that you cannot say no to your military advisors all the time, and with this I agree.[86]

The Beginning of the Taylor Chairmanship

The Taylor term hardly started out under auspicious circumstances. On 1 October, the scheduled date for the installation of the new Chairman, US troops and Federal Marshals were in Oxford, Mississippi, putting down a murderous outburst of violence by rioters attempting to prevent the implementation of a Federal court order to end segregation at the all-white state university with the registration of James Meredith, an African-American Air Force veteran. After a wild chaotic night of rock throwing, fire setting, and rifle fire, two persons lay dead and scores were injured and wounded. President Kennedy had stayed up until nearly 0500, when the first elements of a patchwork US Army task force were able to reinforce the besieged Federal marshals and the small federalized Mississippi National Guard unit on the university campus. By 1130 that morning, President Kennedy at the White House had awarded General Lemnitzer the Distinguished Service Medal and then looked on as his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, administered the oath to General Taylor as the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. By nightfall, over 5,000 US troops from the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions were in Oxford. While the military deployment successfully quelled the disturbances, there had been a serious Army communications equipment breakdown, which delayed the timely arrival of the first regular units for several hours. Even with General Taylor as Chairman, there would remain in the Kennedy administration a certain lack of confidence in the military establishment.[87]

While domestic affairs temporarily dominated the front pages and a new international crisis was about to erupt with the US nemesis in the Caribbean, Castro's Cuba, the US involvement in Vietnam would continue. For a time, however, in late September and early October, US policymakers were cautiously optimistic about the war. Forwarding a rather positive weekly progress report from Saigon to President Kennedy, Michael Forrestal wrote: "While we cannot yet sit back in the confidence that the job is well in hand, nevertheless it does appear that we have finally developed a series of techniques which, if properly applied, do seem to produce results."[88] Still, Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, expressed concern to General Harkins about the vulnerability of US helicopters and light fixed-wing aircraft to enemy light anti-aircraft guns. He also passed on information that the Viet Cong had "devised fox hole techniques of listening for approaching helos and getting as much as 15 minutes warning."[89] In early October, at the request of the President, two members of the Vietnam Task Force prepared a paper examining the progress that had been made in Vietnam since General Taylor's first visit to Vietnam the previous year. Their basic conclusion was that in October 1961 the Viet Cong were winning the war, and in October 1962 "the Viet Cong are not winning the war."[90]

The North Vietnamese were saying much the same thing. Historians of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) observed that in late 1962 their forces in the south had grown rapidly, "but the tactical and technical capabilities of our troops had not kept pace with the changes the enemy had made in his own tactics and technical capabilities." North Vietnamese leaders specifically expressed concern about the advantages to the South

Vietnamese of the helicopter assault and armored personnel carrier assault tactics. Finally, the Communists admitted that their forces had enjoyed only limited success in assaults against the new "strategic hamlets" that the South Vietnamese were erecting.[91] In a sense, for both sides, the glass was either half empty or half full, depending upon their perspective.

10

Uncertain Progress, October 1962–March 1963

Another Look at the War in South Vietnam

As indicated in the previous chapter, by early October 1962 both the Kennedy administration and the North Vietnamese took stock of their renewed efforts in South Vietnam following the US advisory buildup. In their October status report, Chalmers B. Wood and Theodore J. Heavner, the director and deputy director, respectively, of the US Government's Vietnam Working Group, expressed a generally positive view of the war against the Communist Viet Cong since General Taylor's visit the previous year.[1]

In contrast to October 1961, when the Communists clearly had the upper hand, Mr. Wood and Mr. Heavner now believed neither side enjoyed the initiative, maintaining that the "VC are clearly further from their objective." They asserted that the South Vietnamese armed forces had demonstrated a decided upswing in troop morale. The two American officials suggested as evidence of this new élan the record number of officer volunteers in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. They maintained there was a growing belief amongst the civilian population in South Vietnam that the Diem regime would win the war against the Communists. As proof of this improvement in public support, the two authors pointed to the increasing number of Vietnamese villagers volunteering information about the local Communist forces to government authorities.[2] Even the critical American Saigon press corps reported that the South Vietnamese Army had improved. *New York Times* correspondent David Halberstam observed in mid-October that the government campaign against the guerrillas was "going better than it had a year ago" but also cautioned "that there is considerably less optimism out in the field than in Washington or in Saigon."[3]

Chalmers Wood and Mr. Heavner reported that both the ARVN and the South Vietnamese militia organizations had reached their 1962 strength goals by October. The ARVN now totaled some 200,000 men, a 30,000 increase since 1961. The two militia forces, the Civil Guard and Home Defense units, stood at 154,000. The Civil Guard had expanded from 33 companies in January to 255 in October, while the number of Self Defense platoons in the villages had risen from none in 1961 to 966. These increases had not occurred without cost. The government troops had suffered over 3,000 dead since the beginning of the year.[4]

The US military in South Vietnam had shown proportionately an even more striking expansion. With the formation of the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, under General Harkins, American military personnel in Vietnam numbered over 10,700 by October. This new command in February incorporated the old Military Advisory Assistance Group; the individual US advisors to the South Vietnamese military; the Army and Marine helicopter units; the Air Force Farm Gate unit; various intelligence, naval, logistic, and communications specialists; and eleven Army Special Forces teams operating with the ARVN Special Forces and Montagnard units. With the enlarged US military presence, the Americans also took casualties, suffering since January 1961 eleven dead and thirty-two wounded. Defense Department financial experts estimated that the war in South Vietnam was taking up about 1 percent of the US military budget for the year.[5]

The Communist forces, like the American and the South Vietnamese forces, also grew markedly during the year. US intelligence sources now placed the Viet Cong regular force strength at over 20,000, nearly double the number the previous year.[6] According to a North Vietnamese official history, the total strength of the Communist forces in 1962 in the south was 40,000 and they had reduced the South Vietnamese military manpower advantage by half during the year, from a ratio of 10 to1 to 5 to1.[7] Still, according to Wood and Heavner, the Communists also endured extensive casualties, sustaining "nearly 600 a week and going up." MACV sources observed that the enemy had also currently reduced the number of attacks on government targets but still sustained an average of 110 offensive actions per week for the year.[8]

Despite their increased numbers, the Communists worried about the mounting American assistance to the South Vietnamese. In North Vietnam the Communist hierarchy continued a reevaluation of its tactics and strategy to counter the US-inspired ARVN mobile operations. The Hanoi leadership believed that the Communist forces in South Vietnam needed to build up their main force units, provide more mobility, and create larger base areas.[9] In August, to counter the American aid to South Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh together with a small delegation had visited Beijing to secure military logistic assistance from the Chinese Communists. While the Soviet Union had proved less generous, the Chinese government agreed to provide the North Vietnamese Army with approximately 90,000 modern infantry weapons.[10]

At the same time, the North Vietnamese intensified their efforts by land and by sea to reinforce and reequip the Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam. While paying lip service to the recently negotiated Geneva agreement on Laos, they only withdrew a token

number of their troops. Many more remained to secure the Ho Chi Minh Trail infiltration routes into South Vietnam. Beginning in 1961 the North Vietnamese had moved the trail further west into Laos from Vietnam to avoid South Vietnamese Army interference with the Communist reinforcement of their forces in South Vietnam. By 1962 Group 559, the command group for the trail, had a total strength of over 4,600 personnel consisting of porters, laborers, troops, and guides, whose mission was to construct and protect the trails, transport supplies for the southern Communist forces, and lead cadre from North Vietnam into South Vietnam. During 1962 some 5,000 Communist reinforcements infiltrated into South Vietnam from North Vietnam using the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In late 1961 the North Vietnamese created Military Transportation Group 759 consisting of small wooden vessels disguised as fishing boats to ply the coastal waters to supplement the overland infiltration of men and supplies. During the next two years these craft ferried some "1430 tons of weapons, including mortars, recoilless rifles, and 12.7 mm machine guns" into South Vietnam. Thus by October 1962 neither the Americans nor the North Vietnamese were about to abandon their protégés in South Vietnam.[11]

The October Honolulu Meeting

As part of his continuing monitoring of the situation in Vietnam, Secretary McNamara scheduled another high-level conference of senior US officials and commanders in Honolulu at Pacific Command headquarters in October. The purpose of this session was to observe the progress that MACV and the US civilian assistance structure in Vietnam had made in carrying out the July meeting decisions. Earlier in September Admiral Felt, the Pacific commander, recommended to Secretary McNamara that the agenda for October should include a review of ARVN operations since July with the purpose of "developing better strategy and tactics." He also suggested the need to look at such topics as the training of the paramilitary groups, crop destruction, and the progress made on the three-year program for South Vietnam with particular emphasis on the Strategic Hamlet Program. The admiral also expressed concern about the possible implications of hints by the North Vietnamese offering some form of rapprochement with the Diem regime and possible unification with North Vietnam.[12] Apparently the Communist leaders believed there was a chance that President Diem and the United States might agree to a neutralist coalition in South Vietnam based on the recent Geneva agreement on Laos.[13]

The meeting on 8 October in Honolulu once more had high-level Washington representation from both the State and Defense Departments. While Secretary McNamara and General Taylor headed the Defense delegation, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Averell Harriman led that of the State Department. Secretary McNamara opened the discussion with a request that General Harkins review for the group the present military situation. According to the MACV commander, Communist battalion operations had declined from eight in May to only one each in June and July and to none in August and September. In contrast, the ARVN had increased the number of

their battalion-sized campaigns from a low of 156 during May to a high of 454 in August. The general admitted, however, that in September the South Vietnamese conducted 76 fewer battalion operations.[14]

Overall however, General Harkins, as in July, was upbeat about progress being made. He remarked that since the meeting in July the South Vietnamese had readied two more Airborne battalions and two Marine battalions. An additional infantry division, the 9th, had become operational, and another, the 26th, would be activated in January. The MACV commander also observed that the Vietnamese units for the most part remained out in the field for longer periods of time. He stated that one battalion had stayed out for three weeks. General Harkins admitted, however, that too many units still remained poorly trained and lacked adequate leadership. He did see improvement in logistic support, exploitation of intelligence, and staff planning, although this last activity still remained weak.[15]

The MACV commander then described the activities of the Vietnamese Air Force. According to General Harkins, the South Vietnamese Air Force had flown some 628 combat sorties in September as compared to 150 in January. US Farm Gate pilots, however, had flown a large percentage of these flights in US aircraft with South Vietnamese markings. At this point Air Force Brigadier General Rollen H. Anthis, Commander, US 2nd Air Division, and also double hatted as Chief, US Air Force Advisory Group, Vietnam, remarked that the American aviators were flying more than 100 hours a month and that this pace could not be maintained. The Air Force general, backed by General Harkins, suggested that more aircraft and pilots were needed.[16]

Secretary McNamara indicated his displeasure about the request. He replied, "If you really want more US pilots, make recommendations, but they will be received coolly." The Defense Secretary reminded the conference that the purpose of the US assistance was "to help the Vietnamese fight their war and to reduce, not increase our own combat role." In any event, after further discussion Secretary McNamara agreed that the United States should assist the South Vietnamese to form a B–26 Invader light bomber squadron. The Douglas Invader (formerly designated A–26) was a World War II vintage two-man, two-engine prop-driven aircraft already being flown by US Farm Gate pilots in Vietnam. In order to speed up the activation of this new B–26 squadron, the conferees suggested that the United States explore the possibility of recruiting Chinese Nationalist pilots to take the place of Vietnamese now assigned to Douglas C–47 Skytrain transports. The Vietnamese aviators would then be reassigned to the proposed new squadron and receive training in manning the Invader aircraft.[17]

Another aviation problem involved the possibility of arming helicopters so they could provide suppressive fire during landing operations. Very little progress had been made on the subject since July. General Anthis expressed the view of most Air Force officers that the helicopter provided a poor gun platform because of its vibration and also offered "a relatively stationary target." Army Major General Edward L. Rowny, on the other hand, while agreeing that vibration was a problem, was more optimistic that it could be overcome. The Army general was on his way to Vietnam to supervise research

and development and was confident that some form of "recoilless artillery" or automatic weapons could be mounted on the helicopters. In his informal notes on the meeting proceedings, Chalmers Wood wrote, "the reason for the delay in arming helicopters was the Air Force reluctance to have the Army demonstrate that its helicopters could be effectively armed."[18]

The conference took up briefly a few other topics. As far as the Strategic Hamlet Program, the minutes merely mentioned that it "was OK." General Harkins expressed his satisfaction that the Montagnard-manned Civilian Irregular Defense Groups advised by the US Army Special Forces teams "had made good progress." The most optimism was voiced over the defoliation operations in the Mekong Delta. In this case, the minutes noted that the six campaigns in the area were almost completed and "were very successful." Apparently pleased with the results, Secretary McNamara asked for further suggestions on areas that might be targeted. The Secretary added that General Harkins might consider proposing test sites for crop destruction that would in all probability receive "rapid Washington approval" as long as the general provided "the same high standard of choosing these sites."[19]

Finally, the MACV commander described the steps he had initiated in the long-range planning effort to bring the war to an end or at least to a point where US military assistance would not be needed. He mentioned that both President Diem and his acting defense minister, Nguyen Dinh Thuan, had approved his "explosion" concept of a broad-based national offensive. General Harkins visualized "full-scale coordinated operations exploding at every level from the rice roots to the national level." According to the general, the objective was "to exert sudden and continuing pressure on known areas of VC concentration." The concept required an initial planning phase, followed by a preparation phase that would involve "saturation bombing" of known Communist strongholds such as Zone D, and finally the "explosion." In reply to questioning by General Taylor, General Harkins admitted that the "explosion" phase "might have to be repeated several times." Still, he remained confident that even if there were "30,000 hard-core VC" their forces would be "far inferior" to the ARVN and would not be able to cope with the far more numerous and better trained South Vietnamese units. Because of the pressure of time, the MACV commander was unable to go into detail about his plans for phasing out the US military forces within three years. It was obvious, nevertheless, that this effort would entail large increases in the US Military Assistance Program.[20]

All in all Secretary McNamara appeared to be satisfied with the results of the meeting. When he returned to Washington the following day, he told the press that "it was 'too early' to say that the tide had turned against the Communists . . . [but] he was encouraged by recent developments." At the same press event, Assistant Secretary of State W. Averell Harriman echoed the Defense Secretary's sentiments.[21]

In actuality, Mr. Harriman had much more of a pessimistic view of the situation than his Defense Department colleagues. In a letter to Ambassador Nolting in Saigon a few days later, the Assistant Secretary acknowledged "that things are much improved since last year," but warned against over confidence. He believed there was a real "danger

that certain very serious problems may not be receiving the attention and action which they deserve here in Washington." Specifically, the Assistant Secretary believed more attention needed to be applied to local village defenses, to the arming of helicopters, and to General Harkins' "explosion" plans.[22]

As far as the village defenses, he believed that the villagers needed to be better armed and trained since they bore the brunt of the VC assaults. In relation to the subject of armed helicopters Assistant Secretary Harriman voiced the opinion that one of the factors behind the Air Force resistance to the idea was that it would reduce the role of fixed-wing aircraft in that mission. The Assistant Secretary granted that the Air Force fighter/bombers were possibly more efficient in preparing the landing zones but contended that the rotary aircraft, which belonged to the Army, were less likely "to kill more innocent Vietnamese." However, he reserved his greatest criticism for General Harkins' "explosion" strategy. Mr. Harriman argued that

> the VC would be tipped off before such an operation could possibly take place and that it would give them time to make themselves scarce. I am concerned that given the very large numbers . . . of armed forces now operating in Viet-Nam the attempt to carry out such an operation simultaneously throughout Viet-Nam would lead to chaos. In sum, I am dubious about such an operation and I think that its political implications are so important that it should not be approved without full consultation with the Department of State.[23]

The Cuban Missile Crisis

During the last half of October President Kennedy and his senior advisers were preoccupied with a crisis over Cuba. The American discovery that the Soviet Union was installing medium-range missiles on that island precipitated perhaps the most dangerous confrontation in the history of the Cold War. After tense White House policy deliberations, the United States demanded removal of the missiles, established a naval quarantine of Cuba, and massed forces for air strikes or invasion. The crisis ended with a Soviet agreement to remove the offensive weapons in return for a US pledge not to invade Cuba and an unpublicized promise by President Kennedy to withdraw US medium range missiles from Turkey. Represented by General Taylor, the Joint Chiefs of Staff participated in the administration's policy debate, advocating early and decisive military action—a course the President rejected.[24]

Although the Cuban missile crisis had little immediate impact on the US effort in Vietnam, it did exacerbate the already fragile relationship between the Kennedy administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Taylor did his best to bridge the gap, but he was unable to dilute the suspicion on both sides. At the President's only meeting with all of the Joint Chiefs during the crisis, General LeMay openly disagreed with President Kennedy's policy of military restraint. Admiral Anderson and Secretary McNamara had a confrontation over how the Navy would enforce the quarantine. According to Roswell

Gilpatric, Secretary McNamara told him "that's the end of Anderson. He won't be reappointed." President Kennedy expressed unhappiness with the JCS contingency planning for Cuba. On 5 November he told Secretary McNamara that he had informed General Wheeler, the Army Chief of Staff, that the plan was "too thin" and that the United States could become "bogged down." President Kennedy cited the British difficulties in the Boer War, the German-Soviet war, and the American experience in Korea as examples of what he feared. General Taylor relayed the President's dissatisfaction to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Perhaps the greatest effect of the Cuban episode on Vietnam was voiced by McNamara's replacement as Secretary of Defense, Clark M. Clifford, who declared that President Kennedy's advisers took the lessons of the missile crisis to be that such policies as "flexible response" and "controlled escalation" could be applied equally to the Vietnam conflict.[25]

Vietnam Again

With the denouement of the Cuban situation, the focus in Washington once more turned to Vietnam. On 29 October Secretary McNamara met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and asked about the status of the MACV planning effort and when the Vietnamese would implement General Harkins' "explosion" offensive. About two weeks later, after consulting with the MACV commander, General Taylor reported to the Secretary that the concept was still in the planning and preparatory phases. This included not only the planning for the so-called explosion but continuing on-going operations as well. Before the planning could be completed, General Harkins needed the South Vietnamese military to "streamline" its command structure and to develop a "comprehensive" operational plan for the Republic of South Vietnam Armed Forces. According to the MACV commander, the South Vietnamese Army would start implementing the "explosion" offensive in selected critical areas in December, and by February 1963 these operations would extend throughout the country. The aim was to bring "the full military potential of the RVNAF, paramilitary and citizenry of South Vietnam in an integrated campaign" against the Viet Cong insurgency.[26]

On 19 November, just a month after Assistant Secretary Harriman had criticized General Harkins' "explosion" strategy, Ambassador Nolting provided a defense of the MACV concept. Apologizing for his tardiness, the Ambassador declared that continuing problems with the American press corps in Vietnam, the non-recognition by the Diem regime of the new Souvanna Phouma government in Laos, and border incidents between Cambodia and South Vietnam had all played a role in delaying his response. While observing that there were several reasons for a sense of caution about over-optimism, including a few setbacks and a certain "general stickiness," he still maintained that there had been progress in the war. The Ambassador agreed with the sentiment expressed by General Harkins: "we must 'whistle while we work.'"[27]

As far as General Harkins' "'explosion' scheme," Ambassador Nolting believed that Assistant Secretary Harriman had misconstrued its basic concept. The Ambassador

argued that the general did not intend it as a "one-shot operation" but rather as a means of placing the South Vietnamese forces "in a more aggressive posture" through a series of offensive operations. While conceding that he too had his own misgivings, the Ambassador stated that he could "think of no better way" to measure the ability of the South Vietnamese military "to bring this struggle to a showdown."[28]

Still, a month later Ambassador Nolting found it necessary again to defend the Harkins proposal to the State Department. In response to a request from the Department of State on the status of the "explosion" plan, he attempted to excuse some of the delays in the implementation of the plan by stating, "All things are relative, and an 'explosion' of the Vietnamese Armed Forces is not likely to take on the characteristics of a similar phenomenon occurring in the US military establishment." The Ambassador even admitted that the term 'explosion' was perhaps an unfortunate choice of words but that the "objective . . . [was] sound and essential." He further argued that the basic concept remained to extend the "govt's authority and the services of gov't throughout the country." Ambassador Nolting concluded that he and General Harkins concurred that they did not see the explosion concept "as the final climax of the struggle here," but that it was "sound and psychologically necessary at this juncture."[29]

At the End of the Year

The Ambassador's note was received with a certain grain of salt in official Washington. Theodore Heavner of the Vietnam Working Group sarcastically wondered whether the concept should be designated "poof" instead of explosion.[30] In any event he and senior State Department officials viewed with a jaundiced eye some of the programs supported by the American mission in Vietnam. On 11 December Mr. Heavner filed his own report on the situation in Vietnam as a result of his visit to the country lasting from 18 October through 26 November. Assistant National Security Advisor Michael Forrestal later forwarded Heavner's report to President Kennedy, stating that it was "one of the more informative reports we have."[31]

In the report Mr. Heavner took exception to some of the optimism both in the Pentagon and in Saigon. While agreeing that the ARVN and the Vietnamese militia had made great progress, remarking on higher morale and better results on the battlefield, he argued that "there is also no blinking the fact that VC do not seem to be declining in numbers, weapons or ability." He also observed that it would take several years before the South Vietnamese could "handle the situation with greatly reduced US military assistance." While praising the US military advisory effort in general, Mr. Heavner had doubts about the employment of allied air in "bombing 'VC villages,'" maintaining that the resulting death of innocent civilians harmed the government cause politically with the local populace more than it deterred the enemy. He also remarked that there had been some improvement in the command and control system, but that it was still too rigid in delegating authority to subordinate corps and division commanders. Mr. Heavner

especially criticized President Diem for personally removing or demoting "any officer who suffers heavy losses, even though he is successful."[32]

Still, at the urging of General Harkins, President Diem had made a few modifications in the command and control of the military by the end of the year. On 26 November he signed a directive doing away with the Field Command Headquarters; establishing a new IV Corps sector that was to include the Mekong Delta; developing an Unconventional Warfare Directorate to coordinate special forces and irregular units; forming three Service Component commands; and assigning tactical and logistic support units to each Corps commander. While perhaps making for a more streamlined command structure, the elimination of the Field Command also got rid of a potential enemy to President Diem, General Minh. It was apparent, however, that neither the MACV nor the South Vietnamese National Campaign Plan would be completed by the end of the year.[33]

For the most part, there was general satisfaction that the South Vietnamese Armed Forces had made great improvement during the year, but there remained dissatisfaction in Washington, especially among Assistant Secretary Harriman's influential circle. Much of the debate centered around the "little war" versus the "big war" advocates. Many of the "little war" proponents in both the Pentagon and the State Department were significantly influenced by the counterinsurgency theories of Robert Thompson. Many, including Theodore Heavner and the head of the Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Roger Hilsman, while admitting progress in the Vietnam war, questioned some of the tactics of the regular forces as contrary to counterinsurgency doctrine. Mr. Hilsman, in a report in December to Secretary Rusk, declared that the South Vietnamese government could not take advantage of its recent successes on the battlefield unless it adopted a counterinsurgency program and tamped down "large-unit actions and tactical use of air power and artillery." He repeated much the same warning in a memo to Mr. Harriman two weeks later.[34]

By the end of the year, despite these objections and the earlier disapproval by Secretary McNamara himself of any increase in US pilots or aircraft for the South Vietnamese, the Defense Department was about to ask for just such an augmentation. On 20 December Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, acting in place of Secretary McNamara who was at a NATO meeting in Paris, asked in a memorandum to the President for 18 additional aircraft as well as 117 additional Air Force personnel (95 in a combat role and 22 for air base support) in Vietnam. Deputy Secretary Gilpatric stated that he had reviewed this request from CINCPAC with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They observed that during the last six months of 1962 nearly all of the ground actions were coordinated with air support, which placed a greater burden on the air resources. The air missions now were flown in support of convoys and strategic hamlets as well as helicopter support. According to Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, the growth of missions had resulted in a situation in which American "Farmgate pilots are being overflown averaging 100 hours per month and cannot fill the gap." Finally, Mr. Gilpatric declared that the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the "overriding conclusion is that an immediate increase in the air support capability is needed and should be provided without losing sight of

the necessity for continuing to increase the capability of the VNAF to fill Vietnamese air support capabilities."[35]

On 21 December Michael Forrestal of the National Security Staff forwarded the Gilpatric letter to the President. Apparently he or Mr. Gilpatric had shown a copy to Assistant Secretary Harriman. According to Mr. Forrestal, "Governor Harriman approves Secretary Gilpatric's proposal." While Harriman, like Hilsman and Heavner, had doubts about the use of air strikes in guerrilla warfare, he believed such strikes were warranted at this time. He justified his changed perspective on the fact that the South Vietnamese depended heavily upon "close-in air support" to defend the strategic hamlets against VC control. Like Mr. Heavner and many of the other counterguerrilla advocates, Mr. Harriman had come to the view that the Strategic Hamlet Program had become the "best hope of defeating the Viet Cong." The President approved the requested increase on 31 December.[36]

Although the Strategic Hamlet Program enjoyed strong support within the Kennedy administration, there were misgivings about its viability within both the State Department and the Pentagon as well as among some of the President's immediate advisors. In a memorandum to Chairman Taylor on 12 November, Lieutenant Commander Worth H. Bagley, his naval aide, mentioned that among the doubters was Michael Forrestal, and that even Assistant Secretary Harriman had expressed some "uneasiness" about the security aspects of the program. The Assistant Secretary had asked General Victor Krulak, the JCS counterinsurgency expert, to come over to his office to reassure him. According to the naval commander, General Krulak apparently assuaged Mr. Harriman's concerns and planned "to spread the gospel and offset opposing views in Washington."[37]

Commander Bagley believed that General Krulak had a daunting task before him. He blamed much of the divergence of views about the program on a "paucity of information" from Vietnam and on a rivalry between President Diem's brothers, Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can. Mr. Can, who was basically in charge of the northern provinces in Vietnam, apparently paid only lip service to the strategic hamlet concept, which was under his brother Mr. Nhu, and emphasized instead his own Self Defense and Republican Youth Civic Action programs. Commander Bagley also pointed to incomplete statistics about the types of hamlets established under Mr. Nhu and the number of attacks upon them. He basically wanted General Krulak to develop a "refined continuing reporting system levied on the field" that would provide an accurate statistical depiction of the program.[38]

In turn, on 17 November General Taylor in a detailed memorandum to Secretary McNamara outlined the history of the uneven implementation of the Strategic Hamlet Program. The Chairman observed that President Diem announced the program in February 1962 but had not approved a national plan for its standardization until August. In the interim, the program had expanded "with little planning and less coordination." According to General Taylor, the determining factor was numbers and not quality, "with the result that a basically sound idea got off to a weak start." The general now believed the new implementing directives had improved many of the past deficiencies and "there is some evidence of limited progress."[39]

General Taylor then proceeded to provide a statistical rundown on the status of the program. According to his statistics, out of the nearly 11,000 communities selected to be transformed into strategic hamlets, over 3,300 had already made the conversion. As indicated above, the process had been uneven, and General Taylor estimated that no more than 600 met the required standards. He believed, however, from now on there would be a steady improvement in quality as the hamlets met the new standards of equipment, defenses, and security. The general speculated that the Vietnamese would soon be able to incorporate new hamlets at a rate of 300 a month. He conceded, however, "the real strength of the program is still more in prospect than in reality."[40]

The last part of the memorandum was an analysis of the attacks launched by the Viet Cong against the strategic hamlets as compared to attacks against other targets during the three previous months. According to its figures, the strategic hamlets sustained on average five attacks weekly, while the enemy hit other localities on average nine times per week. These assaults consisted of "destruction of defenses, assassination of hamlet officials, kidnapping, and theft of foodstuffs." In this period, according to the statistical review, the enemy struck at 2 percent of the total number of hamlets in the country.[41]

The Chairman concluded his memorandum by stating that he supported General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting in their view that the Strategic Hamlet Program was only now beginning to reveal its possibilities. He argued that "the vigorous reactions against it—both reported and forecast—suggest that the Viet Cong also perceive its potential." General Taylor thought it significant that of the total number of Viet Cong assaults, only fourteen attacks occurred against strategic hamlets "in the current GVN clear and hold operations."[42]

Among the Service Chiefs, General David Shoup, the Marine Corps Commandant, dissented on the applicability of the strategic hamlet policy. After a visit to Vietnam, he reported to the other Chiefs that the attempt to force Vietnamese villagers "into defended communities was counterproductive." The Commandant believed the "forced resettlement" of the rural population from their old communities into the new encampments only created resentment and was no way to win their allegiance to the government. He expressed the opinion that the new policy resulted in "antagonism rather than good will." General Shoup, however, for the most part remained a minority of one.[43]

There was also growing agreement within the Kennedy administration about the once controversial defoliant and herbicide program. After the successful completion in November of the original program approved by the President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff urged Secretary McNamara to give General Harkins the general authority to approve defoliant operations that did not involve crop destruction without referring back to Washington for permission. The Secretary forwarded the new request to the President and at the same time asked the State Department, which originally had qualms about the program, for its concurrence. The State Department agreed to the new authority with the proviso that the Saigon Embassy provide regular reports "on the effectiveness of the operation as weighed against the harm being done to United States interests by Communist propaganda on the subject." President Kennedy on 27 November approved the

delegation of authority to General Harkins but asked that he be informed on the results of these operations and that he be "consulted on any operation beyond these limits."[44]

By December 1962 the Kennedy administration took stock of what progress had been made in Vietnam during the year and what the outlook was for 1963. In general they were optimistic. They believed the South Vietnamese Armed Forces had made great improvements under the tutelage of the expanded US advisory effort. With the establishment of the Strategic Hamlet Program, they had hopes that the South Vietnamese had found a formula for separating the rural population from the Viet Cong and winning them over to the government. Most of the progress reports were generally positive, especially from the military perspective. General Harkins told Senator Mike Mansfield in December 1962 that he believed that the war could be won in one year. While Ambassador Nolting was somewhat less optimistic, he strongly supported the MACV commander. In Washington Secretary McNamara and General Taylor continued to hold to the July Honolulu decision for a three-year withdrawal timetable for US advisors from Vietnam.[45]

Even among the "small war" advocates in the State Department, the prevailing opinion was one of cautious optimism. Although Theodore Heavner was critical of several aspects of the US effort in Vietnam, his December report was generally positive. Looking at the events of the past year, he wrote, "we have moved from a situation in which the VC were clearly winning to a stand-off. This is real progress, particularly in a guerrilla war." He also saw great potential in the Strategic Hamlet Program, believing it to be "the heart of our effort" and having the potential in the long run to "work a revolution in rural Vietnam."[46] Roger Hilsman was also a strong proponent of the Strategic Hamlet Program and, despite some of his qualms on the state of the war, also wrote in December that "the rate of deterioration has decelerated with improvement, principally in the security sector, reflecting . . . GVN implementation of a broad counterinsurgency program."[47] As indicated earlier, Assistant Secretary Harriman even withdrew his opposition to increased use of US airpower because of its usefulness in protecting strategic hamlets from Viet Cong incursions.

One important knowledgeable and influential political voice, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, however, at this time began to raise serious questions about the entire US policy in Vietnam. Senator Mansfield, a former professor of Far East History at the University of Montana, had the reputation of being the Senate's leading authority on Southeast Asia. Although a Democrat, he had worked closely with the Eisenhower administration on its policy in the region and had made a visit to the region in 1955 at the behest of President Eisenhower.[48] In December 1962, at the request of President Kennedy, he returned to Vietnam to provide the President a firsthand account of conditions there. He met with President Diem and discussed the situation with General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting as well as with other Vietnamese and US officials.[49]

In his report, the Senator raised some serious questions about progress in the war. While agreeing that South Vietnam was the central focus in Southeast Asia, he expressed serious doubts as to whether the situation had improved to the extent that was being reported. Senator Mansfield observed that the Americans were claiming a new approach

centered on the strategic hamlets, and they and the Vietnamese officials are "extremely optimistic ... although the first results have scarcely been registered." According to the Senate Majority Leader, he had "heard optimistic predictions of this kind with ... other 'new concepts' beginning with French General Navarre in Hanoi in 1953." Although conceding that there had been some recent positive news, he contended that "it was distressing on this visit to hear the situation described in much the same terms as on my last visit [in 1955] although it is seven years and billions of dollars later."[50]

He concluded, "it would be well to face the fact that we are once again at the beginning of the beginning." Senator Mansfield worried that US and South Vietnamese officials in Vietnam were unduly optimistic and had not taken into consideration many possible pitfalls. In the long run, the Senator insisted that the United States must determine whether it was essential or merely desirable that it maintain a position of power on the Asian mainland. If it were the latter, Senator Mansfield suggested it might be well "to concentrate on a vigorous diplomacy which would be designed to lighten our commitments without bringing about sudden and catastrophic upheavals in Southeast Asia."[51]

According to Senator Mansfield, President Kennedy rejected his conclusions, stating that the Senator's views did not conform to that of his advisors.[52] Kenneth O'Donnell, the President's appointment secretary, stated that the President later confided to him, "I got angry with Mike [Mansfield] for disagreeing with our policy so completely, and I got angry with myself because I found myself agreeing with him."[53]

The Press and the Battle of Ap Bac

The reasons for the President's mixed emotions about the Mansfield report may have been due to events in January 1963, which would lead eventually to a wholesale questioning of his entire Vietnam policy. On 2 January, an operation under the command of the South Vietnamese Army 7th Division to seize or silence a suspected Viet Cong radio transmitter near the hamlet of Ap Bac, some thirty-five miles southwest of Saigon in the Mekong Delta, went terribly awry. It resulted in the ambushing of the lead South Vietnamese column and a Civil Guard company, as well as relief units; the shooting down of five US helicopters; and the death of three Americans. In the daylong battle, the ARVN lost about eighty dead. The Viet Cong force consisted of the 214th VC Battalion reinforced by elements of the 514th My Tho Province Local Force Battalion. The enemy commanders admitted to only eighteen of their men killed in the battle.[54]

US correspondents were quick to act upon the news of the debacle. Neil Sheehan, who at the time was the AP correspondent, remembered that he heard that day in Saigon rumors that the United States had lost five helicopters. He and another reporter immediately drove from Saigon to Tien Hiep near Ap Bac. There they located Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, the senior US advisor to the 7th ARVN Division, who provided them with his account of the battle.[55] Based largely on Lieutenant Colonel Vann's perspective, Mr. Sheehan and other reporters, including David Halberstam of the *New York Times*,

filed their accounts of the battle. According to Mr. Sheehan's story, which appeared in the *Washington Post*, "outnumbered Communist guerrillas [in Ap Bac] inflicted one of the most costly and humiliating defeats yet on the South Vietnamese army and its United States advisers."[56] Mr. Halberstam in his piece observed that US advisers "in the field, however, have long felt that conditions here made a defeat like this virtually inevitable." He then went on to say that it was their "hope that one product of the defeat will be an improved relationship between United States advisers and the Vietnamese."[57]

Similar descriptions of the battle appeared in many of the other major US newspapers. In his analysis of the news coverage of the operation, Army historian William Hammond observed that in their first accounts of the battle the US Saigon press corps was largely factual rather than analytical. In fact, David Halberstam in his first despatch reported that a blocking force consisting of a small ad hoc group of US advisors and support troops together with a Vietnamese Civil Guard unit captured thirty-four Viet Cong four miles south of Ap Bac trying to make their escape. After three or four days, however, the reporters became more "interpretative" and critical. They used such descriptive phrases as "bad luck and disorganization," "a miserable performance," and the enemy troops slipped away "ahead of half-hearted Vietnamese pursuit." There were some obvious distortions, including a story that a US advisor died vainly trying to stop ARVN troops fleeing the battlefield.[58]

The general gist of most of the press accounts was that the South Vietnamese leadership was poor or nonexistent. The ARVN troops lacked aggressiveness and made several tactical errors. A paratroop drop that was to close off the VC avenue of retreat was moved at the last moment from the original drop zone to a new one, resulting in several troopers being killed by automatic fire while still in their parachute harnesses. Much of the blame was placed on newly promoted Brigadier General Huynh Van Cao of the just established IV Corps in the Mekong Delta. General Cao, who had been the former commander of the 7th ARVN Division, had been reprimanded in the autumn of 1962 by President Diem himself for taking too many casualties. After that, General Cao, who had been one of the more aggressive ARVN commanders, became one of the most cautious. The press placed the onus on General Cao for not permitting Colonel Bui Dinh Dam, his former chief of staff who succeeded him as commander of the 7th Division, to rush reinforcements to relieve the initial forces and for not providing adequate artillery support.[59]

It became apparent very early that one of the major sources for these stories was Lieutenant Colonel Vann, who had earned a reputation as one of the outstanding US advisors serving with the South Vietnamese Army. In August 1962 he had sent a picture to his wife of General Cao and himself with the inscription, "Vann and Cao, the best US Vietnamese team for fighting Communists." The 7th Division had been credited with the killing of more VC in its area of operations than the total number in the rest of the country.[60]

Still, according to his biographer, Lieutenant Colonel Vann in his after-action reports reiterated that he made little progress in transforming the ARVN division into a fighting force capable in the long run of defeating the VC. Despite these negative reports, General Harkins apparently thought highly of the lieutenant colonel and invited him to

a luncheon to brief General Taylor during his visit to Vietnam in September. Lieutenant Colonel Vann apparently had hoped to indicate to the incoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff his concerns about the limited progress that he believed was occurring in the improvement of the Vietnamese division. His attempt to make his case, however, failed. He later wrote, "General tenor of conversation such that Gen Harkins presented views and/or overrode key points I tried to present."[61]

After this incident Vann's relationship with both General Harkins and General Cao began to cool. With General Cao relinquishing command of the division after becoming IV Corps commander, the US advisor was in hopes of having more influence with his successor, Colonel Dam. After some initial success, this hope was dashed after Ap Bac.

Lieutenant Colonel Vann was not entirely blameless for the outcome of the fight for the hamlet. He and his subordinates had drawn up the plans for the operation, and he personally had insisted on a frontal assault by a squadron of M–113 armored personnel carriers that became bogged down in the rice paddies. Moreover, the advisor had designated the landing zone for the helicopters. When he learned about the ambush of the Civil Guard unit, he commandeered a small plane and had his pilot overfly the scene. He then directed the troop-laden helicopters to set down in a landing zone equidistant between two tree lines. Instead, intentionally or unintentionally, the lead pilot landed closest to the more western of the two lines. The Viet Cong almost immediately took the hovering aircraft under fire. In the melee, two of the aircraft were lost, the second upon landing to pick up survivors of the first. A third helicopter, a HU-1E gunship, then tried to pick up the downed crews, and it too was shot down. Finally, one of the other troop-carrying helicopters was so badly damaged that it had to make a forced landing in the rice paddies, where the crew had to abandon their aircraft.[62]

By daybreak, the Viet Cong had largely made good their escape from Ap Bac, leaving the area in the control of the government forces. General Cao had reinforced the 7th Division with additional forces to round up any stray Communist troops that may have remained behind. Lieutenant Colonel Vann, by this time disheartened and angry, was giving his accounts of the battle to his journalistic friends. General Harkins soon arrived and tried to put the best light on the situation. According to Neil Sheehan, he told two of the correspondents that the ARVN had the VC "in a trap and we're going to spring it."[63] Later, in a message to CINCPAC, the general admitted that the "ARVN could have done better and I think they should have." He believed that the 7th Division, however, had remained in contact with the enemy through the night, which was not the situation.[64] Seven days later, General Harkins would issue a statement defending the courage of the individual South Vietnamese soldier in responding to the press criticism of the ARVN forces in Ap Bac.[65] Twenty years later, General Harkins referred to Ap Bac as his "aching back" and mentioned that it was the first time that the ARVN forces engaged the VC in battalion strength. He denied that the South Vietnamese suffered heavy casualties and declared that "The Viet Cong took Ap Bac, but we took it back . . . it was just like going through France, you'd lose a city and then take it the next day. Yes we did suffer some casualties."[66]

Although General Harkins would award Lieutenant Colonel Vann the Distinguished Flying Cross for braving Viet Cong anti-aircraft fire in the spotter plane over Ap Bac, Vann's influence with both MACV and the South Vietnamese was largely spent. He would complete his Vietnam tour in April and return to Washington, where he was reassigned to the Pentagon. There he would attempt to influence the Joint Staff to reexamine the US advisory effort with the South Vietnamese Army. Lieutenant Colonel Vann retired from the Army in the summer of 1963.[67]

The Wheeler Inspection Trip, the Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam, and the Hilsman and Forrestal Report

The news of Ap Bac soon brought questions from Washington. The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided an initial defense of the US command, declaring that "the press reports have distorted both the importance of the action and the damage suffered by the US/GVN forces."[68] Still, on 7 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized the formation of a high-level investigation team headed by Army Chief of Staff Earle Wheeler to provide an "up to date assessment of the situation in Vietnam." The group consisted of several high-ranking officers, including six general officers in addition to General Wheeler. Among the members were Army Colonel George I. Forsythe, a special aide to General Wheeler, and Marine Major General Victor Krulak, the Joint Staff expert responsible for monitoring the Vietnam conflict. According to General Krulak, Secretary McNamara had been troubled by the press accounts of Ap Bac and told him "that the administration had to have a fresh appraisal of the war." The JCS team arrived in Saigon on the morning of 18 January.[69]

According to military custom, General Harkins and his staff arranged the itinerary for the inspection team. They spent eight days visiting the various Corps areas, including the Mekong Delta for one day. Interestingly, the group did not visit the 7th Division area. Colonel Forsythe, however, did receive a briefing on the battle, and General Krulak read Lieutenant Colonel Vann's after-action report. In fact, Colonel Forsythe even spoke to Vann. According to General Krulak his impression was that Lieutenant Colonel Vann, his immediate superior, and his subordinate advisors "were being unduly harsh in their appraisal of the Saigon army because they were comparing it to the standards of their US Army model." After leaving Vietnam, the team stopped off at Pacific Command Headquarters in Hawaii, where General Krulak and Colonel Forsyth drafted the team's report, which General Wheeler signed and the other members approved. In the extensive final report there was only one reference to Ap Bac and that was relative to the press accounts. According to the team's report, the reporters insisted "contrary to the facts, that the battle was a defeat" and their stories "were based on ill-considered statements made at a time of high excitement and frustration by a few American soldiers."[70]

Among the team's recommendations was approval of the MACV Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam (CPSVN). General Harkins had forwarded the plan on 19 January to Admiral Sharp as directed by Secretary McNamara at the July Honolulu meeting. The plan basically outlined the materiel and financial costs to build a South Vietnamese "military and para-military [capability] sufficient to exercise permanent and continued sovereignty . . . without the need for continued US special military assistance" by the end of 1965. Despite this provision, the plan allowed for the continued existence of funds for US assistance to Vietnam into 1969.[71]

According to General Harkins, the CPSVN consisted of several existing programs that had developed along parallel lines, the three basic ones being the National Campaign Plan, the Strategic Hamlet Program, and the Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program. As General Harkins expressed to the visitors, his explosion concept had been incorporated into the National Campaign Plan (NCP). He explained in his discussion of the NCP that government forces would conduct a "national aggressive offensive campaign against the Viet Cong." General Harkins argued that the ARVN would expand its control "through continuous operations, moving into uncontrolled areas immediately adjacent to controlled areas, consolidating, annexing, and expanding again." In addition, the general insisted that the other programs would be "integrated" into the NCP. This included the various militia—the Civil Guard, the Self Defense Corps, and the CIDG Montagnard units as well as the hamlet militia of the Strategic Hamlet Program.[72]

The plan visualized a maximum size South Vietnamese force totaling approximately 570,000 personnel by fiscal year 1964. This would include an increase of approximate 25,000 persons in the regular military establishment, which would then number about 225,000. The regular Army would consist of nine divisions organized under four regional corps commands. Plans also called for some restructuring of the Vietnamese Navy to include a river escort group and five coastal surveillance command centers, as well as increased personnel for a junk fleet. The Vietnamese Air Force would have an increase of two fixed-wing squadrons and an additional two helicopter squadrons. There would be even larger increases in the militia forces. The Civil Guard would expand from 90,000 to 101,000, while the Home Defense Corps would have over a 40,000-man increase, from 80,000 to 122,000. The CIDG would reach its peak strength of 116,000 by July 1964 and then gradually be reduced. These estimates did not include the approximately 201,000 hamlet militia required by the Strategic Hamlet Program. This expansion of the Vietnamese forces would require, through 1965, extensive US support "both to bring the insurgency under control and to prepare GVN forces for early take-over of US activities." The estimated increase in the cost of the war through 1969 as a result of the CPSVN was $68 million. This did not include the funding of the CIDG, which came from US intelligence sources although operating under MACV. Most of the Defense Department extra money would be needed in Fiscal Year 1964 beginning in July 1963 when the preponderance "of the costs of increased training programs, new equipment, and construction [would] occur."[73]

In the meantime, upon arriving in Hawaii, the Wheeler team provided the Pacific Command an oral briefing of its findings in Vietnam. General Wheeler summed up their basic conclusion, declaring that MACV had helped build during the past year what he called the "human and materiel infrastructure which can be the basis for a successful military operation." He attributed this success to General Harkins, whose "attitude and leadership . . . permeated the whole command." General Wheeler also praised the Diem government. While acknowledging that it might appear "'immature' and 'fumbling in carrying out significant programs,'" he attributed this to "the Asiatic or the Vietnamese character." During a question and answer period, one of the CINCPAC staff asked when General Harkins was going to begin his "Operation Explosion." General Wheeler answered that the general had told him, "I'm not going to tell anybody when I start the campaign." General Krulak amplified: "It might be useful to approach it . . . from the viewpoint that it's already begun —. You might lay the 'Explosion ghost' [aside] by saying that there is no beginning. It is a natural outgrowth of what has been going on for a year."[74]

Interestingly, in the team's official report General Krulak wrote that the National Campaign Plan was "sometimes erroneously referred to as 'Operation Explosion.'" He then went on to define the National Campaign Plan as a "concept of coordinated political, economic, and military operations to be undertaken at an accelerated pace by each corps, division, and sector commander in his own area. In fact, the operations have already begun." The report then listed four basic strategies:

> To seek out and destroy Viet Cong strongholds.
> To clear and hold areas heretofore dominated by the Viet Cong.
> To build strategic hamlets in these areas and protect them from Viet Cong attack.
> To gain and hold the plateau and mountain areas and effect a degree of border control with the tribesmen (chiefly Montagnard).[75]

As Lieutenant Commander Worth H. Bagley, the aide to General Taylor, pointed out to the Chairman, on 2 February the four strategies listed in the Wheeler report were in actuality a modification of those mentioned in General Harkins' CPSVN. According to Lieutenant Commander Bagley, the Wheeler group restated the original Clear and Hold Province Rehabilitation concept outlined by the British pacification expert Robert Thompson. The Navy lieutenant commander believed that General Harkins in his strategy discussion had stated much the same thing but had muddied the situation by making the Strategic Hamlet Program a separate entity, more in accordance with that of Ngo Dinh Nhu than Robert Thompson. Lieutenant Colonel Bagley mentioned that Roger Hilsman and Michael V. Forrestal made much the same observation in their report when they returned from their visit to Vietnam.[76]

Mr. Hilsman and Mr. Forrestal were in Vietnam from 31 December 1962 through 9 January 1963, departing about a week before the arrival of the Wheeler mission. The two were much less enthusiastic about the situation in Vietnam than the latter group. In fact, Mr. Hilsman observed in an internal memorandum for the record on 2 January, "I have the impression that things are going much much better than they were a year ago,

but that they are not going nearly so well as the people here in Saigon both military and civilian think they are."[77] In another such memorandum, he asked the question whether there was an overall plan and he answered his own question in the negative: "There are five or six plans many of which are competing. There is, consequently, great confusion."[78]

In their final report, Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal incorporated much the same sentiments. After duly opening their account with a positive statement about progress in the war, they then proceeded to state: "Even so the negative side of the ledger is still awesome." The two pointed to recent setbacks to government forces with the Viet Cong, observing that enemy forces "fought stubbornly and with telling results at Ap Bac." They then noted that in Tay Ninh Province an enemy unit evaded an elaborate trap and escaped unscathed. Elsewhere the Viet Cong penetrated a Special Forces training camp, killed 39 trainees, and captured 114 weapons. In another example, they wrote that in Phu Yen Province the VC overran a strategic hamlet supposedly protected by a Civil Guard company and hamlet militia, killing 24 and capturing 35 weapons. Moreover, they argued that despite the losses suffered by the VC, the enemy forces had actually increased their strength during the past year. According to US estimates, the VC had 23,000 troops in their regular formations and nearly 100,000 part-time guerrillas supported by much of the rural population.[79]

The two Washington visitors believed that the allied strategic concept was valid, especially the emphasis upon winning the loyalty of the rural populace, but its implementation required improvement. They argued that at present there was the lack of an "overall plan keyed to the strategic concept." The two cited as a case in point the Strategic Hamlet Program, which they believed had created an over proliferation of hamlets "that are inadequately equipped and defended." They also remarked that the proportion of ARVN "clear and hold" military operations was too low relative to the "hit and withdraw" operations. According to Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal, these latter operations were "expensive, cumbersome, and difficult to keep secret." Although these large operations did serve to keep the Viet Cong off balance, they also alienated the local population. Furthermore, in a special annex for the "President's Eyes Only," they added that the "American military mission must share some of the blame for the excessive emphasis on large-scale operations and air interdiction which have had the bad political and useless military effects described in our report." They also blamed both the Embassy and MACV for not providing a planning effort that "effectively ties together the civilian and military efforts."[80]

The Hilsman and Forrestal report also differed from the Wheeler report in that its criticism of the US press corps in Vietnam was more subdued. It observed that the US reporters in Vietnam had "good relations with the Embassy and MACV." The report acknowledged that their relations with the Vietnamese were not so good. It allowed, however, that this was largely the fault of the Diem regime. Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal declared that "Diem wants only adulation and is completely insensitive to the desires of the foreign press for factual information." They stated that the result was that US correspondents were "bitter and will seize on anything that goes wrong and blow it

up as much as possible." The two Washington officials cited as an example the Ap Bac battle. They agreed that the South Vietnamese effort there contained several mistakes, but that it was not nearly the "botched up disaster that the press made it appear to be."[81]

In their special annex for the President, Mr. Hilsman and Mr. Forrestal reported that one problem with the US effort in Vietnam was that it was too diffuse. According to them, no one was in control, but rather there existed "a multitude of independent US agencies and people with little or no overall direction." They claimed that the only coordination resulted from "treaty arrangements that are arrived at in the Country Team meetings." Despite these handicaps, however, the two did not believe that there should be any change in this arrangement at this time. Their rationale was that progress was being made in the war under this administrative structure at the time and an abrupt alteration could cause certain "formidable political and bureaucratic problems."[82]

Their overall conclusion was: "that we are probably winning, but certainly more slowly than we had hoped. At the rate it is now going the war will last longer than we would like, cost more in terms of both lives and money than we anticipated, and prolong the period in which a sudden and dramatic event would upset the gains already made."[83]

Reaction in Washington

In Washington, there was apparently some expectation that the Hilsman and Forrestal and the Wheeler assessments of the situation in Vietnam would bring about some clarification. If this was true, it probably resulted in some disappointment. Upon Michael Forrestal's return from Vietnam, President Kennedy required him to suggest several actions as a follow-up to his and Hilsman's report. On 28 January, Mr. Forrestal answered with several proposals, which included the replacement of Ambassador Nolting when his appointment ended in April. According to the presidential advisor, "More vigor is needed in getting Diem to do what we want." He also asked the President to review the command relationship between General Harkins and Admiral Felt. At the least, the President might advise General Taylor to discuss Vietnam strategy with Admiral Felt "and perhaps suggest less interference in the tactical aspects of General Harkins' job."[84]

Michael Forrestal continued to list suggested improvements. He wanted the President to check with General Wheeler about the latter's perception of ARVN operations and whether he was satisfied with the South Vietnamese emphasis on "hit and run operations" as opposed to the more deliberate "clear and hold operations." Mr. Forrestal then advised the President that they needed to do something about the press. He proposed that President Kennedy have Assistant Secretary Harriman call a meeting of government press officials. It was his belief that "we have not been candid enough with [the press] and consequently have generated suspicion and disbelief." He backed a more open policy, even to the extent of ignoring "any efforts by the GVN to prevent [US public affairs officers] from cooperating with US newsmen." First and foremost, however, Mr.

Forrestal wanted the President to meet with General Wheeler, who was to arrive back in Washington on 30 January.[85]

The meeting with General Wheeler was scheduled for the afternoon of 1 February. Mr. Forrestal that morning provided the President with additional questions, as well as amending the ones he had given him earlier. For example, he now suggested that the President ask General Wheeler whether General Harkins should come directly under the Joint Chiefs of Staff rather than Admiral Felt. Near the top of his list was the matter of retaining Ambassador Nolting in Vietnam.[86]

Mr. Forrestal apparently believed that General Wheeler's views on these subjects, as well as questions about the employment of US air power, the Strategic Hamlet Program, press relations, and support of the Diem regime, coincided with his. This obviously was not the case. In some exasperation a few days later, he apologized to the President for arranging the meeting with the Army general. He called the session with General Wheeler a "complete waste" of the President's time and described the general's report as a "rosy euphoria." According to Mr. Forrestal, his aim was to use the JCS report as an instrument to address the problems that he and Roger Hilsman had outlined in their annex. He declared that General Wheeler's presentation "made this device unworkable." Mr. Forrestal then suggested to the President that he and Governor Harriman would "start a campaign in the appropriate departments" to work on their objectives. The objectives would be to adjust command relations; to replace Ambassador Nolting; to place more pressure on the South Vietnamese government to adhere to US advice; for US officials "to dissociate ourselves" from Vietnamese policies "which we disapprove," and finally "to make a rapid and vigorous effort to improve press relations in Saigon, even at some cost to our relationship with the Diem Government."[87]

General Wheeler, of course, had an entirely different perspective of the meeting with President Kennedy. He later remembered that he met with the President after first reporting to both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary McNamara. According to General Wheeler, he told the President that "things were going well in Vietnam militarily, but that 'Ho Chi Minh was fighting the war for peanuts and if we ever expected to win that affair out there, we had to make him bleed.'" The President, as he recalled, "was quite interested in this."[88]

In fact, at the JCS meeting that authorized the Wheeler fact-finding trip, General LeMay asked whether "'we should consider now the application of selected, measured sanctions against the North Vietnamese' ranging from the infiltration of agents to bombing and a blockade."[89] Lieutenant Commander Bagley on 17 January in a memorandum to the Chairman, General Taylor, observed that it was important that the Wheeler group address the question of the North Vietnamese support of the Viet Cong.[90] In actuality, the Wheeler report was relatively moderate on this subject, recommending only the training of South Vietnamese units in unconventional warfare and that the US advisors "encourage their execution of raids and sabotage missions in North Vietnam, coordinated with other military operations."[91]

In many respects, the Wheeler and Hilsman and Forrestal reports commented on the same problems in Vietnam, but obviously from different perspectives. Both called for a reexamination of the command relations between MACV and CINCPAC, although the JCS team was less confrontational in tone. Both also recognized the need for better press relations, the basic difference being that the Wheeler group proposed a press orientation program based upon invitations to "mature and responsible news correspondents," thus implying that the present press corps in Vietnam was neither responsible nor mature. The Hilsman and Forrestal report, for the most part, blamed the Diem regime for the disarray and called for both MACV and the US mission as a whole to place pressure on the Vietnamese government to provide more access to US reporters. Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal voiced much dissatisfaction with both the Vietnamese and the US planning efforts, while the JCS team advocated the approval of the MACV CPSVN. Although both reports recognized many of the same problems, Hilsman and Forrestal were prone to be more critical of both the Vietnamese government and the US mission, including MACV, while the Wheeler group tended to be more protective.[92]

It is not clear whether President Kennedy formally or informally actually approved Forrestal's plan of 4 February to wage a sub-rosa campaign to attain his suggested changes in Vietnam policy. As one historian observed, the President was "always happy to defer a problem that was currently far from a crisis point."[93] President Kennedy probably neither accepted nor disapproved his aide's proposal. Still, there would remain a rift in the administration between the Harriman group in the State Department and the National Security Council and the military.

W. Averell Harriman would prove to be a formidable bureaucratic opponent. Even before the President's meeting with General Wheeler, Mr. Harriman on 30 January wrote a letter to Ambassador Nolting praising the MACV press policy and agreeing with the Joint Chiefs of Staff about the need "to encourage experienced reporters to go to Vietnam," but nevertheless observed:

> this is also a war which involves very important American policies, commitments, and risk to American personnel, the American public has a right to the best possible American information even if this does offend Vietnamese sensitivities. It is for you to decide whether this should be explained to the Vietnamese or whether we should simply take the initiative to increase our briefings and contacts.[94]

On 9 February General Wheeler paid a courtesy call on the Assistant Secretary to discuss his recent trip. Among the several topics of their conversation, the general brought up the press question, calling the situation there "terrible." Both agreed on the need for more experienced correspondents to go to Vietnam. General Wheeler stated that each of the four Corps areas there should have a US press officer to handle the American reporters. He also noted that MACV was now conducting briefings "to 'cut the press in' on information available to US, at least to some degree."[95]

Apparently the general was franker in his conversation with Averell Harriman than he may have been in the meeting with the President eight days earlier. He acknowledged

that General Harkins was having difficulties with President Diem. The MACV commander believed that Diem was being "overly cautious." The South Vietnamese president did not want his army to sustain casualties and ARVN officers "are afraid if they attack they will be criticized for losses that are sustained." General Wheeler then went on to praise General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting, speaking highly of both. At that point, Assistant Secretary Harriman suggested to General Wheeler that General Harkins should report directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The general replied that the Joint Chiefs of Staff currently was considering the matter and declared that "confidentially, if left to him, he would take the action we recommend."[96]

Mr. Harriman was not afraid to exert his influence on the matter. That same day he wrote a letter to General Taylor on the subject. He mentioned to the Chairman his discussion with General Wheeler that morning about command relations and furthermore that the President and the Secretary of State had raised the same question. According to the Assistant Secretary, the situation in Vietnam required the "closest cooperation and coordination" between the US military and civilian authorities in that country and the United States. He asserted that CINCPAC being "off to the side without contact on the political and economic aspects" slowed up procedures in Vietnam and even resulted in military decisions without taking into consideration these other factors. Assistant Secretary Harriman stated that "we feel strongly . . . that General Harkins . . . report directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff" and still receive logistic support from the Pacific Command. General Taylor replied politely five days later stating that he had the Joint Staff look into the matter and that "we will give close attention to the views contained in your letter."[97]

It would be over a month before the Assistant Secretary received a response on his recommendation. On 2 April, in a meeting with General Taylor, the Chairman told him the Joint Chiefs of Staff had reviewed the command situation with both Admiral Felt and General Harkins and both believed the structure should remain the same. In fact, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated in their initial review that the "command arrangements in force in the Republic of Vietnam are adequate, and sufficient flexibility exists within the terms of reference for CinCPac to permit any necessary adjustment, in light of foreseeable operations." According to General Taylor, Mr. Harriman "agreed not to pursue the subject further for the time being, but reserved the right to reopen the question if he judged it necessary."[98]

The above situation pretty much illustrated the quandary that the Harriman group faced in their desire to alter some of the US bureaucratic structure in Vietnam to counter the Viet Cong rebellion as well as reform the Diem government. In March, according to most available indicators, the existing organization and tactics appeared to be working. For example, on 23 February General Harkins had observed to President Diem that the average weekly incidents initiated by the Viet Cong since October 1962 had fallen from 347 to 271 per week. Perhaps just as significant, the number of armed attacks by Communist forces dropped from 98 to 80 per week.[99] By 14 March General Krulak reported to the Special Group for Counterinsurgency that Viet Cong activities during the last six months were at half the number they were in the previous year.[100] The most that the

Harriman circle could do at this time was to nibble at the edges of the Vietnam policy. Interestingly enough, Averell Harriman in his meeting with General Taylor on 2 April informed the general that Ambassador Nolting had requested that he be relieved from his post in Saigon in May.[101]

Despite the improved statistics on the course of the war and the seeming improvement in the performance of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also had some unease with the course of the war. Even with the gains made by the ARVN forces, the Viet Cong remained a formidable force. In a report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Krulak at the beginning of the year estimated that despite their heavy losses in 1962, Viet Cong strength had grown about 18 percent. He concluded, "This makes clear that there is still a strong capability for Viet Cong conscription, and perhaps an appreciable volunteer base as well, not to speak of likely freedom of movement over the infiltration routes for hard core technicians and cadre." General Krulak observed that together with the replacement of deserters and casualties, the Communists had to recruit some 32,500 men a year.[102] The general, in his report to the counterinsurgency group in March, stated that despite the fewer Communist attacks, "It is not known whether this means they are regrouping for a greater effort, or if their capability had been reduced."[103]

At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began to look at further contingency planning for Southeast Asia. When General Wheeler met with Assistant Secretary Harriman on 9 February, the latter suggested that the general "might wish to develop in more detail" the idea he presented to the President that the United States assist the South Vietnamese Army to acquire "commando capabilities against North Viet-Nam."[104] This planning effort was spurred by a new crisis in Laos that occurred in April following a breakdown in the truce in that unhappy country. Secretary McNamara recalled in his memoir that in 1963 the South Vietnamese forces, enhanced by US backing and direction, carried out a small covert program against North Vietnam "consisting of agent infiltration, propaganda distribution, intelligence collection, and general sabotage."[105] For a brief period, however, beginning in April 1963, another Laotian crisis would overshadow the war in South Vietnam.

11

From Laotian Crisis to Buddhist Revolt

Once More Laos

While the situation in South Vietnam appeared to be improving, Laos once more came to the center of attention. Any hopes that the new Geneva agreement would resolve the issues between the Pathet Lao and the Royalists had begun to fade. Although Souvanna Phouma formed a new neutralist central government, he had very little power and had become, as described by US observers, "solely the creature of the Geneva Accords." Notwithstanding that both the Royalists and the Communists had representation in the government, it remained basically a weak coalition of armed factions with each of the sides retaining their own armies. The Pathet Lao forces, still reinforced by North Vietnamese troops, controlled the north and much of the eastern border region with South Vietnam. Kong Le's neutralist troops held the strategic Plain of Jars, while the Royalist forces under General Phoumi held onto southern Laos and the Mekong River region.[1]

This haphazard sort of armed truce continued to exist in Laos with occasional clashes between the various sides. North Vietnamese troops remained in Laos in violation of Geneva, and the Pathet Lao began to nibble at Kong Le's positions in the Plain of Jars. While the United States had removed all of its advisors from Laos, through Air America it continued to resupply the Meo tribesmen who provided intelligence and harassed the Communist forces.[2]

This rather unhappy situation remained relatively stable until April 1963 when one of his own bodyguards murdered Laotian Foreign Minister Quinim Pholsena. Although nominally a neutralist, Mr. Quinim usually allied himself with the Communist faction.

The Pathet Lao blamed Kong Le for the assassination and removed their representatives from the Souvanna government in Vientiene. At the same time, they increased their pressure on the Kong Le forces in the Plain of Jars.[3]

By 10 April Kong Le's military situation had deteriorated to the extent that President Kennedy held a National Security Council meeting to discuss the various options open to the United States. Kong Le still retained control of the two airfields on the strategic plain, which allowed supplies still to reach him. Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma had complained to the Soviet and British co-chairmen of the Geneva treaty that the Pathet Lao had violated the truce supported by North Vietnamese troops illegally present in Laos.[4]

At the meeting on 10 April, CIA Director John McCone cautioned about the accuracy of the information that the United States had on the military situation since it all came from Kong Le. The neutralists still were able to hold on to their positions and the Pathet Lao had failed to dislodge Kong Le. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Averell Harriman, newly promoted to his position, recommended that the United States continue to resupply both Kong Le and the Meo and at the same time pressure the British and the Soviets to use their respective influence to reestablish a cease-fire; the British would sway the Soviets who in turn would pressure the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao. He also wanted the Defense Department to continue its contingency planning for the possible deployment of US forces to Thailand. Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., the Chief of Naval Operations who represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the meeting at the request of the President, detailed the extent of the aerial resupply of Kong Le. The NSAM summing up the meeting stated that the President approved "several recommendations aimed at assisting Kong Le's neutralist forces to withstand Pathet Lao attacks and bringing the fighting in the area to an end."[5]

The situation in Laos remained fluid for the next few days. The American Embassy in Vientiene reported on 14 April that there had been very little combat, even in the Plain of Jars. According to the latest intelligence the Pathet Lao appeared to be "filling up the vacuum" left by the cease-fire and maneuvering to "give impression" that they had the Kong Le neutralist troops surrounded. Furthermore, there was no evidence of any North Vietnamese reinforcements, although there may have been a few cadre present.[6]

A few days later, the situation in Laos appeared to Washington that the Kong Le predicament in the Plain of Jars was once more precarious. On 19 April the President requested a meeting with several key advisors in the late afternoon. These included Secretary McNamara and his Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, Paul Nitze, and the JCS Chairman General Taylor for the Defense Department; Under Secretary Harriman and Roger Hilsman, who replaced Harriman as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, for the State Department; presidential security advisors McGeorge Bundy and Michael Forrestal for the White House; and several representatives of the Central Intelligence Agency.[7]

In an earlier conference that morning with the American Society of Newspaper Editors, President Kennedy had called the situation in Laos "most serious."[8] Before

the afternoon meeting with the advisors, Michael Forrestal suggested to the President that it was possible that it might be proposed if the neutralist or Royalist positions "collapsed" the United States might employ "some form of military force in Laos, including part or all" of the US contingency plan for the overall defense of Southeast Asia. He believed that General Taylor would then "raise the question of whether American troops should be introduced into Laos under any circumstances."[9] It was obvious to Mr. Forrestal that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had little stomach for ground operations in that country.

At the meeting itself, as expected, the intelligence briefing indicated that the situation in Laos was dire. According to reports, "Kong Le may have retired behind his last line of defense" in the Plain of Jars. Roger Hilsman mentioned that the State Department was thinking of sending Under Secretary Harriman to Moscow to protest personally to Premier Khrushchev and attempt to convince him to honor his commitments to President Kennedy relative to Laos at their meeting in Vienna. Under Secretary Harriman wanted assurances, however, that he could raise with the Soviet Premier "the possibility of US military re-involvement in Laos."[10]

At that point, Mr. Hilsman suggested the reintroduction of the US Special Forces teams in Laos or perhaps another deployment of US forces to Thailand. Secretary McNamara countered that the Defense Department position was that no troops should be sent to Laos and that only air units go to Thailand if it were necessary. Otherwise, he suggested the positioning of a "carrier force into the Gulf of Tonkin off Hanoi as a direct threat." At a minimum, Secretary McNamara recommended the alerting of US forces "to indicate the seriousness of American intentions."[11]

After listening to the various proposals, President Kennedy directed that the NSC should meet the next morning. He expected at that time that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to report on the various available military options for the United States to counter the Communist pressure. President Kennedy also wanted to know what diplomatic measures the State Department was prepared to undertake.[12]

At the meeting on 20 April the President made the decision to take action on both the diplomatic and military fronts to meet the threat to the Souvanna regime in Laos and specifically to relieve the siege of the neutralist Kong Le forces on the Plain of Jars. According to further intelligence reports, Kong Le was relying on international support to obtain a cease-fire, but "contrary to some reports," was not ready to surrender. In contrast to Vietnam, the State Department representatives at the meeting pushed for a more interventionist policy in Laos than those of the Defense Department. Secretary of State Rusk suggested that a SEATO exercise scheduled for May be used as a "cover" to move US forces into Southeast Asia. Before landing these troops in Thailand, he would disembark them in northern South Vietnam near Hue. Secretary Rusk mentioned that these forces would be in position to move into North Vietnam in the event Laos fell into Communist hands.[13]

At this point, Chairman Taylor remarked that the Joint Chiefs of Staff planned to order a Navy task force consisting of an aircraft carrier, several destroyers, and a

Marine amphibious force to steam from Subic Bay into the Tonkin Gulf. The general recommended, that "No US forces should be put ashore now." The President agreed with General Taylor in opposing any landing in South Vietnam, "because of the difficulty of removing them at a later time." President Kennedy mentioned that if there were to be a landing, he would prefer them to set the troops down in Thailand. When asked about the wisdom of seeking Thai government permission to deploy US troops in that country, Secretary McNamara advocated notifying the Thais only about air units until the United States determined the need for ground forces there. President Kennedy ordered the immediate embarkation and sailing of the Navy task force to the Tonkin Gulf, but for the time being it would remain in the waters below the 17th Parallel.[14]

In addition to the deployment of US forces, General Taylor recommended and the President approved sending Admiral Felt, the US Pacific commander, to both Laos and Thailand to discuss the situation with officials in both countries. In Bangkok, the admiral would explore with other SEATO advisors the possibility of combined international efforts to diffuse the crisis. Before ending the discussion of the various military options, the President asked General Taylor what actions the United States could take against North Vietnam. The Chairman suggested the best options were sinking ships in Haiphong Harbor, flying reconnaissance missions over the country, and/or bombing selected targets. President Kennedy ended the discussion by directing Secretary McNamara to provide him a study in the following week of "feasible military actions" to take against the North Vietnamese regime.[15]

On the diplomatic front, the President approved sending Under Secretary Harriman to Europe to meet with the British and French governments about a solution to the crisis. If the Under Secretary thought it beneficial, he would then arrange to meet with Premier Khrushchev in Moscow. Shortly after noon on the following day, 21 April, President Kennedy telephoned the Under Secretary. He half jokingly asked "am I talking to the architect of the Geneva Accords." In like vein, Mr. Harriman answered that he was "willing [to] say that." More seriously, he added that "if it goes down, he would "take the blame for it." President Kennedy admitted that he had "a piece of it." In the following discussion, Under Secretary Harriman stated that he believed that this was "the moment to talk" to Khrushchev. He argued that the United States had lived up to its agreement in Geneva to support both Souvanna Phouma and Kong Le and that "we have every right to demand that [Khrushchev] live up to his agreement." The President agreed and suggested that he write a personal note that Under Secretary Harriman could present to the Soviet premier.[16]

The upshot of these discussions was that Mr. Harriman traveled to Europe and discussed the Laotian situation with both the French and British governments and then went on to Moscow. As he had told the President, he did not know if talks with Khrushchev would do any good, but that it "wouldn't do any harm."[17] After some difficult negotiations, he did achieve an understanding of sorts with the Russians, stating that

the Russian leader agreed in principle for the ICC to inspect the situation in the Plain of Jars and incorporating in their final communiqué that:

> Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy reaffirm that the two Governments fully support the Geneva Agreement on Laos. Nikita Khrushchev and John Kennedy had an exchange of opinions and reached mutual understanding on the Agreement in Vienna.[18]

The Soviet leader, however, allowed himself some leeway, declaring that he had no control over the Pathet Lao or the North Vietnamese.[19]

In the meanwhile the situation in Laos had once more stabilized. On 22 April the President chaired a second NSC meeting. At this time, CIA Director McCone reported that the mercurial Kong Le, who a few days earlier was on the verge of despair, was thinking of taking the offensive from the Pathet Lao. President Kennedy wondered aloud about the fact "that a man we had been fighting for two years now turned out to be receiving our support and a key figure in the present situation."[20]

With the movement of the Navy task force into Southeast Asia, Secretary Rusk stated that at this time there was no need for any further deployments. He declared that the US Ambassador in Thailand had informed the Thai Government that the United States might want to station air units there and that the SEATO exercises might occur earlier than had been originally planned. Secretary McNamara indicated that the carrier force with the embarked Marine battalion was nearing South Vietnamese waters. The Secretary pointed out that if need be an Army battle group could be flown to Thailand within twenty-four hours and faster than the Marines could land. The President wondered why the task force could not change course now and disembark the Marines on board in Thailand, as reported by the *New York Times* in its morning edition. Secretary McNamara replied that the task force could still "turn toward Thailand," but when the decision was made, "it had been thought better to direct it toward South Vietnam." In reply to a question, the Secretary stated that any potential enemies "were aware of the task force movements because the operational commands were given [deliberately] in clear text and certainly intercepted." There was no change of orders for the task force.[21]

Even though the story was not accurate as to the destination, President Kennedy was obviously upset by the leak from someone in the Pentagon. When the representative of the US Information Agency asked what answer should be given to reporters about the destination of the task force, the President answered succinctly to tell them only, "the fleet is at sea, where it belongs." Secretary Rusk then made a small joke at the expense of Air Force Chief of Staff General LeMay, who was the Joint Chiefs of Staff representative at the meeting. Secretary Rusk declared that answer was fine as long as the general "did not say, if all of his planes took off, that these planes were in the air where they belonged." General LeMay remained silent.[22] The situation in Laos would continue to simmer through April and May in sort of an armed truce. Once more the focus would be on Vietnam.

The War in South Vietnam, Spring 1963

In the early spring of 1963 there had been a growing sense that the South Vietnamese had begun to take the offensive against the Viet Cong. Even some of the State Department advisors who had doubts about the progress reports from Vietnam expressed a certain refrained optimism. Roger Hilsman, upon assuming his new position as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, wrote to Secretary of State Rusk that he believed "that we can win in Vietnam with a number of provisos."[23]

Mr. Hilsman and several officials in both the State and Defense Departments including General Taylor and Secretary McNamara had been heartened by several presentations given by Robert K. Thompson, the expert on counterinsurgency who headed the British Advisory Mission to Vietnam. He visited Washington for a two-week period in late March and early April, during which time he met with most of the senior officers involved in the war. In a personal conference with Secretary of Defense McNamara, he had told the Secretary that if progress in South Vietnam continued at the same pace it might be "wise to reduce US strength by a significant amount, say 1,000 men."[24]

Later, meeting with Under Secretary Harriman and his entourage as well as Michael Forrestal of the White House Staff, Mr. Thompson reviewed extensively the progress being made. He believed that there had been real progress in the Strategic Hamlet Program in that the Viet Cong could no longer "run in and out of these hamlets at will." When Under Secretary Harriman noted that the communist strength still seemed to grow despite their large number of casualties, Mr. Thompson explained that the communists accomplished this through their recruitment system in that they still controlled large rural areas with enough population "to recruit the numbers they need."[25]

While generally supportive of President Diem, he was wary of some of the government politically sponsored private support groups such as the Republican Youth Group and Womens Solidarity Movement. Mr. Thompson suggested that these organizations were "very much Vietnamese affairs." He believed that President Diem needed to delegate more authority through the chain of command.[26] Nevertheless, in a later meeting with President Kennedy, Mr. Thompson maintained that if "Diem disappeared there would be a risk of losing the war within six months since there was no other leader of his caliber." He would modify this statement later, stating that because of the war and American influence there was an "increase in the number of competent and experienced leaders."[27]

In his conversation with the President, Mr. Thompson repeated much of what he told Under Secretary Harriman and his group, but he did go into some more detail in his coverage of tactics and some US procedures. He believed the introduction of helicopters was useful, especially in preventing the concentration of an enemy force and surprising the Viet Cong. Mr. Thompson maintained, however, that the only way that the war could actually be won was "by brains and feet."[28]

Mr. Thompson was much more dismissive of the US defoliant campaign, claiming that even if foliage died, there still remained sufficient cover in most cases for the VC to keep out of sight. Furthermore, he maintained that Asians had an "automatic aversion"

to "unknown chemicals." He was a little more positive about the spraying campaign to destroy VC food sources. Mr. Thompson said a crop destruction campaign was valid only in the cases where the Viet Cong had no other source for their food supply except in the areas to be sprayed. President Kennedy, who had his own doubts about spraying, turned to an aide and told him that both the defoliation and crop destruction campaigns needed to be reviewed once more. In fact, the President in March had already asked for such a review of ARVN spraying operations.[29]

Robert Thompson rounded out his tour in Washington on the afternoon of 4 April with a meeting of the Special Group for Counterinsurgency at the State Department. In his briefing, he once more provided a review of the situation in Vietnam. In his audience once more were Under Secretary Harriman and the ubiquitous Michael Forrestal. Other members of the committee included Robert Kennedy and General Howard K. Johnson, the Army Assistant Chief of Staff, in place of General Taylor for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Mr. Thompson repeated many of his previous comments and then stated that the only "valid benchmark was when we reach the level of having sufficient control of the population to deny their accessibility to actions by the Viet Cong." He ended on the positive note that he thought this could be reached by the middle of the next year.[30]

Chalmers B. Wood, the director of the Vietnam Working Group, in a personal "Dear Fritz" note to Ambassador Nolting, described the impact that the British visitor had on many of the top officials in Washington. He referred to President Kennedy "warmly" congratulating Mr. Thompson on his presentation and his work in Vietnam. Mr. Wood was most impressed by the reaction of Under Secretary Harriman to Thompson's remarks. According to Mr. Wood, the partially deaf former Governor of New York often turned his hearing aid off when bored, but in this instance kept the device on and at full volume during the entire hour and half that Mr. Thompson spoke. Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hilsman held a dinner party for the British advisor and introduced him to influential members of the Washington press corps. Mr. Wood concluded that Robert Thompson "did so much for us in these last ten days that he would deserve two months home leave even if he had not spent the previous ten months in Vietnam."[31]

Perhaps the most immediate impact of Thompsons visit was President Kennedy's reaction to the South Vietnamese and US spraying campaign. Less than two weeks after listening to Mr. Thompson, while on vacation in Florida, the President sent a telegram to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy stating that he had asked for a review of the subject and directed that there be a "stop [of] any further use until there has been an analysis." Michael Forrestal replied for Mr. Bundy that both the State and Defense Departments had been working on the subject and believed that the report would be available soon. Mr. Forrestal informed the President there had been no crop destruction campaign since December and that none could occur without the President's authorization. The only scheduled defoliation spraying within the next few weeks was to clear the railroad right of way. He suggested that President Kennedy "review the matter after seeing report on your return."[32]

On 22 April Michael Forrestal sent to the President two memoranda, one from the State Department and the other from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both recommending continuation of both the defoliation and the crop destruction programs. In the JCS document forwarded by the Defense Department, General Taylor observed that, although difficult to give exact figures and specific results, the Joint Chiefs of Staff determined that there existed "ample evidence that they do give us a degree of military advantage."[33]

In the State Department paper, Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hilsman agreed with the general that it was "difficult to measure" the military effectiveness of both programs, but "on balance," he too recommended the continuation of both. The two departments also suggested that the Ambassador have the authorization to initiate such operations without reference back to Washington.[34]

About two weeks later Secretary Rusk, in a message to Ambassador Nolting, stated that, after a review "by the highest authorities," he and General Harkins had permission under very specific conditions to carry out defoliation operations, but that "they should be few in number." On the other hand, any crop destruction campaign needed to be approved in advance by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs and by the Defense Department. According to Secretary Rusk's instructions, these could be conducted only in remote areas known to be occupied by Viet Cong and when they presented no danger to local people. The Secretary stated that by July he wanted "a full report and evaluation of all 1963 herbicide operations" to serve as a basis for making decisions whether or not to continue defoliation and crop destruction activities.[35]

Into April intelligence reports remained generally positive relative to the prospects of the South Vietnamese campaign against the Viet Cong. Intelligence analysts in mid-month credited US assistance and "strengthened South Vietnamese capabilities and effectiveness" with blunting communist offensive actions. They believed that this progress meant that the Viet Cong could be "contained militarily" and that it had unalterably changed the outlook for the future. The analysts warned, nevertheless, that the situation in Vietnam remained "fragile." They ended their report with a strong note of caution, remarking, that "the ability of the Diem regime to move willingly and effectively" in consolidating public support in the countryside remained "questionable." They worried that if President Diem believed victory was in sight, he would become even more intractable.[36]

President Diem had already begun to prove his intractableness. Possibly influenced by his younger brother Ngo Dinh Nhu and wife Madame Nhu, President Diem in late March began to renege on a proposal for a joint US–South Vietnamese counterinsurgency that he had earlier accepted "in principle." The main difficulty lay in the approval mechanism for the disposal of these funds for counterinsurgency and the Strategic Hamlet Program. Currently, each province chief dispended these funds through a three-man committee that included himself, the US MAAG sector advisor, and the operations mission provincial advisor. The Vietnamese government now wanted to permit the province chief to have the ability to use these funds on his own authority alone.[37]

The situation came to a head on 5 April, when Ambassador Nolting met with President Diem after several unproductive conversations with Vietnamese Defense Minister

Thuan. According to Ambassador Nolting, the problem involved more than a dispute of spending but was over what the Ambassador called President Diem's conviction that American advisors by their "very number and zeal" were creating the impression of an "American Protectorate" over South Vietnam. The Vietnamese president was especially concerned about the activities of lower-level US civilian and military sector officers working at the provincial and district levels. President Diem complained that "so many Americans" caused confusion and disrupted the workings of his government at the local level. He even hinted about calling for a possible reduction in the number of American advisors. Ambassador Nolting replied that neither he nor General Harkins had heard of any such complaints from South Vietnamese officials except from Diem's brother Nhu. The Vietnamese president answered that he depended "a great deal on his brother... and that he trusted his brother's judgment and integrity." The impasse over the funds continued.[38]

Madame Nhu managed at the same time to add to the frustrations of the Americans. The South Vietnamese Womens Solidarity Movement, an organization controlled by her, issued a statement which in part ostensibly blamed American advisors for using their status "to make lackeys of Vietnamese and to seduce Vietnamese women into decadent paths." On 13 April Ambassador Nolting informed the State Department that because of this statement he and General Harkins had cancelled their acceptance of an invitation from Madame Nhu to spend several days at the presidential retreat in the resort city of Dalat. The Ambassador stated he would explain to President Diem the reasons for their action.[39]

On 26 April, and after further talks with the South Vietnamese defense minister, Ambassador Nolting informed the State Department that he had the basis for a possible agreement with the South Vietnamese Government. He reported that he had received a letter from President Diem three days previous that showed some promise for a possible compromise. While reiterating on the basis of "derogation of sovereignty" his refusal to apply the present approval procedures for the dispensing of the counterinsurgency provincial funds, President Diem promised that the government would finance "all jointly developed projects," as well as coordinating US and GVN activities in rural areas. He also promised to maintain the existing relationship between and functions of the South Vietnamese Interministerial Committee on Strategic Hamlets (ICSH) and the US Committee on Province Rehabilitation (COPROR)."[40]

Although admitting that President Diem's letter was "too vague on question of procedures," Ambassador Nolting was able to iron out some of these difficulties in his discussion with the defense minister. After Mr. Thuan "threw up his hands" at the Ambassador's first proposal, they settled down to serious negotiating. The upshot was that the two reached a tentative agreement that ICSH and COPROR would still approve the counterinsurgency provincial programs. Although the province chief would need to consult with his American advisors, he would not be required to obtain their consent before dispensing his funds but would have to inform them of his expenditures. Defense Minister Thuan stated that after an exchange of letters between the Ambassador and himself, President Diem would approve this agreement.[41]

Ambassador Nolting told the State Department that in principle this agreement would provide what the United States wanted and recommended approval of the terms. He, however, still had his own doubts how it would work in practice. He argued that although using "old and practiced procedures" to fund counterinsurgency projects, "past experience with parsimonious approach of GVN dictates caution at least." He concluded, nevertheless, that there "was no other alternative to trying to make this work."[42]

These doubts were echoed by Rufus Phillips, the Assistant Director of the US Operations Mission for Rural Affairs, who was responsible for the US assistance to the Strategic Hamlet Program. According to Phillips:

> We are now asked [to] give up essential ingredients of what has proven to be a winning formula. We are asked [to] give up direct US funding, and to give up effective US participation in the province administered counter-insurgency operations directed at winning the people. Yet it is precisely this participation, and the funding system which has supported and made it possible, which are essential to the success of the program.[43]

Despite Ambassador Nolting's attempts to pacify President Diem, US intelligence in the last weeks of April indicated that the United States could still expect suspicion and resentment from the South Vietnamese government to the advisory effort. In one such account, the author wrote that both "Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu were concerned over recent 'infringements' of Vietnamese sovereignty." According to this report, the two blamed the US MAAG and especially singled out the US Special Forces as the chief culprit. The main complaint was that Americans did not "understand the necessity for coordinating their activities with appropriate Vietnamese authorities." South Vietnamese presidential staff members had questioned several Vietnamese nationals who worked closely with the Americans about their activities. According to the report, President Diem and his brother Nhu were biding their time for further "American blunders" to build up their case before they demanded from Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins a reduction in the number of US civilians and military serving in Vietnam.[44]

Much of this difficulty with the South Vietnamese government was reflected in the implementation of the Strategic Hamlet Program, which Mr. Nhu had adopted as his pet cause. At the beginning of May Rufus Phillips reported in a candid analysis, from his perspective as the senior US official involved with the program, on the advances and pitfalls since its inception. He had asked the four US Regional Corps Representatives to provide him with their personal evaluation of the progress the Vietnamese had made in the program in their respective Corps areas. In his overall summary of their comments, he began on a positive note, observing that generally "highly significant progress has been made in . . . many provinces." Mr. Phillips then carefully defined his measures of progress: "the establishment, in steadily increasing number, of viable hamlets with inhabitants who have the will and the means to resist the Viet Cong." Using those standards, he noted that there was a large distinction in the number of hamlets that met these standards and the number that the South Vietnamese officials claimed to hold.[45]

Assistant Director Philips then bluntly declared that: "although the concept itself is excellent, execution of the program is seriously handicapped by a lack of understanding of the concept and the lack of sufficient will to put it into effect." Mr. Phillips especially blamed local provincial officials, including province chiefs, for misunderstanding the intents of the program. Too many used "methods sure to alienate the population." He stated that there had been some improvement in the attitudes of the officials but that this had resulted from US advisors "on the spot insistence" upon the welfare of the population rather than any action of the central government. He cited the example of Mr. Nhu speaking about this concept but in terms too vague to be understood. In another case, when a US advisor reminded a province chief that it was illegal to collect money from the target population to pay for the construction of the strategic hamlet, the chief replied that "it would force him to stop his entire program."[46]

Mr. Phillips especially faulted the Diem regime for its overemphasis on numbers rather than quality in the establishment of the strategic hamlets. According to him, this merely "reinforced the natural inclination of most provincial officials to create strategic hamlets 'by command.'" He recalled accompanying Mr. Nhu to one hamlet where the latter praised the provincial chief for moving the entire population "without any expense to the government." Mr. Phillips stated that he had been impressed only to discover much later that the chief found it necessary, "because of popular discontent to use two companies of Civil Guard to keep the people in the hamlets." In any event, he declared that this unfortunately continued "to be the main approach of the Central Government."[47]

In his conclusion, Mr. Phillips attempted to put the best face possible on the program. He wrote that conditions were "changing for the better, but still too slowly to produce the type and number of viable hamlets needed to win the war." In several areas, according to the reports of most of the Corps sector advisors, many province chiefs were learning by themselves that the only way to establish a viable "strategic hamlet" was the "hard way . . . by persuading the population and winning their support—rather than by herding them into hamlets." Assistant Director Phillips argued there had been some limited progress in most Corps areas except in the most southern IV Corps. There the program languished, especially in the heavily populated Mekong Delta, where any reported gains were "largely illusionary." Mr. Phillips ended his report by calling for "a psychological revolution in the way the Vietnamese government and its officials operate."[48]

The May Honolulu Conference

In his report on strategic hamlets, Assistant Director Phillips mentioned in an aside the hopes that it could be used in the forthcoming periodic Secretary of Defense Conference planned for the first week in May.[49] At the same time in Washington, officials made their own preparations. While still basically optimistic about the course of the war, they were becoming more concerned about the recent activities of the Diem government and the growing influence of President Diem's brother Nhu.

Presidential advisor Forrestal gathered together several officials directly concerned with the Vietnamese situation to examine various possible contingencies that could also be discussed in Honolulu.[50] Theodore J. Heavner, the Deputy Director of the Vietnam Working Group, who attended the small hurried informal meeting, informed Chalmers Wood, the director of the group, that Michael Forrestal appeared to be thinking of a study to examine options to place pressure on President Diem to carry out more internal reforms. The Kennedy administration also worried about Ngo Dinh Nhu's influences on President Diem and also about the dispute over the counterinsurgency funds. Mr. Forrestal, who was a relatively new member of the National Security Staff, had apparently been unaware of the administrations 1961 contingency plan in the event "Diem passes from the scene." The administration wanted the plan revised, and Mr. Wood was already working on an update. At the meeting, Mr. Forrestal had asked Mr. Heavner to inform Chalmers Wood, who was to attend the Secretary of Defense Conference, to discuss the subject in Honolulu.[51]

Michael Forrestal asked the participants of his meeting to come up with checklists on what could be done to influence events in Vietnam. Mr. Heavner provided a rundown of the counterinsurgency negotiations. Much of the discussion centered upon the stability of the South Vietnamese government. Intelligence studies indicated that Mr. Nhu would likely succeed to the presidency if anything happened to President Diem. In his memorandum to Mr. Wood, Theodore Heavner wrote: "This disturbs me personally," calling Nhu "a sure loser." He wanted Mr. Wood to bring this subject up at Honolulu as well and to advocate "our present plan which calls for constitutional succession backed or followed by a military leader."[52]

Most of the rest of the meeting centered around a proposal to obtain "political intelligence" about the South Vietnamese military, especially on the so-called "middle levels of major and colonel." They tentatively agreed that they would use US military advisors as "political reporters." These advisors would attempt to appraise "the political tendencies and loyalties" of the Vietnamese officers with whom they worked and "if it ever became necessary to use their influence as directed by the Ambassador." They would make their reports through General Harkins rather than directly through intelligence channels. Marine Major General Victor Krulak from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who participated in the discussion, may have been the one who "repeatedly emphasized that the great danger in this plan would be GVN discovery of the effort." Mr. Heavner suggested to Mr. Wood that he may want to talk to General Krulak about the details in that the Marine general was to bring up the subject in Honolulu.[53]

Another sensitive subject that the administration wanted to be discussed in Honolulu was that of the relations of MACV and the American Embassy with the press corps in Vietnam. In late April, at the suggestion of his press secretary, Pierre Salinger, President Kennedy met with John Mecklin, the public affairs counselor for the US Embassy in Vietnam, who was in Washington recuperating from surgery. At the suggestion of Mr. Mecklin, who advocated a more open administration policy, President Kennedy agreed to issue new press guidelines for Vietnam and authorized

Press Secretary Salinger to draft a new directive. Mr. Salinger's draft incorporated Mecklins suggestion that military and civilian officers take reporters more into their confidence and provide "more leeway to [the] field in making day-to-day news policy." Arthur Sylvester, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, was to hand-carry the draft and give copies to both Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins at the Honolulu Conference.[54]

As planned, on 6 May Secretary of Defense McNamara held his conference in Honolulu. In attendance from Vietnam were General Harkins, MACV, and Ambassador Nolting, as well as Joseph L. Brent, the head of the US Operations Mission. Admiral Harry Felt, Commander in Chief Pacific, played host to the conference at his headquarters. Some of the others present included General Earle Wheeler, Army Chief of Staff, and General Krulak representing the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman and presumably Chalmers Wood from the State Department.[55]

Secretary McNamara opened the meeting by asking General Harkins to give his latest assessment of the war. As had become his pattern at these meetings, General Harkins spoke in various optimistic generalities. He mentioned that over-all the military progress was going well but did not want to predict any final date. The MACV commander stated that, while unable to forecast the end of the war, he believed the United States was on the "right track . . . and would win the war." General Harkins did admit to some recent "setbacks" as a result of individuals "dropping their guard." He believed this was simply "a natural reaction when things are going well."[56]

The general noted that the South Vietnamese Armed Forces had largely completed the preparation, or Phase I, of the National Campaign Plan. He then stated that the offensive Phase II, or "explosion" phase, would officially begin on 1 July. General Harkins cautioned, however, that there would be "no dramatic entry" into Phase II because the South Vietnamese, even in the preparatory phase, had taken the offensive "with increased operations" already taking place throughout the country. Looking to the future, he concluded, "this is the wrong time for us to mention any cutback to the GVN."[57]

This last was probably a sentiment that Secretary McNamara did not want to hear at the time. Although General Harkins' Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam had gone through the chain of command approved by Ambassador Nolting, Admiral Felt, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense had not signed off on the document. Secretary McNamara questioned some of the projections of the plan. He specifically wanted to know, for example, why the strength figures for the RVNAF were larger in 1968 than in 1964, when it had been assumed "that the back of the insurgency would be broken by FY [Fiscal Year] 65." After also questioning the fiscal projections and the suggested mix of aircraft for the South Vietnamese "as too light on [helicopters] and transports and too heavy on fighters," Secretary McNamara stated that "the phase out of US personnel as planned is too slow," and he wanted to "get these numbers down to a minimum level" much earlier than called for in the plan's projection.[58]

The subject of the number of US personnel in Vietnam came up again when Ambassador Nolting discussed the relationship of the South Vietnamese government to the

American mission. Referring to his difficulties with President Diem over the counterinsurgency fund, the Ambassador mentioned that "there remains a sense of touchiness." He stated that this was also compounded by the Vietnamese sensitivity to "US advisors (both military and civilian) whenever advisory efforts touch upon the political field." Ambassador Nolting observed that this did not apply to advisors whose mission was entirely military but to those "advising and assisting province chiefs." As almost an afterthought, the Ambassador acknowledged that the members of this latter group, despite causing concern to the South Vietnamese government, were the ones who were "the most valuable in the over-all CI [Counterinsurgency] effort." Like General Harkins, Ambassador Nolting argued against any move "to remove any blocks of advisors."[59]

At this point, Secretary McNamara stated that he agreed with Ambassador Nolting that American advisors were the last category he would take out. Yet, he argued that at this time there was a need for a plan to phase out US personnel. The Secretary of Defense called for the Vietnamese armed forces to begin "to take over some functions" from the Americans. For the first time, to the group during the conference, he mentioned that he wanted to withdraw 1,000 US troops "this year if the situation permits." Secretary McNamara ended his comments on the subject by reemphasizing his desire for "a plan to expedite training to get [Vietnamese] personnel to take over tasks being performed by US personnel."[60]

Outside of the passing reference to counterinsurgency made by Ambassador Nolting, the only other portion of the allied pacification campaign that received any attention was the Strategic Hamlet Program. A report on this program was made by Nolting's deputy chief of mission, William C. Trueheart. In the account contained in the formal minutes of the meeting, Mr. Trueheart presented a generally positive picture of progress, especially in the first three Corps areas of Vietnam. He confessed, however, that the situation in the IV Corps Mekong Delta area appeared to be in some trouble. According to his explanation, it was basically a matter of there being more Viet Cong and the population generally being more hostile to the government, thus hampering any progress in extending the strategic hamlets. Mr. Trueheart made no mention of the problems enumerated by Rufus Phillips in his report of the overextension and lack of oversight of the program by the South Vietnamese Government.[61]

The minutes do contain a reference to "a brief discussion" on the relationship with the press. They briefly noted that there was a quandary on what information to divulge. Press officers were being criticized for either talking too much, or on the other hand, refusing to talk to the press at all. Secretary McNamara told General Wheeler to study the possible implementation of an indoctrination program in the United States for newly assigned press officers before going to Vietnam. There is no indication in the minutes to the new presidential memorandum on press relations addressed to both General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting.[62]

While the minutes contain a note that General Krulak spoke to the group on South Vietnamese covert operations in North Vietnam, there is missing any report that the general may have made about the possibility of using American military advisors to

provide intelligence about the South Vietnamese officer corps as discussed in the meeting with Michael Forrestal before the conference. In fact, none of the matters discussed at that meeting, including the proposed contingency plan for the succession to President Diem, appear in these minutes.[63]

Upon returning from Honolulu, Secretary McNamara immediately pared down the funding called for in the Comprehensive Vietnam Campaign Plan. In a memorandum to Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA Paul Nitze, he wrote that the $575 million recommended for fiscal years 1965 through 1968 in the plan was "at least 270 million higher than an acceptable program." The Secretary declared that the recommended funds to support the South Vietnamese Armed Forces assumed an unrealistically high level of US Support." Secretary McNamara argued that the plan required the assignment to the South Vietnamese of equipment that was "both complicated to operate and costly to procure and maintain." Finally, he observed that the entire plan needed "to be completely reworked." The Secretary then ordered Paul Nitze to provide him by 1 September with a revised recommendation for funding the RVNAF for those fiscal years. Furthermore, he wanted Assistant Secretary Nitze to attach to his estimate the strength of each of the South Vietnamese forces; an inventory of the weapons held by each one; a copy of the South Vietnamese defense budget "funded by South Vietnam"; the US supplementary assistance in both dollars and weapons; and, finally, the American troops "assigned to South Vietnam broken down by function."[64]

One day later after this memo to Mr. Nitze, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cabled Admiral Felt in Hawaii for him and General Harkins to revise their current plans "as a matter of urgency" to depict the withdrawal of 1,000 US troops by the end of the current year. They wanted Admiral Felt to supplement this withdrawal plan with "training plans to accelerate the replacement of US by South Vietnamese units."[65]

The McNamara decision on the Comprehensive Plan for Vietnam, which in effect nullified much of the Vietnam planning already approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, hardly endeared him or the Kennedy administration to the professional military establishment. This was especially true since this action came on the heels of a decision by President Kennedy and Secretary McNamara not to renew the appointment of Admiral George Anderson as Chief of Naval Operations. On 6 May, the same day as the Honolulu Conference, the White House announced the appointment of Admiral David L. McDonald as the new CNO to take effect on 1 August when Admiral Anderson's one-year term expired. Admiral Anderson would be only the second CNO since World War II who would serve less than two years in that position.[66]

At the same time, the President reappointed General Curtis LeMay for another one-year term as Chief of Staff of the US Air Force. Both General LeMay and Admiral Anderson had been critical of Secretary McNamara's decisions, especially his proposal to develop a single aircraft, the TFX fighter aircraft, for both the Air Force and the Navy. Admiral Anderson had testified in a congressional hearing against the award of a contract to General Dynamics Corporation to build the controversial aircraft. This act, together with the admiral's confrontation with Secretary McNamara in October during

the Cuban missile crisis, apparently was enough to influence the President not to reappoint him. According to Tom Wicker of the *New York Times*, rumors had circulated that General LeMay would not be reappointed, and that the choice was Admiral Anderson instead came as somewhat of a surprise, especially since President Kennedy supposedly had good rapport with him. Apparently General LeMay may have had stronger congressional political support than the admiral.[67]

While this change in the makeup of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had very little to do with Vietnam, it reinforced the mistrust between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the civilian leadership in the Kennedy administration. As far as Vietnam, the administration continued to show public support of the Diem regime, although there remained rumblings of discontent within the State Department and the White House Staff. Still, it exposed another possible stumbling block that could split the civilian and military leaders in the Kennedy administration.

As long as the Vietnamese continued to show success and progress on the battlefield, this dissent remained muted. In early May, except for the situation in IV Corps, the South Vietnamese Army appeared to be on the offensive or at least holding its own. Even an official history of the People's Army of Vietnam admitted that their 1963 spring offensive in northern South Vietnam was a disappointment, stating, "The achievements of our combat operations, especially armed operations in support of the people's efforts to destroy strategic hamlets in the rural lowlands, were limited." The settlement of the counterinsurgency funding dispute between the Diem government and the United States also appeared on the surface to settle the main differences between the two allies.[68]

Beginnings of the Buddhist Revolt and More Troubles with Diem and Nhu

This relative calm between the two allies was short-lived. A foreshadowing of future problems occurred on 8 May with what was supposed to be a peaceful demonstration celebrating the birthday of Buddha in the former Vietnamese imperial capital of Hue. As reported by the US Consul in Hue, John J. Helble, the demonstrators carried Buddhist religious flags, which were not to be displayed publicly, according to Vietnamese law. Mr. Helble stated that the problem was supposed to have been resolved the night before when the province chief agreed to suspend the enforcement of the law, which most often was honored in the breach rather than in its observance. In a speech on the morning of 8 May, Thich Tri Quang, one of the senior Buddhist leaders in central Vietnam, criticized the government for attempting to suppress "freedom of religion." This was followed by many street displays of the Buddhist flag during the rest of the day and public criticism of the government and its religious policy. Buddhist antigovernment feelings had been fueled earlier when the government had not protested the public flying of the Vatican flag when President Diem's brother Thuc celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of his becoming the Archbishop of Hue.[69]

The crisis came to a head when a large crowd of Buddhists gathered that night at the Hue radio station where Tri Quang was to broadcast his sermon in honor of Buddha's birthday. According to Consul Helble's sources, the government withdrew its permission at the last moment for Thich Tri Quang to make this radio address. The Buddhist monks at the scene urged the people to remain peaceful, but not to move. Provincial police attempted to use water hoses to disperse the crowd, which proved futile. Provincial militia then arrived, and the people still stood their ground. A grenade exploded and apparently the troops opened fire. Although totals of dead and wounded in the crowd vary, the generally accepted number was nine killed and fourteen wounded.[70]

Diem's political arm, the National Revolutionary Movement, attempted to blame the Viet Cong for the deaths. His party stated that it was a Communist terrorist that threw the grenade and caused the outbreak of firing. Consul Helble wrote that the organization planned to hold a mass meeting in Hue to protest the supposed actions by the communists. Apparently the party members thought better of the idea and never held the session. On the other hand, despite curfews and troops in the street, the citizens continued to demonstrate, but their leaders, especially Thich Tri Quang, were able to maintain discipline and kept their activities nonviolent. Mr. Helble believed that by the afternoon of 10 May the worst of the crisis was over, although the situation remained fluid.[71]

That afternoon, the Buddhist clergy in central Vietnam held a mass meeting of their members at the Tu Dam Pagoda in Hue and issued a manifesto to the government. Signed by five of the leading members of the Buddhist hierarchy, including the president of the Vietnam General Association of Buddhists, they called upon the Diem regime to repeal the flag law; that the Buddhist receive the same rights that Vietnamese Catholics enjoyed; to stop harassment of the Buddhist clergy and their followers; and that the government pay retribution to the families of those killed on 8 May.[72]

A clergy delegation followed up on the document by meeting with a senior Vietnamese government official on 13 May and two days later with President Diem himself. According to a Vietnamese newspaper interview with the clergy, in their meeting with President Diem, the delegation repeated the demands that they made in their manifesto. According to the interview, President Diem rejected the demand that he rescind the directive about the flags. He claimed that "both Catholics and Buddhists [were] guilty [of] disorderly use of religious flags" and that the banners should be confined to their respective churches and temples. On the matter that Catholic organizations received special privileges, the president claimed that this was a result of "administrative errors." He rejected their claim that the government hindered the Buddhists from practicing their religion, claiming that the Vietnamese constitution guaranteed freedom of religion. President Diem, however, agreed that the families of those who had died in the demonstration on 8 May should receive financial aid. He claimed that there were Catholics and non-Buddhists among the victims that night. Moreover, President Diem rejected the Buddhists version of the events of 8 May, blaming Communist sympathizers for the outbreak of the violence.[73]

In his separate analysis of the crisis with the Buddhists, Ambassador Nolting faulted the Diem government for too slow a reaction. The Ambassador believed that the regime should have quickly tried to placate the Buddhist leaders. He argued that the Vietnamese leadership's first reaction to blame the entire incident on the Communists caused more difficulty because it damaged the government's credibility and further alienated the Buddhists. Furthermore, Ambassador Nolting observed that the Buddhist clergy leadership was "tending to counsel moderation based on religious traditions of non-violence." At the same time he praised Tri Quang's actions in controlling his followers and preventing any violent reaction against the government. The Ambassador was hopeful that Diem's meeting with the Buddhist clergy was indicative of willingness perhaps to make some accommodation with them. Mr. Nolting argued that President Diem needed to make a "prompt clear-cut statement" that would guarantee religious equality and that would accept government responsibility for the events in Hue. The Ambassador worried that the situation could still disintegrate further and cause an upheaval in Vietnamese society.[74]

While the trouble with the Buddhists continued to brew, Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu stirred up the pot of Vietnamese resentment against the American advisory effort. In an interview on 11 May with *Washington Post* correspondent Walter Unna, which appeared as a front-page article in the newspaper, Mr. Nhu declared that the South Vietnamese government wanted the United States to remove about half of its military strength in Vietnam, some 6,000 to 6,500 troops. Moreover, he claimed that the South Vietnamese Army was not prepared yet to begin a general offensive against the communist forces, contradicting General Harkins. Describing Nhu as the "power behind the throne," Walter Unna wrote that Mr. Nhu asserted that both he and President Diem did not trust US advisors at the local level and that many were only there to gather intelligence. In fact, according to the reporter, Mr. Nhu claimed that many of the American advisor casualties were "cases of soldiers who exposed themselves too readily."[75]

As could be expected, the Kennedy administration quickly took issue with the sentiments expressed by Mr. Nhu in the interview. Secretary Rusk signed off on a message, cleared by Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman, to Ambassador Nolting declaring that Mr. Nhu's "public reopening of [the] issue [of] American presence . . . cannot be ignored." The Secretary directed the Ambassador to meet with President Diem to protest Nhu's statement in very strong terms and to "clarify GVN intentions." In fact Roger Hilsman, after facing "sharp questioning" from members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, sent a second message three days later reiterating the need to use the "strongest possible language."[76]

Despite the instructions from the State Department to confront President Diem about Nhu's statements to Walter Unna, both Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins decided to use an indirect approach. On 15 May General Harkins sent a letter to the South Vietnamese president mentioning the progress that the South Vietnamese Armed Forces had made during the past year. He referred to the meeting with Secretary McNamara in Honolulu. The general then reported, "practically all military programs have been completed or are well on the way to completion." He then went into specific

detail ranging from intelligence to operations and creation of new units. The MACV commander argued that the Vietnamese forces had increased their effectiveness, although he believed they needed to increase their small unit actions and pursue the Viet Cong more vigorously. He concluded, "the past year has been one of remarkable effort and remarkable progress." Then, almost as an afterthought, General Harkins added that he noted that Diem's brother Nhu had stated, "we are not ready to go on the offensive." The American general simply added that he disagreed with that assessment, stating that the "time for an all-out offensive is at hand, before the armed forces get stale."[77]

Two days later Ambassador Nolting in a message to the State Department observed that he had spent the previous week traveling with President Diem in visits to seven different provinces. He claimed that one purpose of the visit was for President Diem to show his "appreciation of American help." The Ambassador stated that it was the consensus of the entire group "that important improvements were unmistakable." Ambassador Nolting was impressed with what he described as "the rapport" between President Diem and the rural population. He especially noted what he called "the vast difference between what is actually happening in this country and the reflection of it in the outside world." Ambassador Nolting stressed that the actual events in Vietnam were proving "a vindication of American and GVN policy." He concluded, "there continue to be snafus, but the general average of internal performance is improving constantly, I am convinced." An incredulous Michael Forrestal forwarded the cable to President Kennedy, remarking that Ambassador Nolting "gives a cheerful picture of progress in South Vietnam," but that "it should be read with a grain of salt." Forrestal even remarked that the fact that "Diem has gotten out into the country is in itself hopeful."[78]

Ambassador Nolting obviously had other purposes in making the trip with President Diem besides observing the progress in the countryside. He apparently used the time to convince the Vietnamese president that it would be in his interest to issue formally a joint communiqué signed by both of them relating to the funding of counterinsurgency activities and especially the Strategic Hamlet Program. The announcement also contained the statement "that the scale of the US advisory and support effort in Vietnam is directly related to security requirements." The document then ended on the following note: "Although at this time the present level of the advisory and support effort is still necessary, as the security situation improves and as the strategic hamlet programme progresses, it is expected that the need for foreign assistance, both in terms of material and personnel, will be progressively lightened."[79]

Ambassador Nolting's tactic pleased even as sharp a critic of the Diem regime as Roger Hilsman. In a direct message "For Nolting from Hilsman," the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs praised the Ambassador for his "excellent device" of using the counterinsurgency agreement to allow the Vietnamese president to "disavow Nhu's remarks indirectly and without loss of face." Still, Assistant Secretary Hilsman wanted Ambassador Nolting to keep in mind that this did not necessarily wipe the "slate . . . clean" in Washington. The Assistant Secretary still directed Mr. Nolting to "impress on Diem and Nhu [the] fact that we [are] having rough going defending our

Viet-Nam program" and that Nhu's remarks left "a bad impression in spite of communiqué." Mr. Hilsman also disputed Nhu's latest excuse—that he was badly misquoted—declaring that *Washington Post* correspondent Walter Unna had an excellent reputation "on hill and elsewhere in government as [an] accurate reporter no matter what his policy view." This message, signed by Secretary Rusk although composed by Roger Hilsman, concluded that policymakers in the State Department feared that Mr. Nhu was probably "likely to repeat performance if not brought up sharply" and wanted Ambassador Nolting "to impress consequences on both Diem and Nhu."[80]

The Ambassador's reply was basically negative. He declared that Diem's statement in the communiqué on counterinsurgency was as much as the United States would receive "as a public repudiation of . . . Nhu's remarks." In fact, Ambassador Nolting blamed the *Washington Post* for the way it handled the interview, obviously implying that if the newspaper had not made it front-page news it would not have had the same impact. Given the tenor of Nhu's remarks and his position in the Vietnamese government, this was somewhat of a naïve comment by the Ambassador.[81]

Coincidentally on the following day, 21 May, the State Department issued new regulations on press relations to the Embassy in Vietnam. In the message, Under Secretary of State George W. Ball stated that the State Department at this time wanted "to recapitulate our basic approach and policy" relative to the press. The emphasis was on providing the fullest possible cooperation with the press in order to make available to newsmen the complete picture of the complicated situation in Vietnam and the US role there. Under Secretary Ball insisted that the "public must have [an] accurate story . . . if we are to justify our large human and material investment there." According to him this required a high priority to be placed on assistance to the press. The Embassy was also to encourage the Diem regime to "adopt liberal and generally helpful press policy." Furthermore, Mr. Ball stated that "wherever possible we should take reporters further into our confidence in order to be certain their background understanding . . . is more complete." The message also called for more "pre-operations briefings." While recognizing the necessity of military security, Under Secretary Ball believed that "it might be possible to do more such briefings without endangering war effort." To a large extent the directive followed the guidelines that Pierre Salinger, the President's Press Secretary, had drawn up in April and that were hand-carried to Honolulu for General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting, although there is no direct reference to the earlier document.[82]

Interestingly, David Halberstam on 29 May 1963, probably writing under the new guidelines, published an article on the Buddhist situation. Referring to "diplomatic quarters" in Saigon, he reviewed the course of events since the 8 May incident. For some reason, the Buddhist agitation had received very little publicity in the US city newspapers. For example, the only mention that the *New York Times* made of the Buddhist demonstration and government reaction in Hue was on 10 May, when it printed a short press account from Reuters on page 2 of the newspaper. The *Washington Post* on 10 May did carry a short article by Malcolm Browne of the Associated Press (AP) on page 12 that began: "A Buddhist demonstration believed led by Communist agitators. . . . " Neither

paper had another article on the event for over a week and then only published a few short AP or Reuters releases in the inside pages of the papers until David Halberstam's piece came out. Even his story appeared on page 5 of the *Times*.[83]

In his article on 29 May, Mr. Halberstam opened by describing the action of "More than 400 yellow-robed Buddhists" gathered in Saigon to mourn those killed 9 May in Hue. He then went over the events of the past three weeks, even quoting President Diem calling the Buddhist leaders "damn fools" for asking for religious freedom when he met with them in Saigon. According to the *Times* correspondent, many observers in Saigon viewed the demonstrations in Hue and their aftermath "as the most important development in South Vietnam in months, as disturbing to United States military officials here as they are to international Buddhist officials." He wrote that both American and Vietnamese sources were telling him that they were concerned about the "government's unwillingness to accept responsibility for the incident" and that few accepted its version that "a Communist agent threw a grenade into the crowd." Apparently the Buddhist agitation had finally become big news.[84]

Laos and Further Contingency Planning

While in South Vietnam the internal political situation with the Buddhists bubbled over, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and State Department planners in late May and early June concentrated on contingency plans for actions against both the Pathet Lao and North Vietnam as a new crisis in Laos once more threatened to erupt. In the State Department and White House National Security staff, Under Secretary Averell Harriman, Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman, and presidential advisor Michael Forrestal wanted the Joint Chiefs of Staff to "come up with alternative contingency actions for Laos." Colonel Lawrence Legere on General Taylor's staff observed that the three wanted this planning effort to examine the military assistance given to Kong Le's troops and the possible introduction of US forces into Laos. According to Colonel Legere, there might be some reluctance on the part of the Joint Staff because "everyone who has been mixed up in this Laos in-fighting" was already "nursing a lot of grudges and scar tissue." Despite these reservations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were "prepared to initiate the contingency planning."[85]

In their earlier recommendations to President Kennedy following the National Security Council meeting of 19 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed that the administration should exhaust all the political choices before making any military commitment to Laos. Furthermore, they maintained that they did not consider that military action in Laos would accomplish anything since the root of the problem lay in North Vietnam. They wanted the administration, through diplomatic channels, to inform the North Vietnamese of the US interest in Southeast Asia. Writing for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor asked the President to understand that the "intervention of US forces in support of Laos can be undertaken only with full appreciation of the probable need for and willingness to commit additional forces in event of subsequent communist escalation."[86]

The general then listed a number of military actions that the United States could carry out according to the following priority:

1. Fleet exercises, maneuvers and demonstrations off South Viet Nam, initially below the 17th Parallel
2. Air reinforcement to Thailand
3. High level reconnaissance
   a. Laos
   b. North Vietnam
   c. South China, Hainan Island
4. Low level reconnaissance
   a. Laos
   b. North Vietnam
   c. South China and Hainan Island (if warranted)[87]

General Taylor concluded his memorandum stating that the above list demonstrated the military actions that could be accomplished "without the direct use of force." He warned, however, that if these actions had not accomplished their end the United States would have no choice but to take overt action, including the aerial bombing of selected targets in both Laos and North Vietnam. His list of targets included "ports, bridges, airfields, POL [petroleum, oils and lubricants] storage areas, and industrial plants." Interestingly, these options made no mention of the employment of ground forces in either Laos or North Vietnam.[88]

The dispute over the Laotian contingency planning between the Defense Department and the State Department would continue into June. On 4 June, presidential advisor Michael Forrestal forwarded to the President a State Department research study entitled "If the Pathet Laos Attacks," which outlined five suggested responses. These included: (1) sending US troops to Thailand as part of the already scheduled SEATO maneuvers; (2) a "Lebanon type" operation by landing American troops in areas held by Lao Royalist troops; (3) a "Lebanon type" operation by deploying the American forces in both Royalist and Neutralist troop areas; (4) launching air strikes against the Pathet Lao supply routes in Laos; and finally (5) directly launching air operations against North Vietnam ranging from reconnaissance to bombing missions.[89]

In his memorandum, Michael Forrestal expressed concern about the "grinding away of Kong Le's will to resist" by Pathet Lao artillery bombardment and their "encroachment" upon that small part of the Plain of Jars that he still controlled. He then complained about the progress of the Joint Staff on the Laotian contingency planning effort. He stated that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been asked "to look at as many military options as possible" and as outlined in the State Department study. As an aside, he told President Kennedy, "We have been keeping the pressure on the military planners to come up with some options, but so far the progress has been slow."[90]

Three days later Mr. Forrestal sent another memo to the President about what he considered the slowly deteriorating situation in Laos. He stated that the Pathet Lao had recently maneuvered so that they were in a position possibly to flank Kong Le's defenses

on the Plain of Jars. According to this presidential advisor, the Communists planned to "eliminate Kong Le by a process of division and attrition." He then once more criticized the Joint Chiefs of Staff by stating that the United States had no other contingency plan for reacting than the "JCS version of SEATO Plan 5." Mr. Forrestal told the President that the Defense and State Departments were scheduling a series of weekend planning sessions, "but it will probably require a request from you to get the military to come forward with some new thinking."[91]

One week later Michael Forrestal updated the President on the progress of the contingency planning for Laos. He wrote that there had "been strenuous efforts to stimulate some military planning by State and the Pentagon for possible actions in Laos." According to him, there had been some progress in that a proposed joint memorandum had reached the assistant secretary level in both departments. Probably through his connections with both Roger Hilsman and Averell Harriman, he had obtained a "bootleg copy," which he forwarded to the President. Mr. Forrestal advised the President that the document had "no official status" and had not been approved by any of the most senior officials in either department.[92]

In his memorandum, Mr. Forrestal described the proposed plan as a three-phased program aimed at reaching some sort of consensus for the stabilization of Laos. The first phase would be the attempt through diplomatic means of restoring the coalition government and returning to the status quo prior to 1 April 1963. If that was not possible, a second phase would call for the prepositioning of US air and naval forces in the area and committing third country support for military action in Laos. Furthermore, this phase would also support attempts to use sabotage and other harassing action against North Vietnam itself. Finally, if all this proved futile, the United States would employ air and ground forces in both Laos and North Vietnam during a third phase to achieve a "hard partition" in Laos.[93]

State Department planners and the Joint Chiefs of Staff remained divided as to how this third phase would be implemented. The State Department wanted to place US troops in Laos before taking any action against North Vietnam. On the other hand, the planners from the Joint Staff would hit North Vietnam by air "and other types of strikes" before placing any troops in Laos. The State planners argued that bombing North Vietnam would cause a further escalation and that the Communists would be unsure whether the US aims extended "beyond the stabilization of Laos." In reply, the military worried that they "might never get US troops out of Laos once they were in." The Joint Staff planners proposed that American forces be deployed to Laos "only as a last resort in conjunction with an all-out attack on North Vietnam." Michael Forrestal stated that he hoped to schedule a meeting with the President and his senior advisors on the final version of the Laos plan in a few days.[94]

Four days later, on 18 June, Mr. Forrestal forwarded the approved draft of the plan to the President and scheduled a meeting for him on the following day to review the document. The presidential advisor observed that there had been only a few minor changes in this version than the pirated document that he had previously sent to President Kennedy.

In fact, the major issue between the Defense and State Departments on Phase 3 relating to the deployment of US troops to Laos remained unresolved. Like most bureaucratic compromises, the two sides had papered over their differences, leaving the choice to the President. Mr. Forrestal suggested that President Kennedy "may wish to do some very gentle prodding to ease the military out of their muscle-bound all-or-nothing view of Southeast Asia."[95]

The presidential conference on the following day included representatives of the White House, both the Defense and State Departments, and the Central Intelligence Agency, including Secretary Robert McNamara and Director John McCone. General William F. McKee, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Air Force, represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff. President Kennedy opened the meeting by casting doubt about the "desirability" of the proposed Phase 3 bombing of North Vietnamese targets. He was unsure about their effectiveness and worried about the reaction of the Chinese despite assurances by General McKee that the bombing would "cause real damage" in North Vietnam. The actual combat picture in Laos remained unclear. Admiral Felt had reported to Secretary McNamara that the "situation in Laos was rapidly deteriorating." Both Secretary McNamara and the CIA director contended that "we do not have evidence of a rapid deterioration, but rather of a continuous nibbling action."[96]

After much discussion, Michael Forrestal, who also attended the meeting, reported that President Kennedy agreed to expand political and logistic support of the Laotian government according to Phase 1 of the plan. The President also approved the second phase of the plan for "planning purposes" but directed that no action under its provisions be carried out without his specific consent. Furthermore, he asked the State Department to consult with the British and French governments before undertaking any of these measures. President Kennedy remained unsatisfied with Phase 3 and stated that it needed revision. In fact, he wondered aloud "whether it would not be wiser to put a limited number of US troops in [Laotian] Mekong River towns before moving into Phase 3."[97]

As had become the pattern in Laos, the supposed crisis once more reverted to semicalm. The Neutralist forces under Kong Le continued its uneasy alliance with the Royalist troops loyal to General Phoumi. On the strategic Plain of Jars, the Pathet Lao continued their maneuvering and occasional shelling of Kong Le's positions, but they made no serious attempt to dislodge the defenders. The United States expanded its logistic support of the government forces and the Meo tribesmen. In Washington, the Joint Staff continued to modify its contingency planning. The State Department persisted in its futile efforts with the Soviet Union to have them pressure the North Vietnamese to adhere to the terms of the 1962 Geneva agreement. It soon became apparent to everyone that the Russians either had only limited influence in Southeast Asia or were unwilling to exercise the influence they had. By June 1963 the most pressing crisis was in South Vietnam.[98]

12

From Crisis to Crisis, June–August 1963

The Buddhist Crisis Continues, June 1963

As the street demonstrations continued in Hue and other cities in Vietnam, they would also influence the policymakers in Washington. To a certain extent, President Kennedy remained aloof from the ongoing disputes between the military establishment and the group centered about Under Secretary W. Averell Harriman. In the Harriman inner circle were both Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman and White House Advisor Michael Forrestal. The Harrimans had raised Michael Forrestal, the son of the first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, after the death of both of his parents. According to Mr. Forrestal, President Kennedy laughingly told him that his main job in the White House was to be the "ambassador to that separate sovereignty known as Averell Harriman." He later remembered that the President paid only sporadic attention to the situation in Vietnam until the summer of 1963.[1]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary Robert McNamara basically looked upon the Buddhist protests as a relatively minor impediment to the overall military effort against the Viet Cong. Even later in the crisis, Major General Victor H. Krulak, who monitored the war for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reported, "if there were chaos in Saigon, the military units in the field would continue to confront the Communists." Up to this point Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal believed that the Diem government was winning the war against the Communists. Mr. Forrestal later stated their difference with the Defense Department was one of tactics rather than strategy. In reality, the differences lay in the importance that each side gave to the internal political situation in South Vietnam.[2]

As indicated in the previous chapter, Assistant Secretary Hilsman and Presidential advisor Forrestal had begun to have their doubts about the stability of the Diem government. This was clearly evident in the contingency plan drafted by Chalmers Wood of the State Department on the possible succession to President Diem. In contrast to the earlier plan prepared in October 1961, the new one was much more detailed and provided several more scenarios in which a change of government would occur. It foresaw the two most likely successors to the president as being either his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu or Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho, assuming the latter was backed by the military. In Wood's draft, the only way the United States could show any preference would be in the event "Nhu were removed even temporarily from the scene." In that case the American Ambassador would "support the constitutional succession of the Vice President with backing of the [Vietnamese] armed forces." On 23 May Ambassador Nolting, while still strongly favoring President Diem over any potential rival, gave his concurrence to the plan.[3]

The next day, and with his appointment scheduled to end in August, Ambassador Nolting left Vietnam for consultations in Washington and for a few weeks leave. In Vietnam, William Trueheart, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy, became acting Ambassador while Mr. Nolting was away.[4] On 1 June it appeared that the Diem regime was willing to make some compromises. The Vietnamese president replaced three of the officials who were responsible for the 8 May police and troop suppression of the Buddhist demonstrations in Hue. Four days later a Buddhist monk and representative of Thich Tri Quang had reached a tentative agreement with Defense Minister Nguyen Dinh Thuan on the Buddhist demands. The government was to remove its troops and police surrounding the pagodas in return for the Buddhists ending their street demonstrations.[5]

Any prospect for ending the crisis soon disappeared, with both sides hardening their positions. Madame Nhu's Women's Solidarity Movement on 8 June issued a statement calling the Buddhist demonstrators "exploited and controlled by Communism and oriented to sowing of disorder and neutralism." President Diem refused to disavow the statements, and government troops continued to surround the pagodas. The situation came to a head on 11 June when Buddhist monk Quang Duc calmly sat in the middle of a Saigon square while other monks poured gasoline over him. He then lit a match and set himself on fire before a crowd of some 400 observers, including Western newsmen. While obviously staged, Quang Duc's suicide probably succeeded even beyond the hopes of the radical Buddhist leadership. Malcolm Browne of the Associated Press took a photograph of the Buddhist monk's self-immolation that won him the Pulitzer Prize and added to the popular American disillusionment with the Diem government.[6]

The Washington reaction to the situation was almost immediate. In a message drafted by Roger Hilsman and Chalmers Wood, Secretary Rusk on 12 June ordered Acting Ambassador Trueheart to inform President Diem in very blunt terms of US unhappiness with the South Vietnamese government's reaction to the Buddhist crisis. Describing the situation as "near the breaking point," the State Department warned the South Vietnamese president that the United States could "not associate itself" with his

"unwillingness to meet the reasonable demands of the Vietnamese Buddhist leaders." In actuality, President Kennedy was not aware of the wording of the dispatch sent to the US Saigon Embassy until three days after it had been sent. At that time he read a CIA summary of the document and told Secretary Rusk that he wanted it understood that there be "no further threats . . . and no formal statement . . . made without his own personal approval."[7]

The message, nevertheless, probably had served its purpose. While not repeating his instructions verbatim, the acting Ambassador made President Diem very aware of the State Department's displeasure. On 16 June, with continuing Buddhist agitation together with the American pressure, the South Vietnamese president signed an agreement with the Buddhists that met their demands on the regime. Despite this accord, tensions remained high. Neither Diem's brother Nhu and his wife nor the more strident members of the Buddhist coalition were interested in any compromise.[8]

The July Krulak Report on the War

Despite the political and semi-religious turmoil in the country, the US military remained rather sanguine about the war against the Viet Cong. General Krulak on one of his periodic inspection visits to Vietnam for the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 25 June to 1 July continued to report positively about the progress the South Vietnamese Armed Forces were making in the countryside. He noted that the "Buddhist issue" was "alive, serious and enmeshed with politics," but had not as yet had any effect on the overall military situation. Calling the Strategic Hamlet Program the "heart of the [pacification] campaign," the Marine general claimed that it had gained "momentum and balance." He argued that the Vietnamese Army offensive operations, although requiring much improvement, had placed "the Viet Cong on the defensive." General Krulak described the relationship between US advisors and their Vietnamese counterparts as "efficient and mutually respectful."[9]

In his specific comments about the Strategic Hamlet Program, General Krulak was most impressed with the effort in the former Operation SUNRISE area in Binh Duong Province, which contained some of the first strategic hamlets. Contrasting the situation in the province in the summer of 1963 with that in the spring of 1962, he commented that there were now ninety-two hamlets there as opposed to the forlorn one at the beginning of SUNRISE. That first hamlet did not "extend far beyond a system of strong physical defenses." Furthermore, General Krulak remarked that most of the population of the existing strategic hamlets there entered the program willingly and many "actually sent deputations to request the development of a hamlet," rather than being moved there under duress, as had been the case in 1962. The general claimed he found the same attitude in several other provinces. Only in the Mekong Delta did he find little improvement, stating in somewhat of an understatement, "this degree of coordinated progress apparently has not yet been achieved."[10]

General Krulak's positive observations about the Strategic Hamlet Program contrasted sharply with the more pessimistic views expressed by Rufus Phillips, the senior US civilian in Vietnam responsible for the program a month earlier. This would not be the last occasion during the war when intelligent and knowledgeable individuals would look at the same evidence and come to diametrically opposed conclusions, one seeing the glass half empty and the other half full.[11]

In his discussion of military operations, General Krulak observed that on 1 July the South Vietnamese Army began the operational phase of the National Campaign Plan, or General Harkins' "explosion" plan. General Krulak remarked that in actuality this phase had begun before the official opening date. According to the general, the Vietnamese forces were conducting as of that date about one thousand "assorted offensive operations" per month against the Viet Cong.[12]

In actuality, the phases had little meaning except for establishing target dates. As General Harkins readily admitted, 1 July became the kickoff date because President Diem had picked it for the completion of two thirds of the planned strategic hamlets. While this criteria had not been met in IV Corps, the South Vietnamese military and MACV believed that any delay would cause a nation-wide loss of momentum. As the country team in Vietnam explained, the phases may have lost validity, but "their tasks and objectives . . . provide solid guidelines for control, direction and evaluation of counter-insurgency military effort by GVN authorities and their US advisors." According to MACV, the RVNAF were ready to "launch accelerated operations" to destroy the Viet Cong, but MACV admitted that "some tasks originally described for Phase I are being cleaned up concurrently."[13]

In his evaluation of the military progress in the war, General Krulak wrote that the "shooting war is moving to a climax," and it was possible to see some future reduction in the number of US forces in South Vietnam. He stated that General Harkins told him that 1,000 men could be redeployed by the end of the year "without affecting adversely the conduct of the war." According to most South Vietnamese statistics on enemy casualties, the Viet Cong were losing over 2,000 men a month either through battle casualties or defections. MACV believed that the Viet Cong irregular force strength had dropped from 100,000 to 80,000, although their organized guerrilla units remained basically the same as the previous reporting period, about 22,000 to 25,000 men.[14]

While acknowledging the potential strain on the government from the Buddhist unrest, General Krulak found little indication of any great impact in the country at large. In fact, he cited one example where a province chief in Quang Ngai City foiled one group of demonstrators by offering them a free meal, after which the group dispersed. Moreover, the Marine general downplayed the amount of influence that the Buddhists enjoyed in South Vietnam. He believed that the "true percentage of practicing Buddhists is smaller than generally represented." General Krulak noted that there was a tendency to classify all non-Christians as Buddhists, while many were simply "ancestor worshippers in the Chinese tradition."[15]

Despite General Krulak's downplaying of the impact of the crisis on the counterinsurgency campaign, he recognized that there would be internal repercussions, especially

in the more urban areas. The general argued that for many of the Buddhist leaders, their motivation was as much political as it was religious. Moreover, he observed that the situation nourished "all varieties of dissidents, malcontents, kingmakers, and coup makers," who would "not relinquish lightly this Buddha-sent opportunity" to mount a political offensive against President Diem. General Krulak, like most of the American military, supported President Diem because he believed Diem was the only person strong enough to provide stability and was suspicious of the motives of those who opposed him.[16]

Rethinking the War in Washington and Saigon

The truth was that it was not only Diem's enemies but also his close allies and family that fueled the political unrest in South Vietnam. During the two-week truce period from 16 through 30 June, rumors circulated about possible coup attempts by the Buddhists and threats of more massive street demonstrations, including more fiery suicides. On the other hand, the Buddhists complained that the Diem regime had no intention to carry out their part of the agreement that called for the release of prisoners and less harassment by the police. Apparently, Ngo Dinh Nhu continued his efforts to have the government disavow the June agreement and allowed the publication of an article in a government-sponsored newspaper that in effect dared the Buddhists to resume demonstrations.[17]

On 3 July Acting Ambassador Trueheart met with President Diem and handed him a formal letter on the continuing crisis. In the letter, Mr. Trueheart repeated the instructions that he received from the State Department and stated that if another incident with the Buddhists occurred and the Vietnamese government failed to make a conciliatory gesture, the United States might have to clarify its own position on the situation. The implication was very clear that the US position might very well be critical of the Vietnamese government. According to Mr. Trueheart, President Diem accepted the letter, read it, and then listened politely to some of his suggestions. The president then ended the conversation and ushered the American envoy out "with great, but perhaps forced, politeness."[18]

In Washington on the following day, 4 July, the President, who had just returned from Europe, met with senior State Department officials including both Under Secretaries George Ball and Averell Harriman and Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman, and Michael Forrestal of the National Security Staff. While the President was in Europe, Mr. Forrestal had kept him informed about the renewed tension in Vietnam and the instructions that had been sent to Acting Ambassador Trueheart in Saigon. On 3 July he had updated the President once again, stating that the situation had grown worse and that Diem remained recalcitrant. Mr. Forrestal mentioned that Ambassador Nolting, who was in Washington, did not agree with the approach that they had taken on relations with the Saigon government. The Ambassador had argued that the new instructions "will succeed only in destroying the last vestiges of Diem's confidence" in the United States. Everyone agreed that there was a very strong possibility that there would be "governmental upheaval in Saigon."[19]

In the meeting on 4 July, Assistant Secretary Hilsman once more reviewed the situation in Vietnam as the President interjected questions. Mr. Hilsman mentioned the spoiling role that Diem's brother Nhu and his wife were playing, such as sponsoring anti-Buddhist articles in a newspaper controlled by them as well as veiled anti-American attacks. The group then studied various options available to the United States, including the possibility of "getting rid of the Nhus," but decided that such a move "would not be possible."[20]

For a time, the discussion then centered on the question of the viability of the Diem regime. Assistant Secretary Hilsman observed that there was a faction in the Buddhist movement that was unwilling to compromise and would not be unhappy to see the government fall. Although Roger Hilsman believed the Diem government needed to make concessions, there probably would be coup attempts no matter what steps President Diem took. There was general agreement that if the president fell from power there would be some disruption, but there was disagreement about the extent. According to the Assistant Secretary, Ambassador Nolting held that the removal or death of President Diem would be followed by anarchy. Mr. Hilsman and Michael Forrestal were more sanguine. Mr. Forrestal quoted General Krulak's statement that the military would continue the war. Assistant Secretary Hilsman, somewhat more soberly, allowed that the downfall of President Diem might result in a civil war, but he personally did not believe so.[21]

After the group completed their assessment of the situation, President Kennedy decided to accept their recommendation to send Ambassador Nolting back to Vietnam as soon as practical. The President the preceding month had announced that his one-time political rival Henry Cabot Lodge, who had run as the Republican vice presidential candidate in 1960, would replace Ambassador Nolting. In any event, Mr. Nolting was to return to Vietnam by 11 July and remain there until relieved by Mr. Lodge in August. Before he left for Vietnam, Ambassador Nolting was to call upon the President.[22]

On the following day, 5 July, three days before his appointment with President Kennedy, Ambassador Nolting met with Under Secretary Ball and Chalmers Wood in the State Department to discuss the situation in Vietnam. In his review of the Buddhist crisis, Mr. Nolting voiced his opinion that President Diem would carry out his promise to uphold the tentative agreement with the Buddhists. According to the Ambassador, "when Diem gave his word, he followed through although sometimes it was handled in his own way." Mr. Nolting agreed that Ngo Dinh Nhu could cause trouble but argued that President Diem could control his brother. Ambassador Nolting believed that the best way for the United States to handle the problem was to interfere as little as possible, stating that "the more Diem was prodded the slower he went."[23]

At this point in the discussion Under Secretary Ball asked what would be the result of a change in the government. Ambassador Nolting observed that his view differed from that of Mr. Wood, who headed the interagency Vietnam Working Group, and that of Assistant Secretary Hilsman. He declared his belief that if there were a coup, the country would be divided into feuding armed groups. According to the Ambassador, the United States would eventually have to withdraw and "the country might be lost to the Communists." It was his judgment that if the United States "repudiated" President

Diem on the Buddhist challenge, "the Vietnamese government would fall." While there is no record of the meeting between President Kennedy and Ambassador Nolting, one can safely assume that the Ambassador repeated the same views to the President when they met.[24]

Despite the doubts about President Diem expressed by the Harriman group—consisting of the Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, and Michael Forrestal—the President apparently decided to allow the Ambassador a relatively free hand in his dealings with the Vietnamese government when he returned to Vietnam. This may have been due to a recent cable from Acting Ambassador Trueheart in Saigon, who reported on a meeting that he had with Defense Minister Thuan. The South Vietnamese defense minister discussed with Mr. Trueheart Diem's response to the letter that the US envoy had given him. Mr. Thuan remarked that it would have been better if the South Vietnamese president had become "red in the face and pound[ed] the table." Mr. Thuan described Diem's reaction as "polite immovability." The defense minister recommended that Ambassador Nolting return to Vietnam soon because he might convince the Vietnamese president to change his mind, since President Diem "attached great importance to personal friendship."[25]

By the time Ambassador Nolting arrived in Saigon on 11 July the situation had deteriorated even further. In fact, despite monitoring the news from Saigon the last few days from Washington and Honolulu, the Ambassador himself was surprised at the extent of the tensions in the Vietnamese capital. General Harkins several years later remembered Mr. Nolting asking at the time in some wonderment, "what on earth happened [during my absence]?"[26] In a public statement on the day of his arrival, Ambassador Nolting, nevertheless, projected confidence that the government was winning the war and his personal confidence in President Diem. Still, he warned that "'unity of purpose and perseverance in action' must not be 'weakened by internal dissension.'"[27]

According to the latest US intelligence, the Buddhist crisis had brought about widespread dissatisfaction among many Vietnamese with the Diem government. The unrest played on the Diem regime's "underlying uneasiness" about its dependence on the United States. President Diem was especially irked by the American government's criticism of his response to the Buddhist challenge. The American intelligence community believed it very likely that he would take measures to reduce the US presence in Vietnam. American intelligence analysts also rejected the Vietnamese government's claim that the Communists were behind the Buddhist movement. They allowed that some may have infiltrated but claimed there was no evidence of any Communist influence, despite the claims of the government to the contrary.[28]

In a pessimistic forecast, the authors of the report projected odds of better than even on the probability of a government coup or the assassination of President Diem by non-Communist opponents of the regime if the government did not placate the Buddhists. On 8 July a second intelligence document was even starker. Its authors suggested that no matter what steps President Diem took, it would do little to placate his opponents, and the more radical of the Buddhists would want even more changes. The

report identified three possible existing groups of plotters, the most serious involving several general officers, including Major General Duong Van Minh, the military advisor to the president; Brigadier General Ton That Dinh, commander of the III Corps area; and Major General Tran Van Don, the commander of the Army of Vietnam. Another source claimed that General Don on 8 July was quoted as stating that "there was a military plan for the overthrow of the Diem government."[29]

In fact, the American press corps in Saigon had already focused on what they perceived as President Diem's tenuous hold on power in Vietnam. In a front page story in the *New York Times*, David Halberstam wrote that several US officials who had been praising the Vietnamese president only two months past were openly saying that "they would like to see a new government in Saigon." In his account, Mr. Halberstam also mentioned that younger Vietnamese officers were avoiding Americans because they were not sure of the American reaction if they overthrew the president. The article also reported that some officers were ready to oust the president but wanted the United States "to make a public statement calling for a change."[30]

The American Saigon press corps especially had become something of a bête noire both to the South Vietnamese and to the US Embassy with their aggressive reporting of the Buddhist situation. On 7 July the war of words actually had become physical. In Saigon, plain-clothes police—or as Mr. Halberstam described them, "secret police"—tried to block the way of about nine American reporters covering a small Buddhist demonstration. In the resulting melee, the police pushed Peter Arnett, a New Zealand photographer working for United Press International (UPI), to the ground. They also confiscated two press cameras, one belonging to Mr. Arnett and the other to Malcolm Browne of the Associated Press. The Vietnamese authorities then ordered the two men to appear at the Saigon police station the following day.[31]

Unhappy with the reaction of Chargé d' Affaires Trueheart, four of the reporters—Neil Sheehan of UPI, Mr. Halberstam of the *Times*, Mr. Browne, and Peter Kalischer of CBS—cabled President Kennedy asking for a formal diplomatic protest. The following morning the Vietnamese government pressed assault charges against Peter Arnett and Malcolm Browne. Upon hearing of these charges, the State Department directed Mr. Trueheart to take up the matter formally with the Vietnamese even if he had to lodge his complaints with President Diem himself. Despite the US intervention, President Diem did not order the dropping of the charges until 18 July and not before the Vietnamese released a statement supporting the police version of the incident.[32]

Ambassador Nolting's efforts upon his return did very little, at least initially, to improve the Vietnamese government's relations with either the American press or the Buddhist protesters. On 15 July he reported to the State Department that he spent the first two days back in "intensive briefings" and consulted with many individuals including reporters and Vietnamese and American officials, as well as with the diplomatic community in Saigon. He had concluded optimistically that the situation appeared to be improving although admitting that it remained critical. Ambassador Nolting believed that the Buddhist agitation remained confined mostly to the cities of Hue and Saigon,

as well as affecting "slightly [the] peasant population in [the] central coastal area." He recommended strongly against any "direct intervention" by US officials in the matter, stating that such action would not "be helpful or wise."[33]

During this time the Ambassador had also called upon President Diem. He reported that the Vietnamese president had been "badly shaken" by recent events and had lost much confidence in the promises of the United States. Ambassador Nolting wrote that he had spent several hours talking to President Diem and believed that it would be some time before he could convince the president to alter some of his recent actions. Mr. Nolting described the president as being in a "martyr's mood" and full of resentment. The American envoy, nevertheless, wrote that he may have made some headway in convincing President Diem to "take more positive and sensible actions," but that it would take some time. He recommended strongly against any US "threat of disassociation" with the Vietnamese government. Ambassador Nolting reported that he had made "firm representations to Diem on the Browne-Arnett case," but still expected a "generally bad press" from the US press corps in Saigon.[34]

At the same time that Mr. Nolting was reporting on his meetings with President Diem, the Buddhist hierarchy in Saigon ordered once more a "renewal of their religious struggle" against the regime.[35] The next two days were ones of more Buddhist street demonstrations and government reaction. On 16 July the government allowed the Buddhist groups to march more or less unimpeded although cordoning off several areas. The Ambassador commented that the "foreign press" operated unhampered in their coverage of the marches. Events on the following day told a very different story. According to David Halberstam's account, armed police on the morning of the 17th string up barbed wire to prevent some 1,000 demonstrators from marching. After the marchers sat down in the middle of the street and refused to move, the police advanced and began indiscriminately clubbing the protesters. The police arrested about two hundred persons in the crowd, including Buddhist monks, men, women, and children. President Kennedy in his weekly news conference in Washington stated that the religious crisis was affecting the military effort and called upon the Diem government and the Buddhists to settle their dispute.[36]

Ambassador Nolting provided the State Department his views on the situation. Admitting that it was "confused," he nevertheless held that the Buddhist "radical elements" were now in control of the demonstrations and were working to overthrow the government. The Ambassador was unsure whether these "elements" were working in tandem with any of the coup plots among Army officers but believed they were "almost certainly aware of these." Although acknowledging failure on the part of President Diem "to meet the problem in a timely and politically realistic way," he advised against the United States issuing any statement of "disassociation" from the Vietnamese government.[37]

Later on 17 July, Ambassador Nolting met with President Diem, his brother Nhu, and Defense Minister Thuan for several hours. He finally convinced the president to make a radio statement explaining the situation with the Buddhists and his willingness to make concessions.[38] Tension, however, remained high throughout the night and into

the following morning. David Halberstam reported from Saigon that the 18th "was a day of chases throughout the city," as the police reacted to mostly false reports of Buddhist monks massing for more demonstrations. The authorities continued to close several streets and surrounded pagodas with barbed wire.[39]

The situation eased somewhat after President Diem made his radio address later that day. He announced the establishment of "a special interministerial committee" to work with the Buddhists on settling complaints about possible government violations of the 16 June agreement. President Diem also promised to amend the order relating to the flying of the Buddhist flag. The following day Ambassador Nolting advised the State Department to issue a statement calling Diem's broadcast a reaffirmation that "in unmistakable terms [demonstrated] the government's intention to carry out in letter and in spirit the agreement of June 16."[40]

Ambassador Nolting acknowledged, however, that the government still barricaded the Buddhist pagodas and still had not released any of the detained demonstrators arrested on 17 July. He also noted that the Buddhists were about to make further demands upon the government. According to the Ambassador, he was "working urgently" in trying to convince the government to open the pagodas and free the prisoners. The American envoy argued that the State Department should act immediately on his proposed statement and not wait until the government acted on his suggestions. He believed that an official US statement would assist him in convincing the Diem regime to ameliorate their actions and, furthermore, cause the "Buddhists to hesitate before making further demands." Later that day Nolting sent another message once more asking the Department to issue his recommended statement. He stated that President Diem had now ordered the removal of the barricades from the pagodas and was now "moving in the right direction."[41]

Officials in the State Department, however, remained much less convinced than the Ambassador about President Diem's intentions. In the responding message drafted by Theodore J. Heavner of the Vietnam Working Group, Secretary Rusk observed, "we must anticipate further Buddhist demonstrations and violence." The Secretary also referred to the various coup rumors and concluded that "we have to deal with [a] most uncertain and volatile situation." Furthermore, he went on to declare that the "outcome [of the crisis] remains obscure," and therefore the State Department issued a much more neutral statement than that recommended by the Ambassador. At the same time, Secretary Rusk asked Ambassador Nolting to continue pressing the Vietnamese president "to meet squarely Buddhists' legitimate grievances."[42]

It was apparent there was a growing rift between the State Department in Washington and the Embassy in Saigon on how to deal with the Vietnamese government. In his reply to the last message, Ambassador Nolting remarked that he was "very much disappointed." He countered that "a wait-and-see attitude on our part at this juncture will lead only . . . to undermining of stability here and to further jeopardizing US vital interests." Although agreeing that the Vietnamese government had "badly underestimated and mishandled [the] Buddhist problem," he contended that President Diem had

begun to take "a conciliatory course" and that the United States needed to encourage him. The Ambassador again asked the Department to reconsider his recommendation on the US response.[43]

In an unsigned carefully worded reply, again drafted by Mr. Heavner, Washington gently rejected once more the Ambassador's suggestion to issue a more fulsome response to Diem's speech. Declaring that unless the Vietnamese leader carried out the steps that he had outlined in his radio address, the State Department believed that any new commentary on its part would only be greeted by "hostile speculation." It was obvious there was a growing frustration in Washington with President Diem and possibly with Ambassador Nolting.[44]

Three days later the Kennedy administration indicated its growing disillusionment with the Vietnamese government. On 23 July, in another Heavner-drafted message but with the salutation "For Nolting from [Assistant Secretary Roger] Hilsman," the State Department referred to the latest intelligence reports and indicated that it expected more confrontations between the South Vietnamese government and the Buddhists that would affect both the war effort and the regime. Referring to the rumors of possible attempts to overthrow the government, Mr. Hilsman repeated the intelligence prognostication that the odds were in favor of a possible successful coup "within [the] next few months if not weeks." The Assistant Secretary stated that given the present circumstances the United States had several choices: it could disassociate itself from the Diem policy toward the Buddhists; it could encourage the military to turn the government over to the vice president; it could openly discourage coup attempts by expressing strong support for President Diem; or, finally, it could "hold to present posture of watchful waiting." Assistant Secretary Hilsman believed the last alternative was best suited for the moment and wanted Nolting's opinion on the matter.[45]

Ambassador Nolting remained firm in his support of President Diem. In his reply to Assistant Secretary Hilsman he wrote that he disagreed with the various gloomier prognoses and that he believed the "heat is slowly going out of this crisis and that this government is quite likely to survive this crisis, as it has many others in past." The Ambassador once more declared his ongoing mantra that the Diem government had the "best chance . . . of carrying to successful conclusion counterinsurgency effort here." Finally, the Ambassador recommended praising the Diem regime for any "conciliatory steps," and the Buddhists for any "constructive" effort that they made.[46]

Complicating the differences between the Embassy in Saigon and State Department officials in Washington was the relationship of the American Saigon press corps with both the Diem government and the American Embassy. After the jostling incidents between the four correspondents and the police, the State Department sent Robert Manning, the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, to investigate the entire scope of the press problems. In a damning report on his findings, Mr. Manning faulted all concerned for basically an "unbridgeable gap between the official and the correspondent's assessment of the Vietnamese situation." He believed that at the time "no dialogue . . . [was] possible" between the US officials and the reporters because "each dismisses with contempt the views of the other."[47]

Assistant Secretary Manning blamed much of the existing situation on the peculiar circumstances of the US involvement in South Vietnam. This involvement required "public scrutiny," but this scrutiny was inhibited "by the long-standing desire . . . to see the American involvement . . . minimized." This had led to problems in that it had caused the US Embassy and military personnel to downplay their role and aroused the suspicions of the press about the veracity of the information received from official sources. Mr. Manning called for a more relaxed attitude on the part of US officials, which he believed would "reduce the somewhat sullen Alice in Wonderland miasma that surrounds the Vietnamese press situation." Moreover, he argued that it would pay dividends if both the US diplomats and military personnel took the reporters more into their confidence. In fact, he suggested this procedure upon his return to Washington when he briefed incoming Ambassador to Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge on press relations. Ambassador Lodge agreed with him.[48]

Despite sympathizing with the reporters, Assistant Secretary Manning also believed they had added to the tensions. He considered several of them, especially the younger and less experienced ones, to be prone "to quick-rising emotionalism" and observed that there were "no journalistic giants" among them. On the other hand, he noted that the American reporters "working here are as good or better than the average in such boondocks assignment" and were "exceptionally hard-working." Mr. Manning also defended them against any charge of "irresponsibility." Despite this general acceptance of the workmanlike attributes of the American press corps, he also argued that the Buddhist movement had been able to use the American reporters' bias against the Diem government to its own political advantage.[49]

Finally, Robert Manning was able to make some progress with the Vietnamese government during his visit. Together with the assistance of Ambassador Nolting he was able to convince President Diem to drop the charges against the newsmen involved in the fracas with the police earlier in the month. In meetings with both Ngo Dinh Nhu and President Diem, the Assistant Secretary believed he had obtained "a virtual pledge against harassment of correspondents." Mr. Manning, nevertheless, acknowledged the possibilities of "inadvertent contact between police and US correspondents in the event of further street violence with Buddhists."[50]

Apparently Manning's report had some immediate influence on the Kennedy administration. On 2 August the President, in replying to a protest from the American Society of Newspaper Editors about the treatment of newsmen in Vietnam, wrote about the "peculiar complex[ity]" existing there but stated that he was trying to ease the working conditions for the press. He concluded, "it is difficult for me to see what we have left undone."[51]

Manning's report, however, did little immediately to ameliorate Ambassador Nolting's problems with the press or his difficulties with the State Department. In fact, the Ambassador, in an interview with the United Press whether deliberately or most likely by misspeaking, involved himself in the dispute between the Diem government and the Buddhists. In replying to a question about religious persecution, he declared that during his time in Vietnam he had "never seen any evidence of religious persecution, in fact

I have the feeling that there is a great deal of religious toleration among Vietnamese people at all levels." The government press reproduced the article as indication of US support, while the Buddhists and other political opponents of President Diem criticized the Ambassador for siding with the regime "on an extremely sensitive issue."[52]

In Washington, an angry Under Secretary Harriman telephoned Assistant Secretary Hilsman, remarking that Ambassador Nolting should "be recalled at once." Mr. Hilsman stated that he agreed with the Under Secretary but suggested that the Ambassador's remarks had been taken out of context. Mr. Harriman countered that Ambassador Nolting should not be making any public remarks at all on the subject. Since the Ambassador was scheduled to leave Vietnam in about two weeks, Mr. Harriman agreed that they should just instruct him to clear any public statement with the State Department first. On 1 August, Roger Hilsman informed Ambassador Nolting that, given the situation, the Department would "appreciate opportunity to comment . . . from Washington vantage point" on any proposed farewell remarks.[53]

In Saigon, Ambassador Nolting tried to rectify the situation the best he could, but Diem's brother Nhu and his wife continued to inflame passions on both sides. Madame Nhu on 3 August in a speech before a Women's Paramilitary Youth Group referred to the Buddhist leaders as "so-called holy men [and] murders [sic]" by urging followers to commit suicide "in a most barbaric manner under the pretext of defending a faith that has never been under attack."[54]

The British Reuters press stated that in an interview that same day Ngo Dinh Nhu told the reporter that the continuing religious crisis would "lead toward a coup d'etat." He claimed that "such a coup would be anti-American, anti-Buddhist, and against 'weakness by the Government.'" Mr. Nhu added that the "first action . . . would be to crush Xa Loi [Pagoda]," the headquarters of the Buddhist movement in Saigon. The President's brother denied reports, however, that he had met with military officers and would support a movement to displace Diem and assume power himself. He dismissed such rumors by asking, "Why overthrow my brother? That would lead to anarchy."[55]

The statements by Ngo Dinh Nhu and his wife caused more unhappiness with the Diem regime in Washington. Under Secretary George Ball, in a message drafted in the Far Eastern Division and approved by Assistant Secretary Hilsman, asked Ambassador Nolting "to make it clear to Diem and Nhu that we regard both Nhu's statements as inflammatory and unwise." Furthermore, the State Department wanted Ambassador Nolting to tell the Vietnamese president in no uncertain terms that if the government attacked the Xa Loi Pagoda, the United States "would promptly and publicly denounce the action."[56]

Ambassador Nolting met on 7 August with Mr. Nhu and made arrangements to see President Diem on the following day. In his meeting with Nhu, the President's brother denied favoring the destruction of the pagoda. Furthermore, he stated that he believed whole-heartedly in reconciliation with the Buddhists and supported President Diem's 18 July statement promising such a move. Mr. Nhu declared that such sentiments were not politically popular with many people and a "large segment of the Army," who believed

the Buddhists were "standing in the way of, if not actually subverting the war effort and victory over the Viet Cong." The Ambassador told Mr. Nhu that if he were telling the truth, he was "a most misunderstood man." The latter replied that "he knew he was misunderstood," but he was telling the truth. Ngo Dinh Nhu was more defensive regarding his wife's remarks, stating that she was "a private citizen" and had the right "to express her views." Ambassador Nolting reported that he would speak to Diem about this matter in his meeting with the president.[57]

Before the Ambassador spoke with President Diem, however, Madame Nhu once more muddied the waters. On 7 August, in an interview with the American press, she made the accusation that the US Embassy had "threatened and blackmailed" the Vietnamese government in order to "shut me up." She then followed this statement with another tirade against the Buddhists and called for further strictures to be placed upon them.[58]

The *New York Times* published this interview as a front-page story by David Halberstam on 8 August, together with an article by Ted Szulc. Mr. Szulc reported that the Kennedy "[a]dministration believes that South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem may be overthrown by his own military and civilian bureaucracy if he fails to settle the Buddhist crisis within the next three or four months." These two articles, of course, caused a furor in the administration, which had just received Ambassador Nolting's summary of his conversation with Mr. Nhu.[59]

On 8 August Hilsman's staff drafted a carefully worded message to Ambassador Nolting that was cleared in substance by Under Secretary Harriman and by Michael Forrestal for the White House, before being finally approved by Roger Hilsman and signed by Under Secretary Ball. In its instructions to the Ambassador, the administration made clear its dissatisfaction with the Diem government. George Ball observed that they had been somewhat "reassured" by Nolting's summary of his recent conversation with Mr. Nhu but only to be confronted that morning by the *Times* front-page account of "Mme Nhu's latest outburst." The Under Secretary directed the Ambassador to meet with President Diem and inform him that the United States understood Madame Nhu was a private citizen but that he "cannot ignore such destructive and insulting statements by [a] person clearly identified with him." Mr. Ball then complained that the "contradictory statements" by the president and his sister-in-law "leave us, in dark as to actual policy GVN pursuing." Furthermore, the State Department recommended a formal "repudiation" of Madame Nhu's remarks and that the Vietnamese government "at this time and without any equivocation publicly reaffirm conciliatory posture on Buddhist issue." The Under Secretary also called upon the president's brother Nhu to announce publicly that he supported a conciliatory policy toward the Buddhists. Under Secretary Ball went so far as to suggest it would help "to remove Mme Nhu from scene," even raising the possibility of sending her to a convent in Hong Kong.[60]

As indicated in Szulc's article in the *New York Times*, the State Department had been examining the various options for the United States during the Buddhist crisis in Vietnam. On 6 August Assistant Secretary Hilsman signed a memorandum on the subject to Acting Secretary of State Ball drafted by Paul M. Kattenburg, a senior Foreign Service

officer with a Yale doctorate in international relations and an expert on Southeast Asia. Two days earlier, Mr. Kattenburg had replaced Chalmers Wood as the director of the interagency Vietnam Working Group. According to the Hilsman-Kattenburg analysis, the present situation remained "tense and potentially explosive."[61]

They then listed several measures that President Diem had taken since 18 July to placate the Buddhists, including releasing most of the prisoners, taking down barriers, and appointing a government commission led by the vice president, a Buddhist and a proponent of compromise. On the other hand, the Buddhists refused to meet with the commission while on the government side Mr. Nhu made threats to destroy the Xa Loi Pagoda and his wife insulted the Buddhist leadership. Roger Hilsman and Paul Kattenburg believed that the Buddhist leaders now had little motive to settle the dispute and were perhaps willing to continue their pressure until the Diem regime was overthrown.[62]

They agreed with the general consensus in intelligence circles that the chance of a coup in the next few months was about even and that the odds were the same that it would be successful. Nevertheless, Hilsman and Kattenburg surmised that there had not emerged as yet any alternative leader to replace President Diem. Their best guess was that if a coup occurred it would result in a military junta with a civilian figurehead. They observed that the new approved contingency plan that remained a work in process called for the United States to use its influence to support a coalition of the military with Vice President Tho.[63]

Three days later, on Friday 9 August, White House National Security Aide Michael Forrestal prepared a memorandum for the President's weekend reading file on the situation in Vietnam. In this memorandum, Mr. Forrestal outlined the events in Vietnam including Ambassador Nolting's meeting with Mr. Nhu and the various outrageous statements made by Madame Nhu, including her well-publicized remark in a CBS interview that the Buddhists had "barbecue[d] a Bonze [with] imported gasoline." He stated, however, "Hilsman is opposed to going any further at the moment and specifically does not think that the time has come for the United States publicly and officially to indicate disapproval," of the Vietnamese government. Michael Forrestal stated that he disagreed and that the United States needed to "take into consideration a growing domestic and international" criticism of the Diem regime." He stated that he was attempting to convince both Roger Hilsman and Averell Harriman that the administration should "consider the kind of US statement which will tread the difficult line between accidentally precipitating an upheaval in Saigon and affirming . . . the US position on questions of religious tolerance, specifically in Vietnam."[64]

In ending his memorandum to the President, Mr. Forrestal, like Roger Hilsman, brought up the possibility of a successful coup in Vietnam by the Vietnamese military. According to the presidential advisor, he had asked the Department of Defense to review its contingency planning for the possible evacuation of all American citizens from Vietnam. At the same time he wanted the State Department and the intelligence community to evaluate the available "information on coup plotting." Mr. Forrestal observed that the President did not have to make an immediate decision, but may want "to give some

guidance" later on.[65] Six years later, Michael Forrestal said it was about this time that President Kennedy began "to resist his staff's insistence, and the State Department's insistence, and the Defense Department's insistence on increasing the effort."[66]

In the interim before receiving the instructions from Under Secretary Ball, Ambassador Nolting in Vietnam on his own had already talked to President Diem and other senior Vietnamese officials about the remarks of Nhu's wife. According to the Ambassador in his report to Washington on 10 August, the "fact is Madame Nhu is out of control of everybody—her father, mother, husband and brother-in-law." In his meeting with the Vietnamese president, Ambassador Nolting stated that he had "pulled no punches." President Diem promised to consider what to do about Madame Nhu and went as far as to say, "she ought to take a rest." Mr. Nolting, however, recommended that the State Department reconsider its order that they should have Mr. Nhu make a "public statement of support for Diem's policy, as this brings into question who is running the GVN and related problems." The Department agreed with Nolting's rationale and suggested "Diem, himself should make a gesture in support of the policy of conciliation with the Buddhists."[67]

On the morning of 12 August, Ambassador Nolting met once more with President Diem. According to Mr. Nolting, he had a long serious discussion with the Vietnamese president, who appeared to realize the "gravity of [the] situation." The American Ambassador impressed upon him the fact that he could not continue to make the same promises to modify the government's policy toward the Buddhists and still have Madame Nhu making her outrageous statements. Ambassador Nolting quoted verbatim his recent instructions from Washington. He told President Diem that it appeared both in Vietnam and abroad that Madame Nhu, with the support of her husband, "was usurping his prerogatives and control in this matter." Despite the president's protests that this was not true, Ambassador Nolting insisted that Diem now take "positive public action . . . demonstrating his control over his own government and repudiating Madame Nhu." The Ambassador ended on a positive note, declaring that President Diem told him that his vice president's committee would declare the next day an agreement with the Buddhists to investigate the incidents of 8 May.[68]

On the following day, however, the Special Committee under Vice President Tho announced at its press conference a continuing hard-line policy with the Buddhists. Moreover, the vice president refused to condemn Madame Nhu's statements, implying they were similar to Senator Mansfield's criticisms of the South Vietnamese government. Whether President Diem had deliberately misled Ambassador Nolting or whether the Ambassador had misunderstood him, the effect was to undermine the Vietnamese government's reliability with Washington. Secretary Rusk, in response to the news, cabled the Ambassador that unless President Diem took the "appropriate actions," the United States would "be compelled [to] make public statement strongly critical of GVN handling [of the] religious situation."[69]

On 14 August, the day before his departure for Washington and the end of his assignment to Saigon, Ambassador Nolting met twice with President Diem. In an early morning meeting, the president protested Buddhist attacks against his government as

well as those by the US press. He especially took umbrage at Szulc's article in the *Times* about possible coups. According to President Diem, his ministerial council advised him against compromising with the Buddhists. Ambassador Nolting told Diem that the United States "could not accept this."[70]

In the second meeting of the day, the Ambassador continued what he called his "strenuous goodbye" with the Vietnamese president. During their "frank" discussion, he further pressed President Diem to make a conciliatory declaration relating to the Buddhists and to denounce his sister-in-law's remarks. Finally, after much dilatory vacillation on the part of the president, he surrendered to Ambassador Nolting's pressure, promising to issue some sort of declaration the following morning. At that point, President Diem and Mr. Nolting exchanged compliments and agreed that they would remain friends.[71]

True to his word, President Diem in an interview with Marguerite Higgins of the *New York Herald Tribune* reiterated that his government's "policy of utmost reconciliation [with the Buddhists] is irreversible" and could not be changed by any individual. In an oblique criticism of Madame Nhu, he maintained that some "have contributed either consciously or unconsciously to raising doubts about this government policy that the solution of the Buddhist affair has been retarded." According to an American intelligence report on Diem's statement, it served to reaffirm "his government policy towards the Buddhists, but this format of an interview still provided an opportunity for him to disavow it."[72]

The Coup that Wasn't

The six days following the departure of Ambassador Nolting and the arrival of his replacement, Henry Cabot Lodge, proved to be crucial ones. Despite President Diem's moderate tone in the interview with Marguerite Higgins, the Buddhists continued their demonstrations and carried out additional ceremonial suicides. In a one-week period ending on 16 August, three more monks fed themselves to the flames, bringing the total number of protest self-immolations since 8 May to five.[73]

At the same time, the mass protest marches grew larger and larger, with the culmination occurring over the weekend of 17–18 August when an estimated 15,000 demonstrators massed on Sunday in front of the large Xa Loi Pagoda in Saigon where some 100 Buddhist monks were conducting a protest strike. In a similar rally in the northern city of Da Nang on the same day, the Buddhist protesters clashed with troops, wounding one soldier and burning a jeep. In response, the government there on 20 August placed the city under martial law. Buddhist leaders in that city complained that the Army had arrested over 200 protestors and that several demonstrators had been seriously injured.[74]

Probably afraid of losing control of the growing Buddhist unrest, the government also prepared to settle the tense situation in Saigon. In the early morning hours of 21 August, acting under a presidential order, an overwhelming force of police and troops armed with tear gas and grenades blasted their way into the large Xa Loi Pagoda as well

as three other smaller pagodas. In short order, the government proclaimed martial law throughout the country, and troops occupied Buddhist pagodas in Hue and several other major cities as well as Saigon.[75]

According to William Trueheart, who again was in charge of the Embassy, several key members of the government, including both Defense Minister Thuan and the interior minister, had been unaware of the government plans for the Buddhist crackdown. Acting Ambassador Trueheart's sources credited the Vietnamese military in Saigon as having played the "dominant role." They claimed that the generals, who at first were somewhat sympathetic to the Buddhist claims, had come to see the continuing demonstrations as causing a deterioration of the war against the communists.[76]

A US intelligence report a few days later from Saigon based upon a 23 August interview with General Tran Van Don, the commander of the Army, confirmed in part Trueheart's account but with important reservations. According to this version, several ARVN generals met on the evening of 18 August and outlined plans for the implementation of martial law to end the Buddhist crisis. Two days later they informed Diem's brother Nhu about their designs. He suggested they meet with President Diem. General Don asserted that Mr. Nhu had played no role in the planning and was not present when they discussed the situation with President Diem shortly afterwards. The generals told the president that the morale of the army was deteriorating and that they feared wholesale desertion unless the government acted soon. According to General Don, President Diem accepted their recommendation to implement martial law and appointed him as acting chief of the Vietnamese Joint Staff in place of General Le Van Ty.[77]

On the one hand, General Don played down Nhu's role in the planning of martial law, but on the other hand he claimed that while President Diem was in control, he acted "through Counselor Ngo Dinh Nhu." According to General Don, he was not aware that the police and the Special Forces under Colonel Le Quang Tung were going to attack the Xa Loi Pagoda or the Buddhists in the other pagodas in Saigon. These forces answered only to President Diem and Mr. Nhu. According to the memorandum, General Don "intimated but did not state that the orders came from Nhu." The American interviewer went on to say that General Don was "not completely aware of everything that is going on around him."[78]

About the same time that General Don was giving his interview, his public relations officer, General Le Van Kim, approached Rufus Phillips, rural affairs director of the US Operations Mission. According to Mr. Phillips, General Kim told him that the ARVN was now "acting as puppet of Counselor Nhu who tricked it into establishing martial law." General Kim declared that both General Don and General Ton That Dinh, the III Corps commander, "knew nothing of plans to raid Xa Loi and other pagodas." The general also mentioned that explosives and weapons found in the pagodas had been planted by the police and Special Forces who had initiated the attacks in Saigon. General Kim stated that if the United States "took clear stand against Nhus," the Army "would unite" to remove them from the government. He strongly hinted that if it were necessary, the generals would support a coup against President Diem. On the following morning, 24

August, Defense Minister Thuan at a breakfast meeting with Rufus Phillips basically corroborated General Kim's account, although he personally opposed any coup against the president. He argued that the United States should support a move to separate the Nhus from the president, although he did not know how this could be accomplished.[79]

By this time, rumors had reached the press of the undercurrent of dissension apparently existing in the Vietnamese military establishment. On 23 August the *New York Times* published a front-page article by David Halberstam quoting "highly reliable sources" that the military were faced with a fait accompli in that troops and Special Police loyal to Ngo Dinh Nhu had carried out the initial attack on the Xa Loi Pagoda. Moreover, Halberstam's sources maintained that General Don, the acting Army Chief of Staff, had not been notified about the operation against the pagodas until 0500 on the morning of 21 August. Ironically, on the same page, the *Times* carried an account by Tad Szulc quoting unknown State Department officials that the generals had issued an ultimatum to President Diem to allow them to carry out the "*putsch*" against the Buddhists. Whatever had been the role of the Army, it was apparent even if it had not initiated the attacks, it did agree to cooperate with the campaign.[80]

These intelligence and press accounts caused a confusing and mixed reaction among senior US officials in Washington. On 21 August, when the Vietnamese implemented martial law, the Department of State after a hurried White House meeting officially protested this latest action against the Buddhists, calling it a violation of Diem's past reassurances to Ambassador Nolting that he would not use force. At the same time, President Kennedy asked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor, to cable General Harkins to obtain his perspective of the relationship between the Vietnamese president and his generals. The President then called Ambassador Lodge, who had made a stopover in Tokyo, and ordered him to go immediately to his new post in Saigon.[81]

While in Hawaii before leaving for Tokyo, Ambassador Lodge had consulted with Assistant Secretary Hilsman and former Ambassador Nolting as well as Admiral Felt at Pacific Command headquarters about the continuing crisis in Vietnam. According to Roger Hilsman, upon hearing about the new turn of events in Saigon, the three agreed that the United States should avoid any "precipitate action." Mr. Hilsman believed that Mr. Trueheart's message from Saigon that the military were "a dominant factor" in the planning of the state of siege appeared to be "a logical appraisal" of the situation.[82]

After his return to Washington on the evening of 21 August, Assistant Secretary Hilsman asked General Krulak from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Presidential Advisor Forrestal, and William Colby from the Central Intelligence Agency to meet with him. He then called upon each of the others for their suggestions as to how the United States could "exploit the situation." In general they recommended that the United States should press the Vietnamese government to modify its treatment of the Buddhists, but at the same time, they should not push too hard on removing martial law too quickly so that the military could implement certain reforms that the Americans had been advocating. At that point General Krulak commented that the first priority of the United States should be to determine "who is in charge—whether the military are taking orders from Nhu or

whether Diem is taking orders from the military." Roger Hilsman agreed and directed that Mr. Colby determine from his sources the actual relationship between President Diem and the military as well the status of Ngo Dinh Nhu in the government. This first flush of interagency agreement within the Kennedy administration was to be short lived.[83]

In the Defense Department, General Taylor and the Joint Chiefs of Staff generally supported President Diem, believing they had no choice, although they were suspicious about the influence of his brother Nhu. Secretary McNamara, on vacation in Wyoming, shared this viewpoint. This was reinforced by General Harkins in his reply to the Chairman's request for his judgment of the crisis.[84]

On 22 August General Harkins cabled General Taylor, remarking that President Diem was still in control and "still has confidence in the armed forces otherwise he would not have put them in charge at such a critical time." In fact, according to the MACV commander, President Diem appointed General Don, although fully aware the latter was "one of the most vociferous" of the generals looking for a change in the leadership of the government. General Harkins also mentioned that General Dinh, the III Corps commander, whom he labeled another "coup slinger," was now in charge of the Saigon area, thus creating a "stage . . . for an easy military take-over." Despite this, General Harkins stated that General Don had reassured him that President Diem, not the military, had issued the call for martial law.[85]

While General Harkins admitted that he could not declare absolutely that President Diem was "not a hostage of the military," he ended his message on his usual positive note. He observed that while General Don was "nominally in command," there still appeared to be multiple channels that continued to exist that led directly to the president. General Harkins concluded that the "present situation might be a blessing in disguise." He argued that a "military takeover occurred with minimum violence," which prevented further bloodshed. The general implied, nevertheless, that this "nominal chain of command" still remained under the control of President Diem. General Taylor on 23 August, in the absence of Secretary McNamara, forwarded the cable to the State Department.[86]

In the State Department, however, Assistant Secretary Hilsman had begun to have second thoughts about the existing situation in Vietnam. The flurry of reports expressing the view that the president's brother Nhu was playing a behind-the-scenes role became more and more of concern to him. A Central Intelligence Report on 21 August stated that "the possibility of a take over by Nhu cannot be discounted."[87] Perhaps even more significantly, Roger Hilsman in a telephone conversation with Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, referred to two messages from the US Embassy relating to recent interviews between US officials and Vietnamese generals and Defense Minister Thuan about the growing influence of the president's brother.[88]

In fact, in his first draft of instructions for Ambassador Lodge on 22 August, Mr. Hilsman apparently advised the new ambassador to "eliminate the Nhus as one of his first acts." This was too strong for Under Secretary Ball, who was Acting Secretary of State in the absence of Secretary Rusk. George Ball suggested to Under Secretary Harriman

that it would be best to give the new ambassador "a chance to look the situation over and give us a fresh reading."[89]

The final message, drafted by Mr. Hilsman, signed by Under Secretary Ball, and cleared by both Ball and Averell Harriman, asked for further clarification of the existing situation in Vietnam. The State Department directed Ambassador Lodge to determine as best he could "the relative power . . . of specific groups and individuals both military and civilian." It ended, however, with the statement: "we may deem it useful to throw our influence toward reducing or eliminating the power of the Nhus," with the caveat "we will welcome your fresh reading of this and other aspects of the situation."[90] On Saturday, 24 August, Ambassador Lodge responded, referring to the conversation with General Kim blaming Nhu for maneuvering the generals into backing martial law.[91]

Ambassador Lodge's reply, reinforced by the morning headlines in the *New York Times* on Saturday, 24 August, set off a firestorm in the State Department and the White House. While many of the senior leaders of the government, including President Kennedy, Secretary McNamara, and Secretary Rusk, had taken advantage of the weekend to escape the heat and humidity of a Washington summer, the triumvirate of Harriman, Hilsman, and Forrestal remained behind. Worried by the alarming news about the prominence of Mr. Nhu in the Vietnamese government, they decided that it was necessary that the United States be prepared for a possible overthrow of the Diem regime. In a memo to the President, apparently before he left for Hyannis Port, Michael Forrestal forwarded the cables from Saigon that Ngo Dinh Nhu was the "mastermind behind the whole operation." He then declared, "Averell and Roger now agree that we must move before the situation in Saigon freezes." The memo continued to say that Forrestal was pressing to obtain the endorsement of John McCone on a plan "of action which can be presented to you at the earliest opportunity."[92]

Later in the day Roger Hilsman confided to Admiral Felt in a telephone conversation about the possibility of Vietnamese generals carrying out a coup in Vietnam. He mentioned, "we are coming up here pretty soon for some decisions and I will be in touch with you." The admiral replied, "If three of our guys out there, one of them is mine [possibly referring to General Harkins], can get together, maybe we can swing something." Mr. Hilsman in turn answered "Well I think you are right and am glad to know that you are with us."[93]

During their telephone conversation, Roger Hilsman mentioned a second "fuzzy" message from Ambassador Lodge that day that appeared to call for some caution in the US reaction to the crisis.[94] Listing additional conversations with other Vietnamese generals, Ambassador Lodge once more insisted that Mr. Nhu had played a large role in the action against the Buddhists, but he did not believe that the generals were prepared to take action against the government. According to the Ambassador, "Action on our part in these circumstances would seem to be a shot in the dark. Situation at this time does not call for that, in my judgment, and I believe we should bide our time, continuing to watch situation closely."[95]

Despite these reservations by the Ambassador, Hilsman, Forrestal, and Harriman continued to press forward. Roger Hilsman and Averell Harriman met Under Secretary

Ball on the seventh hole at his golf course and obtained his concurrence to their draft. According to George Ball, he then returned home and called the President, who agreed the message could be sent out if Secretary Rusk and Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric agreed.[96] Mr. Gilpatric, who was at his farm on the eastern shore of Maryland, several years later recalled that Michael Forrestal telephoned him and stated that he had worked with Harriman and Hilsman to compose a draft message that the President and Secretary Rusk had approved orally. Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, who was acting Secretary of Defense in the absence of McNamara, remembered that Mr. Forrestal also told him that General Krulak was to inform General Taylor, who Gilpatric believed would "flush out any concerns from a military standpoint." The Deputy Secretary regarded the matter "as something between the White House and the State Department, and therefore . . . didn't object to it."[97]

In a memorandum for the record on 24 August, General Krulak wrote that about 1800 that evening he received a telephone call from Vice Admiral Herbert D. Riley of the Joint Staff who told him about conversations with both Assistant Secretary Hilsman and Admiral Felt. Vice Admiral Riley told him that they referred to a "proposed course of action" that the three of them favored. General Krulak mentioned that Michael Forrestal had called him, probably on the same subject. The Marine general then placed a call to the White House through a secure line from the Pentagon Command Center with Vice Admiral Riley also on the line. Mr. Forrestal told General Krulak about the proposed draft of new instructions to Ambassador Lodge being forwarded to the President for his approval. Furthermore, Mr. Forrestal did not believe it was a matter of concern for the Defense Department, but he wanted to advise Deputy Secretary Gilpatric of the matter. He then asked General Krulak to pick up a copy to show General Taylor. Vice Admiral Riley volunteered that he believed the general idea of the proposed policy was sound, but he had not seen the draft.[98]

As agreed, General Krulak went to the White House, where Mr. Forrestal gave him a copy of the proposed message to the Ambassador and where he also read the relevant cables from Saigon. Michael Forrestal mentioned that the draft had been received by the President and that he had just obtained a telephone concurrence from Deputy Secretary Gilpatric. At that point, General Krulak volunteered his own opinion that it was "delusive to think of the Vietnamese military as united and homogeneous." He departed and then called General Taylor, but the Chairman was out for the evening. At that point, Mr. Forrestal telephoned him that the President had approved the message, but that the timing of its implementation would be contingent on the "discretion of Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins."[99]

After telephoning General Taylor once more about 2145 that evening, General Krulak brought his copy of the message to the Chairman's house. According to General Krulak, General Taylor read the document, asked some questions, and finally opined:

> he would not wish to be on the receiving end of the message, that it is not sufficiently explicit, that it does not give Diem adequate chance to do what we want. He stated that it reflects the well-known compulsion of Hilsman and Forrestal to depose Diem

> and, had McGeorge Bundy been present, he would not have approved the message. Finally, he stated that the message had not been given the quality of interdepartmental staffing it deserved, and that he would be prepared to say so at a proper time.[100]

Whether the document would have failed to obtain presidential approval if McGeorge Bundy had been present is open to question. In October Mr. Bundy did write that he understood that "consulting only the President . . . [and in coordination] with the Defense Department through General Krulak—a devoted officer but not senior policy maker—Michael [Forrestal] and his friends determined on and sent out the famous cable of August 24." Thirty years later Mr. Bundy observed that he was "safely insulated by the process of being in New England . . . and I cut myself out when I go away for the weekend." Mr. Bundy's biographer hints that this was possibly an admission of limited influence with the President given the responsibilities of the national security advisor.[101]

In any event, the message went out to the Embassy that night. Receiving the new instructions Sunday morning, Ambassador Lodge made no further reference to his doubts of the previous day. In his reply to the State Department, the Ambassador declared that he wanted a change in his instructions to the effect that he be allowed to go directly to the generals "without informing Diem." His argument was that there was basically no chance that the Vietnamese president would agree to the US demands, and by bypassing President Diem he would prevent Mr. Nhu from forestalling or blocking any action on the part of the military. He would explain to the generals that the United States could accept President Diem "without the Nhus, but it is in effect up to them whether to keep him [Diem]." He ended his message with the statement that he would not act until satisfied with the escape and evacuation plans for US personnel and that General Harkins concurred.[102]

The actual relationship between the MACV commander and the Ambassador was not as harmonious as depicted by Ambassador Lodge. According to General Harkins in an oral history interview several years later, the Ambassador confided very little in him despite the fact that they had known each other since 1925. Both were from Boston and had attended the Boston Latin School, but apparently not at the same time. General Harkins, unlike Ambassador Lodge, had serious doubts about the demands of the Buddhists, believing that they blew "everything way out of importance." Furthermore, General Harkins would later claim that the Defense Department "was trying to save Diem, and they [the State Department, especially Hilsman and Harriman] were trying to get rid of Diem and that's what caused the attempted coup in August." He claimed that Ambassador Lodge and the CIA in Saigon "went along with the new regime of Harriman-Hilsman to get rid of Diem."[103]

In Washington on 25 August the State Department in an unsigned message agreed to the modifications that Ambassador Lodge had requested. At the same time, they pressed Ambassador Lodge to get the message to the generals as soon as possible, citing an approach by General Khanh to American officials for the need of clarification of the US position toward the Diem regime. At the same time, the State Department told Ambassador Lodge that they would give a press briefing stating that the Army had not

participated in the attack on the pagodas. The Voice of America was also to broadcast this information to the Vietnamese people.[104]

The Voice of America statement on 26 August actually caused undesired complications for the Lodge plan. The broadcast in Vietnam specifically mentioned Mr. Nhu as controlling the police and stated that the United States might "cut its aid to Vietnam if President Diem" did not punish the "police officials responsible."[105] Ambassador Lodge was obviously upset. In an angry message to Washington, he declared that the statement "has complicated our already difficult problem." The Ambassador believed that it specifically "eliminated the possibility of the generals effort" to achieve surprise. He pointed out that he was not under instructions to say anything specifically to Diem about the situation. Ambassador Lodge argued that if the United States was to achieve its aims, "it must be achieved by the Vietnamese themselves" and not appear as if the Americans were "giving the 'kiss of death' to its friends."[106]

In Washington on 26 August the President had called a special meeting of his senior advisors. Included in the session, which met at noon, were Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Under Secretaries of State Ball and Harriman, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, Chairman Taylor and Major General Krulak of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Assistant Secretary of State Hilsman, and McGeorge Bundy and Michael Forrestal from the White House, as well as representatives of the CIA. Both Mr. Hilsman and General Krulak recorded notes of the deliberations. Relative to the Voice of America broadcast in Saigon, Roger Hilsman observed that the broadcast was in error when it "speculated on our use of aid cuts as a sanction against the Vietnamese." He added that this remark was "contrary to explicit instructions" that the agency should not be involved in policy speculation.[107]

As the meeting proceeded, it became obvious that several members, including the President, had second thoughts about the wisdom of the message sent to Ambassador Lodge on the evening of 24 August. President Kennedy obviously believed that the US reporters in Saigon, especially David Halberstam, perhaps had undue influence on the decision. According to General Krulak's notes, President Kennedy expressed the opinion that Mr. Halberstam was basically "running a political campaign" against the Diem regime and he did not want that to be the basis for American policy. Roger Hilsman in his record noted that the President stated that "Halberstam was a 28-year-old kid . . . and [Kennedy] wanted assurances we were not giving him serious consideration." According to General Krulak, Mr. Hilsman tried to reassure the President. At that time, Under Secretary Harriman interjected his opinion that they made the decision because it was obvious that with the attack on the pagodas the people had turned against the regime and that this was the time that action was required. According to General Krulak, the President then reiterated that despite their faults President Diem and his brother Nhu had accomplished a great deal, and if the United States took action against them, "it should not be as a result of *New York Times* pressure." Mr. Hilsman in his notes observed only that the President asked several questions about the relationship among the various generals and the government's strength in Saigon.[108]

At that point, General Taylor expressed his opinion that the plan in the instructions to Ambassador Lodge contained "many military difficulties," namely that the generals were not unified among themselves. According to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US focus should be on President Diem and trying to convince him to ameliorate his policies. Sometime later in the conversation, President Kennedy turned to General Taylor and asked him from his experience what chances the plan outlined in the cable had of succeeding. The general replied that "in Washington we would not turn over the problem of choosing a head of state to the military."[109]

During the course of the conversations, the question had arisen whether President Diem was aware of his brother Nhu's activities and whether Mr. Nhu was attempting to undermine the president. After President Kennedy referred to an intelligence report stating that Mr. Nhu had raised the subject with several generals about the succession to Diem, Assistant Secretary Hilsman stated that Ngo Dinh Nhu was "riding the fence." Mr. Hilsman then interjected that when Admiral Felt had telephoned him, the Pacific commander had mentioned his concern about South Vietnam "unless the Nhus were removed." The admiral had declared "that the generals could handle the situation but that we will [have] to make known our willingness to support them." In a second telephone conversation, according to Roger Hilsman, Admiral Felt "counseled against delay." Somewhat taken aback, General Taylor asked the Assistant Secretary about his telephone exchange with the Pacific commander. Mr. Hilsman then repeated his account about the two calls from Admiral Felt. In his notes of the meeting, the Assistant Secretary wrote: "Maxwell Taylor was visibly upset" that the admiral had called him and "I am sure Felt will hear about it."[110]

Secretary McNamara for the most part limited his participation to three questions. First, he wanted to know what Vietnamese generals would participate in the plan. In answer to this, Assistant Secretary Hilsman mentioned that the US representatives had spoken only to Brigadier General Tran Thien Khiem of the Joint General Staff; Major General Nguyen Khanh, the II Corps commander; and Major General Minh, the military advisor to President Diem. The three generals had refused to name the others who had agreed to participate. The Defense Secretary then replied that the Embassy should obtain the names of the other Vietnamese generals who would participate. Secretary McNamara's second question referred to the term "direct support" as used in the instructions to Ambassador Lodge. Assistant Secretary Hilsman explained that the term referred to the logistic support of Vietnamese Army units without "using Saigon as a port of entry." Both Generals Krulak and Taylor mentioned that such an endeavor would prove to be very difficult. The Defense Secretary thought it would be judicious to ask US representatives in Saigon what the "'direct support' requirement embodies." Finally, the third question related to Lodge's instructions relative to what the Ambassador was to say to President Diem. This question remained unanswered. Secretary McNamara then asked who was to replace Diem, declaring that "if we stand by and let a weak man get in the Presidency we will ultimately suffer."[111]

At this point, President Kennedy wanted to know what should be done "if we are faced with having to live with Diem and Nhu." Mr. Hilsman replied that "this would be

horrible to contemplate because of Nhu's grave emotional instability." The Assistant Secretary then argued, "the people [of Vietnam] want to get rid of the Nhus, but clearly need US support to do this." According to Mr. Hilsman, it was "imperative that we act." While the meeting ended on this note, the President declared that he wanted the same group to reconvene the following day to examine their options. General Taylor recommended that former Ambassador to Vietnam Nolting be invited to this meeting and the President agreed. Assistant Secretary Hilsman protested, stating that Mr. Nolting's view was "colored." The President replied, "Maybe properly."[112]

It was very apparent that both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor believed that the trio of Hilsman, Harriman, and Forrestal had deliberately waited to draft their message relative to the proposed coup by the generals until the main proponents in support of President Diem were unavailable to block their move. As General Taylor told General Krulak on the night of 24 August, he would speak out against what he considered a backhanded maneuver at the appropriate time. What the general had not expected was that Admiral Felt would be involved in a discussion outside the chain of command leading to the decision to draft the message.

After the meeting on 26 August, General Taylor sent a cable to the Pacific commander asking him if it were true about his telephone conversations two days before with Mr. Hilsman about a possible coup. Admiral Felt answered that he had made two telephone calls to Assistant Secretary Hilsman. In the first, the admiral admitted recommending "US support for a move by the Generals against Nhu." He denied, however, that in the second he had urged that there be no delay in sending the message but only that he be informed of any proposed action. This response did not satisfy General Taylor. On the 27th the Chairman cabled the admiral an official reprimand by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "for expressing his views on a substantive issue outside of proper channels."[113]

Secretary McNamara and General Taylor were not the only ones unhappy with the way Hilsman, Forrestal, and Harriman had bypassed the usual administrative procedures to obtain the President's approval. President Kennedy at the meeting made obvious his discomfort with the decision. According to Michael Forrestal, the President had taken him aside that day and vented his anger. The White House aide offered his resignation, but the President refused to take it.[114] McGeorge Bundy several years later would say that "Forrestal . . . was a very bright, straightforward young man but he's working for the President with one hand and Averell Harriman with the other, and he's got the Vietnam account with me, but not when I'm out for the weekend."[115]

On the night of 26 August, Secretary Rusk cabled Ambassador Lodge informing him of the meeting at the White House. He asked the Ambassador to provide as best he could answers to some of the questions raised by Secretary McNamara. Secretary Rusk wanted to know what Mr. Lodge meant when he used the term "direct support to the military" during the interim period. Secretary Rusk also inquired what the balance of power was among the Vietnamese generals and for the names of those who would join Generals Khanh, Minh, and Khiem in any action against the regime. The Secretary then informed Ambassador Lodge that the Defense Department was studying the emergency evacuation

plans and also the possibility of prepositioning US forces if they were needed in Vietnam. Moreover, the Joint Staff was trying to determine "whether alternatives could be worked out to prevent heavy [troop] concentration in Saigon." Finally, Secretary Rusk ended his message by stating that there was going to be another White House meeting, and he asked Mr. Lodge to provide an answer to his questions before the meeting.[116]

At the same time, General Taylor sent a message to General Harkins in Saigon. He asked the MACV commander for his personal "assessment of danger to US personnel" and whether security or evacuation arrangements were satisfactory. Like Secretary Rusk, he wanted more clarification of what was meant by the term US "direct support" and if such support was "feasible" if opposed by GVN forces. The general also repeated the inquiries about the Vietnamese generals and their loyalty or opposition to President Diem and Mr. Nhu. He also desired information about whom the generals would back in the event of the overthrow of the Diem government. Most important from the perspective of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor declared: "We are keenly aware that this crisis could result in major requirements for US military assistance and in the need for rapid decisions related thereto." Therefore, he directed General Harkins to provide "personal reports from you on matters related to the crisis." He added the proviso that the MACV commander would "keep Ambassador Lodge and Admiral Felt fully informed of what you are doing."[117]

In Vietnam on the evening of 26 August, Ambassador Lodge presented his credentials to President Diem. After an exchange of pleasantries, including joking remarks about the prominence of Madame Nhu, the Vietnamese president proceeded to give a nearly two-hour monologue on Vietnamese history, his family background, the backwardness of Vietnamese society, the lack of education, and an intelligentsia "who abused their trust by turning educational institutions into centers of unrest." President Diem claimed that a "small Buddhist sect" headed "by agitators" had developed "a well-organized plan to create unrest around the country." According to the Vietnamese president, it was because of the Buddhist success in creating disturbances among the city population that he had been forced to declare martial law. Just before the meeting ended, President Diem complained to Ambassador Lodge that some American agencies in Saigon were "interfering in Vietnamese affairs." The Ambassador very diplomatically replied that since he had just arrived in Vietnam, he could not possibly "know everything that was going on but would look into it." On that note, the visit ended.[118]

In responding to Secretary Rusk's request for information about the Vietnamese generals and the possibilities of a coup, Ambassador Lodge simply answered on the 27th, "we do not know." He mentioned that there was to be a further meeting with General Khiem and that General Minh might also attend. As a result there was the possibility that there might be more information. The Ambassador argued that unless the generals provided a "sure sign of willingness and power to act" there was no point to ask the generals "about alternate leadership candidates." He stated that if there was positive information, he would make "soundings." Adding a small postscript later to the cable, Ambassador Lodge stated that an intelligence source suggested "Minh may be moving."[119]

General Harkins' reply to General Taylor was more explicit than the Ambassador's statement to the State Department. Relative to the emergency evacuation plans, General Harkins believed that they were adequate, but they were based on the premise that "a friendly local government" would be in control. While stating that both US civilians and military personnel were "in no more immediate danger than usual," he noted that the present uncertain conditions "could change momentarily." Therefore, he was now having his staff reexamine the plans assuming that there was no local government control or that the government was in unfriendly hands.[120]

Relative to the question about "direct support," General Harkins interpreted this as meaning "US diplomatic recognition will be forth coming promptly and that US economic and military assistance to RVN will continue as at present, even under most extreme contingency of military coup in which not only Nhus but also Diem is removed from scene." He then amplified his definition to consist of "full military backing," including advice, access to American communications, and "unarmed troop transport" aircraft, as well as denying the same to "opposing military and paramilitary forces." The MACV commander acknowledged that if the Vietnamese Air Force were hostile it could deny initially the use of both Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa Airfields to the American advisory effort. He also emphasized that American assistance was contingent "in large part on how play develops."[121]

General Harkins was much more forthcoming than Ambassador Lodge as well when it came to naming the generals who might participate in the coup and in a possible succession to President Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu. In addition to the names listed by Secretary Rusk to Ambassador Lodge, the MACV commander included Generals Don, Le, Little Minh, Tri, Le Van Kim, and Chien and Colonel Vien. He observed that General Don and Le would participate in a coup only against Mr. Nhu, not against President Diem. General Harkins believed that four commanders would oppose any takeover: General Dinh, Commander of III Corps; General Cao, Commander of IV Corps; Colonel Tung, Commander of the Special Forces; and Colonel Hien, the Commander of the Air Force. Of the commanders who would participate in a coup against President Diem, only General Khanh, II Corps commander, and Colonel Vien of the separate Airborne Brigade had direct control of troops. Only General Big Minh, according to General Harkins, had the prestige to command the loyalty of the others.[122]

In Washington on 27 August, the meeting with the President was slated for 1600. As the Harriman faction attempted to regroup prior to the conference, the Under Secretary asked Assistant Secretary Hilsman if some of the others "were getting cold feet." Roger Hilsman indicated that he feared General Taylor would be an obstacle. He also wanted the Under Secretary to be prepared to go to the White House. On the other hand, he believed that he could convince former Ambassador Nolting to support their position.[123]

In the meantime, White House Aide Forrestal, the third member of the triumvirate presented a memo to the President outlining what he thought would be the major items of discussion at the meeting. He observed that Mr. Hilsman and William Colby of the CIA would update the latest news from Saigon. According to Michael Forrestal, the Vietnam-

ese generals had formed a committee to overthrow the government and wanted some signal from the US government as "a token . . . of good faith." He then suggested that the President might end the meeting with a rephrasing of US policy. In Mr. Forrestal's words:

> a. The United States cannot support a government in South Vietnam which is dominated by Counselor Nhu.
> b. While the United States would prefer to retain President Diem in office, we have serious doubts that it can effectively be done. We should leave to the Vietnamese military leaders the decision whether Diem can be preserved.
> c. The fundamental objective of the United States in South Vietnam has not changed. It will continue to give wholehearted support to the prosecution of the war against the Viet Cong terrorists, and will continue assistance to any government in South Vietnam which shows itself capable of sustaining this effort.

Mr. Forrestal then concluded that the President might want to reemphasize "the great importance of highly coordinated collective action" and that at the present time this "coordination is being carried on through Roger Hilsman's office."[124]

The attendees at the noon meeting included all those who were in attendance the previous day with the addition of Edward R. Murrow, the Director of the US Information Agency; Ambassador Nolting; Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy; and Bromley Smith of the State Department, who kept the minutes. It was apparent that the Defense Department came prepared. Before the President entered, Secretary McNamara made several points to the assembled group. He observed that it was necessary to appraise further the actual situation in Vietnam and suggested reviving the executive council that had been formed for the Cuban crisis. Furthermore, he wanted an examination of the possible contingencies if the coup in Vietnam failed. He also wanted to recommend to the President that he not make any decision at the present time.[125]

After the President entered the conference room, Secretary Rusk formally began the official proceedings by offering the Defense Secretary's recommendation to follow the example of the Cuban Crisis Executive Committee with daily meetings. After the intelligence briefing, Secretary Rusk commented that it was apparent that Ambassador Lodge had not "come to grips with the problem in Vietnam" in his preliminary discussions with both President Diem and Counselor Nhu. The Secretary believed that the Ambassador "may be waiting to see what the Vietnamese generals are going to do." In response to a question from the President, Ambassador Nolting offered his opinion that "the generals haven't the guts of Diem and Nhu." Mr. Nolting basically repeated General Taylor's opinion of the day before that the Vietnamese generals were far from being united. Secretary McNamara then distributed the list of the names of the Vietnamese generals and their loyalties that General Harkins had provided to General Taylor.[126]

After some discussion about the impact of the unrest on the military effort, which General Krulak answered in the negative, the group debated the viability of President Diem and his relationship with the Buddhists. Ambassador Nolting basically defended

the Vietnamese president, while Assistant Secretary Hilsman denounced the government's handling of the situation. It was obvious that the Assistant Secretary had not turned the former Ambassador around.[127]

At that point, Secretary Rusk introduced another of Secretary McNamara's preliminary suggestions. He wanted the conference to discuss two contingencies, namely what the United States should do if the Vietnamese general staff remained divided after the coup, and secondly, what would be the US position if President Diem defeated the coup effort. Ambassador Nolting observed that there was at present no military support for the coup but acknowledged there might be if the United States demanded the removal of President Diem and Mr. Nhu. President Kennedy remarked that "he saw no point in trying a coup unless there was a chance of its success." After some further discussion, President Kennedy proposed that both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins be asked for their personal opinions about the "prospects for the coup" and "whether we should proceed with the generals or wait." He asked General Taylor what General Harkins' position was. The Chairman replied that General Harkins "had never been asked for his views—that he merely got orders." The President ended the meeting with the statement that the "generals interested in the coup were not good enough to bring it about." Another meeting was scheduled for the next day.[128]

As the President had suggested that evening Secretary Rusk sent out a cable to the Embassy for clarification of the situation in Saigon. In his message to Ambassador Lodge, drafted by Assistant Secretary Hilsman but cleared by both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, Secretary Rusk observed that the Ambassador's messages still left unanswered the balance of strength between the coup and anti-coup Vietnamese forces and the ability of the coup leaders to maintain security and carry out their plans. The Secretary wanted Ambassador Lodge specifically to comment on the probability of a successful coup. He wanted to know if delaying the initiation of a coup would enhance or impede its chances, taking into consideration four factors. These factors included "local military and political support"; public opinion; security and possible "compromise of US role"; and the ability of Ngo Dinh Nhu to lead a countercoup. Other questions related to the "comparative strength of forces in Saigon area," and the possibility of an indecisive result leading to the involvement of other groups. Finally, Secretary Rusk declared that "highest authority" wanted to know if both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins presently supported "the operation as currently planned by Generals."[129]

On the morning of 28 August, two hours before the noon meeting of the new Executive Committee, General Taylor sent a back channel message to General Harkins. In this message he referred to the message that Secretary Rusk had sent to the Ambassador the previous night. The Chairman wanted to know General Harkins' views on the questions posed by the Secretary to the Ambassador and specifically what the general thought about the proposed plans for the coup. General Taylor then added, for Harkins' information, that the message drafted by Roger Hilsman on 24 August was "prepared without DOD or JCS participation" and that "authorities" were "having second thoughts."[130]

At the same time as the Chairman sent the message to General Harkins, he also provided copies to McGeorge Bundy and to Secretary Rusk and other State Department officials. The message did little to mend the growing chasm between the Harriman group and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Mr. Hilsman would later say that he never saw it, although Michael Forrestal and Under Secretary Harriman had obtained duplicates. Averrell Harriman would later complain that "this was the first occasion he could recall of the military backing off their commitments."[131]

The disagreement between the two sides came out in the open during the Executive Committee meetings on 28 August. At the noon session, Vice President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon joined the committee and Under Secretary Ball headed the State Department contingent in place of Secretary Rusk, who had another commitment. After the first preliminary reports, including an intelligence briefing on recent events in Vietnam and a brief presentation by General Taylor on possible evacuation plans, the committee turned to the question of a possible coup against President Diem. Secretary McNamara argued that the first decision that needed to be made was whether "we are backing the Vietnamese generals in their effort." Under Secretary Ball at that point observed that it was probably "impossible for us to live with a situation in which Nhu was ascendant" and that the United States was "already beyond the point of no return." The Defense Secretary responded that the United States need not act "as if we were being pushed." He further remarked that the recent cables raised his doubts "that the coup generals could overthrow Diem."[132]

The discussion would continue in this vein throughout the session. The State Department representatives, except for Ambassador Nolting, supported going forward with the coup, while Secretary McNamara and General Taylor cautioned against undue haste. President Kennedy noted that Ambassador Lodge in his reply to Secretary Rusk's last cable remarked that he and General Harkins both backed the proposed coup. In fact Mr. Lodge had cabled: "we believe that all factors . . . argue for prompt action and that chances of success would be diminished by delay." Although Ambassador Nolting declared that he was surprised that the general approved of the coup, the President mentioned that he had asked him twice. Despite the pressure by the State Department representatives and the Lodge cable, the President remained cautious. He remarked that he did not hold to the position that the United States could not reverse course: "If a coup is not in the cards, we could unload." With his advisors at loggerheads, the President adjourned the meeting and suggested they resume at 1800.[133]

In the meantime, General Taylor had received his answer from General Harkins to the cable that he had sent out earlier that morning. In his reply, General Harkins confirmed to the Chairman that he had understood that there had been "coordination at all levels" including the military when he agreed to the actions to promote a coup against the Diem regime. He also declared that he too now "had second thoughts." The MACV commander then added that he had always maintained "that whatever we do it should be done with least bloodshed" and while maintaining "friendly cooperative" relations with the Vietnamese. He believed that the military "could live with Diem provided the

Nhus were out of the picture." General Harkins observed that although President Diem always in the past supported Mr. Nhu, "we never actually have given Diem a chance to react to any new instructions." He concluded that whatever action was taken, his only hope was that "we can get back to the main purpose of our being here—helping these very fine people fight the war against the VC."[134]

In the interval between meetings, the President's National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, telephoned Secretary Rusk and voiced concern about the tenor of the discussion. He suggested that the Secretary attend the next session, arguing that there was danger of a "possible split between State and DOD." Mr. Bundy believed that Under Secretary Harriman was "too passionate," and that the Secretary would be a better spokesman for his department and had a better relationship with Secretary McNamara. The National Security Advisor read the message that General Taylor had sent to General Harkins mentioning the lack of proper coordination between the two departments. Before the meeting began at 1800, according to Bundy, the President wanted to meet with Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, and General Taylor to provide for a "common front" on the possible coup. Mr. Bundy would attend as "notetaker."[135]

After this preliminary session, the President announced to the rest of the assembled group that they had agreed to send out three messages: one from General Taylor to General Harkins; the second a personal message from the President to the Ambassador; while the third was a general message to the Ambassador that had been prepared in draft form earlier by Secretary McNamara, Under Secretary Harriman, National Security Advisor Bundy, White House Aide Forrestal, and Assistant Secretary Hilsman. The full committee went over this third message, addressed to both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, line by line. Mr. Bundy suggested a revision stating that Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins should not feel it incumbent upon them to support a coup plan. Before the meeting ended, Under Secretary Harriman observed that he had been "very puzzled" by General Harkins' last cable until he had "read the outgoing [cable] from General Taylor." According to Hilsman's notes, "The President had some difficulty containing himself until everyone had left the room, whereupon he burst into laughter and said, 'Averell Harriman is one sharp cookie.'"[136]

About 2030 that night, General Taylor sent out his new cable to General Harkins. He informed the MACV commander that the President had read his last message and reiterated his desire that the general provide him with his candid views uninhibited "by concern over what the Washington view may be." In addition, General Taylor indicated that the MACV commander's last message raised other questions. The Chairman wanted to know what General Harkins meant by "saying 'the die is cast.'" Did he mean that it was too late not to support the generals? General Taylor also wanted to know if the MACV commander thought it was still feasible to delay a decision and if the United States should first talk to President Diem before "encouraging the coup." Furthermore, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted General Harkins to use his influence with the senior Vietnamese generals, and especially with General Minh, to determine the soundness of their plans. The United States did not want to be involved in any unsuccessful coup.[137]

In his personal cable to Ambassador Lodge, President Kennedy emphasized his wishes for the independent opinions of both the Ambassador and General Harkins "at every stage." The President mentioned that present policy in Vietnam was based upon the accurate on the spot reports from those on the scene. President Kennedy also referred to the last memo from General Harkins, which indicated "uncertainty on his part" concerning the timing of the coup. The President mentioned that he had tasked "through General Taylor" for General Harkins to reply directly "to me as Commander-in-Chief." He wanted General Harkins to provide his "personal assessment of the total situation" and also wanted to have the general's advice on what course of action the US government should take at present and in the future in Vietnam. President Kennedy admitted to Ambassador Lodge that there were "differences of emphases" among several officials in Washington, but he wanted Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins to know that "Washington will act as a unit under my direction." The President emphasized once more that he wanted General Harkins' "candid opinion" and that he still reposed the "greatest confidence" in Ambassador Lodge.[138]

In the State Department's message addressed to the US Embassy in Vietnam for both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, Secretary Rusk reported the results of the latest conference of the Executive Committee. He observed that Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins still supported the coup and believed they concurred with the committee's judgment "that if this operation starts it must succeed." The committee, however, remained "unclear" whether the balance of forces in Saigon was such to provide "high confidence of success." Secretary Rusk emphasized the necessity of maintaining the prestige of the United States, which would depend on a favorable outcome for the coup since the US involvement would be obvious no matter what "cover" it used to hide its participation. The Secretary reiterated that the Ambassador and General Harkins must determine at what point the operation could be suspended and what the consequences would be of such a suspension. He wanted General Harkins to determine as best as possible the intentions of those generals who had not yet made a commitment. While the committee still held to the view that the "Nhus must go," it believed that changing circumstances might make one last effort to persuade President Diem to remove them on his own feasible. The Secretary informed the Ambassador that there was to be another meeting of the committee at noon on 29 August and a reply from the Ambassador and General Harkins was needed before that time.[139]

Both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins replied almost immediately to the messages from Washington. In his answer to General Taylor, General Harkins concurred with the need to remove the Nhus from their influence upon President Diem. He used the phrase the "die being cast" because the Vietnamese generals had received assurances from American officials that they would receive US support in their attempt to remove the Nhus from power. According to the MACV commander, the withholding of such support would be a "breach of faith" with the Vietnamese." He observed that they would not make their move without US support and until they had detailed plans. General Harkins

explained that his only difference with Ambassador Lodge was with the Ambassador's belief that further pressure upon President Diem would be fruitless.[140]

Ambassador Lodge in his message to the committee refused to back down from his belief that action was required. He claimed that "we are launched on a course from which there is no respectable turning back: The overthrow of the Diem government." The Ambassador argued that there was "no turning back . . . because US prestige is already publicly committed to this end." According to Mr. Lodge, he was fully in accord with the instructions that he had received from Washington. He believed that to get the generals to pull off their coup required an effort from the United States. Claiming that the Vietnamese coup leaders had many doubts and feared that the Americans would "run out on them," Ambassador Lodge declared the United States had to carry out its part. He wanted to have General Harkins personally reassure them that they had US backing. The Ambassador asserted that General Harkins concurred in everything except about continuing the attempt to obtain President Diem's approval to remove the Nhus. Ambassador Lodge believed the effort was worthless and was "a risk we should not run" in that it "would give the ball to Nhu."[141]

In fact, the Ambassador had just forwarded a message from Paul Kattenburg, the new head of the Vietnam Working Group, who was in Vietnam on an inspection trip, to Assistant Secretary Hilsman. Mr. Kattenburg described at length a three-hour meeting with President Diem, whom he had known for several years. According to him, the president had obviously aged (he was 62) and "although . . . in full possession of his faculties, [an] impression of growing neurosis cannot be escaped." During what was largely an extended monologue by the Vietnamese president, Diem not only "passionately defended" Nhu but wished that the "Americans could provide me with another like him."[142]

In Washington, on 29 August, President Kennedy telephoned Roger Hilsman before the Executive Committee met to complain about a *New York Times* article by Tad Szulc. The President declared that Mr. Szulc appeared to "be getting pretty close to things" and wondered who had been talking to the reporter. In the piece on the previous day, Mr. Szulc mentioned that some American officials were of the opinion that the solution to the Vietnam crisis was "to remove Mr. Nhu or both brothers through a coup d'etat by Vietnamese military commanders." In the story that appeared on 29 August, Tad Szulc wrote that the "Ngo brothers are prepared to wage political battle against any Washington effort to dislodge them." Mr. Hilsman denied that anyone from the State Department was leaking material to the reporter. He observed that the article was based on official statements by both the US and South Vietnamese governments and that the rest were "Szulc's deductions." The President asked, "We are not making any more press comments, are we?" Roger Hilsman replied that "inevitably there have to be statements on events." He, nevertheless, insisted that his people were "under strict instructions" about the press. President Kennedy ended the conversation with an "O.K. Roger, fine." Still, President Kennedy remained very sensitive to press commentary on the Vietnam situation, especially from the *New York Times*.[143]

At the meeting on 29 August, Secretary Rusk informed the Executive Committee of the replies that had been received from Ambassador Lodge. After some discussion, the President suggested that two questions faced the committee. The first was whether the United States should withdraw its support of the coup, and the second was whether there should be a further approach to President Diem. Finally, after further debate with Secretary McNamara and General Taylor arguing for delay while the State Department group pressed for action, the committee reached a general consensus. It agreed that Ambassador Lodge would have control over all US "overt and covert operations," and that General Harkins would back up intelligence agents' "approaches to the Vietnamese generals." According to the agreement, the Ambassador would have the authority to suspend aid to the Vietnamese government but Washington would "control the timing of this announcement." The United States would maintain secrecy over any movement of US forces closer to Vietnam to avoid any impression on the part of the generals that they could depend upon American troops to assist them. Finally, the committee concurred in the proposed removal of the Nhus but continued to differ whether there should be an attempt to approach President Diem on this matter.[144]

After the meeting and discussing the details with the President, Secretary Rusk sent out the instructions to the Embassy for Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins. The Secretary confirmed that the President had "reaffirmed basic course" of removing the Nhus and that General Harkins could "repeat to such Generals as you indicate" the preliminary messages already made by US officials to them. Secretary Rusk directed, however, that before reaching any "specific understanding" with the generals, General Harkins must obtain information about which military leaders were involved and the plans for the coup. The Secretary also observed that the question of President Diem remained "unsettled," but he would appreciate Ambassador Lodge's perspective. Finally, the Ambassador received authorization to suspend aid to the Vietnamese government, but it was recommended that the announcement be timed "so as to minimize appearance of collusion with Generals."[145]

Both Secretary Rusk and President Kennedy sent personal messages addressed only to Ambassador Lodge. In his message, Secretary Rusk amplified his remarks about President Diem. The Secretary referred to Paul Kattenburg's interview with the Vietnamese president and stated that conversation convinced him that persuasion would not be successful in separating President Diem from his brother Nhu. Secretary Rusk suggested that perhaps the generals rather than the Americans should insist upon the removal of the Nhus. The Secretary of State stated that he would welcome Ambassador Lodge's comments on the matter.[146]

In his personal message, President Kennedy declared that he had approved personally all of the instructions that had been sent to the Ambassador. He, however, stated that he wanted to make one statement relative to his "constitutional responsibilities as President and Commander in Chief." The President observed that until the very moment the decision was to go, he reserved the "contingent right to change course and reverse previous instructions." President Kennedy explained that he was fully

aware of the consequences of such a decision, but that he knew from personal experience that "failure is more destructive than an appearance of indecision." He wanted Ambassador Lodge's candid opinions, especially "if current course begins to go sour." The President stated that the Ambassador did not have to reply, but if he did to send an unnumbered message addressed "For President Only, pass White House directly, no other distribution whatever."[147]

On 30 August Ambassador Lodge responded to both the President's and Secretary Rusk's cables. In response to the first message from Washington addressed to both General Harkins and himself, the Ambassador thanked Secretary Rusk for his "'prompt decisions" but explained that there had been "no further contact from the Generals." General Khiem, who had been a point of contact, canceled a meeting with US officials and could not be reached by telephone. The Ambassador believed that security concerns lay behind the Vietnamese caution.[148] In answering President Kennedy's reference to a possible reversal of the decision for a coup, Ambassador Lodge stated that he respected the President's right to do so, but reminded him that a successful coup would be "essentially a Vietnamese affair" and that the "'go signal' may be given by the Generals" and be beyond the President's ability to countermand.[149]

On 30 August Ambassador Lodge also replied to Secretary Rusk's personal message to him about his suggestions relative to President Diem. The Ambassador agreed with the Secretary that it was useless to appeal to the president to remove his brother Nhu. Furthermore, he was opposed to using sanctions such as cutting aid to the Vietnamese in connection with the planned coup in that it could cause an "even more fantastic reaction." Ambassador Lodge thanked the Secretary for the authority but hoped "we will never have to use it."[150]

The Ambassador's message contained a note of pessimism. He mentioned that his greatest frustration was the "inertia" on the part of the generals, stating that "the days come and go and nothing happens." Ambassador Lodge remarked that the generals wanted assurances, and while the United States reacted promptly, time had slipped by and "there is not yet enough to show for the hours which we have all put in."[151]

In Washington on the afternoon of 30 August, upon receipt of Ambassador Lodge's response to Secretary Rusk and new intelligence from Saigon, there was a rump meeting of the Executive Committee. President Kennedy did not attend, as he had flown to Hyannis Port for the weekend. Secretary Rusk chaired the meeting and Vice President Lyndon Johnson attended this session, as well as the usual members of the committee except for Under Secretary Harriman, who was in New York. The committee opened its session with a discussion of the Ambassador's statement about the "inertia on the part of the generals." The group finally reached an agreement, after some discussion, that it appeared that the "Generals were either backing off or were wallowing." The situation would remain a puzzle at least until General Harkins was able to talk to the generals. Secretary Rusk proposed that they send a cable to the Ambassador indicating "these concerns." The committee ended the meeting with a discussion of possible contingencies and scheduled another meeting for the following day.[152]

That evening Secretary Rusk drafted a message to Ambassador Lodge in conjunction with Assistant Secretary Hilsman and Major General Krulak, who both took notes of the meeting. He mentioned that the committee had focused upon the lack of momentum on the part of the Vietnamese generals. The Secretary then observed that there was an increasing "uneasiness at the absence of bone and muscle as seen from here." The Secretary added, however, that "this changes none of your instructions" and gave assurance "that highest levels in Washington are giving this problem almost full-time attention."[153]

Hopes that General Harkins would be able to get a positive response from the Vietnamese generals were soon to be dashed. In the early afternoon of Saturday, 31 August, in Saigon, the MACV commander dashed off a cable to General Taylor. He told the Chairman that, at the request of Ambassador Lodge, he had met in his office with Brigadier General Khiem of the Joint General Staff earlier that morning to confirm US backing for the possible coup. According to General Harkins, General Khiem appeared very reluctant to discuss anything, saying that he was "just a junior officer and I should talk to Big Minh." The American general replied that he would be delighted to talk to General Minh but that the latter had said that "no Americans were to contact him." At that point General Khiem responded that "Big Minh had called off the planning," as had the others. The Vietnamese general then baldly declared that the others "were not ready, as they did not have enough forces under their control compared to those under President and now in Saigon."[154]

At that juncture General Khiem mentioned a meeting with Mr. Nhu the previous day in which the presidential counselor stated that he had agreed to "everything the US wants to do, and even had the backing of President Kennedy." The MACV commander replied that "was news to him," and General Khiem declared that he believed that Mr. Nhu may have been trying "to flush out the generals." The Vietnamese general then commented that the generals needed reassurance from an American official with the stature of either the Ambassador or General Harkins. General Harkins stated that he "would be glad to talk to Big Minh" and asked General Khiem to arrange a meeting, which the latter agreed to do.[155]

Sometime later in the visit General Harkins returned to the subject of the President's brother, asking General Khiem if one of the generals would not suggest to the Nhus to absent themselves from the scene. The Vietnamese general in no uncertain terms declared that no one would because it would be basically "self-immolation." General Harkins concluded, "we have an 'organization de confusion' with everyone suspicious of everyone else and none desiring to take any positive action as of right now."[156]

A few hours later Ambassador Lodge reported to the State Department that it was obvious from the MACV commander's report "that there is neither the will nor the organization among the Generals to accomplish anything." The Ambassador admitted, however, that there remained a faint possibility that a further conversation between General Harkins and General Big Minh might prove fruitful, but he had his doubts. Ambassador Lodge continued to believe that Mr. Nhu was unstable and believed it even possible that he might be exploring "some sort of gesture to North Vietnam." Ambassador Lodge

closed with a question about the feasibility of cutting foreign aid as a negotiating ploy with the Vietnamese government.[157]

The Vietnamese situation had also been complicated by a recent statement by President Charles de Gaulle, who offered the services of the French government to negotiate a peace between the two Vietnams and the establishment of a neutralized single state. In fact, Ambassador Lodge in his message mentioned a possible recent meeting between the French Ambassador in Saigon and Mr. Nhu.[158]

In Washington, the Executive Committee met at 1100 on Saturday, 31 August, as planned. President Kennedy remained in touch with Washington by telephone from Hyannis Port but once more did not attend the meeting. There was another new member, however: Paul Kattenburg, the head of the Vietnam interagency committee, who had just returned from Vietnam. Secretary Rusk once more presided. He suggested that they were back to where they started and believed that they needed to restudy the problem. He observed that the coup was not occurring and that "engineering" one "was something we could not do."[159]

There followed a general discussion of what the United States should do. After some discussion a general consensus developed around a proposal by Secretary Rusk that Ambassador Lodge begin negotiations with President Diem about the general direction of his administration. Secretary McNamara agreed and expressed the Defense Department view that the United States should reestablish quickly its lines of communications through General Harkins and Ambassador Lodge with the Vietnamese government.[160]

Assistant Secretary Hilsman and Paul Kattenburg fought a rear guard action that the United States should take a tough stand with President Diem and express US disapproval of his administration's latest repressive actions against Buddhists and other non-Communist dissidents. Roger Hilsman also wanted to try Ambassador Lodge's proposal of cutting US foreign aid to the Vietnamese. Mr. Hilsman, like Ambassador Lodge, expressed concern that Mr. Nhu through his meeting with the French Ambassador had been the impetus for President de Gaulle's proposal.[161] Paul Kattenburg remained a minority of one at the meeting, suggesting that if the regime continued in power as constituted, the United States would be thrown out in six months. He suggested that "at this juncture it would be better for us to make the decision to get out honorably."[162]

This last statement was too much for Secretary Rusk and General Taylor. General Taylor wanted Mr. Kattenburg to provide evidence that the situation in Vietnam would disintegrate within six months. While the head of the Vietnam Committee claimed that the Vietnamese government had lost the support of the people, Secretary Rusk countered that Kattenburg's views were largely speculative. The Secretary of State then proposed that US policy in Vietnam should be based on two premises: "We will not pull out of Vietnam until the war is won, and that we will not run a coup." Both Secretary McNamara and Vice President Johnson agreed with the Secretary of State. Lyndon Johnson, who had been relatively quiet during the meeting, added that "from both a practical and political viewpoint, it would be a disaster to pull out; that we should stop playing cops and robbers and get back to talking straight to the GVN; and that we should once again

go about winning the war."[163] Still, as Roger Hilsman later wrote in his memoir of the Kennedy administration, the meeting on 31 August ended inconclusively. According to the former Assistant Secretary, "the only decision was to ask Lodge's views on the wisdom of an approach to Diem and what might be said."[164]

For all practical purposes, the proposed coup had failed. General Harkins several years later recalled that there was to be no further meeting at this time with General Minh. Brigadier General Khiem told him that Big Minh had said "the generals weren't ready" and that ended the coup talk at that time.[165] In a sense, however, the August crisis was a foreshadowing of the November coup. It had become obvious that the new US Ambassador, some of the presidential personal staff as well a significant part of the State Department, and possibly the President himself had lost confidence in the Diem regime. At this point, General Harkins, the MACV commander; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor; most of the Chiefs; the Joint Staff including Major General Krulak; and Defense Secretary McNamara remained the only viable defenders of the South Vietnamese government. Throughout the remaining few months of the Kennedy administration the split would remain between the Defense Department and the State Department (with the possible important exception of Secretary Rusk) about the progress of the war against the Viet Cong and whether to sustain the Diem government. It is quite possible that President Kennedy's hesitation about supporting the coup effort involved a sense that US involvement with the overthrow of President Diem would cause an even further commitment of US prestige, men, and materiel to a war that was on the fringe of American national interests.

13

The Aftermath

The Coup on Hold

The days after the White House meeting on 31 August could be best described by the song title "All Dressed Up with No Place to Go." Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had opposed the planned coup, the Joint Staff had begun the preparation of three contingency plans in the event of "large scale civil disorder" in South Vietnam. One contingency plan for US forces would include the evacuation of American citizens, the defense of US installations, and provision of communication security. The second plan would address the requirements on these forces if the Viet Cong increased their activities, and the third plan would examine the "possible emergency demands" for the US military if North Vietnam ordered its troops to cross the 17th Parallel into South Vietnam.[1] Earlier, during the Laotian political crisis in the spring of 1963 and the May Honolulu meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC had presented contingency plans for a limited bombing campaign against selected targets in North Vietnam. The two staffs also studied the possibility of US support for a proposed covert South Vietnamese campaign above the 1954 truce line. These two proposed plans, however, had as yet received neither departmental nor presidential approval.[2]

At the same time, however, as the military staffs continued their study of these various contingency plans that might lead to an expansion of the US commitment, the Defense Department also looked to reduce the present strength of MACV. On 20 August General Maxwell Taylor forwarded to Secretary McNamara the CINCPAC plan for the departure of 1,000 personnel from MACV in accordance with the order of the Defense Secretary at the May Honolulu conference. Although recommending approval "for planning purposes," the Chairman observed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, nevertheless, suggested that "no US units should be withdrawn ... for purely psychological reasons" until

tensions in the country eased. He proposed that the Secretary delay his implementing order until the Joint Chiefs of Staff completed a "reevaluation of the situation," which should be completed by 20 October.[3]

In the meantime, on 30 August Vice Admiral Herbert D. Riley, the Director of the Joint Staff, reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that a Marine expeditionary brigade totaling 4,500 men and consisting of three BLTs with command elements were in position by sea and airlift to "close Saigon in 24 hours" with initial heliborne elements able to arrive within two hours. One of the BLTs was in its amphibious shipping off Cape St. Jacques and seventy miles from Saigon. Two BLTs were on four-hour alert with their assigned fixed-wing transport on Okinawa. CINCPAC had directed a fourth Marine BLT on board amphibious shipping in the Pacific to Vietnamese waters, with arrival expected within six days. Another two battalions, one Marine and the other from the Army's 173rd Brigade totaling 2,700 men, were on Okinawa and available as a reserve force if needed.[4]

At the same time as the military prepared for possible deployment of emergency US forces to safeguard US interests in Vietnam, the Kennedy administration continued to mount political pressure upon the Diem government. President Kennedy had agreed to an interview with CBS senior newscaster Walter Cronkite to take place on 2 September at the President's summer home at Hyannis Port. During the broadcast, the President carefully enunciated US policy in Vietnam, declaring that unless the Vietnamese government intensified its efforts "to win popular support," he had doubts "the war can be won out there." He continued, "in the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it." Still, the President concluded that he did "not agree with those who say we should withdraw," stating "that would be a great mistake" and that the Vietnam War was a "very important struggle even though it is far away."[5]

On the afternoon of 2 September, Presidential National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, in consultation with Michael Forrestal and Roger Hilsman, forwarded to President Kennedy proposed new instructions for Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. Mr. Bundy explained the urgency of the draft message because he and Secretary Robert McNamara believed it critical "to get dialogue with Diem started." The draft was also being circulated among other senior officials, including Secretary Dean Rusk and Secretary McNamara, Under Secretary Averell Harriman, General Taylor, and Army Lieutenant General Marshall S. Carter, the Deputy Director of the CIA, to give them a chance to comment.[6]

The draft was a reply to a message from Ambassador Lodge, who had recently met with President Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. According to Mr. Lodge, Mr. Nhu told him that he planned to resign after he lifted the government's martial law order and that then he would retire to Dalat. According to the Vietnamese presidential counselor, he would wait, however, until certain US agents who were promoting coups departed his country. He also remonstrated against certain US radio broadcasts that were critical of the Diem government. Mr. Nhu also stated that his wife planned to visit Yugoslavia and possibly the United States, where she had received an invitation to speak to the Overseas Press Club

in New York. According to Mr. Nhu, he could not leave the country himself because of his "contacts with the Viet Cong," who he claimed were "ready to give up." Furthermore, he promised that the government soon would ease some restrictions on the Buddhists and possibly expand the Cabinet by appointing a "de facto Prime Minister."[7]

In the proposed instructions to Ambassador Lodge, Mr. Bundy and his associates suggested that Nhu's promises of reform were basically a "stalling" mechanism to relieve the American pressure on the regime. They observed that Mr. Nhu, even at Dalat, "could still be [the] power behind [the] throne." Moreover, the trio of Bundy, Forrestal, and Hilsman believed that it was urgent to remove the Nhus, husband and wife, from their direct access to the roots of power in South Vietnam, namely President Diem. The new instructions would have the Ambassador ignore Mr. Nhu and as soon as possible open negotiations directly with President Diem.[8]

In these discussions with the Vietnamese president, Ambassador Lodge was to react strongly against any suggested removal of US agents or halting US radio broadcasts critical of the Vietnamese government's Buddhist policy. The Ambassador was to avoid any hint that the United States was backing off from its efforts to influence the Diem regime to halt repressive actions and to broaden its appeal to the general population. The main thrusts of the instructions were that the Vietnamese government should concentrate on the defeat of the Viet Cong and the enactment of such reforms as would make "continued [American] support possible."[9]

On the following morning, 3 September, a somewhat chastened Assistant Secretary Hilsman discussed the proposed new instructions over the phone with Under Secretary Harriman. Roger Hilsman described the draft for the Under Secretary and offered to send him a copy. According to the Assistant Secretary, the President wanted "to let them stew in Saigon." Although approved by Secretary Rusk, President Kennedy decided to postpone sending the instructions out until the Executive Committee had a chance to discuss them at its meeting that afternoon. At that point, Averell Harriman criticized Mr. Hilsman for inviting former Ambassador Frederick Nolting to participate in the previous committee meetings. The Assistant Secretary merely replied that he had wrongly believed that Mr. Nolting would support their failed initiative to change the makeup of the Vietnamese government.[10]

At noon that day, the Executive Committee, including Ambassador Nolting and both Mr. Hilsman and Mr. Harriman, met with the President. The other members in attendance were Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, General Carter, Director John McCone and William Colby of the CIA, General Taylor and General Victor Krulak from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Mr. Bundy and Mr. Forrestal from the White House staff. Vice President Lyndon Johnson was not present. Bromley Smith from the State Department kept the official minutes, although General Krulak also maintained his personal record of the meeting.[11]

While the President opened the meeting with some questions about French intentions in Vietnam, he quickly turned to the proposed instructions to Ambassador Lodge. After some discussion, the committee largely approved the Bundy memorandum with

a few changes. Relative to the suggested meeting of Ambassador Lodge with President Diem, the President directed that General Paul Harkins should also "resume frequent meetings with Minister of Defense Thuan and Diem on military matters." Assistant Secretary Hilsman suggested that two additional paragraphs be added to the memorandum. He would have Ambassador Lodge explain to General Big Minh or his representative that "we are pressing Diem to change policies, but realize there is little real hope of achieving this." Mr. Hilsman also wanted it spelled out explicitly that the Ambassador's "authority to suspend US aid at any time remains in force." Secretary McNamara objected strenuously to the proposal about contacting General Minh, declaring "we ought to keep Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins out of touch with the generals." President Kennedy agreed in part with Secretary McNamara and directed: "we should wait for the generals to contact us.... When they come to us we will talk to them."[12]

That night Secretary Rusk sent out the modified instructions for Ambassador Lodge in two separate messages. In a somewhat softer tone than the original Bundy memorandum, Secretary Rusk in the first cable still referred to the US suspicions of Mr. Nhu, but he declared optimistically, "we should start negotiations with optimum position, expecting that GVN and we might meet somewhere in between." The Secretary instructed Ambassador Lodge that it was "essential" that he negotiate directly only with President Diem and soon, but to use his own discretion as to when. The Secretary, however, left little doubt that the State Department believed the Ambassador should "press" for such a meeting with the Vietnamese president as early as feasible. Moreover, during these negotiations the Ambassador should refer to the President's televised criticisms of the Vietnamese government, emphasizing that they expressed American "concern for the success of the war effort" and the desire that the Vietnamese "will recognize the need for changes in their policy and improvements in their government."[13]

While the first message contained a statement that General Harkins should resume military discussions with President Diem and Defense Minister Thuan, it made no reference to relations with the Vietnamese generals. Considering the sensitivity of the entire coup question, the administration decided to address the subject in the second message. In this set of instructions, Secretary Rusk informed Ambassador Lodge that if the generals mentioned any concern about the Ambassador's discussions with President Diem he should explain that since the previous coup plans originated with the generals, the United States merely "responded to their approach." In the event that the generals wanted to "reopen" the subject, Ambassador Lodge should defer any answer and refer the entire matter back to Washington.[14]

In the interim, Ambassador Lodge had become more restive in Saigon. He believed that there was very little chance that the generals had any stomach at present for further action against the government. The Ambassador welcomed the second message from Secretary Rusk about any new approach from the generals, believing his new instructions on this matter "would be most helpful." Yet, at the same time, his misgivings about the viability of the Diem regime had become even stronger.[15]

In contrast to both his predecessor and General Harkins, the new Ambassador listened to the doubts expressed by the American press corps in Saigon. Perhaps based upon his own experience as a reporter as a young man, he believed that they had valid information not available to the official sources. Neil Sheehan, the Saigon correspondent from United Press International, remembered several years later that the new Ambassador, shortly after arriving in Vietnam, had invited him over for lunch to discuss the situation in the country. According to Mr. Sheehan, the Ambassador had posed several questions about the government, the status of the war against the Viet Cong, and the Buddhist unrest. Mr. Sheehan stated that he frankly told Ambassador Lodge that the Ngo Dinh family "was incapable of governing," that the Viet Cong had made great strides in the countryside, "and that if Diem and his family stayed in power the war was certain to be lost." Before he departed, Mr. Sheehan wrote, he then asked Mr. Lodge what his opinion was and the answer was, "About the same as yours."[16]

Ambassador Lodge disagreed strongly with the new instructions from the State Department that he should immediately try to make overtures to President Diem to negotiate their differences on the Buddhist issue. On 4 September he replied to Secretary Rusk stating that Washington had "a very different reading of the situation here ... than my own and my colleagues." According to the Ambassador, Ngo Dinh Nhu had no intention of altering the Vietnamese government's policy. In fact, Ambassador Lodge believed that Mr. Nhu thought he was in a "stronger position than ever" and interpreted President Kennedy's statements in his news conference as reassurance that the United States was not planning to abandon Vietnam. Accordingly, the American envoy argued that the United States had very little leverage with the Vietnamese government and suggested that at the moment it "would be unwise to talk to Diem." He believed that if he did do so under present circumstances with "Nhu's proposals hanging fire, I will get nothing but a two-hour filibuster and a mouthful of generalities and run risk of losing whatever progress has been made."[17]

Ambassador Lodge observed that the US choices were limited. He maintained that the Americans had to "be clear in our objectives" and decide whether we were willing to accept the modest reforms that Mr. Nhu appeared to be offering or attempt to obtain "far-reaching policy changes." Noting that this latter course could not "be had with existing leverage," Mr. Lodge concluded that he needed further guidance from the State Department to determine what his course of action should be.[18]

Secretary Rusk replied promptly to the request for direction, declaring that Ambassador Lodge was in the best position to determine what course of action should be followed. He stated that the Ambassador could speak first either to President Diem or Mr. Nhu but limit any discussion with the president's brother only to Nhu's possible resignation or retirement. Secretary Rusk, however, strongly suggested that the Ambassador confer on other policy matters only with President Diem. The Secretary stated his belief in the importance of getting talks with both Mr. Nhu and President Diem "started as soon as possible." According to Secretary Rusk, only then would it be possible to have "a clearer picture of what is possible."[19]

The Ambassador, however, remained hesitant about approaching either Mr. Nhu or President Diem. He agreed with the Secretary about the desirability of getting the Vietnamese leaders to change their government's present policies but asserted, "this is clearly impossible in the present atmosphere." Ambassador Lodge stated that rather than meeting with Mr. Nhu, he would through unofficial channels send word to him that "we are not really interested in his package" in the hopes that the Vietnamese would respond more positively. If there was not a suitable reply, the Ambassador would then ask to speak to President Diem and "request the departure of both Nhus," a reformation of the government, and conciliatory action toward the Buddhists. Personally, the Ambassador believed, "this will be for the record only" but he would try. He ended his message with the statement that the Embassy "was studying possibilities of selective cutbacks or controls on aid components."[20]

In Washington concern about the uncertainty of the situation in Vietnam was also growing. In reply to Ambassador Lodge's last message, Assistant Secretary Hilsman answered that the State Department approved his tactics but reiterated "our feeling here of importance seeing Diem as soon as possible in order to try to assess real situation and what can now be best done."[21] At the same time, President Kennedy worried about leaks to the press. In a telephone conversation with Roger Hilsman on the morning of 5 September, he complained about a news story in the *New York Times* that declared that US officials believed that Mr. Nhu "was maneuvering to discredit and blackmail the United States." The article went on to state that these same unnamed officials believed that he was "in a basically insecure position" and that he would eventually fail in his efforts. The President stated to Mr. Hilsman, "We can't have people saying that US officials are saying these kind of things," and directed the Assistant Secretary to look into the matter. Mr. Hilsman again reiterated that he had given strict orders to everyone in the Far Eastern Section not to talk to the press.[22]

The *New York Times* was not the only newspaper that carried unwanted stories. A story appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* with the dateline of 4 September that quoted General Harkins to the effect that the crackdown in the cities on the Buddhists had reduced the overall military effort against the Viet Cong by half. General Harkins, however, denied that he made the statement and stated that recent events in the urban areas had only a limited effect on the overall campaign against the Viet Cong.[23]

In fact, General Taylor had provided a relatively optimistic report of South Vietnamese Army operations for the month of August, declaring the existence of "favorable trends in all military activities." In this report, which the general apparently hand-carried to the White House in early September, he related that during the previous month the South Vietnamese carried out only ten fewer large operations than they had in July. He recognized that not as many regular Army battalions had participated, but that ranger and local militia units had taken up the slack. Moreover, the Vietnamese small unit actions in August numbered over 10,000, more than in the previous month. The general also noted that the Vietnamese government, despite the recent troubles, had established 8,227 out of the 10,592 planned strategic hamlets and that over 70 percent "of the rural

population" resided in these new communities. On the other hand, the report admitted that the Viet Cong during the past week had increased their activity and had conducted nearly 400 assaults, the largest number since July.[24]

By 6 September both General Taylor and Secretary McNamara remained troubled that the continuing strain between the United States and the South Vietnamese government would eventually have a detrimental effect on the war with the Viet Cong. The two worried that the hesitation of Ambassador Lodge in meeting with President Diem would only make the situation worse. In his memoir in 1995, Secretary McNamara remarked that he found it "inexplicable" that the Ambassador had not yet met with President Diem.[25]

The split between the State and Defense Departments became evident during the Executive Committee conference the morning of 6 September. In this session, before the President arrived, Secretary Rusk voiced the opinion that the United States faced an intolerable situation in Vietnam. He worried that if the relationship with the Diem government continued to deteriorate, "we will be faced with no alternative short of a massive US military effort." The Secretary of State continued to believe that a meeting between Ambassador Lodge and President Diem would permit the administration to determine what decisions it needed to make.[26] According to Assistant Secretary Hilsman, this discussion "became an exercise in meandering confusion."[27]

There also remained uncertainty about progress in the war. Attorney General Robert Kennedy asked whether the South Vietnamese would be able to "win the war with Nhu and Diem." Secretary Rusk replied that the answer was in the negative if Mr. Nhu and his wife continued their present activities. The Attorney General then posed the question if "we are going to lose with Diem, why do we not grasp the nettle now," or in other words get out of Vietnam and cut our losses. At this point, General Taylor interjected that only three weeks earlier the United States was confident "that we could win the war [against the Viet Cong] with Diem." He claimed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff also shared that view. The Chairman then posed the question whether it was now the consensus that recent events in Vietnam had caused a change in the consensus.[28]

Once more, Robert Kennedy asked what the administration's policy should be if it were determined that the war could not be won with President Diem. Secretary McNamara answered that Washington did not have sufficient intelligence on the situation in Vietnam to make that determination at present. The Attorney General then wondered whether it was possible to obtain the views of US advisors serving with the Vietnamese military units as to the status of the campaign against the Viet Cong. Secretary McNamara declared that he could charge General Harkins immediately to obtain this information. At this point, General Taylor countered that the need was for a "grass roots military view" and recommended that General Krulak make an immediate visit to Vietnam and talk first hand to both US and Vietnamese officers and seek their views.[29]

According to Roger Hilsman, he did not necessarily agree with the need for another inspection trip by General Krulak but observed that a proposal "to get the facts, is hard to defeat." Instead, he suggested that Joseph A. Mendenhall, a Foreign Service officer who had served as Counselor for Political Affairs in the US Embassy in Saigon under former

Ambassador Durbrow, accompany General Krulak as the State Department representative. While the Executive Committee came to no conclusion about what needed to be done in Vietnam, there was general agreement on the need of a general reappraisal of the US effort in Vietnam. With that in mind, President Kennedy approved the fact-finding mission of the Krulak-Mendenhall trip.[30]

The Krulak-Mendenhall Debate

According to Roger Hilsman, neither Secretary McNamara nor General Taylor had been eager for a joint State and Defense Department mission. Assistant Secretary Hilsman recalled that he had to make a "personal call" to the airfield to delay the departure of the aircraft for Vietnam until Joseph Mendenhall arrived.[31] According to Arthur Schlesinger quoting John Mecklin, who returned from Vietnam with the Washington team, General Krulak and Mr. Mendenhall appeared to dislike one another and "spoke to each other only when it was unavoidable." It was apparent to most observers that the two had very different perspectives about Vietnam.[32]

That evening the State Department informed Ambassador Lodge about the decisions of the Executive Committee and the forthcoming Krulak-Mendenhall visit in two separate messages. In the first, Secretary Rusk once more insisted that the Ambassador make every attempt to meet with President Diem because of the pressing necessity "to clarify present situation." The Secretary argued the importance for the United States to have a clear idea of Diem's attitude and his "future plans and policies."[33]

In the second message, Secretary Rusk explained that General Krulak and Mr. Mendenhall had as their mission to determine as far as possible the Vietnamese public opinion trends toward the Diem government. He directed Ambassador Lodge to facilitate their task. General Krulak was to coordinate his efforts with MACV through General Harkins, while Joseph Mendenhall would rely upon the cooperation of the Embassy. General Harkins was also to meet with Defense Minister Thuan to see if the latter had changed his views about the situation in the country.[34]

Nearly twenty years later, General Harkins still recalled vividly this particular visit. He remembered that he provided General Krulak with a plane and "he went everywhere." According to the MACV commander, the Marine general spoke to advisors in the field while "Mendenhall stayed in Saigon" and confined his interviews to the Ambassador and the Embassy staff.[35] This was somewhat unfair. While General Krulak did conduct extensive interviews in the field, Mr. Mendenhall traveled from Saigon to both Hue and Da Nang. According to the State Department official, he spent most of his time in the central coastal provinces because he believed the "Buddhist problem" was most severe there.[36]

In Washington, the Krulak and Mendenhall trip also contributed to the growing fissures between the State and Defense Departments about the ability of the Diem regime to defeat the Viet Cong. Robert W. Komer, a member of the National Security Council, reported to McGeorge Bundy that Assistant Secretary Hilsman told him that he and

Under Secretary Harriman were "sore as hell over 'dirty pool'" by the Pentagon. During a session in the White House about the proposed test ban negotiations, one of the Defense Department representatives apparently provided the President with a memorandum that General Krulak and the MACV commander reported, "everything's wonderful in Vietnam." Mr. Hilsman complained that the State Department had not received a copy of this document. He then apparently provided Mr. Komer with a copy of an interview that Rufus Phillips had with Defense Minister Thuan to give to the President that contradicted the generals' views.[37]

By 10 September the two special emissaries had completed their four-day whirlwind tour of Vietnam and were back in Washington. In his written report, completed during the return trip, General Krulak's conclusions differed little from those that he had made after his July inspection trip. He still emphasized that one of the best means of determining the Vietnamese attitudes and progress in the war was "through the day-to-day observations of US military advisors." The Marine general observed that although the "horizons" of these officers were largely limited to the Vietnamese unit with which they served, nevertheless, "In terms of what they actually see, hear and interpret daily in this environment, their views have strong credibility."[38]

According to General Krulak, he had conducted some eighty-seven interviews ranging from relatively low-ranking enlisted men to senior officers and serving in all four Corps areas. He maintained there was no way of ascertaining how much these views reflected those of their Vietnamese counterparts, but he certainly believed they were represented. For the most part, he claimed that his questions basically referred to progress in the war, recent changes, future prospects, their relations with the Vietnamese military, and finally, attitudes of the Vietnamese population to the government based on their own observations or as told to them by their counterparts. His general conclusions remained that "the shooting war is still going ahead at an impressive pace" and that the impact of the political crisis had been limited. General Krulak also argued that the American and Vietnamese military relationship had "not been damaged . . . in any significant degree." He observed, nonetheless, that there was "dissatisfaction" in the Vietnamese officer corps with the government, but that this dissatisfaction "focused far more on Ngo Dinh Nhu than President Diem." Finally, the general admitted that, despite the progress in the "shooting war," the Viet Cong remained strong in the Mekong Delta region.[39]

Before his departure for Washington, General Krulak interviewed both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins. He quoted the general as saying that he was "pursuing the military advisory role exactly as before [the crisis]" and that he was "in frequent contact with the Ambassador who obviously seeks and respects his counsel." Apparently Ambassador Lodge in his brief discussion with General Krulak confined his remarks to his difficulty in convincing President Diem to dismiss his brother Nhu but was "not prepared to acknowledge this is impossible to achieve." Ambassador Lodge ended the meeting by declaring that the United States could not "afford to lose" in Vietnam and that he was "confident that an effective formula can be found." Interestingly, the Ambassador

apparently did not care to discuss his relationship with General Harkins, which may not have been as smooth as General Krulak apparently believed.[40]

On 10 September, the same day they arrived in Washington, both General Krulak and Mr. Mendenhall attended a 1030 meeting of the Executive Committee with President Kennedy. Accompanying them from Vietnam was John Mecklin, the press officer of the Embassy, and Rufus Phillips of the US Operations Mission in Vietnam. There was basically a full complement of the committee in attendance, including Secretaries Rusk and McNamara as well as the Attorney General. Other members from the State Department were Under Secretary Harriman, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, and Ambassador Nolting. Secretary McNamara's deputy, Roswell Gilpatric, and General Taylor completed the representation from the Defense Department.[41]

At the meeting General Krulak basically repeated the conclusions in his written report. His thesis remained that it was necessary for victory against the Viet Cong that the United States continue "the current . . . military and sociological programs . . . irrespective of the grave defects in the ruling regime." Furthermore, he argued that the South Vietnamese military did not have the leverage and in all probability would not use any that they had to reform the present government.[42]

Mr. Mendenhall then provided his briefing, which in effect contradicted that of the Marine general. According to Joseph Mendenhall, he found a "pervasive atmosphere of fear and hate" of the Diem regime in all of the cities that he visited. He warned against the possibility of a civil war with Catholics opposed to Buddhists. The State Department official stated that the Viet Cong had "made recent advances" in the northern coastal sector of the country and spoke about the danger of students and some villagers in Thua Thien Province turning to the Viet Cong for assistance. He ended his remarks with the conclusion "that the war against the Viet Cong could not be won if Nhu remains in Vietnam." In a separate record of the meeting kept by General Krulak, he quotes Mr. Mendenhall saying: "that it was his view . . . that we will lose the war with the Diem Government." It was at this juncture that President Kennedy made his famous quip: "The two of you did visit the same country, didn't you?" General Krulak attempted to explain the difference between his presentation and that of Mendenhall's in that the latter had basically presented an urban perspective while his was from a national viewpoint.[43]

The meeting did not end at this juncture. President Kennedy asked both John Mecklin and Rufus Phillips to report on the situation in Vietnam from their perspectives. Mr. Phillips, who had supervised the US support of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Vietnam, was the first to speak. He declared that someone had to convince the Vietnamese that the United States would not support a government with Ngo Dinh Nhu in it. According to Mr. Phillips, Defense Minister Thuan had confided to him that this was his view and that of several generals. He then declared that, contrary to General Krulak's belief, he did not agree that US military advisors were able to give a creditable account on Vietnamese "political attitudes." Rufus Phillips argued that the Vietnamese officers were very reluctant to discuss Vietnamese politics with their advisors. General Krulak interjected that the advisors may not be good "on politics or palace intrigue but they

were good on saying whether or not the war was being won and they do say that the war is going well." Mr. Phillips responded that the war might be going well in the three northern Corps sectors, but that in the Mekong Delta the Viet Cong were ripping apart the Strategic Hamlet Program.[44]

At this point General Krulak again interrupted and contrasted Phillips' view with that of General Harkins and stated that he for one would accept Harkins' judgment that "the battle was not being lost in a purely military sense." Rufus Phillips then responded, "this was not a military war but a political war. It was a war for men's minds more than battles against the Viet Cong." After a short pause, Secretary Rusk asked Mr. Phillips how he resolved the opinions offered by Minister Thuan to him with the exact opposite impression that General Harkins had received in his recent conversation with the Vietnamese defense minister. According to General Krulak, Mr. Phillips answered that he and Mr. Thuan "were very good friends" and that the minister's response to someone he knew less well would be more guarded. He suggested that Mr. Thuan would be less forthright with General Harkins and attempt to "say what he thought his auditor wanted to hear."[45]

John Mecklin was the last to report to the committee. The Embassy press secretary agreed with Phillips' contention that the war was largely a political one rather than a military one but disagreed with his solution. Rufus Phillips had argued that it was possible to pull a "palace revolt" and displace Mr. Nhu in his influence over President Diem by cutting some aid programs. On the other hand, Mr. Mecklin contended that this process was too slow and would result only in "chaos." He recommended that the administration be prepared "to use US combat forces" if need be "to remove the whole government, including Diem." When asked by President Kennedy what he believed American troops could accomplish, John Mecklin said that they would go in as they "did in Lebanon [in 1958] and we should go in since Southeast Asia was so important to us."[46] In his memoir of the Kennedy administration, Roger Hilsman reported that there was an "awkward silence" in the meeting after Mr. Mecklin finished.[47]

President Kennedy broke the awkwardness by praising the presentations of all four of the returnees from Vietnam. He then declared that he wanted another meeting of the Executive Committee on the following day at which he desired to hear proposals about what assistance program the United States could cut. The President stated that the aim was to put pressure upon Diem but have only a limited effect on the war effort against the Viet Cong.[48]

The Continuing Debate

On the evening of 10 September, a group of officials from various federal departments that administered some aspect of material assistance to the South Vietnamese government met to discuss what segments of aid could be cut to meet the guidelines set by the President. Among those present were Secretary McNamara, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Under Secretary Harriman, Generals Taylor and Krulak, Assistant

Secretary Hilsman, and McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Advisor. Robert Kennedy suggested that the idea was to come up with specific actions and not present the President with generalities or differences of point of view. This latter aspect was easier said than done. The existing fissures between the Defense and State Departments soon revealed themselves. Secretary McNamara began by stating that the United States had no alternative but to support President Diem and attempt to convince him to change his policies. He argued that the existing US policy was untenable: on one hand, "we were making it impossible to continue to work with Diem," and on the other hand, the United States had not established any alternative solution. The Defense Secretary proposed that "we start with a clean slate and review the problem in terms of our objectives." Under Secretary Harriman pointedly disagreed, stating that it was impossible "to start with a clean slate" in that the United States had "to operate within the public statements already made by the President."[49]

As the discussion continued about placing pressure on the Vietnamese government, Assistant Secretary Hilsman introduced an entirely new dimension into the debate. He declared that the State Department was considering a two-pronged program with the aim of "forcing" President Diem "to change his present policies." Whether influenced by the presentation of John Mecklin or by his own perceptions of the problem, the Assistant Secretary commented "that if we started down this path we would have to be prepared to contemplate the use of US forces on the ground in Vietnam." General Taylor immediately countered that was all the more reason "to work on Diem" and indicated "a reluctance to contemplate the use of US troops in combat in Vietnam, either against the Diem government or against the Viet Cong." McGeorge Bundy then proposed that Roger Hilsman should prepare two papers, one outlining the American objectives in Vietnam and the second "the pressures" that the United States could place on President Diem that could work.[50]

Interestingly, by 16 September Mr. Hilsman apparently had changed his mind about the use of American troops in Vietnam. In a draft contingency plan, the Assistant Secretary foresaw a possible Phase 4 in which the choice was either "military intervention or complete withdrawal from Viet-Nam." Given this situation, he rejected the intervention alternative, stating: "to fight a former ally could serve no useful purpose, since there would not exist a sufficient popular base of support of US objectives."[51]

Meanwhile, Ambassador Lodge had entered the debate over what the administration should do about support for President Diem and his government. After a fruitless discussion with the Vietnamese president on 9 September, the American Ambassador had become more and more disillusioned about the viability of the South Vietnamese government. In a message to Secretary Rusk, Ambassador Lodge pretty much agreed with the sentiments of Joseph Mendenhall rather than with those of General Krulak. He wrote that he did not question that the war appeared to be "going well" in the countryside, but from his own military experience in World War II and in the Army Reserve, he doubted "the value of the answers which are given by young officers to direct questions by generals." The Ambassador allowed that much of the opposition to President Diem

came from the elite in the cities but pointed out that most of the younger Vietnamese officers came from this same urban elite. He asserted that "time is not on the side of the military effort and that if the situation in the cities is not improved" it would have a deleterious effect on the Army. According to Ambassador Lodge, his own conclusion was that the situation was "worsening rapidly" and that the time had come for "the US to use what effective sanctions it has to bring about the fall of the existing government and the institution of another."[52]

The Lodge message caused a great stir in Washington. Because of the time difference, the Ambassador's cable arrived early on the morning of 11 September. McGeorge Bundy had discussed it with President Kennedy, who indicated that Lodge's analysis was the "most powerful" that he had read. The National Security Advisor telephoned Secretary Rusk to tell him that the Executive Committee should meet at 1800 and that the President would join them later. During their telephone conversation, Secretary Rusk stated that he had discussed the matter with Secretary McNamara. The latter had mentioned that he and General Taylor "just don't buy the assessment this is going to get worse and something serious must be done." Neither Secretary McNamara nor General Taylor agreed with Lodge's recommendations, but the Defense Secretary told Secretary Rusk that he would "mobilize his Department to accomplish this mission if the President decided to accept the Ambassador's proposals." Despite Under Secretary Harriman's assertion that the decision had been made, Secretary Rusk mentioned to Mr. Bundy that he had reservations, "because Lodge has not laid it out before Diem."[53]

At 1800 the Executive Council met as planned without either the President or Secretary McNamara present. There were, however the usual attendees from the White House; from the State Department, including the Secretary and Assistant Secretary Hilsman; and from the Defense Department, with Deputy Secretary Gilpatric taking the place of the Secretary, and Generals Taylor and Krulak representing the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Attorney General Kennedy was also present, as were representatives from the US Information Agency, the Agency for International Development, and the Central Intelligence Agency.[54]

Secretary Rusk presided over the meeting and opened with a review of the situation in Vietnam. He mentioned that they had received Ambassador Lodge's recommendations that morning. According to the Secretary, US officials in Saigon "were in the center of developments, and as a result, felt strongly about what they thought ought to be done." Secretary Rusk believed, however, that from the Washington perspective the occurrences in Saigon were "not a new situation." His message was one of caution. The council needed to be sure of its objectives in Vietnam and their "perimeters." Basically, the Secretary wanted to avoid the deployment of American troops to Vietnam. He agreed that "Nhu probably has to go," but this did not automatically mean "we had to turn against Diem." The Secretary maintained that there still remained a chance that they could persuade the Vietnamese president to exile his brother and his wife, although admitting that Ambassador Lodge had so far failed "to break through to Diem" and broach the subject. Still, Mr. Rusk thought that the Ambassador should continue to "wrestle with

Diem." He maintained that there were "several alternatives yet available" to the United States and argued "that the degree of urgency should be thought of in terms of weeks."[55]

The urgency of the crisis and the amount of pressure that the United States should place on the Vietnamese government dominated most of the remaining discussion. General Taylor and Assistant Secretary Hilsman held almost diametrically opposing views on both topics. The Assistant Secretary had prepared a preliminary draft of a paper that he had entitled "A Plan to Achieve US Objectives in South Vietnam," which he brought to the meeting. He claimed that his plan was still "merely a concept" but that it did outline certain actions that the United States could take. After studying his copy, General Taylor remarked that he did not believe that the suggested steps outlined by Mr. Hilsman would succeed in removing Ngo Dinh Nhu from the government.[56]

The general stated that he basically agreed with Secretary Rusk's observations that there was a need to look at the events in Vietnam "in historical perspective." Mr. Rusk had also noted that it was apparent that although the Buddhist protest may have started as a religious protest, it had now changed into a political movement. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff observed that very few governments would tolerate the protests of a "religious, political movement" during a civil war. He argued that the United States in its criticisms of the Vietnamese government "we should separate those things we must have from those things we would like to have from Diem." The general suggested that "we avoid pin pricks which serve to annoy Diem." Then turning to the subject of urgency, he claimed there was "none." Roger Hilsman at this point interjected that his sense of urgency was the same as that of Secretary Rusk's—it was a matter of "weeks and months," not days. There was no resolution on this subject by the time the committee ended this session to join the President, Under Secretary Harriman, and Secretary McNamara in the Cabinet Room of the White House.[57]

In the meeting with the President that evening, Secretary Rusk summarized the earlier discussion. He asserted that the committee agreed that Mr. Nhu symbolized all that was wrong with the Diem government. According to the Secretary, the United States still needed to be cautious in the steps it took against the Diem regime. He argued that if we moved "too fast" President Diem was very capable of bringing "the Vietnamese house down around him and go to North Vietnam for assistance, possibly with help from the French." Secretary Rusk mentioned in passing his concern that reacting to the "people in the field [probably a reference to Ambassador Lodge] who wanted to get on with the job" could be disastrous. The Secretary defended Assistant Secretary Hilsman's plan, which called for several minor actions, by claiming that it "would have an important psychological effect."[58]

Roger Hilsman then described his plan, which differed from that proposed by Ambassador Lodge, who wanted a suspension of all US material aid to the Vietnamese government. Mr. Hilsman's proposals would be more selective, and there was a general consensus that a non-discriminating suspension of aid would have a debilitating effect on the war effort against the Communists. The President agreed and asked that Assistant Secretary Hilsman provide him a copy of his plan. Mr. Hilsman explained that his

draft concept as it now stood was too vague and needed to be fleshed out. One idea that received unanimous approval was that contingency planning begin for a possible immediate evacuation of all US dependents. Secretary McNamara observed that, because of the numbers involved, such an operation should occur before any disorders broke out. General Taylor suggested that the withdrawal of the dependents be carried out in such a manner as to obtain a response from President Diem.[59]

President Kennedy asked the members of the Executive Committee for their opinions about the possible deterioration of the situation in Vietnam and its seriousness. Director McCone of the CIA replied that he estimated that "within three months" it would be serious. Secretary McNamara stated that he was not prepared to give an answer about the seriousness of the Buddhist unrest in Vietnam, but so far it had not interfered with the war effort. He remarked, however, that Ambassador Lodge wanted not only to cut aid to President Diem but also to oust Mr. Nhu and he was even "thinking of a new coup." According to the Defense Secretary, he and Secretary Rusk opposed such drastic steps and wanted a more cautious approach.[60]

President Kennedy concurred that they needed to be balanced in their attempts to influence the course of events in Vietnam. The President suggested that he write a personal letter to President Diem spelling out the US view on the actions of the Vietnamese government. The President contended this letter would allow Ambassador Lodge to make use of it to open up a dialogue with the Vietnamese leader. For the time being, President Kennedy wanted to defer any decision about aid cuts for a few days. At the same time, he desired to use a pending nonbinding resolution being introduced by Senator Frank Church of Idaho in the Senate calling for an end of US assistance to place further pressure on the Vietnamese government. The President ended the meeting by declaring, "we should tell Ambassador Lodge that we are considering his cable," but that it was necessary "to express our concerns to Diem and get a response from him." One problem that remained unresolved was how to deal with a planned trip to the United States by Madame Nhu that no one wanted.[61]

That night Secretary Rusk telephoned Roger Hilsman and told him that he was drafting "a fairly long discursive message to Lodge" relating to his own personal views about the tensions in Vietnam. At the same time, he told Mr. Hilsman to work on the "letter idea," apparently referring to President Kennedy's idea about a personal letter to President Diem. According to the Secretary, the President wanted to use that method "to get this fellow on board there [apparently referring to Diem rather than Lodge] through persuasion without at this stage a lot of other things that go along with it." In the meantime, Secretary Rusk also wanted Mr. Hilsman to prepare a preliminary message to the Ambassador relating to the decisions made at the Executive Committee meeting.[62]

By the next morning Secretary Rusk had completed his draft. He mentioned that he wanted to provide the Ambassador with his "thoughts" about the "voluminous and most helpful information" that the Embassy was providing. The Secretary repeated much of the argument that he had presented to the committee about the two different perspectives in

Washington and Saigon. He reminded the Ambassador that there were "outer limits" to the administration policy in Vietnam: The United States could not abandon the country to the Viet Cong but neither could it deploy large numbers of American forces to occupy and run the country. The Secretary told Ambassador Lodge that he agreed with the latter's "sense of urgency," but he did so in the framework of weeks rather than days. He diplomatically directed his Ambassador to "concentrate on Diem himself to make him see that everything he has been working for in the past ten years is threatened with collapse." Secretary Rusk concluded that this effort, if successful, would "be worth the tedious and frustrating hours which will undoubtedly be required to get through to him [Diem] and get him to carry out his own full responsibility."[63]

After completing his personal message to Mr. Lodge, Secretary Rusk approved the interim cable drafted by Roger Hilsman to the Ambassador. Basically the Assistant Secretary sketched out the Executive Committee decisions made the previous night. He directed Ambassador Lodge to "continue frequent conversations with Diem, although all recognize how frustrating these are." The message observed that the administration was "preparing plans for consideration highest level of variety of concrete moves we can make to give you additional leverage." Mr. Hilsman indicated that the Ambassador would receive a separate message from the Secretary on dealing with President Diem.[64]

At this point, however, Secretary Rusk decided to delay transmitting his own draft to Ambassador Lodge until he consulted with other members of the Executive Committee, which was to meet once more that evening. One reason for the delay was perhaps a message that had arrived from General Harkins overnight with his take on the crisis, which differed rather remarkably from that of Ambassador Lodge. The MACV commander agreed with developing an evacuation plan for dependents but advocated stopping at that stage unless the United States was willing to give up its interests in Southeast Asia. He claimed that the South Vietnamese were militarily winning the war against the Viet Cong. General Harkins claimed that Thich Tri Quang, who had received asylum in the US embassy, was more responsible for the present impasse than President Diem. In fact, the general claimed that the Communists were behind most of the street demonstrations by Buddhists and their allies among the students. General Harkins argued against taking "counsel in our fears" and advocated getting on "with the offensive."[65]

At the Executive Committee meeting in the early evening of 12 September, which included most of the members of the committee with the exception of the President, McGeorge Bundy presided and immediately made reference to the Harkins' message. He asked Director McCone about the probability that the Communists had thoroughly penetrated the protestors' ranks as General Harkins had charged. Mr. McCone stated that his agency had no definite evidence that this was the case. Secretary Rusk then observed that the Vietnamese government in any event would say that this was the case but also mentioned that the Communists had plenty of motivation to take advantage of the present upheaval. Defense Secretary McNamara ended this speculation by stating that he would ask General Harkins about the "factual background" for his conclusion.[66]

Secretary McNamara then asked what the United States wanted Diem to do. He suggested that the committee needed to make a list of its priorities, such as "relaxation of military law" and "removal of censorship." This discussion was followed by a review of the draft message that Secretary Rusk wanted to send to Ambassador Lodge. After reading the draft, National Security Advisor Bundy remarked that the Secretary's letter was "a major change in policy, from one of urgent action to one of restrained sequential steps." The committee was generally in agreement that such a revolutionary policy move should not be made over the weekend and that the Secretary's draft should be "restudied." For the meantime, the interim message already dispatched to the Saigon Embassy should suffice. Indeed, Mr. Bundy formally obtained the concurrence of the group that there was "no urgency for sending a major policy message to Ambassador Lodge" for a few more days.[67]

President Kennedy confirmed the decision to delay any decision in a personal cable to Ambassador Lodge. He noted that the Ambassador's last message was a "major paper and has stirred a corresponding effort to concert a proper response here." The President then remarked:

> Since it is one thing to talk of these matters and quite another to put them into effective step-by-step operation, we cannot make the big decisions until we have sorted out the staff work. The difficulties and intricacies which your message points out seem to be at least as bad as you think, so this process will take several days.[68]

The McNamara and Taylor Visit to Vietnam

During the next two weeks, an exchange of messages continued between Washington and Saigon, as did unremitting discussion among the presidential advisors. The rift between the Defense and State Departments persisted, with both sides having entirely different perceptions about the situation in Vietnam. In the meantime, the South Vietnamese government remained adamant in its relationship with the Buddhists despite some minor modifications in policy and resisted US efforts to mediate. Intelligence about progress in the war against the Viet Cong also was questionable. Although the odds appeared stacked against success, the latent possibility of a military coup by the South Vietnamese generals still remained.

Ambassador Lodge still retained his view that it was futile to discuss with President Diem the modification of his policy and his relationship with his brother. In response to the last message from Washington, he declared that he had "nothing new to bring up." He believed that at this point repetition of the same arguments would only appear to show weakness. Furthermore, the Ambassador complained that "visiting Diem is an extremely time-consuming procedure" and that he could better use his efforts in calling upon Cabinet members, who often provided valuable information. Ambassador Lodge also expressed fear that Diem's brother Nhu might be willing to negotiate with the North Vietnamese.[69]

Under Secretary Harriman in personal correspondence with the Ambassador complimented him on what he described as Lodge's "courage and incisive manner" in assuming his responsibilities. He explained the delays in responding to the Ambassador's latest dispatches. According to the Under Secretary, these were caused by what he called the "confusion" as a result of the very differing "estimates and conclusions" about the situation in Vietnam between the Ambassador and General Harkins. Averell Harriman assumed that the Ambassador was aware of the general's reports to Washington and suggested, "It might be helpful where you find yourself in disagreement if you would comment on the differences and explain why." Mr. Harriman observed that such explanations would prove "helpful" and perhaps indicate that these differences were not as stark as they appeared from a distance. Mr. Harriman asked that Mr. Lodge keep this note private and not refer to it in his reports and also suggested that the Ambassador could call upon him at any time if he needed assistance. The Under Secretary attempted to play down the policy disputes in Washington, stating that all were behind the effort to win the war despite "some differences in opinion or in emphasis as to how it is to be done, but there are no quitters here."[70]

It was very apparent, however, that the various factions in Washington were suspicious of one another since the 24 August message sent out in support of the planned coup by Big Minh and his fellow generals against the Diem regime. By 16 September Assistant Secretary Hilsman and his staff had presented to Secretary Rusk two alternative courses of action in Vietnam. One was based on a conciliatory policy toward the Diem government while the other was a combination of persuasion and pressure. In his covering letter, Roger Hilsman stated that he preferred the "'Pressures and Persuasion Track'" in that he did not believe the "'Reconciliation Track'" would work. He claimed that the latter required "a public posture of acquiescence" to the Diem government that would be fatal to American policy. Secretary Rusk had presented earlier drafts of Hilsman's proposals over the weekend to the President and the Executive Committee, which had met that morning.[71]

At the meeting, which included most of the principal members of the committee except for President Kennedy, the members deliberated over the two drafts. According to the minutes kept by General Krulak, Secretary McNamara suggested that the Committee adopt in part the "conciliatory program" as a basis for negotiating with President Diem. In a rump follow-on session that included only the two Secretaries, General Taylor, and McGeorge Bundy, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff afterwards told General Krulak that Secretary Rusk indicated that "he preferred the conciliatory" path and that he would have "a cable embodying these thoughts" drafted for the approval of the President. Assistant Secretary Hilsman later informed the Marine general, however, that the Secretary had directed him to prepare two alternative cables, one incorporating the conciliatory approach and the second, the pressure and persuasion policy.[72]

In the account in his memoir, Assistant Secretary Hilsman described the meeting as "merely a representation of the arguments—and the frustrations—of the previous meeting." He wrote, however, that at this time Secretary McNamara "proposed a visit

to Vietnam to 'get the facts'" by himself and General Taylor.[73] General Krulak's minutes made no mention of this proposal. In his account of the Vietnam War, Secretary McNamara hinted that the President suggested the visit the following day during a closed meeting involving only "his closest advisers."[74]

The President had called the meeting to determine the nature of the new instructions for Ambassador Lodge in view of the events of the last few weeks. This need had become even more pressing after the Ambassador, himself, had typed a personal letter on 13 September asking for a shakeup in the US intelligence organization in Vietnam. In the document, hand-delivered by messenger to Secretary Rusk to show to the President, Ambassador Lodge requested the replacement of the Vietnam country team's intelligence chief. The Ambassador later wrote that perhaps "unjustly" there was a belief that the man was "in touch with those who we are trying to replace and who, without ever meaning to be disloyal, do in fact neither understand nor approve of current United States policy." Mr. Lodge claimed that if his request had been approved, "the coup might have been pulled off."[75]

At the top-level conference on 17 September, the participants who met with the President were Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Under Secretary Harriman, National Security Advisor Bundy, and CIA Director McCone. Apparently at this meeting the President approved a new set of instructions for the Ambassador largely drafted by McGeorge Bundy but probably influenced by Michael Forrestal. In a memo to Mr. Bundy, Forrestal observed that Hilsman's Phase 1 was almost identical to McNamara's "policy of reconciliation," and suggested that the President adopt this policy without "embracing the GVN and trying to endorse its public image." Bundy's version of the final directive incorporated both the suggestion that Secretary McNamara and General Taylor visit Vietnam as well as a version of what Bundy now called Phase 1 of Track 2, "a final effort of persuasion and pressure short of a decision to dump the regime no matter what."[76]

Under Secretary Harriman and his allies disagreed strongly with the Bundy memorandum's reference to the proposal for the visit by Secretary McNamara and General Taylor. After receiving an advance copy from Mr. Bundy of his draft, Averell Harriman telephoned Michael Forrestal declaring that he and Roger Hilsman were "very much disappointed" with the document. He called the visit "a disaster." Mr. Forrestal agreed, stating that "it must have been added after he saw it." The Under Secretary described it as "sending two men opposed to our policy, plus one who wouldn't stand up, to carry out policy." The third member was apparently Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson.[77]

Assistant Secretary Hilsman's memory about the McNamara-Taylor visit still rankled when he wrote his memoir. According to Roger Hilsman, the President went along with the idea of the trip because he wanted to keep the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for his Vietnam policy. The Assistant Secretary believed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had little faith in President Kennedy's Vietnam policy, especially the importance of the political aspects of the struggle. Nevertheless, they had not "moved into open opposition" and the President "indicated that he had to keep the JCS on board, that the only

way to keep them on board was to keep McNamara on board—and that the only way to do that, apparently, was to let him go to Vietnam himself."[78]

Ambassador Lodge also was unhappy about the prospect of the forthcoming visit. In his response to the new instructions, the Ambassador observed that the arrival of the Defense Secretary and the Chairman could cause unforeseeable complications for him in his relationship with the Vietnamese government. He argued he would have to accompany them to meet with President Diem, which he believed would undercut his present effort to cause "a certain amount of apprehension" on the part of the Vietnamese government so that the president would ameliorate his policy and make some concessions to his political opponents. Instead, he declared, the arrival of the high-ranking US officials would have just the opposite effect. Ambassador Lodge noted as an aside that it would be impossible for Secretary McNamara and General Taylor at their level to separate military policy from political considerations.[79]

The reaction in Washington to Lodge's concern about the forthcoming visit was immediate. Under Secretary Harriman telephoned McGeorge Bundy on the morning of 18 September and asked how the White House planned to answer Lodge's message. According to Mr. Bundy, he and Michael Forrestal had talked to President Kennedy, who had some ideas that Mr. Forrestal was "putting into a draft reply." Basically, the President believed that they could "stage manage" the situation to prevent "any comfort" for President Diem and not "undercut Lodge." Mr. Bundy declared that there had been discussion about making the trip purely a military one rather than a joint mission. Averell Harriman took the occasion to observe rather pointedly that Under Secretary Johnson was "a fairly high fellow" in the State Department and, besides, that he was "a bit brainwashed by Nolting." In an obvious attempt to placate Under Secretary Harriman, the National Security Advisor stated that he would bring up the subject with Secretary Rusk and, "knowing" of the former New York governor's relationship with Roger Hilsman and Mr. Forrestal, that they would "have a representative if Mike [Forrestal] went on the trip."[80]

Less than twenty minutes after speaking to Mr. Harriman, Mr. Bundy phoned Secretary Rusk to provide him an update of the situation. He informed the Secretary that the President wanted to send a message to Ambassador Lodge that would provide the "best way of structuring the mission" so that it would address the latter's concerns. Secretary Rusk apparently agreed to withdraw Alexis Johnson from the mission entourage and said he would speak personally to Under Secretary Harriman about the subject. In concluding their conversation, Mr. Rusk observed that Lodge's unease about the McNamara–Taylor visit and its effect upon the Vietnamese government was "crucial to the whole business." Mr. Bundy mentioned that Secretary McNamara would prefer to meet with General Harkins in Hawaii but that the President "thinks you have to look at it to see it." The conversation ended with McGeorge Bundy agreeing that there would be no public announcement about the pending trip until they heard further from Ambassador Lodge.[81]

That afternoon, the White House sent out its response to the Lodge protest of the pending mission in the form of a personal message from President Kennedy. The President declared that he understood the Ambassador's problems with the proposed visit

but then insisted that his own "need" for McNamara's and Taylor's perspectives of the situation was "very great as well." He then added that, in his opinion, "we can work out an arrangement which takes care of your basic concerns." Again, the President emphasized that from Washington and from Secretary McNamara and General Taylor in Saigon the administration would make it clear to President Diem that he could not take "comfort" from the visit of the high-level American officials. While the stated reason for the mission was for consultation with the Ambassador on how best to carry out the administration's promise that the United States would support only those Vietnamese activities "which will support the war effort," the real motivation was the President's need:

> to make sure that my senior military advisers are equipped with a solid on-the-spot understanding of the situation, as a basis both for their participation in our councils here, and for the Administration's accounting to the Congress on this critically important contest with the Communists.[82]

There were also other reasons for the President's desire to send Secretary McNamara and General Taylor with a large support staff to Vietnam. He had received conflicting evidence about progress in the war from various official and unofficial sources, including the State Department, the Pentagon, and the intelligence community, and from Vietnam itself between the Embassy and MACV, let alone from the US press correspondents located there. Ambassador Lodge, himself, provided an excellent example when he responded on the following day, 19 September, to the President's last letter. While agreeing that there existed little chance of removing the Diem government, the Ambassador reported that General Big Minh told him that the Viet Cong "are steadily gaining in strength, have more of the population on their side . . . and that the 'heart of the army is not in the war.'" In another message Ambassador Lodge also quoted South Vietnamese Defense Minister Thuan, who "reportedly stated that the war was going badly."[83]

Such statements contrasted vividly with recent positive reports by Generals Taylor, Krulak, and Harkins about the morale of the Vietnamese Army and the battle situation. Addressing personally General Taylor, Admiral Felt, and General Krulak, the MACV commander derided various reports and news articles announcing that "Vietnam and our programs here are falling apart at the seams." General Harkins announced that he wanted to voice his strong dissent to this prevailing view. Like General Krulak, General Harkins asserted the difference between the countryside and the situation in the urban areas. He emphasized that the war against the Viet Cong was largely fought in the countryside and that South Vietnamese Armed Forces continued their operations without letup. Moreover, he claimed the RVNAF had either completed their buildup or were on schedule for completion. The MACV commander claimed that he was as "optimistic as ever, particularly on the military side." Indeed, the general claimed that there was reason for optimism on the political side as well, citing the recent lifting of martial law and some relaxation of press censorship, as well as an easing of curfews and the return of business as usual in Saigon. In contrast to Ambassador Lodge's report, the general

stressed that Defense Minister Thuan had regained his confidence and only "needed his batteries charged."[84]

The contradictory views coming from Vietnam, reinforced by mostly pessimistic press accounts from the American Saigon press corps, added to the Vietnam informational morass. This compounded the President's frustration with the American press and especially with David Halberstam of the *New York Times*. South Vietnamese press censorship had obviously relaxed, as mentioned by General Harkins, as the *Times* published on 15 and 16 September three dispatches by Mr. Halberstam. His article on the sixteenth especially irritated President Kennedy. The story concerned a so-called rift between Vietnamese officials and their American advisors about the expansion of the Strategic Hamlet Program, especially on the Camau Peninsula and in the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam's IV Corps. After reading the article that morning, the President sent a small note to Secretary McNamara: "How accurate is this story[?] Is there a split between our military and the Vietnamese on the strategic hamlets in this area[?]"[85]

Secretary McNamara turned the presidential inquiry over to General Taylor, who then assigned the drafting of the reply by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to an eager General Krulak. The two-star Marine general related that he was "all over this like a circus tent" and had actually started on this project before he even learned of the President's interest. In the resulting nineteen-page JCS analysis, the Krulak team denied the existence of a rift between the South Vietnamese responsible officials and their US advisors regarding the Strategic Hamlet Program. Furthermore, they argued that while there were existing difficulties in implementation of the program in the IV Corps area, the Strategic Hamlet Program in Vietnam was "nevertheless advancing slowly in a favorable direction."[86]

In transmitting the JCS appraisal of the Halberstam article to the President, Secretary McNamara reported that the Joint Staff agreed that the Halberstam article contained many errors in fact and in general misconstrued several of the South Vietnamese initiatives. The President had also received a supplementary report from the intelligence community that had analyzed the reporter's dispatches from Vietnam since June. In this second analysis, the anonymous intelligence officials wrote that Halberstam's reporting is "by and large accurate in terms of the facts." They, nevertheless, faulted the *Times* reporter for his conclusions and his interpretations that implied a "lack of objectivity." These reports may very well have influenced the President's futile attempt a few weeks later to convince the new publisher of the *New York Times*, Alfred O. Sulzberger, to transfer David Halberstam out of Vietnam.[87]

In addition to drafting the JCS reply concerning Halberstam's article, General Krulak was one of the principals in preparing for the McNamara–Taylor visit to Vietnam. In his usual organized, structured manner, Secretary McNamara held a meeting on 19 September with the senior members of the Defense Department delegation for the trip. These included, beside himself, Generals Taylor and Krulak, his military assistant Army Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Berry, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for

International Security Affairs William Bundy, who had transferred to Defense from the State Department. The Secretary announced that the purpose of the trip was to answer the question, "Can we win the war, plus collateral matter." He then expressed the view that no changes would have any effect with the South Vietnamese population "without a dramatic symbolic move" that convinces them "the reforms are real." Secretary McNamara argued that could only be done by a "visible reduction in the influence of the Nhus."[88]

Secretary McNamara then announced the schedule for the trip and specific assignments for each member of the group. They were to leave Washington on Monday, 23 September, and arrive in time for dinner on the 24th in Saigon. The team would remain in Vietnam for about a week, leaving on the eighth day for Hawaii. They would depart Honolulu on 2 October and return to Washington the following day. The Secretary then outlined the individual duties of each member of the team. For example, the Chairman was to draft the statement about the trip objectives and to obtain the recommendations of General Harkins. Among the duties of General Krulak and Assistant Secretary Bundy were the maintainance of the group's "Black Book," apparently the mission's journal.[89]

General Taylor turned to General Krulak to provide him the first draft of the mission's directive. Assistant Secretary William Bundy at the request of Secretary McNamara slightly revised General Krulak's initial text, which he discussed with his brother McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Advisor. After consultation with both Secretaries McNamara and Rusk, President Kennedy approved the final version on 21 September. In the memorandum, the President mentioned that despite progress in the war, "events . . . since May have now raised serious questions" about the course of the war and whether success was even possible until there was "important political improvement in the country." He declared that he needed right now "the best possible on-the-spot appraisal of the military and paramilitary effort to defeat the Viet Cong." President Kennedy went on to say that he realized the close interconnection between the "political situation and the military and the paramilitary effort." He, therefore, wanted Secretary McNamara to consult closely with Ambassador Lodge on political and social questions. Furthermore, if Secretary McNamara believed that the situation in Vietnam was "not hopeful," the President wanted "their views on what action must be taken by the South Vietnamese Government and what steps our Government should take to lead the Vietnamese to the action."[90]

On 21 September as well, both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor had contacted Saigon about their forthcoming trip. In a friendly message to General Harkins, the Chairman at first apologized about adding to the MACV commander's "endless stream of guests" but then explained "we need ability on return to give an eye-ball account of situation." He then observed that his itinerary "purposely avoids following General Krulak's route," as well as wanting not to form his opinion by "talking to same people as Krulak." General Taylor also declared that he wanted protection from long Vietnamese briefings during his stay in country. He also wanted to know from General Harkins not only if there was progress in the war but also the "data and indicators bearing . . . on rate of progress." In his reply, General Harkins invited the Chairman to stay with him. He

claimed that he was pleased by the visit and stated that "we hope to give you a blow-by-blow bird's-eye view of what's been done."[91]

Ambassador Lodge had been less welcoming to Secretary McNamara. In a message to Washington, the Ambassador had hinted that the Secretary and General Taylor delay their visit until after the planned South Vietnamese elections in October. Secretary McNamara responded that to reassure Congress and to have the "desired Congressional impact," their visit had to take place before 27 September. The Secretary noted that "no matter what we do" there would be accusations of interference. If necessary, they could make changes in the schedule after they arrived, but to report effectively on the military effort, his party required "extensive field trips."[92]

On the morning of their departure, 23 September, Secretary McNamara delayed the flight time a few hours so that he and General Taylor could attend a hurriedly called conference with the President.[93] At the meeting were Acting Secretary of State George Ball and McGeorge Bundy as well as President Kennedy. The President quickly signed the written instructions for the mission and then informally supplemented them with several oral comments. According to the minutes, the President advised the Secretary of Defense that the latter would probably find it necessary to meet twice with President Diem and to press the Vietnamese leader in pragmatic terms on the necessity of presenting a reform agenda. He warned Secretary McNamara against threatening the Vietnamese with cuts in assistance but to let a series of small "adjustments speak for themselves." The President also thought that General Taylor should "emphasize the affirmative decision of 1961" and contrast that hopeful scene "against the graver situation which has now developed."[94]

Furthermore, the Chief Executive expressed his concern about maintaining security against potential "leaks to the press." Finally, President Kennedy stressed to Secretary McNamara "the importance of getting to the bottom of differences in reporting from US representatives in Vietnam." At this point General Taylor suggested the development of "a time schedule within which we expect to get this job done and to say plainly to Diem that we were not going to be able to stay beyond such and such a time, with such and such forces, and that the war must be won in this time period." Apparently the President did not respond to this last suggestion. He did say, however, he would send the Embassy in Vietnam a personal letter addressed to President Diem, but that Secretary McNamara and Ambassador Lodge could use their discretion whether the letter should be delivered or not.[95]

The visiting group included, besides the representatives of the Defense Department, Michael Forrestal of the White House Staff, William Colby of the CIA, and William Sullivan of the State Department, who was Under Secretary Harriman's assistant.[96] Secretary Rusk, apparently after Harriman's protest, had substituted Mr. Sullivan for Alexis Johnson. The ill-feelings, however, between the Harriman group and the military continued to exist. On 23 September before leaving for Vietnam, Michael Forrestal telephoned the Under Secretary and inquired whether there were "any last minute instructions." Averell Harriman replied that it was necessary "to reserve State's position" in that the group could not speak for the State Department.[97]

Assistant Secretary Hilsman also continued what Defense Secretary McNamara years later described as a "rearguard" battle by "anti-Diem activists." On the departure day Roger Hilsman penned a "Dear Cabot" letter to Ambassador Lodge. He told the Ambassador that he was using "Mike Forrestal's safe hands" to deliver the missive to him. First, he wanted Ambassador Lodge to know that he believed that "more and more of the town is coming around to our view and that if you in Saigon and we in the Department stick to our guns the rest will also come around." According to Mr. Hilsman, Michael Forrestal would reassure him that "a determined group here will back you all the way." The Assistant Secretary doubted that President Diem and his brother Nhu would agree to the American suggested reforms and "that what we must work for is a change in government." He argued that the generals probably would be reluctant to act unless they received pressure from below. Mr. Hilsman believed that such pressure could be created by US disapproval of the government and selected assistance cuts. While Ambassador Lodge in his reply disagreed with the Assistant Secretary about the effectiveness of assistance reduction, he considered the American "silent disapproval" policy a very potent strategy, declaring he had "never realized before . . . how much attention silence could bring."[98]

By the time that the McNamara–Taylor group arrived in Vietnam on 24 September, the Secretary had given each individual a mission assignment complete with a list of people they were to see and suggested questions. During the ten-day mission the group members were to conduct these interviews, mostly outside of Saigon in the field with the exception of those members of the country team actually assigned to the capital. The Secretary declared that he wanted the group's final report completed before they arrived back in Washington. In fact, he wanted the bulk of the report "worked out in Saigon," with the final touches completed during the layover in Honolulu on the return trip. He assigned William Bundy to draft the report with the assistance of General Krulak.[99]

Both General Taylor and Secretary McNamara conducted interviews on their own with several individuals before they met with President Diem. The Secretary especially found unsettling a meeting with a "Professor Smith," whom he later in his memoir identified as P. J. Honey, a well-established British scholar known for his expertise on both Vietnams. Mr. Honey had long been identified as a supporter of President Diem, but in his conversation with Secretary McNamara he argued this was no longer the case. In this visit, the British expert stated that the president had "aged terribly since 1960." He claimed that President Diem and his brother Nhu were completely dependant upon one another and that there was no way that the Vietnamese president could survive without Nhu. According to Mr. Honey, the Diem government would "not last 24 hours without Nhu who handles the bribes and manipulates the power base," and of course Mr. Nhu needed Diem's prestige to operate. Given the current situation, the professor doubted that the regime as presently constituted could win the war against the Communist forces. According to Secretary McNamara, Honey's views carried "special weight" with him because the latter had been such a strong proponent of the South Vietnamese regime.[100]

Two other McNamara meetings also cast doubts about the survival capacity of the Diem government. The Roman Catholic Papal Emissary in Saigon told the Defense Secretary that the South Vietnamese government had lost the loyalty of much of the population and that if Mr. Nhu attained authority he would try to make an agreement with the Communists. The news was no better when the Defense Secretary spoke to the senior US intelligence officer, who also until very recently had been very supportive of President Diem and Mr. Nhu. According to this official, unless the United States could convince the president to get rid of Nhu in his administration, the military would most likely create a coup.[101]

While General Taylor confined himself largely to the military situation, which he believed still remained positive, he was less optimistic than General Krulak had been when he had returned from Vietnam earlier in the month. He believed that progress in the Strategic Hamlet Program had slipped and showed some major weaknesses, especially in the strategic Mekong Delta. He also had some doubts about the initiative of many of the South Vietnamese division and regimental commanders. General Taylor confined most of these views, however, to a personal letter to President Diem rather than to the final report.[102]

On 29 September the general received word that General Big Minh wanted to play some tennis with him that morning. Secretary McNamara joined them as a spectator. Both had the impression that the Vietnamese general had more on his mind than a game and had issued the invitation because he had some information to impart. If that were the case, both were disappointed. The Vietnamese general failed to respond to several hints "of our interest in other subjects" by both General Taylor and Secretary McNamara during breaks." Later, the Chairman learned that the Vietnamese general claimed he had no other motivation but to play tennis but would be receptive to discussing the military situation at any time with him.[103]

Before meeting a second time with General Minh, however, both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, accompanied by Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, finally had their long-awaited session with President Diem the afternoon of 29 September. As was his custom, President Diem conducted one of his two-hour rambling monologues covering the war and his policy views. While acknowledging shortfalls, he claimed that the Strategic Hamlet Program had created a "growing grass roots democracy" and was the basis of the strategy to defeat the Viet Cong. The Vietnamese president defended the necessity of maintaining some regular military units in some static defensive positions to protect vulnerable villages.[104]

After President Diem had ended his presentation, Secretary McNamara described the purpose of his visit. While it was the mission of his group to determine the course of the struggle against the Communists, he also wanted to express the displeasure of the United States with the South Vietnamese Government's handling of the recent political unrest. According to the American Defense Secretary, this repression of the Buddhists and students could "endanger the war effort and the American support for that government." After President Diem defended his policy, General Taylor reemphasized

the remarks of Secretary McNamara. He, too, mentioned "the very legitimate anxiety" in the United States about the South Vietnamese Government's actions that required a positive response from President Diem. He remarked that the Vietnamese president should not "have missed the point that Secretary McNamara's remarks were a carefully thought-out and deliberately expressed statement of US disapproval and concern." The Chairman emphasized that these were the strong views of both the State and Defense Departments as well as President Kennedy.[105]

Despite these remonstrations by the visiting Americans, President Diem appeared to be unmoved. According to the minutes of the meeting, "His manner was one of at least outward serenity and of a man who had patiently explained a great deal and who hoped he had thus corrected a number of misapprehensions." Everyone then retired for a formal dinner hosted by the president.[106]

By 1 October both General Taylor and Secretary McNamara had completed most of the fact-finding aspects of the mission. The Chairman, however, decided to make a courtesy call upon General Big Minh on this date to obtain the Vietnamese general's candid perspective of the state of the war. In fairly blunt terms, General Minh told the American that the outlook was not good. He believed differences between the Buddhists and the Catholics were based on the effort of each to obtain "special privileges." The Vietnamese senior commander contended that the issue had not yet become a factor in the armed forces but feared its spread into military society. According to General Taylor, General Minh complained about the lack of a viable chain of command in the military and what he termed a "divided responsibility" between military commanders and provincial officials. General Taylor concluded that "General Minh sees his country in chains with no way to shake them off."[107]

During the return flight on 2 October, the Secretary and General Taylor put the final touches on their report. In their conclusions the two agreed that the "military campaign has made great progress and continues to progress." They, nevertheless, admitted that political tensions continued to exist, especially in Saigon, and that if the Diem government continued its repressive actions, these "could change the present favorable military trends." While the report contained the argument that the chances of a successful coup appeared unlikely at present, the Secretary and Chairman observed that the political unrest still existed and could grow if the Diem government did not moderate its ways. Secretary McNamara and General Taylor believed there was little probability that the South Vietnamese Government would change its policies unless pressured by the United States to do so. Even then the Secretary and Chairman were unsure that such pressure would work. Still, the two authors argued that unless the Americans forced the issue, President Diem and his brother Nhu were "almost certain to continue past patterns of behavior."[108]

Among their various recommendations, the Secretary and the Chairman basically suggested the United States adopt a variation of what Assistant Secretary Hilsman had referred to as the "Pressures and Persuasion Track." In somewhat of a reversal of their previous advocacy of a reconciliation strategy with President Diem, the two now suggested "a policy of selective pressures." This would involve continuing Ambassador

Lodge's "purely correct" relationships with the South Vietnamese government at the very top level, withholding actions in the commodity import program, and obviously signaling American disapproval of the Diem regime. Furthermore, despite their opinion that conditions currently made the prospects of a coup very dim, they held that the United States should allow the general impression to remain that it would not be "adverse" to a possible change in the government. In general, however, both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor maintained that the chances were about even that a replacement government would not be any improvement over Diem's regime. Still, as Secretary McNamara wrote and repeated in his memoir, "Our policy should be to seek urgently to identify and build contacts with an alternative leadership if and when it appears."[109]

As it turned out, one of the most controversial aspects of the report was the recommendation proposing the withdrawal of 1,000 US advisors by the end of the year. Secretary McNamara and General Taylor believed that with the establishment of a program to train Vietnamese to take over the functions now performed by US military personnel, the United States could remove the bulk of the American force presently in Vietnam by the end of 1965. As a sign of the growing capacity of the South Vietnamese armed forces and the improving progress in the war, the two argued, "the Defense Department should announce in the very near future" its plans to reduce its military strength in Vietnam by 1,000. This proposal, together with their somewhat muted tone in the report, made it obvious that their mission had political overtones above and beyond providing a general military overview. As General Taylor had admitted candidly to President Diem, part of the purpose of their trip was to convince Congress, and through Congress the American people, to continue their support of the Kennedy Vietnam policy.[110]

According to Secretary McNamara, they arrived back in Washington in the early morning hours of 2 October and somewhat later met with the President for about an hour. In their debriefing by the President, Secretary McNamara mentioned their proposal for the withdrawal of the 1,000 advisors, which took up a large portion of the discussion. In his memoir he quotes himself declaring, "I think Mr. President we must have a means of disengaging from this area, and we must show our country that means."[111]

The Defense Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff returned to the White House that evening to attend a special meeting of the full National Security Council. In this conference, according to Robert McNamara, the question of the withdrawal of the advisors once more was the center of the discussion. In the Defense Secretary's opinion, the members of the committee basically divided into three groups. The first group argued that the South Vietnamese had made great progress in the war and that the training of the Vietnamese forces had reached the point where the United States could begin to withdraw some of its troops. According to the second faction, the South Vietnamese had shown only limited improvement both in training and in fighting the Viet Cong. Still, they supported withdrawing because the United States had been in Vietnam to obtain results that, if not achieved by now, would probably not be "because of political instability." Finally, according to Secretary McNamara, the third faction, which included the majority of the committee, argued that the United States had not been in Vietnam

long enough to obtain the desired results and needed to retain the present strength of its forces there. After a lengthy debate, the President, according to Mr. McNamara, endorsed the recommendation of the report for the redeployment of the 1,000 men.[112]

At this point, the Secretary immediately proposed that the President include publicizing this decision in an official release about the McNamara and Taylor mission. According to the Defense Secretary, his motivation was to put the President's decision into "concrete," so as to discourage those members who might attempt to convince President Kennedy to reverse himself later. The official minutes of the meeting revealed the Secretary argued the need for publicly announcing the withdrawal "to meet the view of Senator Fulbright and others that we are bogged down forever in Vietnam." According to Secretary McNamara, another result would be that it would show that the administration actually had a plan to leave that country eventually. At the suggestion of the President, who did not want to commit himself to any specific number or time period, the public release merely stated that Secretary McNamara and General Taylor believed that the training of the Vietnamese had progressed enough that by the end of the year the United States could bring out 1,000 American troops.[113]

According to the minutes of the conference, the President emphasized the need for unity within the administration on Vietnam policy. He suggested that with the McNamara and Taylor report, there was a general consensus that there had to be a change in "the political atmosphere in Saigon." While there would be no complete suspension of economic assistance to the Diem regime, there would be selected cuts until President Diem made the necessary reforms. President Kennedy ordered that there be no disclosure to the press about specific measures that were being considered to place pressure on the South Vietnamese government. Secretary McNamara recommended that the Executive Committee convene to recommend to the President how these proposals could be carried out. After agreeing to the Secretary's suggestion, the President insisted that the members of the council convey to their subordinates that there were "no differences between Washington and Ambassador Lodge or among the State and Defense Departments." Such unity, however, remained much easier to express than to accomplish.[114]

Despite the President's plea, views continued to harden. For example, on the following day, Under Secretary Harriman's assistant, William Sullivan, who had been a member of the mission, wrote Assistant Secretary Hilsman that he had reached the conclusion that the "ultimate objectives of the United States . . . do not coincide with the Diem-Nhu objectives." He therefore suggested that the administration should "make common cause" with the South Vietnamese establishment "to overthrow the current regime."[115]

From 3 to 5 October the presidential senior advisors continued to meet to discuss the specific recommendations made by Secretary McNamara and General Taylor. At one of these subsidiary sessions, Secretary McNamara made the point that the United States could not be neutral much longer relative to the internal disputes in South Vietnam. He argued that the suggestions by himself and General Taylor would either "push us toward a reconciliation with Diem or toward a coup to overthrow Diem." The Secretary mentioned that for approximately four months the political situation would have little effect

on the war effort. Secretary McNamara believed that the Executive Committee should draw up a list for Ambassador Lodge and ask him which of those recommendations he believed President Diem would accept. According to the minutes of the committee, the group agreed that the administration should explain to Congress that the United States was "not suspending aid but were putting Diem on a shorter leash which would mean that we have greater flexibility to deal with the developing situation in Vietnam."[116]

On 5 October the Executive Committee met with President Kennedy to discuss a report drawn up by a subcommittee headed by General Krulak recommending procedures to place political pressure on the Diem government. After much "heated discussion," according to Secretary McNamara, the President approved the McNamara–Taylor recommendation that the United States should take no action "to encourage actively a change in government [in South Vietnam]." He also directed that the Krulak memorandum serve as a basis for the revised instructions that were to be sent to Ambassador Lodge.[117]

In these instructions, Ambassador Lodge, as he considered necessary, was to continue his official coolness toward the South Vietnamese government, indicating American displeasure with President Diem until the regime made the desired political improvements. On the other hand, the Ambassador was to keep in mind that at some time he "may have to go to Diem to ensure he understands over-all US policy." Moreover, President Kennedy wanted General Harkins to deal directly with President Diem and the Vietnamese General Staff to bring about the changes in the military establishment that General Taylor and Secretary McNamara recommended in their report. In their advocacy of military and political reforms, the Ambassador and General Harkins were not to consider them as "a hard and fast list of demands," but rather as suggestions to improve the political and military capabilities of the Vietnamese government.[118]

At the same time that the State Department issued its new instructions to Ambassador Lodge, General Taylor signed off on the new directive drafted by General Krulak to both Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, the new commander of the Pacific Fleet, and General Harkins. In the message, dated 5 October, the Chairman informed both commanders that the President had approved his and Secretary McNamara's recommendations concerning the Vietnamese military. He specifically ordered General Harkins to review with President Diem and the "appropriate" military officials changes in the campaign plans against the Viet Cong. These included the goal for the South Vietnamese military to complete the clearing out of the communist forces in the northern three Corps areas by the end of 1964 and in the Mekong Delta region in southern IV Corps by the end of the following year.[119]

Accordingly, the new instructions called for a "shift of military emphasis and strength to the Delta," while at the same time maintaining an increased tempo in all sectors. There was also to be a renewed concentration on "clear and hold operations" as opposed to general sweeps. Simultaneously, the South Vietnamese were to provide added impetus to the training of local militia and a consolidation of the Strategic Hamlet Program in the countryside, especially in the Mekong Delta area. Part of the renewed planning effort called for the withdrawal of 1,000 US military personnel by the end of

1963, which should "be treated in low key." Finally, the Chairman called for MACV to establish a series of "checkpoints" to monitor South Vietnamese progress on a quarterly basis. According to the Chairman, these reports would "provide the basis for continued leverage on the GVN to maintain the required rate of progress."[120]

The Fall of Diem

Despite the President's approval of the McNamara-Taylor suggestions and his call for administration unity, much of the situation in Vietnam and in his administration was beyond his ability to control. The group centered about Under Secretary Averell Harriman, while obeying the presidential dictums, still continued to have their doubts about the Diem administration and were ready to advocate a change of policy whenever the opportunity presented itself. The President, himself, had his own qualms about US policy but was not ready to act upon them. As one historian observed, President Kennedy seldom took "any firm decision before he absolutely had to."[121] This attribute allowed subordinates great latitude in carrying out US policy relative to Vietnam and especially permitted Ambassador Lodge to wield great influence as the senior American official in Vietnam. The differences between US officials in the State Department and those in the Defense Department both in Vietnam and in Washington continued to harden. This was especially true in the relationship between General Harkins and Ambassador Lodge.

Much of the strain between the two was based upon how each interpreted their directions from Washington. As a major political figure in his own right as well as being the senior US official in Vietnam, both the President and Secretary Rusk allowed Ambassador Lodge a great deal of latitude in his dealings with the South Vietnamese government. President Kennedy added to the potential for further complications in a separate top secret directive to Ambassador Lodge in addition to the latter's official instructions. In this second message, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy relayed a presidential decision that the United States would not encourage any coup effort, but at the same time authorized the Ambassador to provide "broad guidance" of an "urgent covert effort . . . to identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership." Furthermore, Ambassador Lodge alone in the Embassy had the authority to issue instructions concerning this mission. The Ambassador interpreted this new order as a "command" to keep this matter from US military advisors so as not to distract the military advisory effort from its primary mission. Apparently the Ambassador also reserved to himself how much he needed to confide in General Harkins on the subject, which resulted later in an embarrassing misunderstanding with the Vietnamese military.[122]

Although initially satisfied with the set of instructions he had received, Ambassador Lodge soon had reservations. While on 6 October he called them "excellent,"[123] the following day he sent a message that he had begun to have second thoughts. The Ambassador specifically referred to suggestions about restricting the role of the Nhus, which he called "unrealistic" for several reasons about which he expounded in great detail.

Three days later, on 10 October, Ambassador Lodge reported to the State Department about rumors of possible assassination attempts by the South Vietnamese government against senior US officials in Vietnam including himself. Exasperated by the resistance of the Diem regime to US calls for reform, renewed Vietnamese harassment of US journalists, and the continuing influence of the Vietnamese president's brother Nhu and his wife, the Ambassador's attitude toward the government hardened. In fact Mrs. Nhu, against the advice of Ambassador Lodge and the US Government, was on a speaking tour in the United States, which the administration largely handled by ignoring her.[124]

In Washington, President Kennedy continued to receive favorable reports on the military situation from the Pentagon in contrast to Ambassador Lodge's complaints about the political atmosphere in Vietnam. US intelligence sources further blurred the overall interpretation. For the most part, American intelligence largely agreed with Generals Taylor and Harkins about progress in the war. On the other hand, these same intelligence reports included information about continuing dissatisfaction within the Vietnamese General Staff with the political regime and about the possibility of another coup.[125]

In early October Vietnamese Major General Tran Van Don informed an American intelligence official that the Vietnamese generals now had a new coup plan and wished to make contact with US officials. In a subsequent meeting on 5 October, General Duong Van "Big" Minh, the Vietnamese senior commander, declared he was not asking for outside assistance but wanted assurance that the United States would "not attempt to thwart this plan." The general understood that the American representative was not in any position at the present to make any agreement, but he stated that he would contact the American at a later time.[126]

At this point, Ambassador Lodge consulted with General Harkins and reported to Washington that he and the general agreed that they had little faith in the ability of Big Minh to carry out a coup. According to Mr. Lodge, they recommended, nevertheless, that the United States reassure the Vietnamese general that it would not interfere and agree to review the plans.[127] Despite his initial doubts about the viability of the Vietnamese coup plans, and perhaps egged on by his growing frustration with the Diem regime, the American Ambassador became more receptive to drastic measures. In a message to Washington he suggested a high-level official, possibly McGeorge Bundy, come to Saigon to discuss a new concept which contained "new ideas" which could not "be properly handled by telegram or letter" and required a face-to-face meeting. When told that Mr. Bundy could not make the trip, the Ambassador suggested that he go to Washington for a day. The administration agreed to a possible three-day conference with Ambassador Lodge in Washington at the end of October or early November.[128]

By 14 October President Kennedy decided that he needed more information on the situation in South Vietnam in order to determine US policy in view of the conflicting reports he was receiving, especially from the State and Defense Departments. In a message on that date to Ambassador Lodge, he wrote that he required closer coordination between the Embassy and Washington. The President directed the Ambassador to provide him with a weekly report that answered four specific questions. These were:

1. Are we gaining or losing on balance and day by day in the contest with the Viet Cong?
2. Is the government responding at any point to our threefold need for improvement in (a) campaign against VC, (b) internal political developments, and (c) actions affecting relations with American people and Government?
3. What does the evidence suggest on the strengthening or weakening of effectiveness of GVN in relation to its own people?
4. And more specifically, what effect are we getting from our own actions . . . and what modifications in either direction do you think advisable?[129]

While the President was looking for clarification in both the political and military aspects of the Vietnam War, this was becoming more and more difficult given the diverse viewpoints and goals within his administration. A special assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Joseph W. Neubert, in a memorandum to Assistant Secretary Hilsman, perhaps best described the difficulties in melding a coherent administration Vietnam policy given the existing bureaucratic impulses. While conceding that the various agencies had agreed on the "graduated pressure" strategy to be used on the Diem government, he observed that the various goals, which included progress in the war, popular support for the Diem regime, and improving relations between the United States and Vietnamese governments, were "mutually incompatible."[130]

According to Mr. Neubert, despite their claims of "unity," the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the military each had "interests [that were] necessarily disparate" in Vietnam. He believed that Director of Central Intelligence McCone and the majority in the Pentagon feared that the US political and economic pressure on the Vietnamese would very "unlikely redound to our benefit" and would more probably result in a weak "alternative government." Joseph Neubert indicated that Mr. McCone and Secretary McNamara and General Taylor would probably argue that the Communist Viet Cong would then be "in the best position to exploit the chaos that could ensue." As far as the State Department stance, Mr. Neubert concluded, "we may have rapidly increasing difficulty in inducing the rest of the town to live with the untidiness that we at least have fully expected to accompany pursuit of our present policy." He remarked, "unless we can effectively refute . . . that our present course is tending toward 'an explosion,' we are going to have to assert . . . that such an explosion is to our benefit." He was in hopes that when Ambassador Lodge arrived at the end of the month he might be able to expound a plan "in which we can, in fact, insure than any 'explosion' is exploitable to our advantage."[131]

Given the general consensus that the South Vietnamese Army and militia were winning or at least holding their own against the Communist forces, others in the State Department began to question the Defense Department's comparative statistics on the South Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong. Whether based upon Neubert's memorandum or on his own initiative, in October Assistant Secretary Hilsman asked the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, now headed by Thomas L. Hughes, to prepare an independent statistical analysis of the subject. According to Louis Sarris, an analyst in the bureau at that time, the Assistant Secretary, during a briefing on

the Vietnam situation, expressed concern about the effect of the political crisis on the military situation. A few days later Mr. Sarris received from Mr. Hughes the assignment to prepare the "analysis of the military situation in South Vietnam."[132]

On 22 October Hughes forwarded the resulting research memorandum to Secretary of State Rusk. Based upon Defense Department reports from the Defense Intelligence Agency, General Krulak's Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities, and MACV field reports, the State Department analysis concluded: "Since July 1963, the trend in Viet Cong casualties, weapons losses, and defections has been downward while the number of Viet Cong armed attacks has been upward." Moreover, the report contained the statement that its comparison with earlier periods indicated "that the military position of the Government of Vietnam may have been set back to the point it occupied six months to a year ago." The report made the point that "these trends coincide in time with the sharp deterioration of the political situation."[133]

As could be expected, the report caused a great administrative furor and resulted eventually in Secretary McNamara personally telephoning Secretary Rusk to rescind the report. Secretary McNamara based his request on a JCS three-page review of the State Department document, probably prepared by General Krulak. In their analysis, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the State Department made "a broad military judgment of a complex combat situation, derived from a survey of a limited number of factors in a limited period of time." While Assistant Secretary Hilsman wrote an extensive memorandum to Secretary Rusk defending the Intelligence and Research Bureau's statistical finding, the Secretary decided to accede to the Defense Department on the matter. In a short note to Secretary McNamara, Dean Rusk confirmed that it was "not the policy of the State Department to issue military appraisals without seeking the views of the Defense Department" and that such future memos would be "coordinated" with the Pentagon.[134]

As far as the accuracy of the appraisal, perhaps Ambassador Lodge's comment about Vietnam statistics to President Kennedy is valid in this case. In one of his first weekly reports under the new guidelines enunciated by the President on 14 October, the Ambassador addressed the problem of presenting a coherent description of the status of the war as follows: "a thoroughly responsive answer to this question requires one to strike a balance between a multiplicity of often contradictory military, political, social, and economic 'facts'—any one of which can be used to prove almost anything."[135]

Ironically, on 22 October, the same day as the issuance of the State Department intelligence report, the differences concerning support for the Diem government between US military and civilian officials in both Saigon and Washington were about to come to a head. On that date General Harkins called upon General Don, the South Vietnamese Chief of the Joint General Staff, and expressed concern that one of Don's staff officers had asked a MACV officer to support a planned coup against the government. The MACV commander told General Don that this "was the wrong time to stage a coup because the war against the Viet Cong was going well."[136]

On the following day, when Ambassador Lodge learned about the conversation with General Don, he discussed the matter with the MACV commander, who explained that his purpose was to "discourage" any attempt to involve US officers in Vietnamese politics. At that point the Ambassador reminded General Harkins about the latest directions from Washington about Vietnamese military coup plans. According to Ambassador Lodge, General Harkins replied that his understanding was that the United States was opposed to a coup. The Ambassador responded that, while not wanting to initiate a coup, the latest "high level" orders were "not to thwart any change of government which gives promises of increasing the effectiveness of the military effort." Ambassador Lodge recalled that "General Harkins expressed regret if he had inadvertently upset any delicate arrangements in progress." Later that night a US official explained to General Don that "Harkins remarks had been inadvertent and were actually contrary to a presidential guidance from Washington."[137]

General Harkins, however, in a message to General Taylor had a different view of the entire episode. According to the MACV commander, he discussed the Don episode with the Ambassador but did not see Lodge's account to Washington until after it had been sent. General Harkins disagreed with Lodge's version that he had "contravened our instructions on coup planning." He admitted that he had spoken to General Don about the matter of the Vietnamese officer approaching a member of his staff and that the Vietnamese general told him that "he thought he had stopped all that." General Harkins maintained that until he had seen an account of his meeting with General Don he had not realized that the "Generals group was again in business." While claiming not to be trying "to thwart a change in government," he suggested the need "to take a good hard look at the group's proposals." The MACV commander feared that unless all the military factions were united that there would be continual upheaval, which would "interfere with the war effort." In a follow-up message the next day to General Taylor, General Harkins observed that the discrepancy in the accounts that he had seen was "how the interpretation of what was actually stated gets put down on paper." He then went on to declare that in a telephone conversation with General Don he had told the latter that he "would not discuss coups that were not my business though . . . [he] had heard of many."[138]

In Washington, on 24 October, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy in a message addressed to both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins expressed some administration concern about the Vietnamese coup plans and specifically about the role of General Don. Mr. Bundy indicated that some officials in Washington worried that the Don overture may have been an entrapment ploy by Ngo Dinh Nhu to ferret out those officers who may be susceptible to coup attempts. Others were bothered that the various discussions with General Don might involve Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins "in an operation which is difficult to deny." In any event, the National Security Advisor maintained, "we do feel quite strongly that you and General Harkins should stand back from any non-essential involvement in these matters." Despite this warning, Mr. Bundy declared that Washington needed Lodge's "personal assessment of Don's own status, the

group he represents, and whatever plans they may have for the future." Furthermore, he asked that the Ambassador "maintain close control over the meetings" between General Don and US representatives.[139]

Despite Bundy's attempt to smooth things over, the battle lines in Washington had begun to form along the same old lines: McNamara and Taylor as opposed to Harriman, Forrestal, and Hilsman. Responding to General Harkins' account of his meeting with General Don, General Taylor cabled that "your actions in disengaging from the coup discussion were correct."[140] In contrast, Under Secretary Harriman in a telephone conversation told Michael Forrestal that he "was concerned about Harkins action." He then went on to say, "we should try to get our ducks in a row before Lodge arrives."[141]

In the meantime, on 25 October Ambassador Lodge responded to Bundy's memo concerning the Washington unease about the coup discussions. He maintained that he had complete control of the secret fact-finding meetings between his emissary and General Don. According to Ambassador Lodge, the Vietnamese were reluctant to provide more information out of fear that their plotting would be "prematurely revealed." The Ambassador claimed that the United States had received assurances that the general's group would provide the Embassy with its plans two days before any coup attempt.[142]

Despite his initial doubts about the seriousness of the coup planning effort, Ambassador Lodge had come almost full circle. He informed the National Security Advisor that his "best available evidence," incomplete as it was, indicated that the generals were genuinely working "to effect a change in the government." The Ambassador discounted the theory that Ngo Dinh Nhu was behind the movement. There was little doubt that Ambassador Lodge had basically lost faith in the Diem government. He provided two reasons for not attempting to thwart a coup. First, he believed that "the next government would not bungle and stumble as the present one has." His second was that it "was unwise in the long range for us to pour cold water on attempts . . . particularly when they are just in their beginning states."[143]

In answering the Ambassador's cable, McGeorge Bundy continued to caution him against any hasty moves. While praising Ambassador Lodge for the additional information, the National Security Advisor mentioned that there remained in the President's mind the dangers of an unsuccessful coup, especially since the United States would be blamed no matter "however carefully we avoid direct engagement." Mr. Bundy, nevertheless, ended his message with the statement that the United States should not attempt to thwart a coup, "we would like to have option of judging and warning on any plan with poor prospects."[144]

In the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were much more concerned about the Ambassador's reports from Vietnam. On 28 October General Taylor vented his frustrations about the relationship between General Harkins and Ambassador Lodge in a memorandum to Secretary McNamara. He especially took exception to the guidelines presented to Mr. Lodge and MACV about not thwarting any coups as ill-defined. General Taylor argued that the Ambassador and MACV should accumulate intelligence but avoid contacts with the plotters. Furthermore, the Chairman believed that in his

reports the Ambassador was presenting a one-sided view of the military situation in Vietnam without consulting General Harkins. At a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with Secretary McNamara on that date, they agreed that the Chairman should ask General Harkins about the "apparent lack of effective communication between himself and Ambassador Lodge."[145]

On the following day, 29 October, General Taylor cabled General Harkins about the latter's relationship with Ambassador Lodge. He cited the apparent misunderstandings that should not have occurred. The Chairman remarked that this lack of harmony hampered the necessary cohesion required to defeat the Viet Cong. General Taylor then referred to the conflicting reports from MACV and the Embassy. He asked the general pointedly: "Are we correct in believing that the Ambassador is forwarding military reports and evaluations without consulting you?"[146]

Quick to take the hint, the MACV commander responded the next day, stating that he had been thinking about sending a message to General Taylor about the same matter and that he shared the same concerns. In a second message that followed, General Harkins provided several instances in which the Ambassador had changed the tenor of MACV reports on the military effort in Vietnam. He quoted and took exception to several instances of the Ambassador's comments on military matters, such as: "one cannot drive as much around the country as one could two years ago"; that the Viet Cong were stronger than they had been in the past; "that hatred of the government has tended to diminish the Army's vigor"; and finally, "we at present are not doing much more than holding our own."[147]

By the time Ambassador Lodge departed Vietnam for the high-level meeting in Washington, the emphasis was not on progress against the Viet Cong, but the possibility of a coup. On the afternoon of 29 October the Executive Committee convened to discuss the agenda for the conference with Ambassador Lodge. Speaking for the State Department, Secretary Rusk argued that if the United States failed to support the generals behind the coup planning, they would "turn against us and the war effort will drop off rapidly." Attorney General Kennedy countered, however, declaring that most likely the plotters would once more lose their nerve, as they had in August. Both General Taylor and Director McCone agreed with the Attorney General. According to General Taylor, "even a successful coup would slow down the war effort because the new central government would be inexperienced."[148]

While his advisors continued to disagree, President Kennedy at two meetings on 29 October, one of the full Executive Committee and a later one of a smaller rump group, made a few vital decisions. He agreed with McGeorge Bundy's suggestion that the Defense Department provide a special transport aircraft to Vietnam so that the Ambassador could delay his scheduled departure date. At the same time, the President approved a proposal that in the absence of Ambassador Lodge, General Harkins would assume control of the full US mission in Saigon if a coup occurred. Interestingly, Secretary McNamara, probably contrary to the opinion of General Taylor, had argued that the Ambassador should determine who would remain in control of the mission in

his absence since General Harkins had been left out of the loop on the plotting by the generals.[149]

According to the final instructions sent to the Embassy on 29 October, the President confirmed that General Harkins would assume command of the US mission during a coup if the Ambassador were unavailable. Otherwise, while Ambassador Lodge was in Washington, his assistant, William Trueheart, would be in control according to the traditional protocol. In the meantime, both Henry Cabot Lodge and General Harkins, either jointly or separately, were to provide Washington information on the estimated strength of both those military forces that would remain loyal to President Diem and those that would probably join a coup against him. Furthermore, the Ambassador was not to encourage any plot that was not unlikely to succeed.[150]

The intelligence in Washington indicated that the military units accessible to the plotters probably lacked the overwhelming strength necessary to overthrow the loyalist forces. This well may have provided impetus for the new instructions. In any event, Ambassador Lodge, in a carefully crafted reply, took strong exception to the recommended changes. While acknowledging the validity of having as accurate as possible an estimate of the likelihood of the success of a possible coup, he disagreed with the contention that the United States had any practical chance "to delay or discourage" one. Furthermore, he believed the Washington military estimates ignored certain sources available to the Embassy that showed a much greater number of units available to the rebels, including those that would join the revolt once it began.[151]

Ambassador Lodge also protested the order for the turnover of overall command authority of the US mission in Saigon in the event of his absence to General Harkins. Ambassador Lodge said that he failed to understand the rationale for this decision. He argued that it made little sense "to have the military in charge of a matter which is profoundly political as a change in government." [Ambassador Lodge apparently conveniently ignored the fact that it would be the Vietnamese military that would be making the change.] He attempted to make the point that he was speaking only on principle and not on personal terms, claiming that "General Harkins is a splendid general and an old friend of mine to whom I would gladly entrust anything I have."[152]

Finally, the Ambassador, while objecting to interfering against a possible coup, recommended that he be authorized to assist the rebels against the government under certain circumstances. Henry Cabot Lodge suggested that he use possible funds to buy off any potential opposition to the rebels if "we are convinced that the proposed coup is sufficiently well organized to have a good chance of success." In response to those in Washington who doubted the will and ability of the Vietnamese generals to carry out their planned uprising, he responded that "these men are obviously prepared to risk their lives and that they want nothing for themselves." As a final sop to the caution expressed by the Washington authorities, the Ambassador wrote, "If we were convinced that the coup was going to fail, we would, of course do everything we could to stop it." Ambassador Lodge ended his message with the observation that General Harkins had read this message and did "not concur" in his views.[153]

Indeed, the MACV commander, in his own messages to General Taylor on 30 October, actively disagreed with Ambassador Lodge's argument. As well as complaining about Lodge's observations on the military situation, General Harkins dissociated himself from the Ambassador's opinions about the capability of the generals' group to carry out a successful coup and create a government capable of winning the war against the Viet Cong. While admitting the need for some changes in the Diem regime, General Harkins cautioned that there was a need to take a "hard look" at who would make up any new government before making any decisions. Furthermore, he argued that in his "contacts here, I have seen no one with the strength of character of Diem . . . in fighting Communists. Certainly there are no Generals qualified to take over." He urged that "we not try to change horses too quickly. . . . We have backed Diem for eight long years," and the United States should not now "kick him around, and get rid of him."[154]

In a follow-up message later that day, General Harkins specifically explained to General Taylor his non-concurrence with the Ambassador's account. He declared that when he previously stated that he was "out of the coup business, I did not realize I was going to be out of touch." Complaining that the Ambassador had not shared with him any of the information about the negotiations with the generals' group, he declared that he did not believe the United States had enough knowledge about the coup plans. While acknowledging that the plotters declared that it would be a "purely Vietnamese" endeavor, the MACV commander observed that the Americans would "be involved whether we like it or not." He believed:

> we should go along with only a sure thing . . . or continue to go along with Diem until we have exhausted all pressures. The prestige of the US is really involved one way or the other and it must be upheld at all costs.[155]

In Washington, President Kennedy called a meeting of his senior advisors to discuss both Lodge's protest over the new directions and the very apparent differences of opinion between the Ambassador and General Harkins about the existing situation in Vietnam. The group consisted of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor from the Defense Department, Secretary Rusk and Under Secretary Harriman from State, Director of Intelligence John McCone, and McGeorge Bundy and Michael Forrestal from the White House Staff.[156] The strong differences between State and the other agencies remained. According to Averell Harriman, the Defense Secretary "was indignant" that Ambassador Lodge had ignored General Harkins' opinions on the status of the Vietnam military situation. The Under Secretary doubted the competency of the MACV staff and defended Ambassador Lodge by stating that "Harkins' assessment . . . [was] not accurate."[157]

According to historian David Kaiser, this meeting was the first time that the President and his advisors frankly had confronted the diverging assumptions of the situation by their senior military and political representatives in Saigon. General Taylor and Secretary McNamara brought the cables from General Harkins to the White House meeting. In reviewing the cables from both the Ambassador and the general, the meeting participants understood that the Vietnamese generals had very little trust in the American military,

believing that they were too close to the Diem regime. Quoting from an oral history tape of the conference, Mr. Kaiser wrote that President Kennedy observed that the Ambassador "was much stronger for [the coup] than we are . . . for very good reasons." The President, however, went on to say, "I admire his nerve, not his prudence." President Kennedy then contrasted Lodge's statement with Harkins' cautionary one of favoring a change in "governing rather than . . . personnel." It was very obvious from the course of the discussion that the President had reservations about Lodge's enthusiasm to support the coup effort. Still, Secretary Rusk and McGeorge Bundy expressed the opinion that despite the fact of a possible "failed coup, the chances were 'very high' that the United States could not succeed without 'a real change in the [Vietnamese] government.'"[158]

The President remarked that Joseph Alsop, a columnist who had just returned from Vietnam, had told him that "Nhu was now hopeless." Intelligence Director McCone added to the general pessimism, reporting that the latest intelligence suggested that the possibility of victory over the Viet Cong was more tenuous.[159]

Still, given the lack of agreement among his senior advisors, the President decided again to hedge on his options. He once more emphasized in the reply to the Ambassador the administration's concern about being too hasty to support the generals' group. In the cable sent by Mr. Bundy to Ambassador Lodge late that afternoon, the National Security Advisor tactfully observed that there was "a significant difference of shading" between the views of the Ambassador and Washington. More bluntly, he declared that the administration did not accept Lodge's contention that "we have no power to delay or discourage a coup." McGeorge Bundy stated that "conviction of absolute failure" of a coup was too narrow a definition to guide the Ambassador's actions and that the latter should oppose "any operation which, in your best judgment, does not clearly give high prospect of success." Still, although he was to share his information with General Harkins and the senior US intelligence officer in Vietnam, the Ambassador would remain the sole decider to determine the feasibility of a specific plot.[160]

Before ending his cable, Mr. Bundy told Ambassador Lodge that the administration remained "sensitive to great disadvantage of having you out of Saigon," referring both to a possible coup and his pending return for consultation in Washington. If a coup occurred during Lodge's absence, General Harkins was still to become the head of the country team. Nevertheless, the Ambassador had available to him a military transport aircraft and Mr. Bundy urged him to "keep open" the date and time of his departure. In his reply to his new instructions, Ambassador Lodge merely stated, "Thanks [for] your sagacious instruction. Will carry out to best of my ability."[161]

Actually, by 31 October the probability of a coup had increased. In a message to the State Department, Ambassador Lodge wrote about "a provisional analysis" of coup reports that indicated "dissident officers have been slowly getting together, establishing contacts with other groups, and by evolutionary process this now appears to be congealing primarily behind the generals."[162] It was obvious as well that the plotters remained hesitant to confide in American officials in spite of their promise to provide the Embassy ample notice of the timing of any uprising.

The Ambassador continued to delay his own plans for departing Saigon from 31 October to a later indefinite date. On the morning of 1 November he and Admiral Felt, who was in Saigon on an inspection trip, met with President Diem. In the past few days, the Vietnamese president had appeared to be more amenable to American demands. President Diem had discussed his government's policy with the US Ambassador on 29 October after asking Ambassador Lodge to call upon him. Although the Ambassador found no new initiative on that occasion, at the meeting on 1 November President Diem asked him to remain behind after other participants had departed. According to Ambassador Lodge, the president then told him:

> Please tell President Kennedy that I am a good and a frank ally, that I would rather be frank and settle questions now than talk about them after we have lost everything. I take all his suggestions very seriously and wish to carry them out but it is a question of timing.[163]

In reality, time had run out for President Diem. Shortly after 1300, General Harkins notified Washington that General Don had called Major General Richard G. Stilwell of the MACV staff to tell him that the "Generals were assembled . . . and were initiating a coup." In an interview, the MACV commander several years later remembered that the coup actually took place shortly after Admiral Felt's aircraft took off from Tan Son Nhut, Saigon's airport, about 1400. According to Harkins' account, he radioed the admiral and told him, "the airfield's closed. Don't try to come back because they're having a coup."[164] Although Diem's presidential guard put up a heavy resistance through the night, the president and his brother Nhu fled the palace through a secret passage and took sanctuary in the Cholon suburb of Saigon. At dawn the next morning, they contacted the generals and offered to surrender in return for safe passage out of Vietnam. Probably on orders from General Minh, the Vietnamese Army guard that was to return them to military headquarters shot and killed both Nhu and Diem. Somewhat callously, Ambassador Lodge remarked to David Halberstam, "What would we have done with them if they had lived? Every Colonel Blimp would have made use of them."[165] President Kennedy showed more sensitivity, commenting on the coup that he had been "shocked by the death of Diem and Nhu." He called President Diem an "extraordinary character," who despite becoming "increasingly difficult in the last months . . . held his country together. . . . The way he was killed made it particularly abhorrent."[166]

At the same time that President Kennedy commented on the death of President Diem, he also reviewed the US role in the coup. According to President Kennedy, he believed that "we must bear a good deal of responsibility . . . beginning with our [August] cable." The President stated that the "wire was badly drafted; it should never have been sent on a Saturday." He declared that he was at fault in that he should have withheld his consent until his senior advisors, including Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, had discussed the text. While later messages may have "redress[ed] that balance," he observed, "that first wire encouraged Lodge along a course to which he was in any case inclined."[167]

The President then mentioned the divisions in his administration both in Washington and in Saigon about continuing support of the Diem regime. He noted that in Washington, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor both opposed encouraging a coup attempt, as did John McCone "to a somewhat lesser degree . . . because of an old hostility to Lodge . . . [and] partly because Lodge . . . shifted his Station Chief." President Kennedy then recorded that those who favored overthrowing President Diem included "State led by Averell Harriman, George Ball, Roger Hilsman, supported by Mike Forrestal at the White House." In Saigon, the same division existed between the Embassy and MACV. While Ambassador Lodge remained sympathetic to the plans of the generals, General Harkins "continued to oppose the coup on the ground that the military effort was doing well." The President observed, however, that at the end both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor backed additional pressures on President Diem because they feared the growing political tensions in Vietnam would eventually cause a deterioration in the military situation.[168]

For all of President Kennedy's talk about Vietnam and a small wars counterinsurgency strategy, the truth of the matter was that the greater part of his administration's concern during his presidency was on the US rivalry with the Soviet Union over Berlin, Cuba, and the threat of nuclear war. In fact, even during his commentary on the Vietnam situation following the coup, the President at the end mentioned, "we have . . . another test in the Autobahn," presumably with either the East Germans or the Russians over access to Berlin.[169] In Southeast Asia, President Kennedy and his advisors spent more time on the war in Laos between the Communist Pathet Lao on one side and the Royalists and eventually the neutralists under Souvanna Phouma on the other. Completely unrelated to Vietnam, in one of history's strange coincidental ironies, President Kennedy himself would be the victim of an assassin's bullet twenty days after the death of President Diem.

14

Conclusion

One major factor that characterized the Kennedy administration from the very beginning was the frustration of the President and most of his senior civilian advisors with the military establishment, especially with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was especially true after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, despite the fact that the Joint Chiefs of Staff played only a very minor role in the planning of that operation. The President believed strongly that they had failed in their responsibility as his senior military advisors by providing only a cursory review of those plans. President Kennedy's appointment of then-retired General Maxwell Taylor as his personal military advisor was a very obvious sign of his displeasure.

When it came to the crisis in Vietnam in November 1961, President Kennedy turned to General Taylor and to Walt Rostow of his White House Staff for a solution. In fact, the Joint Chiefs of Staff played only a minor role in developing policy for Vietnam. Most of their contingency planning in Southeast Asia related to Laos and only incidentally to South Vietnam. This planning viewed South Vietnam largely as a staging area for operations in Laos or to mount an offensive into North Vietnam. As late as the summer and fall of 1963, the plans developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff remained relatively limited. They referred to air strikes against North Vietnam and possible support of South Vietnamese operations in North Vietnam, as well as the three contingency plans discussed in the previous chapter relating to "large scale civil disorder" in South Vietnam.

For the most part during the Kennedy administration the individual Chiefs were more concerned with interservice rivalries, respective missions, new equipment procurement, and implementing the various reforms ordered by Secretary McNamara. Although the Army had the lead role in the advisory effort in Vietnam, its primary center of attention was Europe and the Russian threat to West Berlin. While the Air Force experimented with advising the fledging Vietnamese Air Force in its support of the Vietnamese counterinsurgency campaign, the main focus of Air Force headquarters remained on its strategic air mission. The Navy's foremost concern was with Asia rather than Europe, but like the Air Force, it was concerned with the development of new

equipment and expanding its nuclear surface and underwater fleets. Although the Navy had a small advisory group with the diminutive Vietnamese Navy, its main responsibility was to use the Marines to provide amphibious backup to the various contingency plans involving US forces in Southeast Asia.

The Marines also formed part of the Naval Advisory Group as advisors to the Vietnamese Marine Corps and supplemented the US Army helicopter support to the Vietnamese Army and Marine Corps. However, General David Shoup, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, remained skeptical of the US role in Vietnam. A Marine member of the US Joint Staff as a lieutenant colonel, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons more than two decades later recalled reporting to the Commandant that he had succeeded in obtaining an increase in the Marine contribution to the US Vietnam advisory effort. To his surprise, the hard-bitten Shoup replied, "Simmons, what makes you think that I want to put any more Marines into Vietnam? . . . We don't want to piss away our resources in that rat hole."[1]

Despite the Commandant's dissent, Marine Major General Victor H. Krulak played a key role in the administration's oversight of its Vietnam policy. As a matter of fact, during the hectic period from August through November the only representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to participate in most of the National Security Council's heated discussions on Vietnam were General Taylor, the Chairman, and Major General Krulak. General Krulak in his role as the Special Assistant for Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities for the Joint Staff eventually assumed much of the Washington oversight of MACV. Both General Taylor and Secretary McNamara relied upon General Krulak to monitor the progress of MACV and the Vietnamese Armed Forces in the war against the Viet Cong. During the Kennedy presidency, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor used the periodic Honolulu conferences supplemented by Krulak's reports to keep informed about Vietnam. Still, like President Kennedy, McNamara's and Taylor's other responsibilities often diverted them from close attention to Vietnam except for times of emergency.

This allowed General Krulak to have much more influence upon events than his title and rank would indicate, not because he made policy, but because he validated the policy of the policymakers. McGeorge Bundy observed that when Michael Forrestal sent out the White House cable on 24 August authorizing support for a possible coup, Mr. Forrestal coordinated his activities with the Joint Chiefs of Staff through General Krulak. In his account of the Vietnam War, Roger Hilsman described General Krulak, nicknamed the "Brute" because of his short stature, "as intelligent and ambitious . . . personable . . . and very sophisticated and knowledgeable about the Far East." Assistant Secretary Hilsman then went on to say that the Marine general knew very well "where his natural allies lay, and he hewed closely to the views of the senior officers in the Pentagon." Thus, Krulak in his reporting tended to reinforce the accepted views of the Pentagon and MACV as opposed to those of the Harriman and Lodge group in the State Department.[2]

The relationship between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Kennedy administration was the result of a complex interplay of forces. These included personality clashes,

differing concepts about the nature of war, interservice rivalry, the McNamara reforms based upon system analysis techniques, budgetary considerations, and the vogue of counterinsurgency theory among many of Kennedy's civilian advisors, all of which affected the conduct of the Vietnam War. Moreover, one cannot discuss the war without considering the situation in Laos, the nature of the Cold War, and US relations with the Soviet Union, Cuba, and China as well as with its allies in SEATO and NATO. All of these factors were part and parcel of the American effort to preserve an independent South Vietnam and the eventual deployment of US combat forces to that embattled country. This was not the result of any one step, however, but the result of many little steps, often taken reluctantly by the administration. While the presence of General Taylor as Chairman ameliorated somewhat the relations between the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the rift between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their commander in chief would become even stronger after Kennedy's death and the succession of Lyndon Johnson to the presidency. The piecemeal and hesitant commitments to South Vietnam would continue to exacerbate the differences between the new President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that had developed with President Kennedy.

Acronyms

AID	Agency for International Development
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, and United States
AP	Associated Press
ARPA	Advanced Research Projects Agency
ARVN	Republic of Vietnam Army
BLTs	battalion landing teams (US Marine)
BNSP	Basic National Security Policy
CAT	Civil Air Transport
CG	Civil Guard
CGFMFPAC	Commanding General, Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific
CHJUSMAG	Chief, Joint US Military Advisory Group
CI	Counterinsurgency
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief, Pacific Command
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COMUSMACV	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
COPROR	Committee on Province Rehabilitation (US)
COSVN	Central Office of South Vietnam
CPSVN	Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam
CRC	Control and Reporting Center
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DOD	Department of Defense
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FAL	Laotian Armed Forces
FAR	Forces Armées Royal
FY	Fiscal Year
GVN	Government of Vietnam
HMM	helicopter medium squadron (US Marine)

HUS	Seahorse Helicopter, Utility, Sikorsky
ICC	International Control Commission
ICSH	Interministerial Committee on Strategic Hamlets
ISA	International Security Affairs
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JOC	Joint Operations Center
JSCP	Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan
JSOP	Joint Strategic Operations Plan
JTF	Joint Task Force
LPH	amphibious assault ship (helicopter)
LSD	landing ship dock
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAP	military assistance program
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MTF	Multinational Task Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCP	National Campaign Plan
NDU	National Defense University
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (Soviet)
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	National Security Council
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OCB	Operations Coordination Board
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PEO	Program Evaluations Office
PL	Pathet Lao
PLAF	People's Liberation Armed Force
POL	petroleum, oils and lubricants
PPBS	planning-programming-budgeting system
R&D	research and development
RCT	regimental combat team (US Army)
RLG	Royal Laotian Government
RLT	regimental landing team (US Marine)

RVNAF	Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam
SACSA	Special Assistant for Counter Insurgency and Special Activities
SDC	Self Defense Corps
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
SVN	South Vietnam
TERM	Temporary Equipment and Recovery Mission
UN	United Nations
USIA	United States Information Agency
USMACV	US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
USOM	US Operations Mission
VC	Viet Cong
VM	Viet Minh

Principal Civilian and Military Officers

President and Commander in Chief	
John F. Kennedy	20 Jan 61–22 Nov 63
Lyndon B. Johnson	22 Nov 63–20 Jan 69
Special Assistant to the President (National Security Affairs)	
McGeorge Bundy	20 Jan 61–27 Feb 66
Secretary of State	
Dean Rusk	20 Jan 61–20 Jan 69
Secretary of Defense	
Robert S. McNamara	20 Jan 61–29 Feb 68
Deputy Secretary of Defense	
Roswell L. Gilpatric	24 Jan 61–20 Jan 64
Cyrus R. Vance	28 Jan 64–30 Jun 67
Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs)	
Paul H. Nitze	29 Jan 61–29 Nov 63
William P. Bundy	29 Nov 63–14 Mar 64
John T. McNaughton	01 Jul 64–19 Jul 67
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff	
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 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
Chief of Naval Operations	
Admiral Arleigh A. Burke	17 Aug 55–01 Aug 61

Admiral George W. Anderson	01 Aug 61–01 Aug 63
Admiral David L. McDonald	01 Aug 63–01 Aug 67
Chief of Staff, US Air Force	
General Thomas D. White	01 Jul 57–30 Jun 61
General Curtis E. LeMay	30 Jun 61–31 Jun 65
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
Director, Joint Staff	
Lieutenant General Earle G. Wheeler, USA	01 Apr 60–24 Feb 62
Vice Admiral Herbert D. Riley, USN	25 Feb 62–23 Feb 64
Lieutenant General David A. Burchinal, USAF	24 Feb 64–31 Jul 66
Commander in Chief, Pacific	
Admiral Harry D. Felt	31 Jul 58–30 Jun 64
Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp	30 Jun 64–01 Aug 68
Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command	
General Thomas S. Power	01 Jul 57–01 Dec 64
General John D. Ryan	01 Dec 64–01 Feb 67
Commander in Chief, Strike Command	
General Paul D. Adams, USA	09 Oct 61–01 Nov 66

Notes

Chapter 1. Vietnam and the Eisenhower Administration

1. The Joint Chiefs consisted of a Chairman and initially three Service Chiefs: the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Since June 1952, as a result of Public Law 412, the Commandant of the Marine Corps sat in on meetings of the JCS on matters relating to the Marine Corps. Eventually, by custom, the Commandant sat in on most meetings of the JCS. The Appropriations Authorization Act of 1979 made the Commandant a full-time and equal member of the Joint Chiefs.

2. The Geneva Protocols, however, prevented them from seeking membership in the alliance.

3. Byron R. Fairchild and Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, vol. 7 (Washington: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2000), p. 4, hereafter Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–60*. For other references to the JCS and the NSC, see also Lawrence J. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington, Ind. Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 7, hereafter Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*; Office of Joint History, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1949–1999* (Washington: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2000), pp. 7–9, hereafter JCS, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*; and H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty, Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), pp. 5 and 13, hereafter McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*.

4. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 109.

5. JCS, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 11.

6. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, p. 31.

7. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, pp. 95, 105–06. Bradley is paraphrased on page 95.

8. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 34. See also JCS, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, pp. 67–68.

9. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, p. 2.

10. JCS, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, pp. 11–17; Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, p. 42. See also endnote 25, p. 240.

11. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 104.

12. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 11–12. NSC 5602/1 is reprinted in Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955–57*, vol. 19, pp. 242–68.

13. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, p. 13.

14. Ibid., p. 17.

15. Ibid., p. 19.

16. Quoted in ibid.

17. JCS, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 14.

18. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 18–22.

19. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, p.13. McMaster quotes and paraphrases the Arleigh Burke transcript.

20. Ibid., pp. 13–14; Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 5–7.

21. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 5–7.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 21.

25. Ibid., pp. 22–23.

26. Ibid., p. 21.

27. Ibid., p. 24.

28. Ibid. See also Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 5–7.

29. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, p. 8.

30. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 105. See also Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 8–10.

31. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 94.

32. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 28–29.

33. Ibid., p. 42. According to the authors, Eisenhower expressed the opinion to his Secretary of Defense that Lemnitzer, unlike Taylor, "would prove to be another man like Twining who, once a decision had been made, did not try to undercut it by appealing to Congress or the media."

34. Ibid., p. 24.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., p. 27.

37. Ibid., p. 28.

38. JCS, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 70.

39. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 153–60, and Jack Shulimson, *Marines in Lebanon, 1958* (Washington: History and Museums Division, HQMC, reprinted 1983), passim.

40. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 209–15.

41. Ibid., p. 228. See also JCS, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, pp. 78–79.

42. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, p. 228.

43. JCS Memorandum on "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Communist Aggression in Southeast Asia," reproduced in *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967*, Study Prepared by the Department of Defense (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office (GPO), 1971), Book 12, hereafter *Pentagon Papers*, p. 488, quoted and cited in Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, pp. 149 and 202.

44. JCS Memorandum on "Studies with Respect to Possible US Action Regarding Indochina, May 26, 1954," in Neil Sheehan, Hendrick Smith, E. W. Kenworthy, and Fox Butterfield, *The Pentagon Papers: Secret History of the Vietnam War as Published by the New York Times*, p. 44, hereafter *The New York Times Pentagon Papers*, quoted in ibid. p. 150.

45. NSC 5429/2, Review of US Policy in the Far East, 20 Aug 1954, *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 736–37. See also Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1983), p. 228, hereafter Spector, *Advice and Support*, and Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," MS, 16 Jun 1972, pp. 18–19, hereafter JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959."

46. Dept of State, *American Foreign Policy, 1950–1955: Basic Documents*, v. 1:913, quoted in Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 229. See also the Appendix, "The Evolution of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization," in JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 257–293.

47. Arthur Radford, Chairman, JCS, Memorandum for SecDef, 19 Oct 1954, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 771–74. See also discussion on training decision of Vietnamese troops in Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 228–30, and JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–59," pp. 55–62.

48. Interview with Andrew J. Goodpaster, quoted in Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 232. See also "The Collins Mission," chap. 3, JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 55–90 for further discussion of the Collins mission.

49. NSC 5429/5, 22 Dec 1954, *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, p. 837.

50. Annex A in ibid., pp. 851–52.

51. JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," p. 27. See also David Kaiser, *American Tragedy, Kennedy, Johnson, and The Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA:. The Belknap Press of Harvard, 2000), hereafter Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 13–14, for discussion of NSC 5429/5.

52. Arthur Radford, Chairman, JCS Memorandum for SecDef, 21 Jan 1955, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 862–63. See also JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 86–87.

53. J. Lawton Collins, Special Representative in Vietnam, to SecState, 20 Jan 1955, vol. 10, *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 865–68. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 247–48; JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 87–88. For the Hinh affair see "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 29–34,

54. See ibid., pp. 91–116, and Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 243–49.

55. JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 117–18. See also Dept of State msg, Paris to SecState, 8 May 1955, in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 959–66.

56. Adm. Arthur Radford, memo to SecDef, 9 May 1955 in ibid., pp. 971–73.

57. Memo, BGen C. H. Bonesteel, Defense Member, NSC Planning Board, n.d., in ibid., p. 975.

58. JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 119–20.

59. Ibid., pp. 123–26. See also James S. Lay, Executive Secretary, NSC, Memo for the NSC, Subj: US Policy on All-Vietnam Elections, 13 Jun 1955, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, p. 984. A copy of the Planning Board draft is reprinted in Dept of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–57*, vol. 1, Vietnam, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1985), Doc 190, pp. 410–11, hereafter *FRUS, 1955–57, Vietnam*.

60. JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 123–28. Quote is from Embassy of Vietnam, Washington, DC, Press and Information Service, 22 Jul 1955, as quoted in Chester A. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade, America in Vietnam*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co, 1970), p. 149.

61. Gen. N. F. Twining, USAF, Chief of Staff, for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Memo for the SecDef, 9 Sep 55, Subj: US Policy in the Event of a Renewal of Aggression in Vietnam, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1002–15, hereafter JCS Memo for SecDef, 9 Sep 55. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 268–72 and Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 14–15. The Twining Memo refers to a Dept of Defense memo dated 19 Aug 1955 for the origins of the JCS study, apparently as a result of an NSC action. Both Kaiser and Spector state that the request to the JCS originated with the NSC Planning board, which Kaiser implied occurred in June 1955, while Spector states that the request occurred in August. The August date is most likely in that it probably would not have taken the JCS three months to respond to a request from the National Security Council.

62. Ibid.

63. Memo, JCS for SecDef, 9 Sep 55, pp. 1003 and 1006. General Twining does not indicate why he signed the memo except to state that JCS Chairman Radford "did not participate in the action . . . outlined in this memorandum." Ronald Spector in his history observes that the US Army Staff also continued to work on contingency plans to counter North Vietnamese aggression. Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 270–71.

64. JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," pp. 138, 179–81.

65. Ibid., pp. 206–07.

66. Paper Presented by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Radford) at the 287th Meeting of the National Security Council, 7 Jun 56, reprinted in *FRUS, 1955–57*, Vietnam, pp. 703–09; p. 703, hereafter Radford Paper, 7 Jun 56. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 271, and JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," p. 208.

67. Radford Paper, 7 Jun 56, pp. 705–06.

68. Ibid., pp. 705–07.

69. Memorandum of Discussion at the 287th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, 7 Jun 56, Doc 332, in *FRUS, 1955–57, Vietnam*, pp. 695–703.

70. Ibid., p. 700.

71. Ibid., pp. 698–99, 701–02. According to David Kaiser, this meeting of the NSC "was apparently the last time the NSC discussed specific military plans for Southeast Asia until early 1961. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 18.

72. Telegram from the Chief of Naval Operations (Burke) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Stump), 30 May 56, Doc 328, *FRUS, 1955–57*, Vietnam, pp. 687–88. Until 1958, the Navy Department was the executive agent for the Pacific Area. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the 1958 law took the individual Service Departments out of the chain of command between the President, Secretary of Defense, and the Unified Commands.

73. Msg, CINCPAC to CNO, 1 Jun 56, Doc 329, *FRUS, Vietnam*, pp. 689–91.

74. According to Ronald Spector, Williams received his nickname "because of his insistence on stern punishment for a child rapist in a regiment he commanded." Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 275.

75. Msg, Chief MAAG, Vietnam, to CINCPAC, 4 Jun 56, Doc 330 in *FRUS, 1955–57, Vietnam*, pp. 692–93.

76. Msg, Chief MAAG, Vietnam, to CINCPAC, 7 Jun 56, Doc. 334 in *FRUS, 1955–57, Vietnam*, pp. 709–11.

77. Ltr, Chairman, JCS to CINCPAC, 14 Jun 56, Doc. 335 in *FRUS, 1955–57, Vietnam*, pp. 712–13.

78. Ibid. The editors of the *FRUS* volume note that they could not find the draft copy of the CINCPAC plan. See note 5, p. 712.

79. Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 272.

80. JCS, "War in Vietnam, 1954–1959," p. 208.

81. Ibid., pp. 208–09. See also Note by the ExecSec, NSC, 5 Sep 56 in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, p. 1082.

82. Statement of Policy . . . Mainland Southeast Asia, 5 Sep 56, in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1083–95.

83. Ibid., pp. 1093–94.

84. US Policy on Mainland Southeast Asia, 2 Apr 58, *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1113–33.

85. Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960*, pp. 16–17. See also discussion in earlier section and in Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 18–19.

86. US Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia, 25 Jul 60, *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1281–97.

87. Memo, JCS for the DepAsstSecDef for NSC Affairs and Plans, 14 Jul 59, *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, 1211–35.

88. Ibid., p. 1284, and Fairchild and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–60*, p. 24. See also discussions of BSNP in the previous section.

89. William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), p. 495, hereafter Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*.

90. Ibid., pp. 495–96, 498–99.

91. Ibid., pp. 508–09, quote is on p. 513.

92. Ibid, p. 510.

93. "A Party Account of the Situation in the Nam Bo Region of South Vietnam, 1954–1960," quoted in ibid.

94. Tran Van Giau, "Great Strategic Effects of the Guerrilla War in South Vietnam through Ten Years of Armed Struggle," quoted in Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 510.

95. Ibid., p. 511.

96. The resolution is reproduced in part in ibid., p. 511.

97. Robert S. McNamara et al., *Argument Without End, In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy*, (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), p. 431, n. 28, hereafter McNamara et al., *Argument Without End*.

98. McNamara et al., *Argument Without End*, p, 73.

99. US Embassy, Saigon, Despatch 278, 7 Mar 60, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, p. 1254, hereafter Saigon Despatch 278, *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, p. 1254.

100. Msg, USARMA Saigon CX 9 to ACSI, 27 Jan 60, DA IN 279039.

101. Despatch 278, *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, p. 1254.

102. Hearings before State Dept Organization and Public Affairs Subcommittee of Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 86th Cong, 1st Sess (1959), p. 118; ltr, Sen. Mike Mansfield to LTGEN Samuel W. William, Chief of MAAG, Vietnam, 5 May 60, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1276–77.

103. Msg, Ch, MAAG, to OSD/ISA, 20 May 60, containing Williams ltr to Sen. Mansfield, reprinted in ibid., pp. 1279–80, hereafter Williams ltr to Mansfield. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 259–62.

104. Williams ltr to Mansfield and Saigon Embassy 2525 msg to Dept of State, 27 Feb 60. See also Spector, *Advise and Support*, p. 361.

105. JCS 1992/791, 30 Mar 60; Note to Control Div JCS 1992/791, 25 Mar 60 msg.

106. JCS 974802 to CINCPAC 30 Mar 60, JMF 9155.3/4060 (15 Feb 60).

107. NIE 63–59, 26 May 59, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1190–95.

108. Ibid. See also Paper (Basic Counter-Insurgency Plan), Prepared by the Country Team Staff Committee, Saigon, 4 Jan 61, reproduced in Dept of State, *Kennedy Years*, vol. 1, *Vietnam, 1961–63*, hereafter Basic Counter-Insurgency Plan, *FRUS* online.

109. Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 335. Citing John C. Donnell, *Viet Cong Recruitment: Why and How Men Join*, Rand Memorandum, RM5486–ISA/ARPA (December 1967), pp. 41–44, and W. P. Davison and J. J. Zasloff, *A Profile of Viet Cong Cadres*, Rand Memorandum, RM 4983–ISA/ARPA (June 1966), pp. 8–11, Spector observed that "Diem and his American advisors failed to recognize the extent to which the measures aimed at suppressing the Viet Cong increased antigovernment sentiment in the countryside and created a reservoir of potential recruits for the Viet Cong."

110. Milton E. Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets in South Vietnam* (1965), pp. 23–25; Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 332–33. The original draft of this chapter citing Osborne stated that the program began in March 1960. Spector, citing Joseph J. Zasloff, *Rural Resettlement in Vietnam: An Agroville in Development*, Michigan State University Advisory Group (Saigon, 1961), states that program began in late 1959 and that "by early 1961 the program had virtually ground to a halt."

111. BGEN James Lawton Collins, Jr., *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950–1972* (Washington, DC: Dept of the Army, 1991 edition), pp. 17–18, hereafter Collins, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army*. See also Whitlow, *The Advisory*

& Combat Assistance Era, p. 32; Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict: From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959–1965* (Washington, DC, Naval Historical Center, 1986), p. 135, hereafter Marolda and Fitzgerald, *Military Assistance to Combat*; COL John Schlight, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, The War in South Vietnam, The Year of the Offensive, 1965–1968* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1988), p. 3. Whitlow gives the strength of the Vietnamese Marine Corps in 1959 at 2,276; Marolda and Fitzgerald place the strength of the Vietnamese Navy in 1958 at 3,600; and Schlight states that in January 1961 the Vietnamese Air Force had 4,000 personnel.

112. Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 322.

113. Ibid, p. 339. Spector paraphrases Williams' memorandum.

114. Desp, Saigon 251 to State, 12 Feb 60.

115. Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 349–50.

116. Msg, Saigon 2622 to State, 12 Feb 60.

117. Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 351.

118. Ibid., pp. 350–51; see also Collins, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army*, p. 17.

119. Msg, Saigon G–79 to State, 25 Aug 60; Msg, Saigon 539 to State, 5 Sep 60.

120. Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 365.

121. Ibid.

122. Collins, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army*, p. 17. See also the earlier chapter reference to Lemnitzer and JCS March recommendations.

123. Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 351–52.

124. Ibid., pp. 357, 361–62; Marolda and Fitzgerald, *Military Assistance to Combat*, pp. 94–95; Ltr, CINCPAC 00212 to JCS, "Counterinsurgency Operations in South Vietnam and Laos," 27 Apr 60, Encl to JCS 1992/798, 3 May 60, JMF 9060/3360 (27 Apr 60). The quote is from Marolda and Fitzgerald, *Military Assistance to Combat*, p. 94.

125. JCSM-382-60 to SecDef, 6 Jun 60 (derived from JCS 1992/814), JMF 9060/3360 (27 Apr 60).

126. Ltr, CINCPAC 00331 to JCS, "Counterinsurgency Operations in South Vietnam," 30 Jun 60, Encl to JCS 1992/821, 8 Jul 60, JMF 9060/3360 (27 Apr 60).

127. JCSM-382-60 to SecDef, 30 Aug 60 (derived from JCS 1992/838).

128. Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 365. A rough draft of the joint message is reproduced in *The Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1325–26.

129. Special National Intelligence Estimate 63 1–60, 23 Aug 60, reproduced in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1298–1301. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 360.

130. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984 edition), p. 236, hereafter Karnow, *Vietnam*. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 369–71. For the participation of the Vietnamese Marines, see Capt. Robert H. Whitlow, USMCR, *US Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964* (Washington, DC: History & Museums Division, HQMC, 1977), p. 36, hereafter Whitlow, *The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era*.

131. Karnow, *Vietnam*, p. 236. Karnow at the time was a correspondent for *Time* magazine in Vietnam.

132. Durbrow to SecState, 4 Dec 60, reproduced in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1334–36, hereafter Durbrow msg, 4 Dec 60. See also Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 370.

133. Msg, Lansdale to DepSecDef, 15 Nov 62, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1330–31, hereafter Lansdale msg, 15 Nov 62.

134. For a general description of the coup see Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 369–71, and Karnow, *Vietnam*, pp. 235–37. Karnow places the number of dead as a result of the brief skirmish at 400, including many civilian bystanders. A later Senate report citing press reports from Saigon gives the number of dead including civilians as 200. See US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam* (Revised Edition), 90th Cong, 1st Sess, July 1967, p. 7.

135. Karnow, *Vietnam*, p. 371.

136. Durbrow msg, 4 Dec 60, p. 1335.

137. Memo BRIG GEN Lansdale for Sec Gates, 11 Nov 60, reproduced in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, p. 1329.

138. Msg Durbrow to SecState, 4 Dec 60, reproduced in ibid., pp., 1337–39.

139. Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 371–72; Memo, JCS for SecDef, 1 Dec 60, Subj: Helicopters for Vietnam, reproduced in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1332–33.

140. Msg, Durbrow to SecState, 24 Dec 60, *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1349–51.

141. State Dept Msg 961 to Saigon, 31 Dec 60. The message is reproduced in *FRUS, 1958–60*, pp. 271–74. See Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 65 and 510.

142. Saigon Desp 276 to SecState, 4 Jan 61, reproduced in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1357–59, hereafter Saigon Desp 276; see also Basic Counter-Insurgency Plan, *FRUS* online.

143. Ibid.

144. Saigon Desp 276.

145. For a coherent description of the confused Laotian military and political situation in 1960–1961, see Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1967), pp. 118–26.

146. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 32.

147. Clark Clifford to the President, Memorandum of Conference on January 19, 1961, between President Eisenhower and President-Elect Kennedy on the Subject of Laos, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 10, pp. 1360–64.

Chapter 2. The Kennedy Administration and Crisis Management

1. *Public Papers of the Presidents, John F. Kennedy* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1962), pp. 1–3.

2. Richard P. Stebbins, *The United States in World Affairs, 1961* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 64.

3. Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation, The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1967), p. 53, hereafter Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*. See also Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life, John F. Kennedy, 1917–1963* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 2003), p. 350, hereafter Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*. Dallek observes that Kennedy read the speech, "time and time again—in his office, at Cabinet meetings, at dinners with friends, alone. At times he read it aloud and urged his colleagues to comment."

4. Ibid., p. 312. See also Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days, John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965, Mariner edition 2003), p. 128, hereafter Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*. Schlesinger states that "advisors argued strongly against keeping Gates." After Kennedy had made such a campaign issue about inadequate defense, he "could hardly anoint the man who bore so heavy a responsibility."

5. Lawrence J. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff, The First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 112, hereafter Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff.*

6. Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect, The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1996 edition), pp, 22–23, hereafter McNamara, *In Retrospect.*

7. Ibid., p. 6.

8. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, pp. 118–19.

9. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 22.

10. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 113.

11. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 318.

12. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 119.

13. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 210.

14. Ibid.

15. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 23. For discussion of the Operations Coordination Board and the Planning Committee of the National Security Council, see chap. 1.

16. See chap. 1. See also Lansdale Biog, AF Office of Information; DOD Press Release No. 1441–6, and Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 320.

17. According to Lansdale, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Lyman Lemnitzer and Admiral Arleigh Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, were instrumental in obtaining permission for him to make the trip to Vietnam in January. See letter, Lansdale to President Ngo Dinh Diem, 30 Jan 61, Doc No. 6 reproduced in Dept of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* online, *Kennedy Years*, vol. 1, *Vietnam, 1961–63*, hereafter Lansdale ltr to Diem 30 Jan 61, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years*, vol. 1.

18. Rpt, Lansdale to SecDef and DepSecDef, "Vietnam," 17 Jan 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam. The report is also reproduced in *Pentagon Papers*, bk. 11, pp. 1–12.

19. Lansdale ltr to Diem, 30 Jan 61.

20. Walt W. Rostow Oral History cited in David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 66, hereafter Kaiser, *American Tragedy.*

21. See Summary Record of Meeting, White House, 28 Jan 61, Doc No. 3, *FRUS* online, vol. 1, hereafter Summary Record of Mtg, 28 Jan 61. For the above quote, the editors of the volume cite a memo from Bundy to Dulles, Rusk, and McNamara, 27 Jan 61.

22. Summary Record of Mtg, 28 Jan 61. See also discussion of Counterinsurgency Plan in chap. 1.

23. Ibid.

24. Memo, ASD(ISA) to CJCS, "US Support for Additional Military Forces in Vietnam and Thailand," 25 Jan 61, Encl to JCS 1992/911, 28 Jan 61.

25. Summary Record of Mtg, 28 Jan 61, and Walt W. Rostow, President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Memo, to President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (McGeorge Bundy), 30 Jan 61, "*Vietnam*," *FRUS* online, vol. 1, hereafter Rostow Memo, 30 Jan 61. Rostow also attended the meeting on 28 January and provided his own summary for Bundy. The quote is from this document. See also Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 67.

26. Summary Record of Mtg, Doc 28, Jan 61.

27. Rostow Memo, 30 Jan 61.

28. Ibid., and Summary Record of Mtg, 28 Jan 61.

29. Rostow Memo, 30 Jan 61.

30. Ibid.

31. Summary Record of Mtg, 28 Jan 61.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Rostow Memo, 30 Jan 61, Hilsdale, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 419–20; Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 67.

35. Rostow Memo, 30 Jan 61. Assistant Secretary Parsons in his memorandum stated that Secretary Rusk proposed the formation of the special Vietnam Task Force rather than the President, but given Secretary Rusk's reservations about the formation of the task force, Rostow's version appears to be the more credible.

36. Ibid.

37. *Pentagon Papers*, bk. 11, p. 13.

38. National Security Action Memo 2, 3 Feb 61, in National Security Action Memoranda online from John F. Kennedy Library & Museum, Web Site http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/nsam.htm.

39. Memo General Lemnitzer, 6 Feb 61, National Security Action Memorandum No. 12, Doc No. 9, *FRUS* online, vol. 1.

40. Office of Joint History, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1949–1999* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2000), pp. 87–88, hereafter Office of Joint History, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*.

41. Quoted in "Review of FY 1961 and FY 1962 Military Programs and Budgets," Encl to Ltr, McNamara to President, 20 Feb 61, Doc. No. 17, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Administration*, vol. 8, *National Security Policy*, hereafter *FRUS* online, *National Security*, vol. 8.

42. BG C. V. Clifton, USA, Minutes of Meeting with the President, 23 Feb 61, Doc. No. 18, in ibid., hereafter Minutes of Mtg, 23 Feb 61.

43. Quoted in Kaiser, *American Challenge*, p. 69.

44. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 329.

45. Notes of a Conversation between President Elect Kennedy and President Eisenhower, 19 Jan 62, dictated by Kennedy to his Secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, Doc. No. 7, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*, vol. 24, hereafter, Notes of a Conversation, 19 Jan 62.

46. Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, JCS, Chronological Summary of Significant Event Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 29 Oct 60–31 Jan 61, entry for 7 Jan 61, p. 78, declassified internet copy, http/www.Vietnam.ttu.edu/star/images/250/2500118001A, hereafter JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis. See also chap. 1.

47. Ibid., entry for 6–17 Dec 60, pp. 56–57.

48. Ibid., entry for 7 Jan 61, p. 78.

49. Memorandum of Discussion, NSC Mtg, 5 Jan 61, Doc. No. 3, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

50. JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis, entry for 14 Jan 61, citing JCSM-13-61, derived from JCS 1992/894, 14 Jan 61, JMF 9155.2/9105 (30 Dec 60), pp. 84–85.

51. Ibid.

52. Memorandum of Conversation, 17 Jan 61, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 6, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

53. Ibid.

54. JCS Chronological Summary Laotian Crisis, entry for 19 Jan 61, pp. 89–90.

55. Notes of a Conversation, 19 Jan 62. Besides the notes dictated by Kennedy, Gen. Willard B. Persons, Presidential Assistant to Eisenhower, prepared a formal memorandum for the record. Robert S. McNamara and Clark Clifford kept informal notes of the meeting. Most of the accounts

except for McNamara's agree more or less with that of Kennedy. McNamara, on the other hand, stated, "President Eisenhower advised against unilateral action by the United States in connection with Laos." Apparently at the beginning of the meeting Eisenhower emphasized cooperation with the allies, but at the end indicated that if necessary the United States would have to intervene alone. SecDef Robt McNamara to President Kennedy, 24 Jan 61, Doc. No. 11, in *FRUS* online, *Laos*. See also Persons, Memo for the Record, 19 Jan 61, Doc. No. 8, same sources, and Clark Clifford, note to the President, 29 Sept 67, Subj: Memorandum of Conference on January 19, 1961, between President Eisenhower and President-Elect Kennedy on the Subject of Laos, *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, vol. 2, pp. 635–637.

56. Memo, AsstSecDef Nitze (ISA) to SecDef McNamara, 23 Jan 62, Subj: White House Meeting, 23 Jan 61, Doc. No. 10, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, hereafter, Memo, Nitze to McNamara, 23 Jan 62. Editorial note 3 provides information on the makeup of the interdepartmental task force.

57. Report Prepared by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Laos, n.d. [22–23 Jan 61], Att to Memo, Nitze to McNamara, 23 Jan 62.

58. Ibid.

59. Kennedy quoted in Memo, Nitze to McNamara, 23 Jan 62. Editorial note in the document also quotes Kennedy citing minutes of the meeting prepared by Parsons.

60. JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis, entry for 24 Jan 62, citing JCSM 34-61, 24 Jan 61, derived from JCS 1992/903, JMF Laos, pp. 98–102.

61. Memo of Conference with President Kennedy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 25 Jan 61, Doc. No. 12, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

62. Ibid.

63. JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, entry for 6 Feb 61, p. 7, citing JCS Study, "US Air and Sea Lift Readiness and Posture, 6 Feb 61, CJCS, 091 Laos (1). JCS 1992/912, "Air and Sea Lift, Readiness and Posture of Laos," 3 Feb 61, JMF 9155.2/3000 (30 Jan 61).

64. Memo of Mtg with the President, 6 Feb 61, Doc. No. 11, *FRUS* online, *National Security*, vol. 8.

65. "Summary Record of Mtg [with President], 8 Feb 62, Doc. No. 14, *FRUS* online, *Laos*. See also Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 28.

66. JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, entry for 16 Feb 61, p. 18, citing CJCS memo to President, Subj: "Maximum Bloc Forces in Laos," 16 Feb 61, CJCS-091 Laos (1).

67. Ibid., entry for 14 Feb 61, p. 13, citing SecState Circular 1208, 14 Feb 61.

68. Amb Winthrop G. Brown, Memo, Conv with the President, 3 Feb 61, Doc. No. 13, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

69. Msg Rusk to Amb to Laos, 10 Feb 61, Doc. No. 15 in *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

70. Minutes of Mtg, 23 Feb 61, Doc. No. 18, *FRUS* online, *National Security*, vol. 8.

71. Ibid.

72. Memo Rostow to President Kennedy, 28 Feb 61, Subj: Laos Task Force Meeting, 27 Feb 61, Doc. No. 19, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

73. Ibid.

74. See for example, memo of conversation between the Soviet Ambassador Mikhail A. Menshikov with SecState, 28 Feb 61, Doc. No. 20, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

75. Memo, AsstSecState McGhee SecState Rusk, 3 Mar 61, Subj: Meeting with the President, Doc. No. 22, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

76. "Thompson Prods Moscow for Khrushchev Meeting; US Ambassador Prods Soviet for meeting with Khrushchev," *New York Times*, 4 Mar 61, p. 1.

77. "Concept for the Recapture of the Plaine des Jarres," CJCS 091 Laos (2), 1 Mar 61, cited in entry for 9 Mar 61, JCS Chronological Summary Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, pp. 42–43.

78. Ibid., entry for 10 Mar 61, citing Msg, CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, 10 Mar 61. Roger Hilsman gives the date of the attack as 9 March. Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 127. Given the time differential between Laos and Washington, it is probable that the attack took place on 9 March Washington time and 10 March Laotian Time.

79. Memo of Conf with President Kennedy, 9 Mar 61, Doc. No. 25, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, hereafter, Conference with Kennedy, 9 Mar 61.

80. Ibid.

81. Memo, Clifton to President, 10 Mar 61, Doc. No. 29, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

82. Conference with Kennedy, 9 Mar 61.

83. Ibid.

84. Entry for 9 Mar 61, citing Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 991705, 11 Mar 61 and JCS msg 991727, 13 Mar 61, JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, pp. 42–43. See also Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict: From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959–1965*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1986), p. 60, hereafter Marolda and Fitzgerald, *From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959–1965*, for the reference to Marine helicopters and the Marine maintenance detachment.

85. Entry for 10 Mar 61, citing State Dept msgs, 10–11 Mar 61, JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, pp. 43–45.

86. Dept of State, Memo of a Conv, 12 Mar 61, Subj: Situation in Laos, Doc. No. 31, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, hereafter Situation in Laos, Doc. No. 31.

87. Associated Press (AP), "Major Offensive by Laos Leftists Gains Key Points," *New York Times*, 12 Mar 61, p. 1.

88. "Situation in Laos," Doc. No. 31.

89. Ibid.

90. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 10 Mar 61 and Memo, CJCS to Trapnell, 14 Mar 61 (CJCS-091 Laos) cited in JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, entry 14 Mar 61, p. 49.

91. Quoted in Msg Vientiane to SecState, 1714, 17 Mar 61, as cited in JCS Chronological Summary Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, entry 17 Mar 61, pp. 53–54.

92. "Pathet Lao 11-Day Offensive Still Rolling," AP dateline 18 Mar 61, *New York Times*, pp. 1–2.

93. Msg, SecState to Moscow, 1529 (et al.), 18 Mar 61, as cited in JCS Chronological Summary, Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, 18 Mar 61 entry, p. 54. See also ftnt 1 to SecState Rusk, Notes, 18 Mar 62, Doc. No. 34, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, in which the editors also cite SecState msg 1529.

94. As quoted in CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 94444, 18 Mar 61, as cited in JCS Chronological Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, 18 Mar 61 entry p. 54.

95. Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 992240, 20 Mar 61, as cited in entry 20 Mar 61.

96. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, DA IN 95339, 21 Mar 61 as cited in entry 20–21 Mar 61 JCS CSLC.

97. See editor's note 2, Memo, Rostow to President Kennedy, 21 Mar 61, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 35, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, hereafter Rostow memo, 21 Mar 61. The editorial note gives the names of the attendees at the meeting on 20 Mar 61 and refers to Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 332–333, for the substance of the meeting. Interestingly, both Schlesinger and Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 43, imply that all of the Joint Chiefs were present at the meeting. Kaiser states that he found no extant copies of the minutes. The list of attendees, however, contains only the name of Admiral Burke. William J. Jorden, in an article in the *New York Times*, observed that Admiral Burke

represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the meeting and that General Lemnitzer was in Miami. See Jorden, "US to Rush Help to Laotian Army," *New York Times*, 22 Mar 61, p. 1.

98. Rostow memo, 21 Mar 61.

99. Memo for Record, 21 Mar 61 Subj: Discussion of Laos at White House Meeting (from notes by Mr. Nitze but signed by William Bundy, Doc. No. 36, *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

100. Ibid.

101. Robert J. Jorden, "West Will Offer New Plan," *New York Times*, 23 Mar 61, pp. 1 and 3. Interestingly, Jorden later was recruited by the Kennedy administration for a position in the State Department, which he accepted.

102. W. H. Lawrence, "Kennedy Alerts Nation on Laos," *New York Times*, 24 Mar 61, pp. 1 and 7.

103. Marolda and Fitzgerald, *From Military Assistance to Combat 1959–1965*, pp. 60–61, Capt Robert H. Whitlow, *US Marines in Vietnam, The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964* (Washington, DC: History & Museums Division, HQMC, 1977), p. 86, hereafter Whitlow, *The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era*. See also Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 212235Z Mar 61, as cited in JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, entry for 22 Mar 61.

104. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 131.

105. JCS Chronological Summary Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, entry for 23 Mar 61.

106. W. H. Lawrence, "Kennedy and Macmillan Appeal to Soviet to Back Neutral Laos," *New York Times*, 27 Mar 61, p. 1.

107. SecState Circular msg, 1478, 28 Mar 61, as cited in JCS Chronological Summary Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, entry 26 Mar 61, Kennedy cable to Rusk in Bangkok, 27 Mar 61, Doc. No. 43 in *FRUS* online, *Laos*, hereafter Kennedy Cable, 27 Mar 61, Doc. No. 43. See also Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 334.

108. Msg, Rusk to Bowles, 27 Mar 61, Doc. No. 42, *FRUS* online, *Laos*. General Trapnell was still on his inspection visit to Southeast Asia for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

109. Kennedy Cable, 27 Mar 61, Doc. No. 43.

110. Copy of Resolution in entry 29 Mar 61, JCS Chrono Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, pp. 78–79.

111. Msg, Rusk to StateDept, 30 Mar 61, Doc. No. 44 in *FRUS* online, *Laos*.

112. Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 3 Feb 61, encl to JCS 1992/928, 8 Mar 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (24 Jan 61).

113. Jt State-Def-ICA Msg, State 1054 to Saigon, 3 Feb 61; JCSM-62-61 to SecDef, 9 Feb 61 (derived from JCS 1992/917).

114. JCSM-62-61 to SecDef, 9 Feb 61.

115. Saigon Emb msg 1351 to Dept of State, 8 Feb 61, Doc No. 10, *FRUS, Kennedy Years*, vol. 1.

116. Saigon msgs 1366 and 1367 to State, 13 Feb 61; Saigon despatch 351 to State, 14 Feb 61. Msg 1367 is reproduced as Doc No. 10 in *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*, and Saigon dispatch 351 is reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, bk 11, pp. 14–16.

117. Msg, Joint Emb, USOM, MAAG to Dept of State, 28 Feb 68, Doc No. 15, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*.

118. Msg, Dept of State to Emb, Saigon, 1 Mar 61, Doc No. 16 in *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*.

119. Emb Saigon, msg, 8 Mar 61, quoted in ftnt 4 to ibid.

120. Ltr, CHMAAG to RADM Luther C. Heinz, OASD (ISA), 27 Feb 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 60–Jul 61.

121. Ltr, CHMAAG to Director of Military Assistance, AsstSecDef, 3 Mar 61, Doc No. 17, *FRUS* online, vol. 1.

122. Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 13 Mar 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 60–Jul 61.

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid.

125. Ibid.

126. Ibid.

127. Ltr, Ch MAAG to Secretary of State for the Presidency, 13 Mar 61, Doc No. 18, *FRUS* online, vol 1.

128. Emb Saigon msg 1466 to State, 16 Mar 61, Doc No. 20, *FRUS* online, vol 1.

129. Ltr, Ch MAAG to CJCS, 22 Mar 61, OCJCS File 901, Vietnam Oct 60–Jul 61.

130. Ibid.

131. Ibid.

132. LtGen T. J. H. Trapnell to CJCS, "South Vietnam," 28 Mar 61, encl to JCS 1992/937, 28 Mar 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (28 Mar 61). The list of Trapnell's recommendations is also included in JCS memo 228-61 to Secretary McNamara, Recommendations on South Vietnam, 11 Apr 61, Doc No. 26, *FRUS, Kennedy Years 1961*, 1, hereafter JCS memo 228-61, Doc. No. 26.

133. JCSM 202-61 to SecDef, 31 Mar 61 (derived from JCS 1992/942); 1st N/H of JCS 1992/942, 14 Apr 61.

134. ASD(ISA), "Report: Relationships between the Chief MAAG and the Ambassador/Country Team in Vietnam," n.d. [prior to 18 Apr 61], OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 60–Jul 61.

135. Ibid.

136. Ibid.

137. There apparently still remained some question whether General Lansdale should receive the ambassadorial position. After an interview with Diem on 11 April 1961, Joseph Alsop related that Lansdale was the only American Diem liked and that Diem thought it too bad Lansdale was not ambassador since he understood Asians and was one of the best US experts in antiguerrilla warfare. Saigon Msg 1599 to Dept of State, 12 Apr 61. In a memorandum to President Kennedy, presidential advisor Walt W. Rostow stated: "On Lansdale as Ambassador, he may have been good. I believe so, but Diem never had to deal with him when he bore the full burden of an Ambassador, with all the awkward inevitable problems of negotiation. I think we must go with Nolting, whom I know well personally." Memo from the President's Deputy Special Asst on Nat'l Security Affairs to the President, 15 Apr 61, Doc No. 30, reproduced in *FRUS*, online, *Kennedy Years 1961*, vol 1, hereafter Rostow memo, 15 Apr 61, Doc No. 30.

138. Rostow memo, 15 Apr 61, Doc No. 30.

139. JCS msg 994578 to CINCPAC and CHMAAG, 21 Apr 61.

Chapter 3. Continuing Crises

1. CJCS memo to SecDef, 31 Mar 61, Subj: Trapnell Report, entry for 31 Mar 61 JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61.

2. Ibid. See also JCS Memo 232–61, 11 Apr 61, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 50, in *FRUS* online, 1961–63, *Laos Crisis*. Brown would remain as US Ambassador in Laos until June 1962.

3. CinCPac msg to JCS, 24 Mar 61 as cited in entry for 24 Mar 61 JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, pp. 69–70.

4. Ibid.

5. JCS msg to CinCPac, 992897, 29 Mar 61 as cited in entry for 29 Mar 61 in ibid., pp. 80–81.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. JCS msg 992922, 29 Mar 61 to CinCPac in ibid.

9. Hadyn Williams, AsstSecDef for International Affairs, memo to SecDef McNamara, 31 Mar 61, Doc. No. 45 in *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

10. Ibid.

11. Entry for 29 Mar 61 in JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 Feb–31 Mar 61, p. 82. Maj. Bailey was released on 17 Aug 1962 in Vientiane after being flown there in a Soviet plane. See ftnt 14 in transcript of presidential meeting on Laos, 15 August 1962 in Timothy Naftali, editor, *The Presidential Recordings, John F. Kennedy, The Great Crises, July 30–August 1962*, vol. 1 (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 437.

12. Entry for 1 Apr 1961 in JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 Apr–31 May 1961, p.1 and Thompson msg to State Department, 1 Apr 61, Doc. No. 46, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

13. Entry for 1 Apr 1961 citing JCS SitReps in JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 Apr–31 May 1961, p.1.

14. Entry for 2 Apr 1961 citing CinCPac msg to JCS 020330Z Apr 61 in ibid., p. 2.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., pp. 2–3.

18. JCS 993269 msg, 3 Apr 61, as cited in entry for 3 April in ibid., p. 4.

19. JCS 993343 msg, 4 Apr 61, as cited in entry for 4 April in ibid.

20. Memo of Conversation, 6 April 1961, Doc. No. 49, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

21. Memorandum of Conversation, 6 Apr 61, Subj: East-West Issues: Laos, Doc. No. 48, in ibid. See also "Extracts from the report" of the US Delegation to the International Conference on the Settlement of the Laotian Question . . . at Geneva, Switzerland, from May 12, 1961, to July 23, 1962, attached to covering letter with White House Letterhead signed by initials F. G. W., 17 Oct 61 in Maxwell D. Taylor Papers, File T641-71-14, National Defense University (NDU), hereafter "Extracts from the Report of the US Delegation, Geneva," Taylor Papers, NDU.

22. CinCPac msg 050446Z Apr 61 to JCS entry for 5 Apr 61 in JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, p. 9.

23. CinCPac msg to JCS, 050446Z Apr 61 as cited in entry for 5 April in ibid.

24. CinCPac msg to Canberra et al., DA IN 100585, 5 Apr 61, entry for 5 April in ibid., pp. 10–11.

25. CinCPac msg 062320Z Apr to CTF 116 and DepComUSAPac, et al., entry for 6 Apr 61 in ibid., p. 12.

26. JCS memo to SecDef, 11 Apr 61, Subj: Activities of International Commission in Laos, JCSM-222-61, JCS 1992/950 as cited in entry for 11 Apr 61 in ibid., pp. 18–20.

27. JCS memo to SecDef, 13 Apr 61, Subj: Situation in Laos, JCSM 244-61, JCS 1992/950 as cited in entry for 13 Apr 61, pp. 24–25.

28. Walt Rostow memo to President with encl, 13 Apr 61, Subj: Task Force Meeting on Laos, 13 Apr 61, Doc. No. 52, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

29. SecState msg to Embassy in Laos, 14 Apr 61, Doc. No. 53 in ibid. See editorial note 1 for information relating to Presidential meeting on 13 April.

30. SecState msg to US Embassy, London, 15 Apr 61, Doc. No. 54 in ibid. Lord Home's quote is from Editorial Note 2 in the document citing and quoting a letter written by the British Secretary to Rusk on 14 April.

31. Ibid.

32. "Extracts from the Report of the US Delegation, Geneva," Taylor Papers, NDU, pp. 4–5.

33. William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh, A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), pp. 525–27.

34. Memo for Record on Col. Flesch's visit to Vietnam, 31 Mar–7 Apr 61, I-13678/61, 12 Apr 61 OASD(ISA) File 333 Vietnam. Rpt, "Outline Chief MAAG Vietnam," n.d., OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (28 Apr 61). Ann A to Draft Program of Action, 26 Apr 61, OCJCS File 091Vietnam. NIE 50-61, 28 Mar 61. The NIE is reproduced as Doc No. 22 in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

35. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 70.

36. Rostow memo to the President, dtd 3 Apr 61 with enclosure entitled Questions Concerning Counter-Guerrilla Programs, Doc No. 24, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*, hereafter Rostow Memo and Questions Concerning Counter-Guerrilla Programs. See also Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 341.

37. Rostow Memo and Questions Concerning Counter-Guerrilla Programs.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid. See chap. 1 for further discussion of the limitations on US advisors and the deployment of the Special Forces troops.

41. Ibid.

42. JCS memo 228-61, 11 Apr 61, Doc. No. 26, *FRUS, Kennedy Years 1961.*

43. Rostow Memo to the President, 12 Apr 61, Doc 27, *FRUS, Kennedy Years 1961.*

44. Ibid.

45. On 26 April, President Kennedy did send a congratulatory letter to Diem on the occasion of the latter's second inauguration stating that, "We have watched with sympathy your courageous leadership during your country's struggle to perfect its independence and its efforts to create a better life for its people. The United States stands firmly with you in this struggle and in these efforts." Kennedy ltr to Diem, 26 Apr 61, Doc No. 34, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1.

46. Memorandum on the Substance of Discussion at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, 14 Apr 61, Doc No. 29 in ibid.

47. Rostow memo, 15 Apr 61, Doc No. 30, *FRUS 1961*, vol 1. In a footnote to the document the editors of the FRUS state that Durbrow suggested that the Department send him instructions to the effect that unless Diem began to implement the CIP [Counterinsurgency Plan], the United States would not provide MAP [Military Assistance Program] aid for a force increase.

48. JCSM-242-61 to SecDef, 13 Apr 61, derived from JCS 1992/953, JMF 9155.2/3100 (30 Mar 61).

49. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 70; SecDef to DepSecDef, 20 Apr 61, Encl to JCS 1992/965 JMF 9155.3/9108 (20 Apr 61).

50. Cuba Study Group Memo No. 1, 13 Jun 61, Narrative of the Anti-Castro Cuban Operation Zapata, reprinted as Doc 231 in *FRUS 1961–63*, vol. X, *Cuba 1961–1962*, online Edition, *FRUS Cuba 1961–62.*

51. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 290. See also Joint History Office, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 85.

52. Bradlee is quoted in Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, p. 368.

53. Memorandum of Conversation, 18 Apr 1961, Subj: Admiral Burke's Conversation with Cdr Wilhide, Doc No 121, *FRUS Cuba 1961–62.*

54. Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, p. 371; Joint History Office, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 95. The other two members of the Cuba Study Group were Allen Dulles, the Director of Central Intelligence and Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General.

55. Memorandum No. 3 from the Cuba Study Group to President Kennedy, June 13, 1961, Conclusions of the Cuban Study Group, Doc 231, *FRUS Cuba 1961–62*.

56. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 297. See also Joint History Office, *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 95.

57. Rostow memo to President Kennedy, 17 Apr 61, Subj: Laos Task Force Meeting, 17 Apr 61, Doc. No. 56, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

58. Entries for 17 and 18 April 1961, in JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, pp. 33–34.

59. Entry for 23 Apr 61 in ibid., pp. 45–46

60. Amb. Brown msg to Dept of State, 26 Apr 61, Doc. No. 60, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

61. Acting SecState Bowles memo to President Kennedy, 26 Apr 61, Subj: Laos—Deteriorating Situation and Need for Critical Decisions, Doc. No. 61 in ibid.

62. McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum of Meeting with President Kennedy, 26 Apr 61, Doc. No. 62 in ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Entry for 26 April, citing SecState msg to Vientiane, 26 Apr 61, in JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, pp. 49–50.

65. Entry for 26 April 61, citing JCS msg 994935 26 Apr to CinCPac, in ibid., p. 50.

66. Marolda and Fitzgerald, *From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959–1965*, p. 66.

67. See Editorial Note, Doc. No. 63, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis* and Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 337.

68. Bowles msg to SecState, 27 Apr 61, Doc. No. 65 in *FRUS* online, *1961–63*. See also Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 48–50 for the list of attendees at the meeting with the Congressional leaders and for the quote from Senator Russell.

69. See entries for 27–28 Apr 61 in JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, pp. 51–54.

70. State Dept, Memo of Conversation, 29 Apr 61, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 67, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos, Crisis*, hereafter Conversation, 29 Apr 61, Doc. 67, and Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 644, hereafter Sorensen, *Kennedy*. In Sorensen's account the President asked both Robert Kennedy and himself to attend all National Security Council Meetings. Sorensen, apparently did not attend this meeting hosted by the State Department.

71. Conversation, 29 Apr 61, Doc. 67.

72. Ibid.

73. See entry 29 Apr 61, citing NSC Action Memo No. 2915, 29 Apr 61, JCS Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, p. 55.

74. James Reston, "Washington," dateline, 29 Apr 61, *New York Times*, 30 Apr 61, p. E. 10.

75. Entry for 29 Apr 61, citing JCS msg 995131 to CinCPac, 29 Apr 61 in Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, p. 55.

76. Entry for 1 May 61, citing CinCPac msg 109146 to JCS in ibid., pp. 62–63.

77. Ibid.

78. SecDef McNamara, Notes on the 481st National Security Council Meeting, 1 May 61, Doc. No. 73, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

79. Ibid. See especially ftnt 2 in ibid. relative to NSC Action Memo No. 2417.

80. Harriman msg to President, 1 May 61, Doc. No. 74 in ibid.

81. Entry for 1–2 May 1962, citing Notes to Control, 1 and 2 May, OCJCS Files 091, Laos (3) in Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961.

82. McNamara and Gilpatric memo to President Kennedy, 2 May 61, Subj: Alternative Courses of Action in Laos, Doc. No. 75, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

83. See Editorial Note, Doc. No. 76 in ibid.

84. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 644–45.

85. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 339.

86. Editorial Note, Doc. No. 77, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

87. Jacques Nevard, "Fighting in Laos Halts in Key Area after Truce Move," *New York Times*, p. 1.

88. Entry for 2 May 1961, citing JCS 995267, 2 May 61, in Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, p. 63a.

89. Entry for 3 May 61, citing CinCPac msg to JCS 031110 May 61, in ibid., p. 67.

90. Entry for 9 May 61, citing JCS Memo to SecDef, JCSM 313-61, Subj: Proposed draft on Plan for proposed intervention in Laos," 9 May 61, in ibid., pp. 81–2, hereafter JCS Memo 313-61. See also Johnson memo to Bowles, 6 May 61, Subj: Lao Paper, Doc. No. 82, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 52.

95. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp, 130, 133.

96. Entry for 11 May citing SecState msg to Geneva, To Sec 59, 11 May 61 in Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, pp. 82–83.

97. State Dept msg to SecState, 9 May 61, Doc. No. 84. *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis*.

98. Entry for 12–13 May 1961, citing memo CNO to JCS, "Contingency Planning Laos," 12 May 61, Serial 00096P61 reproduced in JCS 1992\987, in Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 April–31 May 1961, pp. 88–89.

99. Ibid., citing also JCS msg 995920 to CinCPac, 13 May 61 in ibid.

100. Entry for 16 May 1961, citing CinCPac msg to JCS, 160438Z May 61 in ibid., pp. 96–97.

101. Entry for 20 May 1961, citing JCSM 340-61 to SecDef, "A Concept for a Divided Laos," derived from JCS 1992/995, 17 May 61, as revised by Dec on JCS 1992/995, 20 May 61; JCS 1992/989, 15 May 61, in ibid., pp. 107–110.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid.

104. Marolda and Fitzgerald, *From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959–1965*, p. 74.

105. May documents, passim., in *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis* and *New York Times*, May 1962, passim.

106. William M. Leary, "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955–1974," *Studies in Intelligence*, Winter 1999–2000, /www.cia.gov/csi/studies/winter99-00, hereafter William M. Leary, "Air Operations in Laos"; "Rebels Fire Shells," dateline, 9 May 61, *New York Times*, 13 May 61.

107. E. W. Kenworthy, "Kennedy to Talk with Khrushchev in June in Vienna ..." dateline 16 May 61, *New York Times*, 17 May 61, p. 1.

108. Quoted in US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Background Information relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam, (Revised Edition) 90th Congress, 1st Session, July 1967, p. 8; Memoranda of Conversations, 3 and 4 Jun 62, Docs. No. 107 and 108, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis.*

109. Memorandum of a Conversation, 14 May 62, Doc. 113, *FRUS* online, *1961–63, Laos Crisis* and *New York Times*, Jun 61, passim.

110. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam, The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1971*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 456, note 21.

111. Ibid., p. 88.

Chapter 4. A New Emphasis on Vietnam

1. "Fulbright Hints US Weighs Use of Troops in Asia . . ." *New York Times*, 5 May 1961, p. 1.

2. JCS Memo for SecDef, 10 May 61, Subj: US Forces in South Vietnam, JCSM-320-61, File 9155.3/9108 Vietnam (27 Apr 61) sec. 3, pt. 1, RG 218 JCS, NARA, Box 175.

3. Chairman [Lemnitzer] msg to JCS, 8 May 61, Doc. No. 47, *FRUS, Kennedy Years 1961.*

4. *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2. See also Memo, DepSecDef to Pres, "Program for Action for Vietnam, 27 Apr 61; Draft, "A Program of Action to Prevent Communist Domination of South Vietnam," 26 Apr 61 OCJCS File 091 Vietnam; CNO (Burke) Memo for the Record, 28 Apr 61, Subj: NSC meeting on South Viet Nam, 27 April 1961, Doc. No. 36, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

5. *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2. See also JCSM-238-61 to SecDef, 28 Apr 61 (derived from JCS 1992/970); Editorial Note, Doc No. 40 and Gilpatric Memo to President, 3 May 1961, Doc No. 42, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1, hereafter Gilpatric memo to President, Doc No. 42, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

6. Gilpatric memo to President, and attachment "A Program of Action To Prevent Communist Domination of South Vietnam," 1 May 61 Doc No. 42, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*; *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid. The Lansdale quote is from ftnt 5 of Draft Memorandum of the Conversation of the Second Meeting of the Presidential Task Force on Vietnam, the Pentagon, 4 May 1961 Doc. 43, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1. Hereafter, Conversation of Meeting, 4 May 1961, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

9. Draft Memorandum of the Conversation of the Second Meeting of the Presidential Task Force on Vietnam, Doc No. 43, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.* Hereafter, Draft Memorandum No. 43. It can be assumed that Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara agreed between themselves to accept the State Department version or that President Kennedy made the decision.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid. See also Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War, Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996, paperback edition, 1997), pp. 95–96. On page 96, Buzzanco argues that "Bonesteel thus had made it explicit that the JCS would be following Kennedy's lead, not pushing the president to intervene."

15. Draft Memorandum No. 43.

16. Adm. A. Burke, Memo for the Record, 5 May 68, debriefing of NSC Meeting, Doc. No. 46 in ibid.

17. Col. Robert M. Levy, USAF, JCS Representative, Memo for the Record, 5 May 1961, Subj: Meeting at State, reproduced in *Pentagon Papers*, bk. 11, pp. 67–68.

18. "A Program of Action" draft, 6 May 61, reproduced in ibid, pp. 138–154.

19. Ibid. pp. 141–143.

20. Ibid., pp. 145–46, 149–150.

21. JCSM-312-61 to SecDef, 9 May 61 (derived from JCS 1992/980), JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61), sec. 2 for paper; sec. 3, pt. 1 for memo.

22. The Gilpatric request and the JCS 10 May reply are reproduced in part in *The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2.

23. NSAM No. 52, 11 May 61, reproduced in ibid. pp. 136–37. It is also reproduced as Document No. 52 in Doc No. 43, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid. For the Nolting quote see his msg to State Dept, 14 Jul 1961, Doc. No. 92, in ibid.

26. Quote is from Galbraith's letter to President Kennedy, 10 May 1961, reproduced in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal, A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), p. 96. Hereafter, Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal.* See also Editor's Note, Doc. No. 53, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.* Hereafter, Doc No. 53, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

27. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 541. See also Doc. No. 53, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

28. Ltr Pres to Diem, 8 May 61, OCJCS File 091, Vietnam. This letter is reproduced in the *Pentagon Papers*, bk. 11, pp 132–35. See also Doc. No. 53 and Nolting msg to SecState, 13 May 61, Doc No. 54, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.* Hereafter, Nolting msg 13 May 61 will be referred to as Doc No. 54, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

29. Doc No. 54, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

30. See Docs No. 53 and 54, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961* and also Msg, Saigon 1743 to State, 15 May 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec. 3, pt. 1.

31. Young msg to Dept of State, 20 May 61, Doc. No. 57, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

32. Joint Communiqué, 13 May 61, *Department of State Bulletin*, XLIV (19 Jun 61), pp. 956–57.

33. Msg, Saigon 1748 to State, 15 May 61.

34. Ibid.

35. Diem ltr to Pres, 15 May 61, Encl to JCS 2339/1, 8 Jun 61, JMF 9155.3/5420 (15 May 61).

36. See State Department historians' comments in ftnt 2, Chairman (Lemnitzer) msg to Joint Staff, 8 May 61, Doc No. 47 in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*, vol. 1.

37. Report by the Vice-President, "Vietnam," n.d. [May–June 1961] Doc No. 60 in ibid.

38. Quoted in Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, p. 417. Dallek cites Harris Woffard, *Of Kennedy and Kings* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980), p. 379. Ambassador Galbraith was away from his post in India from 27 May to 20 June 1961. During this time he had three visits with the President. See Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 112–118.

39. Memorandum of Conversation at White House [with Nguyen Dinh Thuan], 14 Jun 61, Doc. No. 69, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.* Hereafter, Conversation, Doc. No 69, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.* For copy of letter from Diem to Kennedy, 9 Jun 61 see *Pentagon Papers*, bk. 11, pp. 167–173.

40. Doc. No. 69, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961.*

41. Ibid.

42. SecState msg to Embassy in Vietnam, 16 Jun 61, Doc. No. 71, in ibid.

43. Saigon Embassy msg to Dept of State, 26 Jun 61, Doc. 76, and SecState msg to Embassy in Vietnam, 28 Jun 68, Doc No. 77, and ftnt 4 to Doc. No. 77, in ibid.

44. JCSM-422-61 to SecDef, 21 Jun 61 (derived from JCS 2339/6).

45. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, pp. 11–12; Editorial Note, Doc. No. 75, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*. Hereafter, Editorial Note, Doc. No. 75.

46. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, p. 16.

47. Editorial Note, Doc. No. 75.

48. Gilpatric ltr to SecState, Doc. No. 82, *FRUS 1961, Vietnam*, online.

49. The text of the letter is contained in Dept of State msg to Embassy in Vietnam, 3 Jul 61, Doc No. 84, in ibid.

50. Memo of conversation between Executive Secretary of the NSC and the President's Military Aide, 3 July 1961, Doc No. 83 in ibid.

51. This and the following two paragraphs are based upon the following sources: Nolting msg to State Dept, 14 Jul 1961, Doc. No. 90 and Staley and Thuc ltr to Presidents Diem and Kennedy, 14 Jul 61?, Doc No. 93, in ibid. See also Minutes, Task Force Vietnam Meeting, 20 Jul 61. The report itself is published in the *Pentagon Papers*, bk. 11, pp. 182–209.

52. Paper prepared by President's Military Representative, 15 Jul 1961, Doc. No. 94, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Memorandum of a Conversation, 18 Jul 1961, and editor's ftnt 2, Doc. No. 98 in ibid.

57. Taylor memo to President, 26 Jul 1961, Doc. No. 104, in ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum of a Conversation, 28 Jul 1961, Doc. No. 109 in ibid. Hereafter, Bundy Memo, Doc. 109. For the contents of the Steeves memo, see Chairman of the Southeast Asia Task Force memorandum to the President, 28 Jul 1961, in ibid. David Kaiser makes the observation that the meeting was "oddly, without any representatives from the Pentagon." Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 83.

60. Bundy Memo, Doc. 109.

61. Ibid.

62. Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, pp. 423–24.

63. Bundy Memo, Doc. 109.

64. Ibid. For the Ball quote see ftnt 2 in the document.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. JCSM-529-61 to SecDef, 2 Aug 61 (derived from JCS 2343/9, JMF 9155.3/9105 (26 Jul 61)).

68. Ibid.; JCS memo to SecDef, 3 Aug 61, Doc. No. 111 in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961*.

69. Kennedy ltr to Diem, 5 Aug 61, Doc. No. 114 in ibid.

70. Ibid. NSAM-65 is published in *Pentagon Papers*, bk. 11, pp. 241–44.

71. Rostow memo to the President, 4 Aug 1961, Doc. No. 112, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961–63*.

72. JCS msg 1126 to Craig, 1422346Z Aug 61, JMF 9050/5420 (10 Aug 61). Craig rpt, Encl to DJSM-1259-61, 13 Oct 61, same file.

73. See Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 85–89 for discussion of the Laotian August crisis and meetings, pp. 85–89. Kaiser cites *FRUS, 1961–1963*, vol. xxiv, pp. 167–173 as his source for the 29 August meeting.

74. All quotes are found in ibid., pp. 88–89.

75. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 38.

76. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 88.

77. Ibid., p. 89.

78. Ibid. Kaiser cites the Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Box 519, Vietnam, General, as the source for the Harriman quote.

79. Status Rpts of the President's Program, 15 Sep 61, JMF 9155.3/9108.

80. Saigon msg 70 to State, 14 Jul 61. The message is reproduced as Doc. No. 92 in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1961–63*.

81. NIE 14.3/53-61. The conclusions of this report are reproduced in *The Pentagon Papers*, bk. 11, pp. 245–46.

82. Quoted in *The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2.

83. Quoted in Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 544.

84. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 646.

Chapter 5. Continuing Reassessment and the Taylor Mission

1. The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam, The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, translated by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, Kansas: Univ Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 80. Hereafter, *Victory in Vietnam*.

2. See AmEmb Saigon, msg, 20 Sep 61, Doc. No. 135, *FRUS*, online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*, vol. 1 and *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1, for description of attack on Phouc Thanh. For intelligence estimate on number of enemy forces in September and for analysis of the VC attacks during the month see State Dept Study, entitled "South-Vietnam—Military," 1? Oct 61, reproduced in *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1. Hereafter, "South Vietnam—Military," 1? Oct 61, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*. See chap. 2 of this volume for intelligence estimate of VC forces in August.

3. "South Vietnam—Military," 1? Oct 61, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*.

4. See chap. 2.

5. Rostow memo to President, 15 Sep 1961, Doc. No. 131, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*, vol. 1, hereafter Rostow memo, 15 Sep 61.

6. Taylor memo to the President, 18 Sep 1961, Doc. No. 134, *FRUS* online, *The Kennedy Years 1961–63*, vol. 1.

7. Lemnitzer memo to SecDef McNamara, JCSM 583-61, 24 Aug 61 in ibid. For the origins of this memo see ftnt. 1 in ASecDef for International Security Affairs memo to Gen. Lemnitzer, 19 Jul 61 in ibid. According to the footnote, the request for information came from a 5 Jul 1961 meeting of the Planning Council on 3 Jul 61 where "the Department of Defense was asked to make a study of the consequences of a naval blockade of North Vietnam."

8. See chap. 2 of this volume. SEATO Plan 5 was the basic plan for the employment of SEATO forces in Southeast Asia.

9. Rostow Memo, 15 Sep 61. According to ftnt. 2, the editors of the *FRUS, 1961*, vol. 1 state that according to General Taylor's appointment book, the meeting took place on 16 Sept, but they were unable to find any other written record of the meeting.

10. Craig Rpt, Encl to DJSM-1259-61, 13 Oct 61, in JMF 8959/5420 (10 Aug 61). According to the editors of the *FRUS, 1961*, vol. 1 the Craig briefing report was dated 15 Sep 61, see ftnt. 2, Rostow Memo, 15 Sept 61.

11. See ibid.

12. Joint State-Defense Msg to US Embassy, dtd 22 Sep 61, Doc No. 136, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*, vol. 1.

13. Ibid. While the message contained Under Secretary Bowles' name as the author, Sterling T. Cottrell, the Director of the Vietnam Task Force in Vietnam, actually initialed the document for Bowles, who was then acting Secretary of State during a temporary absence of Secretary Rusk. See ftnt. 1 in ibid.

14. *Public Papers of the Presidents, John F. Kennedy, 1961*, p. 624. See also Rostow memo to U. Alexis Johnson, 29 Sep 61, Subj: Contingency Planning for Southeast Asia, Doc No. 140, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*. Hereafter, Rostow Memo, Contingency Planning.

15. Rostow Memo, Contingency Planning.

16. Ibid.

17. William J. Jorden, memo to Gen. Taylor, 27 Sep 61, Subj: Some Observations on Countermeasures against Viet Cong Activities in Vietnam, Doc No. 139 in ibid.

18. Nolting msg to State Dept, 1 Oct 1961, Doc. No. 142 in ibid. Hereafter, Nolting msg, Doc. No. 142. For Article 19 of the Geneva Accords, see US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, (Revised Edition) 90th Congress, 1st Session, July 1967, p. 57. Hereafter, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information . . . Vietnam*. It is unclear whether Diem may also have asked for US combat troops at that time. Nolting makes no mention of such a request in his message. Navy Historians Edward Marolda and Oscar Fitzgerald in their history, however, write that at the same meeting, Diem "indicated that American forces now were needed in the struggle." Marolda and Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict*, p. 122.

19. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information . . . Vietnam*, entry for 2 Oct 1961, p. 9.

20. See Nolting msg, Doc. No. 142, ftnt. 5 for reference to the State Dept reply to Nolting.

21. William P. Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, 5 Oct 61, Subj: Planning Group Luncheon, Tuesday October 3, 1961 Doc. No. 144, *FRUS*, online, *Kennedy Years 1961*. See *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1 for discussion of the Rostow proposal.

22. USecState Chester Bowles memo to SecState, 5 Oct 61, Subj: The Situation in Southeast Asia, Doc. No. 145, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*, vol. 1. See editor's ftnt. 1 for reaction to memo in State Department.

23. Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation, The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co, 1967), pp. 423–24. Hereafter, Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*. Presidential advisor Arthur Schlesinger also described the reaction in the administration in much the same terms: "It was an imaginative proposal, but it seemed either too early or too late." Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 545.

24. Nolting msg to SecState, 6 Oct 61, Doc. No.147, in *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*, vol. 1. For the quotations from the Rusk inquiry to Nolting, see editor's ftnt. 2 in the above-mentioned document.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid. Nolting in the message does not identify the two US officials but the editors in a footnote quote Joseph A. Mendenhall, who at the time was the Embassy's Counselor for Political Affairs, that the Ambassador was referring to him and to Arthur Gardiner, the Director of USOM.

27. Ibid.

28. Adm. G. W. Anderson, USN, Diary Entry, 9 Oct 61, Doc No. 148 in ibid.

29. JCS memo to SecDef, JCSM-716-61, Subj: Concept of Use of SEATO Forces in South Vietnam, 9 Oct 61, Doc. No. 150 in ibid.

30. Ibid. See also discussion in *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1, and a revised copy of Concept for Intervention in Viet-Nam, Tab B, Doc. No. 155 in *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*, vol. 1.

31. *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1.

32. Taylor memo to President, Subj: Discussion of Southeast Asia Planning, 11 Oct 61, Doc. No. 154, in *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*, vol. 1.

33. See ftnt. 2 to DepSecDef Gilpatric, Memo for the Record, 11 Oct 61, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No. 156 in ibid. Hereafter, Gilpatric memo, 11 Oct 61, Doc. No. 156. Gilpatric's memo outlines the decisions made at the NSC meeting on 11 October. There are apparently no extant minutes for that meeting. The footnote provides the names of the attendees at the meeting.

34. Dept of State Paper, Southeast Asia, 11 Oct 61, Doc. No. 155 in ibid.

35. Gilpatric memo, 11 Oct 61, Doc. No. 156.

36. Ibid., ftnt. 2.

37. The Krock interview is quoted in Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 101. Kaiser cites Krock papers, Mudd Library, box 1.

38. Gilpatric memo, 11 Oct 61, Doc. No. 156; *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1.

39. Quoted in Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, p. 447. The public announcement caused some embarrassment for Ambassador Nolting and the American country team in Vietnam. The announcement was made public in Saigon before the State Department informed the Ambassador. The Ambassador apologized to President Diem, explaining that "Washington authorities had undoubtedly 'failed to take into account the time differential' in not giving him prior notification." On the other hand, the State Department noted to Nolting that it regretted "the circumstances of the decision precluded advance notice . . . but pointed out that the Chargé at the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington had been informed prior to the President's announcement." See ftnt. 3, Gilpatric memo, 11 Oct 61, Doc. No. 156

40. Draft Instructions from the President to His Military Representative (Taylor), 11 Oct 61, Doc. 157, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–1963*, vol. 1.

41. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972), pp. 225–26. Hereafter, Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*. See also Capt Robert H. Whitlow, USMCR, *US Marine in Vietnam: The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964* (Washington, DC: History & Museums Division, HQMC, 1977), p. 42 and Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 102.

42. National Security Action Memorandum No. 104, 13 Oct 1961 in National Security Action Memoranda, http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/images/nsam. Hereafter, NSAM 104.

43. Ball Telegram to Nolting, 12 Oct 1961, Doc. No. 161, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–1963*, vol. 1.

44. Lemnitzer telegram to Adm. Felt, 13 Oct 1961, Doc. No. 163 in ibid.

45. Joseph Alsop, "Cloud Over Southeast Asia," *The Washington Post*, 6 Oct 61, p. A17.

46. Jack Raymond, "US Considering Troops to Help Vietnam," *New York Times*, 7 Oct 1961, p. 1.

47. John Kenneth Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal: A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years*, entry for 12 Sept 61, p. 179. Hereafter, Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*.

48. Joseph Alsop, "The Hardly Noticed Crisis," *Washington Post*, 11 Oct 1961, p. A19.

49. Max Frankel, "President Sees No Easy Solution in Berlin Crisis," *New York Times*, 12 Oct 61, p. 1.

50. "Pentagon Adding 10,000 to its Forces in Europe," in ibid.

51. Arthur Krock, "In the Nation: When Policy Critics Propose No Solutions," in ibid., p. 28. See also Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 101.

52. For a discussion of the Berlin crisis see Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, pp. 426–435 and Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 379–405. For examples of newspaper accounts of continuing tensions in Berlin during October and early November, see *New York Times*, "Soviet Aim Seen To Humiliate US on Berlin Issues," 14 Oct 61, p. 1; "German Reds Act; Demand all Foreigners Show Papers Before Crossing Border..." 28 Oct 61, p.1; "Big Air Maneuver Scheduled by US; 7,000 Paratroops Due to Go to Germany for Games," 31 Oct 61, p. 1; "Vehicles Carrying Troops for Patrols in the East Sector are Held Up; US Army's Cars Blocked in Berlin," 5 Nov 61, p. 1.

53. Special to the *New York Times*, "Saigon Hopeful on Trip," *New York Times*, 14 Oct 1961. See also *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1, V C, "The Newspapers and Cables." Hereafter, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, "The Newspapers and Cables."

54. *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, "The Newspapers and Cables."

55. John Hightower, "Kennedy Seen Reluctant on Asia Troops," *Washington Post* and *Times Herald*, 15 Oct 1961, p. 4.

56. Special to the *New York Times*, "Major US Review of Asia Policy Set," *New York Times*, 15 Oct 1961, pp. 1 and 30. Hereafter, "Major US Review of Asia Policy Set," *New York Times*, 15 October 1961.

57. *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, "The Newspapers and Cables."

58. Editorial Note, Doc. No. 169, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*. Hereafter, Editorial Note, Doc. No. 169.

59. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 421.

60. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 545.

61. See chap. 2 and McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 38. For the quote about McNamara's views about Vietnam and the establishment of an "experimental command" see Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 124 citing Wheeler memo for Lemnitzer, 13 Sep 61, NA, RG 218, JMF 9155.3/3 Vietnam (7 Sep 61).

62. See "Estimates Prepared in the Department of Defense and Other United States Agencies," especially ftnt. 1, Doc. No. 168, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1 and Editorial Note, Doc. No. 169.

66. McGarr ltr to Lemnitzer, 12 Oct 61, Doc No. 159, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid, especially ftnt. 10. See also Editorial Note, Doc. 132 in ibid. Hereafter, Editorial Note, Doc 132.

69. Editorial Note, Doc. 132.

70. Cottrell Checklist, dtd 13 Oct, Doc. No. 165 in *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961*. See Rostow Memo, Contingency Planning [29 Sep 61] for a reference to adopting some of Thompson's techniques in South Vietnam.

71. Graham A. Cosmas, draft, "History of MACV," chap. 1, "A Deepening Commitment and a New Command," p. 27, US Army Center of Military History. Hereafter, Cosmas draft, chap. 1.

72. Questions Prepared by Taylor Mission, 18 Oct 61, Doc. No. 173, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961.*

73. Nolting msg to State Dept, 18 Oct 61, Doc. No. 174, in ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 230.

77. Memo for the Record, Subj: Meeting held at Field Command Headquarters, ARVN, 19 Oct 68, in ibid.

78. Memo for the Record, Subj: Minutes of Intelligence Discussion, 20 Oct 61, Doc 179 in ibid. See especially footnote 2, for a description of McGarr's briefing.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Quoted in Jack Shulimson et al., *US Marines in Vietnam, The Defining Year, 1968* (Washington: History & Museums Div, HQMC), p. 21 citing Lansdale ltr to Robert W. Komer, dtd 31 May 71 in Edward G. Lansdale Collection in the Hoover Institute on War and Peace, Stanford University.

83. Hillsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 421.

84. Lansdale memo to Taylor, 23 Oct 61, Subj: Unconventional Warfare, Doc. No. 185, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961.*

85. Interestingly enough, Ambassador Nolting informed the State Department that President Diem asked if General Lansdale could be sent to serve in Vietnam. In the margins of the note someone emphatically wrote: "No. No. NO!" See Nolting msg to State, 25 Oct 61, Doc. No. 192 especially ftnt. 2 in ibid. Hereafter, Nolting msg, 25 Oct 61, Doc. No. 192.

86. McGarr msg to Adm. Felt, 23 Oct 61, Doc. No. 188, in ibid. See also Editorial Note, Doc No. 183 in ibid. and Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 239.

87. Lansdale memo to Taylor, 23 Oct 66 Doc. No. 187 in ibid.

88. McGarr msg to General Lemnitzer, 24 Oct 61, Doc. No. 189 in ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Taylor msg to Dept of State, USecState Johnson, 25 Oct 61, Doc. No. 190 in ibid. Hereafter, Taylor msg to Johnson, 25 Oct 61, Doc. No. 190.

91. Ibid.

92. Nolting msg, 25 Oct 61, Doc. No. 192. See footnote 85 in this chapter for further reference to this request.

93. Taylor msg to Johnson, 25 Oct 61, Doc. No. 190.

94. Taylor msg to Dept State, 25 Oct 61, Doc No. 191, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961.*

95. Taylor to State Dept, 27 Oct 61, Doc. 197 in ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, pp. 240–41.

98. Taylor msg to President (eyes only) [1 Nov 61] reproduced in *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap 1, Sec VD, "Taylor in Saigon."

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

101. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 244.

102. Taylor ltr to President, 3 Nov 61, Tab A, "Report on General Taylor's Mission to South Vietnam, 3 November 1961," Doc 210, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*. Hereafter, Taylor Mission Report, and Tab or App. See editorial comment in footnote 1 of document which relates the time of the meeting between Taylor and Kennedy but notes that no record was made of their discussion.

103. Taylor Mission Report, Tab A.

104. Taylor Mission Report, Tab C in ibid. See also Cosmas draft, chap. 1, p. 25.

105. Taylor Mission Report, Tab C in ibid.

106. William Jorden memo to Taylor, 27 Oct 61, Taylor Mission Report, App C in ibid.

107. Sterling Cottrell memo to Taylor, 27 Oct 61, Taylor Mission Report, App B in ibid.

108. Military Committee, n.d. [Oct 61], Taylor Mission Report, App A in ibid.

109. Entry for 14 Nov 61, Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 221.

110. Mansfield memo to President, dtd 2 Nov 61, Subj: The Vietnamese and Southeast Asian Situation, Doc. No. 207 in ibid.

111. Galbraith Paper, A Plan for South Vietnam, 3 Nov 61, Doc No. 209 in ibid. See footnote 1 in document for quotation from covering letter.

112. Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 212 and 218. For the details of the luncheon see the 1969 revised edition of the publication, p. 246. See also Editorial Note, Doc No. 215, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*.

113. Lemnitzer memo to SecDef, CM-414-61, 31 Oct 61, Subj: Support for Vietnam, Doc No. 203 in ibid. General Brown's letter is quoted in footnote 1 of the document.

114. ISA Report quoted in *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1, Sec VI A, "The Final Decisions."

115. Rusk msg to Dept of State, 1 Nov 61, Doc. 204, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*.

116. Memo for the Record, 6 Nov 61, Subj: Meeting to discuss the recommendations of the Taylor Mission to South Viet-Nam, Doc 211, in ibid. Hereafter, Memo for Record, 6 Nov 61. According to the editors, this meeting took place on 4 November, one day after Taylor's meeting with Kennedy. The President was not present during this second meeting. See also Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 245. In his biography of Robert Kennedy, Schlesinger quotes Taylor as saying: The President just didn't want to be convinced that this was the right thing to do." Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York: Ballantine Books Edition, 1979), p. 761. Hereafter, Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy*.

117. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 547. In his biography of Robert Kennedy, Schlesinger cites the source for this quotation as "Author's Journal," 13 Nov 61. See Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy*, note 21, p. 10.

118. *New York Times*, 4 Nov 1961, p. 1.

119. Memorandum for the Record, 6 Nov 61, Subj: Meeting to discuss the recommendations of the Taylor Mission to South Viet-Nam, Doc. 211, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*. In footnote 1 to the above document, the editors declare that although the memo is dated 6 November, they believe that was the drafting date rather than the date of the meeting, which they suggest was 4 November.

120. Ibid.

121. Draft Memo from SecDef to President, 5 Nov 61, Doc. No. 214, in ibid. Hereafter, Draft Memo from SecDef. See footnote 1 as to Bundy as the author of this memorandum.

122. Notes by SecDef, 6 Nov 61, Views of the Chiefs, Doc. No. 217, in ibid. In footnote 1, the editors quote a telephone conversation between Secretaries Rusk and McNamara about doubts that the JCS may have had.

123. Ibid.

124. Draft memo from SecDef. The editors in their footnotes provide McNamara's pen changes to Bundy's draft.

125. SecState draft memo to the President, 7 Nov 61, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc No. 222 in ibid. Editor's footnote 1 indicates that Johnson was the author.

126. Editorial Note, Doc. 225, in ibid. The note quotes telephone conversation between Rusk and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy.

127. SecDef memo to the President, 8 Nov 61, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No.227, in ibid.

128. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 38.

129. Notes of a Meeting, 9 Nov 61, Doc. 232 in, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*. Hereafter, Notes of a Meeting.

130. Draft Memo for the President, 8 Nov 61, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No. 228 in ibid.

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid. See editor's footnote 1 in the document.

133. The Rusk/McNamara, 11 Nov 61, memo is reproduced in *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1, VI B, "The Final Decisions." Hereafter, Rusk/McNamara 11 Nov 61, Memo.

134. Lemnitzer, "Notes of a Meeting," 11 Nov 1961.

135. Ibid. Rusk/McNamara 11 Nov 61, Memo.

136. Tele conversation between Rusk and Taylor, 13 Nov 61, Doc. No. 244, in *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*.

137. The cable is quoted in *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 1, VI B, "The Final Decisions."

138. Notes on the National Security Council Meeting, 15 Nov 61, Doc. No. 254 in *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years 1961–63*.

139. NSAM 111, 22 Nov 61, "First Phase of Vietnam Program," Doc. No. 272 in ibid.

140. SecDef to Chairman JCS, 13 Nov 61, Subj: Command Structure in Vietnam, Doc. No. 245, in ibid.

Chapter 6. From MAAG to MACV

1. Nolting to Dept of State, 18 Nov 61, Doc. No. 266, *FRUS*, online, *Kennedy Years, 1961–63, 1961*, vol. 1. Hereafter, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*.

2. Nolting to State Dept, 22 Nov 61, Doc. No. 270 in ibid.

3. Quoted in "Aftermath," sec. VIC, chap. 1, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2.

4. "Saigon Newspaper Attacks US Policy," *New York Times*, 25 Nov 1961, p. 7.

5. CIA Information Report, 29 Nov 61, Doc. 295, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*.

6. Quoted in "Aftermath," sec. VIC, chap. 1, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2.

7. Robert H. Johnson memo to NSC, dtd 28 Nov 61, Subj: Possible Contingencies in South Vietnam, and editor's fnt. 1, Doc. 292, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

8. Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, "Notes of a Meeting, The White House," 27 Nov 61, Doc. No 285 in ibid.

9. Ibid. Although obviously both Lansdale and Lemnitzer names start with the letter "L," the assumption can be made that the reference was to Lemnitzer in that the latter was directly in the US Chain of Command. Despite Lansdale's experience in Vietnam and his recent participation in

the Taylor mission, he was working at this time on a secret project for Attorney General Robert Kennedy relative to Cuba.

10. Lansdale ltr to Gen. Samuel T. Williams, 28 Nov 61 Doc. No. 293 in ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. See Editor's note in ibid.

13. "Aftermath," sec. VIC, chap. 1, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2.

14. Rusk msg to Nolting, 27 Nov 61, Doc. No. 286, *FRUS* online, *1961*. For references to previous messages see discussion in chap. 3.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Nolting to State Dept, 1 Dec 61, Doc. No. 303 in ibid.

18. Ibid. and Nolting to State Dept, 3 Dec 61, Doc. No. 305 in ibid.

19. "Memo of Understanding," 4 Dec 1961, attachment to Nolting ltr to Diem, 5 Dec 61, Doc. 307 in ibid. Diem had approved the initial draft of this memo the day before.

20. Rusk msg to Nolting, 4 Dec 61, Doc. 306 in ibid.

21. Diem ltr to Kennedy, 7 Dec 61 and Kennedy ltr to Diem, 14 Dec 61. Both letters are reproduced in US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Background Information relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam, (Revised Edition) 90th Congress, 1st Session, July 1967, pp. 100–02. For a copy of the original State Department draft of the Diem letter which was sent to Ambassador Nolting, see Rusk msg to Nolting, 15 Nov 61, Doc. No. 257, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*. Nearly all of the State Department draft except a few words relating to the United Nations charter and world opinion was incorporated into Diem's letter to Kennedy.

22. Bigart is quoted in Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 548.

23. "US Sending 200 Airmen," *New York Times*, 10 Nov 61, p. 14; Robert Trumbull, "US Officers Crowd Saigon on 'Routine Missions,'" *New York Times*, 14 Nov 61, p. 23.

24. GEN Maxwell Taylor, telegram to President, 7 Dec 61, Doc. No. 314, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*. Hereafter, Taylor telegram to President, 7 Dec 61; "Implementing the First Build-Up" sec. A 10, chap. 6, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2; Collins, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950–1972*, p. 26.

25. COL R. H. Moore, USA, Asst S&D, J–5, Talking Paper for the Chairman, 12 Sep 61, JMF 9155.3/3360 (7 Sep 61) Vietnam, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (NARA). Hereafter, Talking Paper for the Chairman, 12 Sep 61. See also chap. 3.

26. Dir Joint Staff to Joint Staff, 28 Nov 61, DJSM-1425-61, Fldr 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61) Vietnam, sec. 2, Records of the Joint Chiefs, RG 218, NARA. Hereafter, Dir Joint Staff, DJSM-1425-61.

27. JCS msg to CinCPac 30 Oct 61, (Folder 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (31 Oct 61), RG 218).

28. JCS msg to Ch Staff, Army, 17 Nov 61 (ibid).

29. Dir Joint Staff, DJSM-1425-61.

30. Note 3, Taylor telegram, 7 Dec 61.

31. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, A History* (New York: Penguin Group, 1984), p. 254.

32. Jacques Nevard, "US 'copter units arrive in Saigon; craft, flown by Americans, to aid in anti-Red fight," *New York Times*, 12 Dec 61, p. 21.

33. See chap. 3 relative to NSAM 104, 13 Oct 61, and the decision to send the "Jungle Jim" squadron to Vietnam.

34. Director, Joint Staff, memo for the Chairman, 14 Nov 61, Subj: South Vietnam DJSM 1383-61 and attachment, Folder 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (13 Oct 61), sec. 1, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 218, NARA.

35. Ibid. and JCS msg 2370 to CinCPac, 15 Nov 61, Fldr 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61) sec. 2, RG 218, NARA. Hereafter, JCS msg to CinCPac, 15 Nov 61.

36. Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *From Military Assistance to Combat 1959–1965, The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict*, vol. II (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, Dept of the Navy, 1986), p. 251.

37. JCS msg to CinCPac, 15 Nov 61.

38. Series of msgs from DOD, JCS, CinCPac, and MAAG, Vietnam, in Fldr 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (26 Oct 61) sec. 1, RG 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, NARA.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid. Eventually Farm Gate became the code name for all US advisory fixed-wing air operations.

41. Copy of Gilpatric ltr to President, 21 Nov 61 in ibid.

42. Rusk memo to the President, 24 Nov 61, Subj: Defoliant Operations, Doc. No. 275, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*.

43. NSC, NSAM No. 115, 30 Nov 61, Subj: Defoliant Operations in Vietnam, in National Security Action Memoranda, http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/images/nsam 115.

44. Rostow memo to President, 21 Nov 61, Doc. No. 269, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*.

45. Rusk msg to Nolting, 5 Dec 61, Doc. No. 310 in ibid. Hereafter, Rusk msg, 5 Dec 61.

46. Kennedy ltr to Chairman Khrushchev, 16 Nov 61, Doc. No. 262, in ibid.

47. US Dept of State, *A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam* (Washington: GPO, 1961). See also references to Jorden Report in chap. 3, and "Editorial Note" Doc. No. 315, *FRUS* online, *Vietnam, 1961*.

48. Editorial Note, Doc. No. 315 and Memorandum of Conversation, NATO Ministerial Conference, Quai D'Orsay, Paris, France, 11 Dec 61, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 316, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

49. Galbraith to Dept of State, 26 Nov 61, Doc. No. 282, in ibid.

50. John Kenneth Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal, A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1969), Entry for 30 Nov 61, p. 235.

51. Rusk msg to Galbraith, 28 Nov 61, Doc. No. 290, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

52. Galbraith msg to Rusk, 7 Dec 61, Doc. No. 313 in ibid.

53. For discussion of the communication with the ICC, see Memo of conversation with Indian Ambassador and SecState 27 Feb 62, and attachment, Doc. No. 90 and Nolting msg to SecState, 1 Mar 62, Doc. No. 91. Both are in *FRUS* online, *1962, Vietnam*, vol. 2.

54. Acting AsstSecDef William P. Bundy memo to Chairman, JCS, 5 Dec 61, Subj: Withdrawal of US Personnel from Laos, Folder 9155.2/3100 Laos (5 Dec 61), Records of the JCS, RG 218, NARA.

55. Lemnitzer memo to SecDef, Subj: Planning for Southeast Asia, 5 Oct 61, JCSM 704-61, Folder 9155.2/3100/Laos (9 May 61)(2) Records of the Joint Chiefs RG 218, NARA.

56. Lemnitzer memo to SecDef, Subj: Withdrawal of US Military Personnel from Laos, 12 Feb 62, Records of the Joint Chiefs RG 218, NARA. This memo contains quotes from the Joint Chiefs document JCSM-12-62, 5 Jan 62, on the same subject that is not in the file.

57. GEN Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972), pp. 217–20, quote is from p. 219. Hereafter, Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*.

58. See Editorial Note, Doc. 281, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

59. James Reston, "Shake-up at State; Shifts in Department Posts Held Correction of Hasty Appointments," *New York Times*, 27 Nov 61, p. 24.

60. See Editorial Note, Doc. No. 300, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

61. See chap. 3 for Rostow's role in the Taylor mission.

62. McGeorge Bundy memo to the President, Subj: Notes for Talk with Secretary Rusk-Nov. 15, 15 Nov 61, Doc. No. 256, *FRUS* online, *1961*. Apparently Johnson as Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs handled Vietnam in the Department rather than McConaughy.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Talking Paper for the Chairman, 12 Sep 61.

66. Ibid.

67. LTGEN Earle G. Wheeler, Director Joint Staff to Chairman, Subj: Experimental Command for South Vietnam, 13 Sep 61, DJSM 1104-61, File 9155.3/3360 Vietnam (7 Sep 61), RG 218 Records of the Joint Chiefs, NARA.

68. SecDef Memo to CJCS, Subj: Command Structure in South Vietnam, 13 Nov 61, Doc. No. 245, *FRUS* online, *1961*. See also reference to this memo in chap. 3.

69. Ibid.

70. C/JCS msg to CinCPac, 13 Nov 1850Z61, Folder 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (13 Nov 61) sec. 1, RG 218, NARA.

71. CinCPac msg to CJCS, 14 Nov 1212Z61 in ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Report by the J–5 to JCS on South Vietnam, 16 Nov 62, JCS 2343/32, with enclosures, File 9155.3/9105 (13 Nov 62), RG 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

74. Note by the Secretaries, 22 Nov 61, JCS 2343/46 and Report by the J–5 on South Vietnam with attachments, 21 Nov 61, File 9155.3/9105 (13 Nov 61), RG 218. See also JCS memo, JCSM-812-61, to SecDef McNamara, 22 Nov 61, Subj: South Vietnam, and attachment, Doc 271, *FRUS* online, *1961*. Hereafter, JCSM-812-61, Doc. 271.

75. Editor's note 1 to JCSM-812-61, Doc. 271.

76. Taylor memo to the President, 27 Nov 61, Subj: Possible Command Relationships in South Vietnam, Doc No. 284, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

77. CinCPac msg to JCS, 29 Nov 61 0301Z, File 9155.3/9105 (13 Nov 61) sec. 1, RG 218, NARA.

78. Bagley's statement is quoted in editor's comment in ftnt 3 to Acting AsstSecDef for ISA, William Bundy memo to SecDef McNamara, 1 Dec 61, Subject: Vietnam Command Arrangements, Doc No. 301, *FRUS* online, *1961*. Hereafter, William Bundy memo, 1 Dec 61, Doc. 301.

79. William Bundy memo, 1 Dec 61, Doc. 301. Apparently Secretary of State Rusk's support for the naming of a four-star general to head the US command in Vietnam was not as strong as William Bundy's brother McGeorge believed it was at the time of his discussion with the Secretary on 15 November. Of course it was possible that the Secretary had changed his mind after consulting with his subordinates in the State Department.

80. Ibid.

81. SecDef ltr to SecState, 7 Dec 61, Doc No. 312, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

82. Ibid.

83. Rostow memo to President, 6 Dec 61, Doc. 311, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

84. Taylor msg to President, 7 Dec 61, Doc. 312, in ibid.

85. Under SecState Ball to SecState, 12 Dec 61, Doc. 317, in ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. SecState ltr to SecDef, 18 Dec 61, Doc. No. 328 and Lemnitzer ltr to McGarr, 23 Dec 61, Doc No. 338 in ibid. Hereafter, Lemnitzer ltr to McGarr, 23 Dec 61, Doc. No. 338.

88. Lemnitzer ltr to McGarr, 23 Nov 61, in ibid.

89. See McGarr msg to Lemnitzer, 20 Dec 61, Doc. No. 331, in ibid.

90. Nolting msg to SecState, 25 Nov 61, Doc. No. 277, in ibid.

91. SecState msg to Nolting, 27 Nov 61, Doc. No. 281, in ibid. See also CinCPac msg to JCS 29 Nov 61 0301Z, File 9155.3/9105 (13 Nov 61) sec. 1, RG 218, NARA.

92. Nolting msg to U. Alexis Johnson, 13 Dec 61, Doc. No. 318, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

93. For description of earlier concerns of McGarr, see chap. 3.

94. "Appreciation of Vietnam, Nov 1961–Apr 1962 [Thompson Report]," dtd 27 Oct 61, Encl 1 to CinCPac memo to JCS, 5 Dec 61, Subj: Activities of the "Thompson" Grp, Folder 9155.3/3360 Vietnam, 9 Aug 61, RG 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

95. "Thompson's Counterproposals," sec. IIE, chap. 2, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2. Hereafter, "Thompson's Counterproposals."

96. Thompson is quoted in ibid.

97. CinCPac msg to MAAG, 23 Oct 61 0617Z, File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (8 Nov 61), RG 218, NARA.

98. CinCPac msg to MAAG, 3 Nov 61 2358Z in ibid.

99. Geographically Phased National Level Operation Plan For Counterinsurgency, Encl 1 to MAAG ltr to JCS, 8 Nov 61, Subj: SVN Operation Plan, File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (8 Nov 61).

100. Ibid. and "Thompson's Counterproposals."

101. McGarr is quoted in "Initial Reaction of US Military Advisors," sec. III A, chap. 2, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2.

102. McGarr Comments [on Thompson report], 18 Nov 61, Encl 2 to CinCPac memo to JCS, 5 Dec 61, Subj: Activities of the "Thompson" Grp, File 9155.3/3360 Vietnam 9 Aug 61, RG 218, NARA.

103. Nolting to State Dept, 30 Nov 61, Doc. No. 299, *FRUS* online, *1961*. Hereafter, Nolting to State Dept, Doc. No. 299. According to the editors, Deputy AsstSecState Johnson declared that "General Taylor stated that he was 'somewhat disturbed' that 'Thompson was using me as a kind of screen for his out-of-channel operations in Saigon.'"

104. Ibid.

105. CinCPac memo to JCS, 5 Dec 61, Subj: the "Thompson" Grp Activities, File 9155.3/3360 Vietnam, 9 Aug–Apr 62, RG 218, NARA.

106. Roger Hilsman, Dir of I&R, Dept of State, to SecState, 16 Nov 61, Subj: Taylor Rept, Doc. No. 259, *FRUS* online, *1961*. See also Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1967), pp. 429–31. Hereafter, Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*.

107. Nolting to State Dept, Doc. No. 299.

108. CinCPac msg to MAAG, 28 Nov 61, 0119Z, File 155.3/9105 Vietnam (8 Nov 61), RG 218, NARA.

109. Nolting msg to State Department, 3 Dec 61, Doc 305 in *FRUS* online, *1961*. Quote is from editor's ftnt 2 of document.

110. CinCPac msg to MAAG, 23 Dec 61, Doc. No. 337, in ibid. Hereafter, CinCPac msg 23 Dec 61, Doc No. 337.

111. CH MAAG to CinCPac 210057Z, 21 Dec 61, File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (8 Nov 61), RG 218, NARA. This message is reproduced as Document 333, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

112. McNamara personal to Felt and McGarr, 28 Nov 61, Doc. No. 289, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

113. Ibid. and Editorial Note, Doc. No. 324 in *FRUS* online, *1961*. Hereafter, Editorial Note 324.

114. Editorial Note 324.

115. Ibid.

116. See Lemnitzer ltr to McGarr, 23 Nov 61.

117. MajGen T. W. Parker memo to Lemnitzer, 18 Dec 61, Doc. No. 325, in ibid. Hereafter, Parker memo, Doc. No. 325.

118. Edwin W. Martin ltr to S. Cottrell, 18 Dec 61, Doc. No. 326, in ibid. Hereafter, Martin ltr, Doc No. 326. Martin was the State Department Representative on the CinCPac Staff. He had relieved Cottrell in this position and Cottrell now headed the Vietnam Task Force in Washington.

119. Ibid.

120. CinCPac msg to JCS, DA, ChMAAG, 19022Z Dec 61, File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (30 Nov 61), sec. 2, RG 218, NARA. See also "Consolidation of Decisions and Actions, SecDef Conference," encl to McGarr ltr to Adm. Felt, 18 Dec 61, File 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61), sec. 2, RG 218, NARA. Hereafter, "Consolidation of Decisions and Actions," NARA.

121. "Consolidation of Decisions and Actions," NARA.

122. Ibid. See also Parker memo, Doc. 325 and Martin ltr, Doc. 326.

123. Parker memo, Doc. No. 325. See also Martin ltr, Doc. No. 326 and "Consolidation of Decisions and Actions," NARA.

124. McGarr ltr to McNamara, 18 Dec 61, File 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61), RG 218, NARA, sec. 2.

125. McGarr ltr to Lemnitzer, 20 Dec 61.

126. Lemnitzer ltr to McGarr, 23 Dec 61, Doc. No. 338. See also Martin ltr, Doc. No. 326.

127. SecDef memo to SecState, 18 Dec 61, Doc. No. 327, *FRUS* online, *1961*.

128. SecState ltr to SecDef, 18 Dec 61, Doc. No. 328, in ibid.

129. Nolting cable to SecState, 19 Dec 61, Doc. No. 330, in ibid.

130. The "terms of Reference" of the agreement are enumerated in Lemnitzer msg to ADM Felt, 6 Jan 62, Doc. No. 9, *FRUS* online, *1962, Vietnam*, vol. 2. Hereafter, Lemnitzer msg, 6 Jan 62, Doc. No. 9. These were not revised after the McNamara and Rusk meeting.

131. McNamara ltr to President, 22 Dec 61, Doc. No. 336 in *FRUS* online, *1961*. The agreement was not attached to this letter.

132. Quotation is from Graham A. Cosmas, draft, "History of MACV," chap. 2, "A Joint Command—Complications and Conflicts, 1962–63" p. 6. Cosmas cites for the quotation USAMHI Senior Officer Debriefing Program, Conversation between Gen. Paul D. Harkins and Maj. Jacob B. Couch, Jr., transcript, pp. 32–34.

133. Harkins Military History, 13 Apr 61, File 9060/1120 SEATO (9 Apr 61) Folder 1, RG 218, NARA.

134. McG. Bundy memo to President, 27 Dec 61, Subj: Military Command in South Vietnam, Doc. No. 342, in *FRUS* online, *1961*.

135. DepSecDef Gilpatric, Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting with President Kennedy, 3 Jan 68, Doc. No. 3, in *FRUS* online, *1962*. Gen. Lemnitzer also kept a record of the meeting, see Lemnitzer msg, 6 Jan 62, Doc. No. 9.

136. Lemnitzer msg, 6 Jan 62, Doc. No. 9.

137. Editors ftnt 2 to Taylor memo to President, 11 Jan 62, Subj: Meeting with Ambassador Frederick Nolting, 10:00 a.m., January 12, 1962, Doc. No. 14 in ibid. See also "Terms of Reference for the Senior United States Military Commander in Vietnam," 12 Jan 61, Doc. No. 17, in ibid. In ftnt 2, Doc. 17, the editors cite a later Nolting interview in which he claimed, "President Kennedy agreed during the meeting that the Ambassador should have overall authority in Vietnam and that the military commander's terms of reference should reflect this relationship. President Kennedy, according to Nolting, directed General Taylor, in the course of the meeting, to revise the draft terms of reference along these lines." On the other hand, the editors also cite a record of telephone conversation between Secretaries McNamara and Rusk on 12 January that refers to the President being "presented a paper incorporating Nolting's views on the relationship between the Ambassador and military commander. The record says that the President handed the paper to Taylor." The quote from the revised terms of reference is from Doc. No. 17. In ftnt 1 of Doc. 17, the editors note that the "revised terms of reference were transmitted to McNamara from General Taylor." According to the editors, they also note that the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs under Harriman also prepared a revised draft.

138. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 250.

139. Taylor, memo [for the record], 13 Jan 62, Subj: Points at Issue with Regard to the Command Structure in South Vietnam, Doc. No. 17 in *FRUS* online, *1962*. According to the editors of the *FRUS*, citing an oral history interview with Ambassador Nolting, Secretary McNamara told the Ambassador "that his hands were tied on the terms of reference for the commander of MAC by JCS opposition to placing a four-star general in a position subordinate to an ambassador. As a result, the basic problem of who had overall authority to conduct US relations with the Government of Vietnam remained unresolved in Nolting's mind." (Department of State, Office of the Historian, Vietnam Interviews, Frederick Nolting, June 1, 1984.) See ftnt 3, Nolting cable to SecState, 17 Jan 62, Doc. No. 25, in ibid. Hereafter, Nolting Doc. No. 25.

140. Taylor memo to the President, 13 Jan 62, Subj: Visit of Secretary McNamara at 10:30 a.m., 13 January, Doc. No. 19, in ibid.

141. Nolting Doc. No. 25.

142. U. Alexis Johnson to Gen. Taylor, 18 Jan 62, in ibid. The editors note that the letter that General Taylor received from Thompson was dated 3 Jan 62.

143. Summary of President Kennedy's Remarks to the 496th Meeting of the National Security Council, 18 Jan 68, *FRUS, 1961–63, National Security Policy*, vol. 8. Hereafter *FRUS, 1961–63*, 8.

144. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 53 and 427.

145. Kennedy memo to SecDef McNamara, 11 Jan 68, Doc. No. 67, *FRUS, 1961–63*, 8.

146. NSAM 214 and Special Annex, 18 Jan 62, Doc. No. 124, in ibid. Taylor, *Sword and Plowshares*, pp. 201–02.

147. Editor's ftnt 1, Hilsman, "A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam," 2 Feb 62, Doc. No. 42.

148. OSD msg to CinCPac 6 Jan 62 signed by Wm. P. Bundy, File 9155.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec. 2, RG 218, NARA; Edwin W. Martin ltr to S. Cottrell, 19 Jan 62, Doc. No. 29, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*. Hereafter, Martin ltr, Jan 62, Doc. No. 29.

149. Martin ltr, Jan 62, Doc. No. 29.

150. "Where to Begin?" sec. IVA, chap. 2, *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2. Hereafter, "Where to Begin," *Pentagon Papers*. See also McGarr Memo for Record, Jan 12, Subj. Meeting with President Diem, 11 Jan 62, Doc. No. 13, vol. 2, *FRUS, 1962*.

151. Martin ltr, Jan 62, Doc. No. 29.

152. "Where to Begin," *Pentagon Papers*. According to the authors of the *Pentagon Papers*, General McGarr at first demurred, wanting to have the "test" operation in Phuoc Tuy Province

south of Saigon, which contained the port city of Vung Tau, the designated area for US troops to land "if a decision were ever made to commit them."

153. Martin ltr, Jan 62, Doc. No. 29.

154. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 427.

155. Ibid., pp. 436–438. See also the account of the operation in Hilsman, "A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam," 2 Feb 62, Doc. No. 42. An official investigation into the operation apparently supported Hilsman's conclusions: "Study of CHMAAG's report of the entire operation indicates that the plan did not make adequate use of the element of surprise. Troop movements prior to the attack alarmed the VC and the heavy air activity caused a VC alert and evacuation. Had troop movements been carried out gradually over the period of a few days prior to the attack and with some deceptive moves included, VC suspicions may not have been aroused. Aerial reconnaissance and the airstrikes appear too prolonged and without an attempt at deceptive strikes in areas outside the actual objective zones." DepSecDef Gilpatric memo to Gen. Taylor, 6 Feb 62, Subj: Binh Hoa Operation of 21 January 1962, Doc. No. 49, vol. 2, *FRUS, 1962*.

156. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 439.

157. "Memorandum on the Substance of Discussion at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting," 9 Feb 62, Doc. No. 54, vol. 2, *FRUS, 1962*.

158. For DOD action see DepAsstSecDef Bundy memo to DepSecDef Gilpatric, 31 Jan 62, Subj: Air Operations in South Vietnam, 31 Jan 62, Doc. No. 39, in ibid.

159. CinCPac msg to ChMAAG, 3 Feb 62, Doc. No. 47, in ibid.

160. Hilsman, "A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam," 2 Feb 62, Doc. No. 42.

161. Editorial note, Doc. No. 46, in ibid.

162. Nolting msg to SecState, 17 Jan 62, Doc. No. 25, in ibid.

163. Dept of State msg to Nolting, 1 Feb 62, Doc. No. 40, in ibid.

164. Graham A. Cosmas, draft, "History of MACV," chap. 1, "A Deepening Commitment and a New Command," p. 35.

165. CJCS memo to SecDef, Subj: The Strategic Importance of the Southeast Asia Mainland, 13 Jan 62, JCSM-33-62 and appendix, File 9155.3/9105 (30 Nov 61) sec. 1, RG 218, NARA.

166. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 41.

167. James Reston, "The Undeclared War in South Vietnam 'Less Than Candid,'" dateline 13 Feb 62, *New York Times*, 14 Feb 62, p. 34.

Chapter 7. A New Beginning

1. Col. Robert M. Levy, Talking Papers, 4 Jan 62, Subj: "Current Actions and Requirements in Viet-Nam," Doc. No. 6, *FRUS*, online, *Kennedy Years, 1961–63, 1962*, vol. 2. Hereafter, citations for this volume are *FRUS, 1962*. See chap. 3 for the Taylor visit to Vietnam and resulting report.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. See chap. 4 for the Nolting discussions with Diem in November–December 1961.

4. "Talking Paper for the Chairman, JCS, for meeting with the President of the United States on Current US Military Actions in South Vietnam," 9 January 1962, *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 12, pp. 412–39. Hereafter, "Talking Paper," 9 Jan 62, *Pentagon Papers*. Notwithstanding the title of the document, there is no evidence that President Kennedy met with General Lemnitzer on this date. See Editorial Note, Doc. No. 10, *FRUS, 1962*.

5. "Talking Paper," 9 Jan 62, *Pentagon Papers*

6. Lemnitzer memo to SecDef, 13 Jan 62, Subj: "Increase of GVN Forces," *FRUS, 1962*. Hereafter, Lemnitzer memo to SecDef, 13 Jan 62, *FRUS, 1962*. The actual strength of the Vietnamese armed forces were as follows: Army: 163,696; Navy: 4,207; Air Force: 5,314; and Marines: 3,135. "Talking Paper," 9 Jan 62, *Pentagon Papers*.

7. Lemnitzer memo to SecDef, 13 Jan 62, *FRUS, 1962*.

8. CJCS memo to President, 13 Jan 62, Subj: The Strategic Importance of the Southeast Asia Mainland, JCSM-33-62 and appendix 9155.3/9105 (30 Nov 61) sec. 1, RG 218, JCS Records NARA. Copy also in *Pentagon Papers*, vol. 12, pp. 447–54 and also discussion in chap. 3 which highlighted the differences in the strategic views of the situation between the Chiefs and Secretary McNamara. McNamara in his covering note of 27 Jan 62 also stated that he was not ready to accept "the views of the Chiefs until we have more experience with the present program in Vietnam." Ibid. pp. 447–8.

9. President Kennedy's News Conference, 7 Feb 1962, *Public Papers of the Presidents: Kennedy, 1962* (Washington: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, GPO, 1963) p. 121. Hereafter, *Public Papers: Kennedy, 1962*.

10. Jack Raymond, "Fears on Vietnam Rising in Capital," 11 Feb 62, *New York Times*, 12 Feb 62, p. 1.

11. Jack Raymond, "GOP Asks Candor on Vietnam War," 13 Feb 62, ibid., 14 Feb 62, p. 1. Hereafter, Raymond, "GOP Asks Candor."

12. President Kennedy's News Conference, 14 Feb 1962, *Public Papers: Kennedy, 1962*, p. 136.

13. Raymond, "GOP Asks Candor," p. 5.

14. "GOP in New Attack on Vietnam Secrecy," 17 Feb 62, *New York Times*, 18 Feb 62, p. 26.

15. Memorandum from the Director of the Vietnam Task Force (Cottrell) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, (Harriman), 17 Feb 62, Subj: Tuesday, Senate Foreign Relations Meeting—Viet-Nam, Doc. No. 68, *FRUS, 1962*.

16. Ibid.

17. Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations (Dutton) to the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Fulbright), 14 Mar 62, with enclosure, Doc. No. 108 in ibid. The enclosure contained Morse's questions and the Department's answers.

18. David Kaiser, *American Tragedy, Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 129. Hereafter, Kaiser, *American Tragedy*. Kaiser in his footnote states that the Vietnam portion of the meeting was never published. He cites as his source the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, National Security File, Clifton Series, Conferences with the President, 1/25/61–2/27/62.

19. Rusk msg to Nolting, 23 Feb 62, Doc. No. 82, *FRUS, 1962*. Hereafter, Rusk msg, 23 Feb 62, Doc. 82. See chap. 4 and the citation there for the 20 January letter from Rusk to Nolting.

20. Dir, Joint Staff, DJSM 151-62 to DepAsstSecDef (ISA), 3 Feb 62, Attachment of Agenda items [Feb Honolulu Meeting] 9155.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec. 2, RG 218, NARA; Memorandum from the Director of the Vietnam Task Force (Cottrell) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Harriman), 17 Feb 62, Subj: Your Meeting in Honolulu on February 19, Doc. 67 and Editorial Note, Doc. No. 71, *FRUS, 1962*.

21. Memorandum from the Director of the Vietnam Task Force (Cottrell) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson), 16 Feb 62, Subj: Civic Action Teams and the Provincial Survey in Viet-Nam, Doc. No. 64, *FRUS, 1962*.

22. Memorandum from the Naval Aide of the President's Military Representative (Bagley) to the President's Military Representative (Taylor), 23 Feb 62, Subj: Viet-Nam Task Force Meeting, 21 February 1962, Doc. 74, in ibid. Hereafter, Bagley Memo, 23 Feb 62.

23. Memorandum from the Director of the Vietnam Task Force (Cottrell) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson), 16 Feb 62, Subj: Civic Action Teams and the Provincial Survey in Viet-Nam in ibid. Bagley Memo, 23 Feb 62.

24. Letter from the Commander in Chief, Pacific's Political Adviser (Martin), to the Director of the Vietnam Task Force (Cottrell), 21 Feb 62, Doc. No. 77, *FRUS, 1962.*

25. Ibid. Hereafter, Martin ltr., Doc. No. 77.

26. Ibid.

27. Horace Bigart, *New York Times*, 2 Feb 1962, p. 3.

28. Martin ltr., Doc. No. 77.

29. Memorandum from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs (Rowan) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson), 15 Feb 62, Subj: US Handling of American Newsmen in South Viet-Nam, Doc. No. 62 in ibid. Italics in quote are in the original.

30. Nolting msg to State, 6 Feb 62, Doc. No. 48 in ibid.

31. Memorandum from the Director of the Vietnam Task Force (Cottrell) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs (Rowan), 13 Feb 62, Subj: re Press Treatment, Doc. No. 59 in ibid. The quote is from ftnt 1.

32. Memorandum from the Naval Aide of the President's Military Representative (Bagley) to the President's Military Representative (Taylor), 19 Feb 62, Doc. No. 73 in ibid.

33. William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968, US Army in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), p. 12.

34. Rusk msg to Nolting, 21 Feb 62, Doc. No. 75, *FRUS, 1962.* Hereafter, Rusk msg, Doc. No. 75. See ftnt 1 relative to discussion at Honolulu Meeting relative to guidelines.

35. Bagley Memo, 23 Feb 62.

36. Rusk msg, Doc. No. 75.

37. Ch MAAG Vietnam msg to CinCPac 5 Feb 62 1405Z, File 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 62) sec. 6, RG 218, Records of the JCS, NARA; CinCPac to JCS 28 Feb 62 0217Z, File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (31 Oct 61) RG 218, Records of the JCS, NARA; Bagley memo 23 Feb 62; *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, "Implementing the First Buildup," chap. 6, IIA 10. Hereafter, *Pentagon Papers*, "Implementing the First Buildup."

38. DJSM-249-62, 23 Feb 62, Subj Actions to Implement Military Programs in South Vietnam, Fldr 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61), RG 218, JCS, NARA. According to former Army Historian Graham A. Cosmas, efforts to bring the research people under military control was resisted by Dr. Harold Brown, the Defense Director of Research and Engineering. The research field unit in Vietnam was part of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), a division of the Office of the Director of Defense Research and Engineering. As a compromise in August 1962, McNamara "appointed a single director, Brigadier General Robert H. York, a member of Dr. Brown's Pentagon staff, for both the ARPA Field Unit and the Joint Operational Evaluation Group. Under terms of reference issued by Admiral Felt in December, General York was to oversee and evaluate all military research, development, and testing in South Vietnam. He was to report to ARPA on matters of research and development and tests of equipment and systems and to COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Joint Chiefs on the evaluation of military operations and tests of materiel by troops in the field. "Joint Command—Complications and Conflicts, 1962–63," p. 25. Hereafter, Cosmas draft, "History, Joint Command."

39. CinCPac msg to JCS, 23 Feb 62, Doc. No. 81, *FRUS, 1962.*

40. Ibid.

41. See chap. 2 and 4.

42. Transcript of Oral History with Gen. Paul D. Harkins by Ted Gittinger, 10 Nov 61, copy in Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, pp. 8 and 11–12. The quote is from p. 8. Hereafter, Harkins Interview. (Copies of the transcript are available online from the University of Virginia Library web site).

43. Rusk msg, 23 Feb 62, Doc. No. 82.

44. Lemnitzer draft of ltr to Sec. McNamara, 2 Mar 62, and attached clippings "Nolting to Keep Reins in Vietnam," *NY Times*, 11 Feb 62 and "Touchy Political Situation," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 28 Feb 62, Memos to SecDef, File, L-213-71, Lemnitzer Papers, National Defense University Library.

45. Harkins Oral History, pp. 20–21. The quote is from p. 21.

46. Cosmas, draft, "History, Joint Command, pp. 1–2. Cosmas in his draft cites CinCPac msg 7 Feb 62 relative to responsibility of COMUSMACV.

47. Ibid. Quotation is on p. 19. Cosmas cites Ltr, Harkins to Cowles, 29 Aug 79, Historians files, CMH. Harkins Interv, 23 Feb 72, pp. 25, 77–78.

48. Nolting msg to Dept of State, 27 Feb 62, Doc. No. 88; Brigadier General Howard K. Eggleston (?), Memo for the Record, 1 Mar 62, Subj: Meeting at Gia Long Palace, Saigon, Vietnam, from 1530–1815, 1 March 1962, Doc. No. 93 in ibid. Hereafter, Eggleston (?) Memo for the Record, 1 Mar 62. The editors in ftnt 1 observe that although the memo was unsigned, it was typed on MAAG stationery. They believe, therefore, that General Eggleston, the Deputy Chief for Plans & Programs for the MAAG was the author. See also Nolting msg to SecState, 2 Mar 62, Doc. No. 96. Hereafter, Nolting msg, 2 Mar 62; all in *FRUS, 1962*.

49. Eggleston (?) Memo for the Record, 1 Mar 62; Nolting msg, 2 Mar 62.

50. Harkins Interview, pp. 16–17.

51. Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, 20 Oct 61, Subj: Suggested Contingency Plan, enclosure to AsstSecState Harriman to Nolting, 27 Feb 62, Doc. No. 89, *FRUS, 1962*. Hereafter, Harriman to Nolting, 27 Feb 62, Doc. No. 89. The italics in the quote were in the original.

52. Harriman to Nolting, 27 Feb 62, Doc. No. 89.

53. BGen Clifton, USA, memo to Nat'l Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, 29 Mar 62, Doc. No. 135, *FRUS, 1962*. Hereafter, Clifton Memo, Doc. 135. All italics in the quotes were in the original.

54. Gen. Lemnitzer, Meeting of JCS with President, 1 Mar 62 in File L-214-71, White House Meetings, Box 29. According to the editors of the *FRUS, 1962* volume, they had not found any record that the meeting took place. See ftnt 2, Clifton Memo, Doc 135. General Lemnitzer's brief notes serve to verify the validity of Clifton's memo.

55. JCS case file sheet and Dir of Joint Staff Herbert Riley VAdm, msg to CinCPac, 25 Apr 62, [msg drafted by MajGen (USMC) Victor H. Krulak, SACSA (Special Assistant for Counter Insurgency and Special Activities)] File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (2 Nov 61) Records of the JCS, RG 218 NARA. Hereafter, Riley and Krulak msg, 25 Apr 62, RG 218, NARA. The JCS case file sheet refers to a message sent earlier to CinCPac with the subject listed above.

56. CinCPac (Felt) memorandum to Rostow, 2 Nov 61, no subject, Doc. No. 206, *FRUS, 1961*. Copies of this memorandum were also sent to the Joint Chiefs and General Taylor. See editor's note in ftnt 1 of the document.

57. Riley and Krulak msg, 25 Apr 62, RG 218, NARA. The message refers to a second CinCPac message apparently in response to the JCS message mentioned above in JCS case file sheet. In their response to CinCPac, Riley and Krulak wrote, "The US possesses substantial resources for pursuit of the varied clandestine tasks which you envisage. As you are well aware, the initiation of all such projects would have to be preceded by high level approval here in Washington."

58. Eggleston (?) Memo for the Record, 1 Mar 62, Doc. No. 93.

59. Ibid. and Nolting msg to SecState, 1 Mar 62, Doc. No. 96, *FRUS, 1962*.

60. US Embassy, Vietnam, msg to Dept of State, 15 Mar 62, Doc. No. 110, *FRUS, 1962*.

61. Roger Hilsman, Memorandum for the Record, 19 Mar 62, Doc. No. 115 in ibid. According to the editors, Hilsman sent copies of the report to members of his staff in Washington. He concluded the report by stating that "The whole business could blow up in any number of horrendous ways" and suggested trying some way to "intervene either at the White House with Bobby Kennedy or in some other way." According to Hilsman, he was in Vietnam to report back to President Kennedy on the situation in Vietnam. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 441.

62. Memorandum from the Naval Aide of the President's Military Representative (Bagley) to the President's Military Representative (Taylor), 27 Mar 62, Subj: SecDef Honolulu Conference on South Viet-Nam, 22 March 1962, Doc. No. 125 in ibid. Hereafter, Bagley memo, 27 Mar 62.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Decree by the President of the Republic of Vietnam No. 1/QP, 16 Mar 62, Subject: Special instructions on the plan to restore security in the third tactical zone, Doc. No. 113 in ibid. See also chap. 4 and *Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition*, vol. 2, chap. 2, sec. IVA, "Where to Begin." Hereafter, *Pentagon Papers*, "Where to Begin."

66. Bagley Memo, 27 Mar 62.

67. Clipping from unnamed English Language Newspaper, "We'll Provide Whatever is Needed, Lemnitzer," n.d. [28 Mar 62?] and COMUSMACV msg to ChJusMAG, Thailand, 240431Z Mar 62. Hereafter, Lemnitzer Trip Itinerary. Both documents are in Far East Trip, Box 30 File L-222-71, Lemnitzer Papers, National Defense University Library.

68. Lemnitzer Trip Itinerary.

69. Memorandum from the Naval Aide of the President's Military Representative (Bagley) to the President's Military Representative (Taylor), 10 Mar 62, Subj: Operation Sunrise, Doc. 103, *FRUS, 1962*. Hereafter, Bagley memo, Operation Sunrise. See also chap. 4; *Pentagon Papers*, "Where to Begin"; Lemnitzer handwritten notes, Conference at HqCinCPac, 15 Jan 62 in Notes Miscellaneous Meetings, Box 29, File L-218-71, Lemnitzer Papers, National Defense University Library and Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 168. Kaiser cites as his source the Operation Sunrise Plan in JCS File 9155.3/9105 (22 Feb 62), NARA, RG 218.

70. *Pentagon Papers*, "Where to Begin"; Eggleston (?) Memo for the Record, 1 Mar 62.

71. Hilsman memo to Gen. Taylor, 31 Mar 62, Subj: Report on Meeting with General Harkins, Directed by Higher Authority, 31 Mar 62, Doc. No. 114, *FRUS, 1962*. Hereafter, Hilsman memo to Taylor, 31 Mar 62. See also Bagley memo, Operation Sunrise and *Pentagon Papers*, "Where to Begin." Coincidentally the opening of the campaign was on the same date as the March Secretary of Defense Honolulu Conference.

72. Homer Bigart, "US Role in Vietnam," 31 Mar 62, *New York Times*, Week in Review Section, 1 Apr 62, p. 177. Hereafter, Bigart, "US Role in Vietnam," 1 Apr 62.

73. Hilsman memo to Gen. Taylor, 31 Mar 62, Subj: Report on Meeting with General Harkins, Directed by Higher Authority, 31 Mar 62, Doc. No. 114, *FRUS, 1962*. Hereafter, Hilsman memo to Taylor, 31 Mar 62. In a message to AsstSec Harriman, Hilsman was slightly less pessimistic, stating that, it was "too early to make an assessment...." See Hilsman to Harriman, 3 Apr 62, Subj: Implementation of an Effective Strategic Concept for South Vietnam, Doc. No. 139 in ibid.

74. Bigart, "US Role in Vietnam," 1 Apr 62. The cartoon had originally appeared in the *Sacramento Bee*.

75. Rusk msg to Nolting, 4 Apr 62, Doc. No. 145, *FRUS, 1962*.

76. Nolting msg to AsstSec Harriman, Doc. No. 150 in ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Homer Bigart, "Vietnam Sets Up Fortified Towns," 31 Mar 62, *New York Times*, 1 Apr 62, p. 3.

79. Nolting msg to Harriman, 27 Mar 62, Doc. No. 13.

80. Dept of State Circular 1730, 11 Apr 62, Doc. No. 155 in ibid.

81. See chart "Selected Field Advisors, April 1962 and Nov 1963" in *Pentagon Papers*, "Implementing the First Buildup." See also Table 1, "US Military Personnel in Southeast Asia, 1960–1968" in Col. John Schlight, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, The War in South Vietnam, The Years of the Offensive, 1965–1968* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1988), p. 5. Hereafter, Schlight, *The Years of the Offensive*. Robert H. Whitlow, *US Marines in Vietnam, The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964* (Washington, DC: History & Museums Division, HQUSMC, 1977), pp. 46–7. Hereafter, Whitlow, *The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era*; Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict: from Military Assistance to Combat, 1959–1965* (Washington, DC, Naval Historical Center, 1986), pp. 220–223.

82. US Embassy Vietnam msg to Dept of State, 20 Mar 62, Doc. No. 120; Dept of State msg to US Embassy Vietnam, 21 Mar 62, Doc. 121; SecState msg to Dept of State, 24 Mar 62, Doc. 128; Dept of State msg to SecState, 26 Mar 62, Doc. No. 131 (all msgs in *FRUS, 1962*). See also JCS History Office, "draft history, 1959–1968," chap. 5, citing CinCPac Command History, 1962, p. 189.

83. Table 1, Schlight, *The Years of the Offensive*, p. 5.

84. Whitlow, *The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era*, p. 62.

85. Hq, MAAG, Vietnam, to CinCPac, 8 Feb 62, Subj: Army Aviation Plan for South Vietnam, File 9155.3/9105/Vietnam (31 Oct 61), Records of the JCS, RG 218, NA.

86. JCS memo to C/S US Army, 2 Mar 62, File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (31 Oct 61) in ibid.

87. Whitlow, *The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era*, pp. 57–58. Whitlow cites the following messages: CHMAAG VN msg to CinCPac, 26 Feb 62, 08945Z; CGFMFPAC to JCS, 28 Feb 62, 0113Z; CinCPac to CinCPac, 28 Feb 62 2044Z; all in HQMC Message File.

88. Ibid. In addition to the messages listed above, Whitlow cites the following: CinCPac to ComUSMACV, 5 Mar 62, 0340Z and ComUSMACV to CinCPac, 8 Mar 62 0941Z, both in HQMC Message File.

89. Ibid.

90. CinCPac msg to JCS 14 Mar 62, File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (31 Oct 61) RG 218, Records of the JCS, NA.

91. JCS Decision Paper, JCS 2343/96 and encl. 19 Mar 62, File 9155.3/9105 Vietnam (31 Oct 61) in ibid. Hereafter, JCS Decision Paper.

92. Whitlow, *The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era*, p. 59. Whitlow cites as his source: Dir, DivAv, HQMC, Briefing Item, 14 Mar 62, for CMC Weekly Conf., Subj: Assignment of Marine Helicopter Squadron to CHMAAG, Vietnam.

93. JCS Decision Paper.

94. Whitlow, *The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era*, p. 61; US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, (Revised Edition) 90th Congress, 1st Session, July 1967, p. 9; Table 1, Schlight, *The Years of the Offensive*, p. 5. See also Terrence Maitland, Stephen Weiss, and the Editors of Boston Publishing Company, *The Vietnam Experience: Raising the Stakes* (Boston, MA: Boston Publishing Company, 1982), p. 8.

95. Kennedy is quoted in Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Shulman, *Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words, The Unpublished Recollections of the Kennedy Years* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), "Interview with Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Feb 65," p. 10.

96. Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995–1996), pp. 47–48.

97. Cottrell memo to AsstSecState for Far Eastern Affairs Harriman, 17 Feb 62, Subj: Senate Foreign Relations Committee Meeting, Doc. No. 68, *FRUS, 1962*. In this message, Cottrell provided Harriman data and rationale on Vietnam for the latter's testimony before the Committee.

98. State msg to Embassy in Vietnam, 1 Mar 62, Doc. No. 95, *FRUS, 1962*. In ftnt 1 of the document, the editors state that the message was drafted for the Secretary by Cottrell and approved by AsstSec Harriman.

99. Director of the Vietnam Task Force (Cottrell) memo to AsstSecState for Far Eastern Affairs (Harriman), 3 Apr 62, Doc. No 138, *FRUS, 1962*.

100. Memo for the Record, 3 May 62, Minutes of Meeting of Special Group (CI), Doc. 180 in ibid.

101. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972), pp. 191–2. See also chap. 4.

102. JCS Special Assistant for Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities (Krulak), Memorandum to DepSecDef Gilpatric, 26 Mar 62, Subj. Civic Action in Vietnam, Doc. No. 132, *FRUS, 1962*.

103. Graham A. Cosmas, draft, "History of MACV," chap. 1, "A Deepening Commitment and a New Command," p. 36.

104. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 130. In his ftnt, Kaiser cites *FRUS, 1961–63*, XXIV, pp. 130.

Chapter 8. The Continuing War in Vietnam

1. Ambassador-at-Large Bowles, Memorandum to the President, 4 April 1962, Doc. No. 142. State Dept, *FRUS*, online, *Kennedy Years, 1961–63*, vol. 2. Hereafter, *FRUS* online, vol. 2. See previous chap. 3 and 4 for discussion of the earlier memoranda.

2. See JCS draft manuscript, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968," chap. 5, pp. 19–20, citing JCSM-282-62 to SecDef, 13 Apr 62, derived from JCS 2343/108, Memo, ASD/ISA to D/JS, "US Policy toward Vietnam," 10 Apr 62, JCS 2343/105, 11 Apr 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (30 Nov 61).

3. Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 293–96.

4. Ibid, p. 296. Galbraith's covering letter and memorandum is reproduced in ibid., pp. 296–299.

5. Galbraith memo to the President, 4 April 1962, Doc. No. 141 in ibid. See also chap. 4 for the description of the "Thanksgiving Massacre."

6. Michael V. Forrestal, Memorandum of a Conversation between the President and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Harriman), dtd, 6 Feb 62, Doc. No. 148, in ibid. See chap. 6 for discussion of State Dept draft memo to Ambassador Nolting pertaining to relations between advisors and press. For copy of actual message to Ambassador Nolting, see Rusk msg to Nolting, 4 Apr 62, Doc. No. 145, *FRUS, 1962*.

7. AsstSecDef (ISA) memo to SecDef, dtd 14 Apr 62, with attached draft memo to President, Doc. No. 156 in ibid.

8. Attached draft memo to President, Doc. No. 156 in ibid.

9. Ibid. See also reference to SNIE 10-62, 10 Feb 62, in Editor's Note, Doc. 78, *FRUS, 1962*.

10. See ftnt 1 to Doc. 156 in ibid. for the Secretary's response.

11. Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, 16 Apr 62, Doc. 158, in ibid.

12. Telegram from the Embassy in India to the Department of State, 19 Apr 62, Doc. 164, in ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Draft Memorandum of Conversation, 1 May 1962, Doc. No. 176 in ibid., *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

15. For example of American concern over the Laotian situation in January, 1962, see Memorandum for the Record, Presidential Conference, 6 Jan 62, Doc. No. 264, *FRUS* online *Kennedy Years, Laos, 1961–63*, vol. 24. Hereafter, Doc. No. 264.

16. Far Eastern Region, ISA, DOD, Draft Working Paper, 16 Dec 61, Subj: Contingency Planning, Folder 091 Laos 1962–64, Box 10, Records of Gen. Maxwell Taylor, RG 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, NARA. See also ActingAsstSecDef William P. Bundy memo to Chairman, JCS, 5 Dec 61, Subj: Withdrawal of US Personnel from Laos, Folder 9155.2/3100 Laos (5 Dec 61), RG 218, NARA, Records of the JCS.

17. Entry 31 Dec 61, citing messages 915 and 916 from US Embassy Laos to State Dept, 31 Dec 61, 1 Jun 61, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, JCS, Chronological Summary of Significant Event Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 31 Dec 61, p. 324, declassified internet copy, http/www.Vietnam.ttu.edu/star/images/250/2500118001A. Hereafter, with entry, inclusive dates, and pages.

18. Entry 31 Dec 61 citing various JCS SitReps 7–28 Dec 61 in ibid., pp. 324–325.

19. DIA, Brief of SNIE, 12 Jan 62, Subj: "Relative Military Capabilities of Opposing Forces in Laos," Doc. No. 268, *FRUS* online, *Laos, 1961–63*, vol. 24. Hereafter, DIA, Brief of SNIE, 12 Jan 68, Doc. 268, *FRUS* online, *Laos, 1961–63*.

20. Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Dir, JCS Staff, Memo to Chairman, 6 Jan 62, Subj: CinCPac Concerning Reinforced Viet Minh Intervention in Laos, Folder 091 Laos 1962–1964, Box 10, Records of Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 218 NARA.

21. See Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation, The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1967), p. 142. Hereafter, Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*. According to Hilsman, in 1961 and 1962, who at the time headed the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "an informal set of working relations had developed to deal with Laos. Averell Harriman, William H. Sullivan, and the foreign service officers of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs were the central switchboard and conducted the whole operation. A group of us in the intelligence bureau … served as a sort of intelligence and planning staff for Harriman and his bureau." Hilsman also noted that President Kennedy through Michael Forrestal of the National Security staff "and by telephone, kept day-to-day control, feeding his own ideas into both planning and operations."

22. CJCS memo to SecDef, JCSM-12-62, 5 Jan 62, Subj: Reassessment of US Policy in Laos, encl to Doc. 269, in *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

23. Ibid.

24. DepSecDef Roswell Gilpatric to President Kennedy, 12 Jan 62, Subj: Reassessment of US Policy in Laos, Doc. 269, ibid.

25. AsstSecDef (ISA) memo for Mr. Bundy, 16 Jan 62, Subj: US Policy on Laos, Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer Files, Folder Laos 3, 091, Laos, Box 7 NN3-218-89-2, RG 218, Records of the JCS, NARA. This document is also published as Doc. 272, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

26. Ball msg to Brown, 27 Jan 62, Doc. 279, in ibid. Hereafter, Ball msg, 27 Jan 62, Doc. 279.

27. CinCPac msg to JCS, 27 Jan 62, Doc. No. 280 in ibid. Hereafter, CinCPac msg to JCS, 27 Jan 62.

28. Boyle quoted in NSC Advisor McGeorge Bundy memo to President Kennedy, 21 Feb 62, Subj: Capabilities of the Royal Laotian Government Armed Forces, Doc. 296 in ibid.

29. Ball msg, 27 Jan 62, Doc. 279 in ibid.

30. Entry for 11 Jan 62, citing SNIE 58-62, 11 Jan 62, JCS, Chronological Summary of Significant Event Concerning the Laotian Crisis, p. 33. See also DIA, Brief of SNIE, 12 Jan 68, Doc. 168, *FRUS* online, *Laos, 1961–63.*

31. CinCPac msg to JCS, 27 Jan 62.

32. Ibid. and Editorial note citing SNIE 58/1-62, 31 Jan 62, "Relative Military Capabilities of Opposing Forces in Laos," Doc. No. 286, *FRUS* online, *Laos, 1961–63.*

33. Ibid.

34. Entry for 2–7 Feb 1962, citing various messages in JCS, Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, p. 85.

35. Entry for 5 Jan 62, citing Embassy Vientiane msg to SecState, 969, 10 Jan 62, in ibid., p. 31.

36. Interdepartment Meeting, Memorandum for the Record, 6 Feb 1962, Doc. No. 289, *FRUS* online, *Laos, 1961–63.*

37. Memo of Conversation with President Kennedy, 21 Feb 62, Doc. No. 297, in ibid.

38. Ibid. See chap. 6 for discussion of the article that appeared in the Republican newsletter.

39. Ibid.

40. JCS Chronology of Significant Events, entry for 31 Aug 61, citing CinCPac msg to JCS 300410Z Aug 61, p. 158. See chap. 2 through 4 for discussion of the earlier crises in Laos and Vietnam.

41. Ibid., entry for 13 Oct 61, citing DJSM-1259-61, w/encl 13 Oct 61; JMF 9150/54208 (10 Aug 61), pp. 241–245. See also "Summary of Briefing by Brigadier General William H. Craig, Joint Staff, on his Trip to Southeast Asia," n.d. [Sep 61], Attachment to Gen. Maxwell Taylor, memo to President Kennedy, 26 Sep 61, Doc. No. 187, *FRUS* online, vol. 24. See also discussion of Craig report in chap. 3.

42. SecState Rusk Memo to President Kennedy, 29 Aug 61, Subj: Plan for Southeast Asia, Doc. 171, *FRUS* online, vol. 24. See also discussion in chap. 3 of August meeting.

43. JCS Chronology of Significant Events, entry for 2 Sep 61, citing SecState msg to Bangkok No. 283 and to Saigon 269, 2 Sep 61, pp. 164–65.

44. Ibid., entry for 5 Sep 61, citing Bangkok msg to SecState, No. 352, 5 Sep 61, pp. 166–67.

45. Ibid., entry for 8 Sep 61, citing Saigon msgs to SecState, 5, 9 and 14 Sep 61, pp. 178–79.

46. Ibid., entry for 6 Sep 61, p. 170.

47. Ibid., entry for 29 Sep 61, citing ExO to Air Chief Marshal Sir George Mill to Dir JS, 29 Sep 61, encl to JCS 2344/15, 30 Sep 61, JMF 9155.2/3100 (29 Sep 61), p. 212.

48. Ibid, entry for 6 Oct 61, citing Head, Asst JSS to Dir JS, 6 Oct 61, JCS 2344/20, 12 Oct 61, JMF 9155.2/3100 (9 May 61), pp. 237–38.

49. Ibid. Entry for 29 Sep 61 citing JSCM 688-61 to SecDef, w/encls, 29 Sep 61 derived from JCS 2344/14, 29 Sep 61; JMF 91.2/3100 (9 May 61) pp. 212–18. Hereafter, JCS Chronology, citing JSCM 688-61 et al., and Gen. Maxwell Taylor memo to President Kennedy, 26 Sep 61, Subj: Southeast Asia Planning, Doc. No. 188, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

50. JCS Chronology, citing JSCM 688-61 et al.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., entry for 3 Oct 61, JCSM 690-61 to SecDef, w/encl, 3 Oct 61, derived from JCS 2544/16, 2 Oct 61, JMF 9150/3100 (1 Oct 61) pp. 223–25.

53. Ibid.

54. Entry for 3–5 Oct in ibid., citing DepSecDef msg to CJCS, 3 Oct 61, attached to JCS 2344/17, 3 Oct 61; JMF 9155.2/3100 (9 May 61) (2) pp. 225–26.

55. Ibid., citing JCSM 704-61 to SecDef, 5 Oct 61, derived from JCS 2344/18, 4 Oct 61; JMF 9155.2/3100 (9 May 61) (2), pp. 232–33. See also discussion in chap. 4 about the crisis situations in October 1961.

56. Taylor memo to President Kennedy, 11 Oct 61, Subj: Discussion of Southeast Asia Planning, 11 Oct 61, Doc. No. 204, *FRUS* online, vol. 24. See also discussion in chap. 4 as mentioned above.

57. NSAM 104, Southeast Asia, 13 Oct 61, Subj: Southeast Asia in The Papers of John F. Kennedy, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Reproduced online http:/www.jfklibrary.org. See the discussion in chap. 4 relative to the Taylor Vietnam mission in October 1961.

58. Entry for 14 Oct 61, citing JCS msg to CinCPac, 12 Oct 61; JCS1866, 14 Oct 61, JCS Chronology, p. 246.

59. AsstSecDef for ISA Williams memo to SecDef McNamara, 5 Oct 61, Subj: Alternative Plans for Southeast Asia, Doc. No. 196, *FRUS* online, vol. 24.

60. Entry for 21 Oct 61, citing CinCPac msg to JCS 210235Z Oct 61, in ibid., pp. 253–54.

61. Entry for 26 Dec 1961 in ibid., citing JCS msg to CinCPac, JCS 2715, 26 Dec 61, derived from JCS 2339/48, 19 Dec 61; CinCPac msg to JCS, DAIN 176001, 25 Nov 61; all in JMF 9060/3100 (25 Nov 61), pp. 316–17. See chap. 2 for comparison with the force composition in SEATO Plan 5 during the May 1961 crisis.

62. Lemnitzer memo to SecDef, Subj: Withdrawal of US Military Personnel from Laos, 12 Feb 62, Folder 9155.2/3100 Laos (5 Dec 61) Records of the Joint Chiefs RG 218, NARA.

63. Entry for 5 Feb 62, citing JCS 2344/33, 5 Feb 62, JMF 9155.2/3100 (2 Feb 62) Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, JCS, Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis, 1 Jan 62 to 30 Apr 62, p. 92. Hereafter, JCS Chronology, Jan–Apr 62.

64. Entry for 24 Feb 62, citing JCS 2344/36, 24 Feb 62; Note by Secy JCS to Control Div, 28 Feb 62; in JMF 9155/2/3100 (2 Feb 62) in ibid., pp. 119–20.

65. Entry for 9 Mar 62, citing JCS 2344/38, 9 Mar 62, and JCS 2344/38, 20 Mar 62; JMF 9155.2/3100 (2 Feb 62), in ibid. pp. 146–47.

66. Entry for 28 Mar 62, citing Chairman, Southeast Asia Study Group, "Report of Field Trip to Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Thailand and Laos), 4–18 Feb 62," JMF 91-50/5420 (4 Feb 62) in ibid., pp. 177–79.

67. Entry for 28 Mar 62, citing CinCPac msg to ChMAAG Laos, 280002 Mar 62, in ibid., p. 179.

68. William Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, 21 Mar 62, Subj: Discussion of Laos at CINCPAC Headquarters, Doc. No. 311, *FRUS* online, vol. 24. Hereafter, Bundy memo, 21 Mar, Doc. 311. See also Entry for 21 Mar 62, citing JCS2343/99, 27 Mar 62, JMF 9155.3/910, 16 Dec 61 sec. 4, JCS Chronology, Jan–Apr 62, pp. 165–166. Hereafter, Entry 21 Mar 62, pp. 165–66.

69. Bundy Memo, 21 Mar 62, Doc. No. 311.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid. See also Entry, 21 Mar 62, pp. 165–166.

72. Ibid.

73. Instructions approved by President Kennedy, 28 Feb 1962, Doc. No 301, *FRUS* online, *Laos, 1961–63*. In a footnote the editors observe that a "handwritten note by McGeorge Bundy on the source text reads: "Approved by President for Sullivan-Forrestal mission at Averell's recommendation, February 28, 1962. Sullivan and Forrestal arrived in Vientiane on March 3."

74. US Embassy Laos msg to Dept of State, 15 Mar 62, Doc. No. 307, in ibid

75. See ltnt 3 to memo of telephone conversation between Acting SecState George Ball and McGeorge Bundy, 20 Mar 62, Doc. No. 309 in ibid. Hereafter, Ball and Bundy Telephone conversation, Doc. 309.

76. Harriman in msg US Embassy Thailand to Dept of State, dtd 21 Mar 62, Doc. No. 313 in ibid.

77. US Embassy Thailand msg to State Dept, eyes only President and Acting SecState, 22 Mar 62, Doc. No. 314 in ibid. For reference to Sarit originating meeting with Harriman and Phoumi, see Ball and Bundy Telephone conversation, Doc. 309. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson, who participated in the above telephone conversation, related that Sarit originated the idea of a meeting in Thailand between Harriman and Phoumi.

78. See ftnt 2 in Doc. No. 314 in ibid., citing Harriman msg to President, 23 Mar 62.

79. See Ball msg to Harriman, 22 Mar 62, in ibid.

80. Harriman msg to Dept of State, 25 Mar 62, Doc. No. 317 in ibid. See ftnt 2 relative to his conference with the king.

81. Harriman msg to SecState, 26 Mar 62, Doc. No. 318 in ibid.

82. Sullivan msgs to Dept of State, 31 Mar 62, Doc. No. 320 and Doc. No. 321, and 1 Apr 62, Doc. 322 in ibid.

83. Sullivan msgs to Harriman, 1 Apr 1962, Doc. No. 322 and 2 Apr 62, Doc. No. 323 in ibid.

84. See editorial note 2 in W. B. Bagley memo to Gen. Taylor, 3 Apr 62, Subj. Laos Situation, in ibid. The editors quote from Memo for the Record, 2 April 1962, White House Daily Staff Meetings, Jan–Apr 1962 in Taylor Papers, National Defense University.

85. Hilsman memo to Harriman, n.d., Subj: "Continuation of 'Mild' Pressures on Phoumi: A Short-term Estimate," Attachment to Sullivan memo to SecState Asst, 16 Apr 62, Doc. No. 327 in ibid. Editorial ftnt 4 refers to the meeting of Forrestal and Hilsman with the President.

86. See Michael Forrestal memo to President Kennedy, 17 Apr 62, Subj. Congressional Briefing on Laos, Doc. 329; NSAM 149, 19 Apr 62, Subj: "Withdrawal of Certain Military Units from Forward Positions in Laos," Doc. No. 330; Dept of State msg to Embassy in Laos, 19 Apr 62, Doc. No. 331; SecState Rusk msg to Ambassadors Brown and Young, dtd 19 Apr 62, Doc. No. 332. All documents are published in ibid.

87. US Embassy in Thailand msg to State Dept, 1 May 1962, Doc. No. 337 in ibid.

88. Special to the *New York Times*, "Leave by Helicopter," 6 May 62, *New York Times*, 7 May 62, pp. 1 and 2.

89. Dept of Defense Paper, n.d., Subj: Visit to SE Asia by SecDef, 8–11 May 62, Doc. No. 187, *FRUS* online, vol. 2.

90. See AP "Reds Widen Gains," 11 May 62, pp. 1–2, UPI "Retreat is Disorderly," 11 May 62, p. 2, and Special to the *New York Times*, "500 Troops Desert Army," *New York Times*, p. 2.

91. Brown to Dept of State, 10 May 62, Doc. No. 353, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

92. Transcript of General Lyman Lemnitzer oral history interview with Ted Gittinger, 3 Mar 82, p. 8, electronic copy, http//webstorage 1.mcpa.Virginia.edu-library-mc-poh-transcripts-lemnitzer_lyman-1982-0303.pdf.url. Hereafter, Lemnitzer interview, 3 Mar 82. A copy of the transcript and recording of the interview is in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. Either General Lemnitzer confused the date of these events as May of 1961 instead of 1962 or there was a typographical error in the transcript. The NATO conference on nuclear power occurred in May 1962 as did the McNamara and Lemnitzer visit to Southeast Asia. For description of the conference, see Drew Middleton, "New Look in NATO," *New York Times*, 8 May 62, p. 6.

93. Memo of telephone conversation between State Department officials and Bundy 6 May 1962, 10:15 AM, Doc. 343 and Memo of Telephone Conversation between President and Ball, 6 May 1962, 10:45, Doc. 344, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

94. Memo of telephone conversation between Bundy and Ball, 6 May 62, 11:20 AM, Doc. 345, in ibid. In this conversation Bundy relayed the substance of a conversation that he had with the President. See also Doc. 343 cited above.

95. See Doc. 345 in ibid.

96. For this ANZUS meeting see Editorial Note, Doc. No. 185 in *FRUS, 1962*, vol. 2.

97. Memorandum of Conversation, 8 May 62, Subj: Meeting with the President on the Situation in Laos, Doc. 346 in *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

98. Ibid.

99. Transcript of the President's News Conference, 9 May 62, *New York Times*, 10 May 62, p. 20.

100. SNIE 58-3-62, 9 May 62, Subj: Implications of the Fall of Nam Tha, Doc. No. 350, *FRUS* online, *Laos, 1961–63*.

101. Forrestal Memo, 10 May 62, Doc. No. 351 and attachment in ibid.

102. Memorandum for the Record, 10 May 62, Doc. No. 352, in ibid. According to Editorial note 1, Michael Forrestal actually prepared the memo on 23 May 62 from notes that he had taken at the meeting. The editors also indicate that McCone was a last minute participant at the conference.

103. Ibid. Doc. 352 and Memo for the Files, 9 May 62. Subj: Luncheon Conversation between the Attorney General and Ambassador Dobrynin, Doc. No. 349 in ibid.

104. Ibid. and Doc. 352.

105. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 143–44. See Lawrence Freeman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, Paperback version, 2002), p. 348. Hereafter, Freeman, *Kennedy's War*. Freeman cites the quote about General Dexter to a memo by Hilsman.

106. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 144.

107. Russell Baker, "Eisenhower says Kennedy has too much Power," dateline 10 May 1962, *New York Times*, 11 May 62, pp. 1 and 18.

108. Memo of Telephone Conversation between President Kennedy and Acting SecState Ball, dtd 11 May 68, Doc. 355, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24. See Editor's note 2, which includes the Eisenhower statement about the use of tactical nuclear weapons, citing Forrestal, Memo for the Record, 10 May 62 and Editor's note 3 which quotes Kennedy stating that Eisenhower's statement might be helpful, citing a Hilsman memo, dtd 10 May 62. See also Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 145.

109. Max Frankel, "Accord is Sought: Kennedy Acts to Force Rightists to Join a 3-Faction Regime," *New York Times*, 12 May 1962, pp. 1–2.

110. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 145.

111. JCS [signed by Gen. Decker as Acting Chairman] Memorandum to SecDef, JCSM 376-62, 11 May 62, Subj: Military Implications of the Situation in Laos, Doc. 356, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

112. Ibid.

113. See editorial notes in ibid.

114. Freeman, *Kennedy's War*, p. 349.

115. Current Opns Div, J–3, Talking Paper for the Chairman JCS for the White House Meeting [scheduled for 12 May 62], dtd 11 May 62, Subj: US Marine Corps BLT to Thailand, Folder Laos 3 091, Laos, Jan 62, Records of Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, Files 091, Box 7, Accession NN3-218-89-2, RG 218, Records of the JCS, NARA. Hereafter, Lemnitzer Files 091, RG 218, NARA and Box No. See also WHB [LtCdr Worth H. Bagley], Memo for General Taylor, 12 May 62, Subj: Essential Facts (On Laos Sit), Folder D, Item No. 4, Box 47, Taylor Papers, NDU.

116. Col. Sidney C. Bruce, USAF, Special Asst, Memo for Admiral Riley, 11 May 62, Subj: JCS Meeting at White House 12 May, Lemnitzer Files 091, RG 218, NARA, Box No. 7; Lemnitzer interview, 3 Mar 82, p. 11.

117. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 136. Kaiser cites as his source for this incident, Michael Forrestal Oral History, 28 July 1964, Kennedy Library.

118. Lemnitzer interview, 3 Mar 82, p. 12.

119. Current Opn Div, Joint Staff, Talking Paper, 11 May 62, Subj: Bringing SEATO plan 5 and CinCPac OPlan 32-59 more up-to-date with the situation," Lemnitzer Files 091, RG 218, NARA, Box 7.

120. Memo of Conversation, 12 May 62, Doc. No. 357, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24. Hereafter, Doc. 357, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

121. Lemnitzer interview, 3 Mar 82, pp. 11–12.

122. Doc. 357, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

123. Gen. Lemnitzer, Notes "2d White House Meeting," 12 May 1962, File White House Meetings, L-214-71, Box 29, Lemnitzer Papers, NDU. See also Capt. Robert H. Whitlow, *US Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964*, p. 88. Hereafter, Whitlow, *US Marines in Vietnam, 1954–64*. See discussion in chap. 2 of role of JTF 116 during the Laotian crisis in 1961. At that time, General Harkins was Commanding General, US Army, Pacific, and had assumed command of the Joint Task Force headquarters on Okinawa.

124. JCS msg to CinCPac, JCS 4527, 12 May 62, Doc. No. 360, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

125. Memorandum of Conversation, 13 May 1962, Doc. No. 362, in ibid.

126. Ibid.

127. John A. McCone, Memorandum of Conversation with Former President Eisenhower, 13 May 1962, Doc. 363 in ibid.

128. Memorandum of Conversation, 13 May 1962, Doc. No. 362, in ibid. See also Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 147.

129. Max Frankel, "US Hears Soviet Still Backs Plan for Neutral Laos," dateline 13 May 1962, *New York Times*, 14 May 62, pp. 1 and 3.

130. Ibid.

131. Robert F. Kennedy Interview with John Bartlow, March, April, May 1964 reprinted in Martin Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Shulman, eds. *Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), pp. 259–60. Hereafter, Guthman and Shulman, *Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words*.

132. Michael Forrestal memo to President Kennedy, 12 May 62, Meeting on Laos, 12 May 62, Doc. No. 358, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

133. Quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (NY, NY: Ballantine Books edition, 1979), pp. 538–39, citing Robert Kennedy dictated Memorandum, dtd 29 May 1962. Hereafter, Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*.

134. Michael Forrestal, National Security Council Staff memo to President Kennedy, 14 May 62, Doc. No. 366 in *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24. Hereafter, Forrestal to Kennedy, 14 May 62, Doc. No. 366.

135. Enclosure to ibid.

136. Current Opns Div, J–3, JCS, Talking Paper for the Chairman, JCS, for the Sec/Def/JCS Meeting 14 May 62, Subj: Laos Situation—Status of CinCPac Forces as of 0800, 14 May. Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer Files, Folder Laos 3, 091, Laos, Box 7 NN3-218-89-2, RG 218, Records of the JCS, NARA.

137. Editorial ftnt 2 in Forrestal to Kennedy, 14 May 62, Doc. No. 366. The ftnt contains a summary of the meeting on the 14th.

138. Special to *New York Times*, Dateline, 14 May 1962, "Laos Neutralist Ready to Return To Form Regime," E. W. Kenworthy, Dateline 14 May 62, "Neutral Buffer is Aim," Homer Bigart, Dateline 14 May 1962, "Harkins Confers on Use of Troops," p. 4.

139. Memorandum of Conversation, 15 May 1962, Subj: Meeting with Congressional Leaders, Doc. No. 368, in *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

140. Ibid.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

143. Ibid. See also E. W. Kenworthy, "US Orders 4,000 Troops to Thailand," dateline 15 May 62, *New York Times*, 16 May 1962.

144. Memorandum of Conversation, 15 May 62, Subj: Meeting Called by Governor Harriman Concerning Laos, Doc. No. 370, in *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

145. AP, "1800-Man Marine Force Starts Ashore in Thailand," dateline 17 May 62, in *New York Times*, 17 May 1962, pp. 1 and 16.

146. Telephone conversation between Attorney General and Secretary of State, 17 May 62, quoted in ftnt 3 in Dept of State msg to Embassy in Laos, dtd 19 May 62, Doc. No. 373, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

147. Arthur J. Olsen, "Khrushchev Says US Troops Risk Fighting in Asia," *New York Times*, pp. 1–2, Ted Szulc, "Soviet Reaction Mild," in ibid., p. 2.

148. "Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Affairs," 17 May 1962, *New York Times*, 18 May 1962, p. 10.

149. Ibid.

150. "Thai Refusal Seen for SEATO Aid Now," Reuters, 18 May 62, in ibid., p. 2.

151. Whitlow, *US Marines in Vietnam, 1954–64*, pp. 89–91.

152. For a description of Communist strength in Laos especially in the north during this period see articles by Jacques Nevard, "Laos Army Balks Attack on Reds," dateline 24 May 62, *New York Times*, 27 May 62, p. 10 and "Concentration of Pro-Red Units in Laos Worries" US Officials," dateline 2 June 62, *New York Times*, 3 Jun 62, p. 3.

153. See Editorial Note, Doc. 375 and John McCone, Dir CIA, Memorandum of Discussion, 28 May 62, Doc. 380, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

154. Ibid.

155. Michael Forrestal memo to SecState Rusk, 24 May 62, Subj: Presidential Meeting on Laos, Doc. No. 378 and W. H. Bagley, Memo for the Record, 24 May 62, Subj: White House Conference on Laos/Thailand, 1630 24 May 62, Doc. 379, both published in ibid.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid. The Forrestal memorandum was the basis for NSAM 157 published on 29 May 1962 signed by McGeorge Bundy. See The Papers of John F. Kennedy, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Reproduced on line http:/www.jfklibrary.org.

158. Forrestal, memo to McGeorge Bundy, 31 May 62, Subj: Status of Laos Planning, Doc. No. 382 in ibid.

159. Johnson memo to Sec Rusk, 1 Jun 62, Subj: Planning for Laos, Doc. No. 383, in *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

160. Draft Memo for the President, 31 May 1962, Subj: Plan for Possible Intervention in Laos, Attachment to Doc. 383 in ibid.

161. William H. Sullivan, Memo of a Conversation, 2 Jun 62, Subj: Contingency Planning for Laos, Doc. No 384 in ibid. Hereafter, Sullivan memo, 2 Jun 62, Doc. No. 384.

162. Ibid.

163. Ibid.

164. Ibid.

165. [Joint State-Defense Department] Memorandum for the President, 4 Jun 62, Tab A to Forrestal memo to President Kennedy, 5 Jun 62, Subj: Contingency Planning for Laos, Doc. 387, in ibid.

166. SecDef McNamara memo to President Kennedy, 4 Jun 62, Doc. No. 386 in ibid.

167. See editor's fnt 9 in Sullivan memo, 2 Jun 62, Doc. No. 384, in ibid.

168. Gen. Maxwell Taylor memo to President Kennedy, 4 Jun 62, Subj: Contingency Planning for Laos, Doc. 385 in ibid.

169. Michael Forrestal memo to McGeorge Bundy, 6 Jun 62, Subj: Laos Planning, Doc. No. 390 in ibid. Hereafter, Forrestal memo to Bundy, 6 Jun 62, Doc. 390.

170. JCS Memo, JCSM-431-62, to Sec McNamara, 6 Jun 62, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 391 in ibid.

171. Interestingly General Lemnitzer apparently did not have the same doubts on the logistic planning as some members of the Joint Staff. He wrote to Secretary McNamara on 8 June that he believed that "existing US unilateral and SEATO plans as well as the concepts and forces proposed by Admiral Felt and General Harkins are logistically supportable." Lemnitzer memo to McNamara, 8 Jun 62, Subj: Logistic Planning for possible Intervention in Laos, Folder Laos 3 091, Laos, Box 7 NN3-218-89-2, RG 218, Records of the JCS, NARA. For the views of Hilsman and Johnson see Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 147–51 and Under Sec of State for Public Affairs Johnson to Sec State Rusk, 9 Jun 62, Subj: Laos Contingency Planning, Doc. No. 393, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24.

172. On 11 June Prince Souvanna Phouma, the neutralist leader, and his half-brother Prince Souphanouvong, and Prince Boun Oum, the figurehead premier of the Royalist government agreed to form a coalition government. Boun Oum would retire from public life and Souvanna would become the Prime Minister of the new Coalition Government. Both Prince Souphanouvong and General Phoumi Nasavan, the actual leader of the Royalist faction would become deputy premiers. Phoumi would also head the Finance Ministry and Souphanouvong would also be Economics Minister. Souvanna in addition to being premier would also head the Defense Ministry. See "Coalition Regime is Formed in Laos: Neutrality is Aim," dateline Khang Khay Laos, 11 Jun 62, *New York Times*, 12 Jun 62, pp. 1 and 14.

173. Dept of State, Sullivan, Memorandum of Conversation, 12 Jun 62, Subj: Contingency Planning for Laos, Doc. No. 396, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24. See also Gen. Lemnitzer notes, 12 Jun 62, "Meeting at State," File L-218-71, Miscellaneous Meetings, Box 29, Lemnitzer Papers, NDU.

174. Ibid.

175. Ibid.

176. Forrestal, Memorandum for the Record, 14 Jun 68, Meeting with the President on Contingency Planning for Laos, 13 Jun 68, Doc. No 398, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24 and Gen. Lemnitzer notes, 13 Jun 62, "White House Meeting" File L-218-71, White House Meetings, Box 29, Lemnitzer Papers, NDU.

177. See copy of "Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos, 23 July 1962 and Protocol," reprinted in Committee of Foreign Relations, 90th Congress, 1st Session, *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam* (Washington: GPO, July 1967), pp. 104–112.

178. Khrushchev msg to Kennedy, 12 Jun 62, Doc. No. 46, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years, 1961–63, Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges*, vol. 6.

179. Guthman and Shulman, *Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words*, p. 260.

180. Whitlow, *US Marines in Vietnam, 1954–64*, p. 94; Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 139.

181. Sullivan, Memorandum of Conversation, 22 July 1962, Doc. No. 410, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24. The Sullivan quote is from Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, p. 525.

Chapter 9. The Ongoing War.

1. Sullivan, Memorandum of Conversation, 22 July 1962, Doc. No. 410, *FRUS* online, *Laos*, vol. 24. The Sullivan quote is from Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, p. 525.

2. Homer Bigart, "McNamara Asks Vietnam Chief to Alter Tactics in Struggle," dateline 10 May 1962, *New York Times*, 11 May 1962, p. 2. Hereafter, Bigart, "McNamara Asks Vietnam Chief to Alter Tactics…," 11 May 62. See chap. 6 for discussion of both the Strategic Hamlet program and Operation Sunrise.

3. Ibid. and Defense Dept Paper, n.d., Subj: Visit of the Secretary of Defense to Southeast Asia, 8–11 May 62, Doc. 187, *FRUS* online, *Kennedy Years, 1961–63, 1962*, vol. 2. Hereafter, "Visit of SecDef, May 62," *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 2.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. See also Homer Bigart, "McNamara Terms Saigon Aid Ample," and UPI despatch, "McNamara Returns to US," *New York Times*, 12 May 1962, pp. 1–2. Hereafter, Bigart, "Saigon Aid Ample" and UPI despatch, "McNamara Returns."

6. Taylor, *Sword and Plowshares*, pp. 248–49.

7. Bigart, "McNamara Asks Vietnam Chief to Alter Tactics…," 11 May 62.

8. Ibid. and Bigart, "Saigon Aid Ample" and UPI despatch, "McNamara Returns."

9. "Visit of SecDef, May 62," *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 2.

10. Memo for the Record, 3 May 62, Subj: Minutes of Meeting of Special Group (CI), Doc. No. 180. Hereafter, Meeting of Special Group (CI), Doc. 180, and LtCdr Worth Bagley, Naval Aide to Gen. Taylor, memo to Gen. Taylor, 9 May 63, Subj: Vietnam Task Force Meeting, 9 May 62, Doc. No. 184, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2.

11. Meeting of Special Group (CI), Doc. 180 and Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, pp. 191–2. See also chap. 5 for the establishment of the Special Group. At the time of Cottrell's appearance both Secretary McNamara and General Lemnitzer were in Paris attending a NATO Conference. See chap. 7.

12. "LtGen Victor H. Krulak, (Ret), Who's Who in Marine History Series," History Reference Section, US Marine Corps History Div; LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Oral History Interview, 20 Jun 71, Marine Corps History Div; Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea, *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961–1965*, vol. 5, History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), p. 41. Hereafter, Kaplan et al., *The McNamara Ascendancy*.

13. Memo for the Record, 17 May 61, Subj: Minutes of Meeting of Special Group (CI), *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2.

14. Ibid. In his article citing the official US daily communiqué in Saigon, Bigart reported "intensified Communist activity including the seizure of an administrative office in a Vietnamese village and killing two of the South Vietnamese militia and kidnapping several others less than six miles from the South Vietnamese 7th ARVN Division headquarters at My Tho in the Mekong Delta." Bigart also reported that South Vietnamese bureaucratic inefficiency was causing delays in the approval of a contract for 1,200 radio sets to be distributed among villages in South Vietnam. See Homer Bigart, "Vietnam Battles Rebels on Island," *New York Times*, May 17, 1962, p. 15.

15. Ralph L. Stavins, "A Special Supplement, Kennedy's Private War," *The New York Review of Books*, 22 July 1971, vol. 17, No. 1.

16. Bagley memo to the President's Military Representative, 13 Jun 62, Subj: Southeast Asia Task Force, Doc. No. 215, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2.

17. NSAM 165, 16 Jun 62, Subj: Assignments of additional responsibilities to Special Group (CI), NSAMs online, JFKLibrary.org.

18. See Editorial Note citing letter from Ball to McNamara, Lemnitzer, Taylor, McCone, Murrow and Hamilton, as well as Sec State Action Directive, 21 Jun 62, Doc. 222, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2.

19. Ibid.

20. JCS Special Assistant for Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities (Krulak), Memorandum to DepSecDef Gilpatric, 26 Mar 62, Subj. Civic Action in Vietnam, Doc. No. 132 in ibid.

21. Graham A. Cosmas, draft, "History of MACV," chap. 1, "A Deepening Commitment and a New Command," p. 36.

22. Southeast Asia Task Force, Status Report on Southeast Asia, 27 Jun 62, Doc. No. 230, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2. Hereafter, SEAsiaTF, Status Report, Jun 62, Doc. No. 230.

23. Ibid.

24. Sterling Cottrell, Final Report of the Vietnam Task Force, dtd 1 July 62, Doc. 233 in ibid. Hereafter, Cottrell, Final Report, 1 Jul 62.

25. Memorandum of the Substance of Discussion at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, dtd 15 Jun 62, Doc. No. 219, in ibid. See also discussion in chap. 5 on the subject of possible change in South Vietnamese government.

26. Cottrell, Final Report, 1 Jul 62.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.; SEAsiaTF, Status Report, Jun 62, Doc. No. 230; Seth S. King, "Plan on Vietnam Urged by Britain," *New York Times*, 26 Jun 1962, p. 8. The ICC report was dated 2 Jun 1962, but the British government, one of the Co-Chairs of the 1954 Conference, did not make it public until 25 Jun 62.

30. The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam, The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, translated by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, Kansas: Univ Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 80 and 111. Hereafter, Military History Institute, *Victory in Vietnam*. See also chap. 4 for discussion of the September 1961 decision.

31. Kaplan et al., *The McNamara Ascendancy*, p. 275.

32. Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York, New York: Vintage Press, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1995), p. 48. Hereafter, McNamara, *In Retrospect*.

33. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 140. Kaiser cites as his source for the quote the oral history of Gilpatric in the LBJ Library.

34. Record of the Sixth SecDef Conference, Hawaii, 23 Jul 62, Doc. 248, *FRUS, Vietnam 1962*, vol. 2. Hereafter, SecDef Conference, Jul 62.

35. News Release, Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii, 23 Jul 62, cited in McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 46.

36. See account in ibid., p. 49, and SecDef Conference, Jul 62.

37. SecDef Conference, Jul 62.

38. Ibid.

39. John W. Finney, "Taylor to Head Joint Chiefs of Staff; Norstad Retiring, Lemnitzer Chosen," *New York Times*. Hereafter, Finney, "Taylor to Head Joint Chiefs of Staff." Norstad was "double-hatted" as both Commander, US Forces, Europe, and Supreme Commander North Atlantic Treaty Forces. It was expected that the NATO Council would approve Lemnitzer in the latter position as well, which it did.

40. Hanson Baldwin, "US Command Shifts," *New York Times*, 24 July 1962, p. 4. Hereafter, Baldwin, "Command Shifts."

41. Rostow quote is from H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty, Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York, New York:

HarperCollins, 1997), ftnt 82, p. 343. Hereafter, McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*. McMaster cites as his source, Walt Rostow, Oral History Transcript, 21 Mar 1969, sec 1, p. 33.

42. Baldwin, "Command Shifts."

43. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, p. 22.

44. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff, The First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana Univ Press, 1976), pp. 42–43.

45. Transcript of Oral History Interview with Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, USAF, by Joe B. Frantz, 28 Jun 1971, pp. 24, 25, and 27, NARA, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

46. Baldwin, "Command Shifts."

47. Ibid. See also Finney, "Taylor to Head Joint Chiefs of Staff." For General Taylor's views of military organization after his experience as Army Chief of Staff see his *The Uncertain Trumpet*, (New York: Norton, 1959), passim.

48. "Lemnitzer A Foe of One-Chief Plan," dateline 31 Jul 1962, *New York Times*, 1 Aug 1962, p. 8. In fact nearly two months later, General Lemnitzer repeated to a group of industrial defense contractors his opposition to "a single military chief." See Jack Raymond, "Lemnitizer Backs Joint Chief Setup," *New York Times*, 27 Sep 62, p. 8. Hereafter, Raymond, "Lemnitzer Backs Joint Chief Setup."

49. Jack Raymond, "Taylor Supports Atom Arms Policy," *New York Times*, 10 Aug 62, pp. 1–2.

50. Jack Raymond, "Taylor Supports 'No Cities' Policy," in ibid., 2 Oct 1962, p. 20.

51. Transcript of Oral History Interview with Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor by Ted Gittinger, 1 Jun 1981, NARA, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, p. 41. Hereafter, Taylor Interview, Jun 1981.

52. Timothy Naftali, editor, *The Presidential Recordings, John F. Kennedy, The Great Crises, July 30–August 1962*, vol. 1 (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 47 and 49.

53. Transcript of Oral History of Roswell I. Gilpatric with Ted Gittinger, 2 Nov 1982, p. 8, NARA, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

54. Taylor Interview, Jun 1981, p. 11.

55. Chairman, JCS memo to SecDef, JCSM-563-62, dtd 28 Jul 62, Doc. No. 251, *FRUS, Vietnam 1962*, vol. 2.

56. SecDef (McNamara) memo to President, 1 Aug 62, Subj: Herbicide Opns in South Vietnam, Doc. 254 in ibid.

57. Hilsman memo to AsstSecState for Far Eastern Affairs (Harriman) dtd 28 Jul 62 Doc. No. 250 in ibid.

58. Rice Memo to Harriman, 2 Aug 62, Subj: Crop Destruction, Doc. No. 256 in ibid.

59. SecDef Memo to President Kennedy, Subj: Chemical Crop Destruction, South Vietnam, dtd 8 Aug 62, Doc. 259 in ibid. Hereafter, SecDef memo, 8 Aug 62, Subj. Crop Destruction. The quote of Assistant Secretary Harriman is in editorial ftnt 5 of this document.

60. Chalmers B. Wood, Dir, Vietnam Working Group, to Ambassador Nolting, 7 Aug 62, Doc. No. 259 in ibid.

61. SecDef memo, 8 Aug 62, Subj: Crop Destruction.

62. McGeorge Bundy, NSAM 178, Doc No. 178, in ibid.

63. SecState Rusk memo to President Kennedy, dtd 23 Aug 62, Subj: Viet-Nam: Project for Crop Destruction, Doc. 270 in ibid.

64. Dept of State Draft memo, 24 Aug 62, Subj: Substance of Discussion at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, Doc. 271 in ibid.

65. Special to the *New York Times*, "Gen. Taylor Leaves on Visit to Three Commands," *New York Times*, 25 Aug 62, p. 8.

66. See *New York Times*, 31 Aug 62–4 Sep 62, passim.

67. Memorandum for the Record, 10 Sep 62, Subj: Meeting held at Gia Long Palace, Saigon, Vietnam, 7 Sep 62, Doc. No. 277, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Memo for the Record, 14 Sep 62, Subj: Meeting with the Special Advisor to the President of Vietnam, 11 Sep 62, Doc. No. 279 in ibid.

72. Nolting msg to Dept of State, 22 Sept 61, Doc. No. 280 in ibid. The message is a summary of the meeting with Diem on 11 Sept 62.

73. Homer Bigart, "Vietnam Victory Remote Despite US Aid to Diem," *New York Times*, 25 July 62, pp. 1 and 4. Hereafter Bigart, "Vietnam Victory Remote." See also William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968*, United States Army in Vietnam, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 24–27. Hereafter, Hammond, *The Military and the Media*. See also, A. J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam, The War, 1954–1975* (NY, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 193–94. Hereafter, Langguth, *Our Vietnam*.

74. Hammond, *The Military and the Media*, pp. 25–26; Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, p. 194.

75. Ibid. The last quote is from David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, Twentieth-Anniversay Edition (NY, NY: Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 254.

76. Timothy Naftali and Philip Zelikow, editors, *The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy, The Great Crises, September–October 21, 1962*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), vol. 2, "Meeting with Maxwell Taylor on His Far Eastern Trip, 25 Sep 62," pp. 156–77, p. 165. Hereafter, "Meeting with Taylor, 25 Sep 62" in Naftali and Zelikow, *John F. Kennedy, The Great Crises*, vol 2. The reader might have some reservations how frank a junior officer might be when questioned by a four-star general he had probably never met before.

77. David Halberstam, "Gen. Taylor Sees Vietnam Efforts," dateline 12 Sep 62, *New York Times*, 13 Sep 62, p. 3.

78. David Halberstam, "Taylor Hopeful on Vietnam Fight," dateline 13 Sep 62 in ibid., 14 Sep 62, p. 2.

79. Taylor memo to President, 20 Sep 62, Subj. "Impressions of South Vietnam," Doc. No. 288, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2. Hereafter, Taylor Memo, 20 Sep 62, Doc. 288.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid. Admiral Felt the CinCPac commander described the Harkins concept as "painting a picture of a great up-rising and explosion as a final phase of a campaign plan...." CinCPac msg to ComUSMACV and info JCS, 19 Sep 62, Records of Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Box 11, Folder Oct 62–Jul 63, RG 218, NARA. Hereafter, CinCPac msg, 19 Sep 62.

82. Taylor Memo, 20 Sep 62, Doc. 288.

83. "Meeting with Taylor" 25 Sep 62 in Naftali and Zelikow, *John F. Kennedy, The Great Crises*, vol. 2, p. 156.

84. Ibid., pp. 165–68.

85. Nolting msg to Dept of State, 26 Sep 62, Doc. No. 294, *FRUS, Vietnam, 1962*, vol. 2.

86. Ibid. See editorial ftnt 4 to the message for the reference to President Kennedy's approval and the Forrestal memo. Kennedy approved the action on 2 October and the Forrestal memo dated two days later.

87. The above paragraph is derived from the following sources: Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 940–47; Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, pp. 514–18, Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New

York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 483–88; Naftali and Zelikow, *John F. Kennedy, The Great Crises*, vol. 2, "Sunday, September 30–Monday, October 1, 1962" pp. 250–319, passim.

88. Michael V. Forrestal memo to President, dtd 18 Sept 62, Subj: Situation in Vietnam, Doc. No. 283, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 2.

89. CinCPac msg to Harkins, 19 Sep 62.

90. Dept of State Paper, n.d. (5 Oct 62) Subj: Developments in Viet-Nam Between General Taylor's Visits—October 1961–October 1962, Doc. No. 297 in ibid.

91. Military History Institute, *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 113.

Chapter 10. Uncertain Progress

1. Dept of State Paper (drafted by Heavner and Wood), n.d. (5 Oct 62), Subj: Developments in Viet-Nam Between General Taylor's Visits—October 1961–October 1962, Doc. No. 297, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 2. Hereafter, Heavner and Wood Paper, Oct 62, Doc. 297.

2. Ibid.

3. David Halberstam, "The Struggle: Saigon is Making Some Progress…," Week in Review, *New York Times*, 21 Oct 62, p. 189.

4. Heavner and Wood Paper, Oct 62, Doc. 297.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 459, note 41.

8. Heavner and Wood Paper, Oct 62, Doc. 297.

9. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 113.

10. Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken, The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 162. Hereafter, Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*. William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), p. 531. Hereafter, Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*.

11. See Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 517, 528, 531; *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 114–16; Robert J. Destatte, "Myth and Reality: History of the Ho Chi Minh Trail," paper delivered at OAH Annual Meeting, Spring 2002, p. 8.

12. CinCPac msg to DOD, 17 Sep 62, Records of Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Box 11, Folder Oct 62–Jul 63, RG 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, NARA.

13. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 529–30.

14. Dir Vietnam Working Group (Wood) memo to DepUSec for Political Affairs (Johnson), dtd 11 Oct 62, Subj: Decisions and Discussion at Honolulu Meeting, 8 Oct 62, Doc. No. 298, *FRUS Vietnam*, vol. 2.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Jack Raymond, "US Army Chiefs Report on Antiguerrilla Warfare," dateline, 9 Oct 62, *New York Times*, 10 Oct 62, p. 4.

22. AsstSecState for FE Affairs Harriman ltr to Amb Nolting, 12 Oct 62, Doc. No. 300 in ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. For a detailed account of the JCS role in the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, vol. 8, *1961–1964*, (rev. ed. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011), chap. 11.

25. For the dispute between McNamara and Anderson, see Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea, *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961–1965* (Washington: Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), p. 212; and Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khruschev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), pp. 71–72. For the Gilpatric quote, Dobbs cites the latter's oral history in the Kennedy Library. For the Kennedy quote, see Memo, Kennedy to McNamara, 5 Nov 62, *FRUS*, vol. 11, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, Doc. No. 150. For the Clifford quotation, see Dobbs, p. 347.

26. Taylor memo to SecDef, 12 Nov 62, Subj: Status of National Military Campaign, South Vietnam, Doc. 315, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 2.

27. Nolting ltr to Harriman, dtd 19 Nov 62, Doc. No. 320, in ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Nolting msg to Dept of State, 19 Dec 62, Doc. No. 331 in ibid.

30. Ibid. Heavner made his comment in pen on a copy of the Nolting msg.

31. Heavner Rpt to Vietnam Working Group, 11 Dec 62, Subj: Visit to Vietnam, 18 Oct–Nov 62, Doc. No. 328. Hereafter, Heavner Rpt, 11 Dec 62, Doc. 328. See editorial note for Forrestal quote.

32. Ibid.

33. JCS draft History, p. 4–25.

34. Roger Hilsman, memo to SecState, dtd 3 Dec 62, Subj: The Situation and Short-Term Prospects in South Vietnam, Doc. 32, reproduced in part in *The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times* (New York, New York: 1971), pp. 155–57, p. 156. Hereafter, Hilsman Memo, 3 Dec 62, Doc. 32, *NY Times, Pentagon Papers*. Roger Hilsman, memo to AsstSecState Harriman, dtd 19 Dec 62, Subj: Capsule Assessment of the Effort in South Vietnam, Doc. No. 332, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 2.

35. DepSecDef Gilpatric msg to President, dtd 20 Dec 62, Subj: Augmentation of US Air Unit in Vietnam, Attachment to Michael Forrestal, Nat'l Security Staff, memo to President, 21 Dec 62, Doc. No. 333 in ibid.

36. See Michael Forrestal memo 21 Dec 62 in ibid. For the quote see Heavner Rpt, 11 Dec 62, Doc. No. 328.

37. LtCom Worth H. Bagley memo to Chairman, JCS, dtd 12 Nov 62, Subj: Proposed memo concerning Viet Cong Attacks on Strategic Hamlets, Doc. No. 314 in ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Chairman of the JCS memo to SecDef, dtd 17 Nov 62, Subj: Viet Cong Attacks on Strategic Hamlets, Doc. No. 319 in ibid.

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41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Capt Robert H. Whitlow, USMCR, *US Marines in Vietnam, The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964* (Washington: History & Museums Division, HQMC, 1977), p. 53.

44. SecDef memo to President, 17 Nov 62, Subj: Defoliant/Herbicide Progam in South Vietnam, Doc. No. 317 and DepUSecState Johnson ltr to DepSecDef Gilpatric, dtd 9 Nov 62, Doc. No. 313, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 2.

45. Deputy Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Heavner), Memorandum for the Files, dtd 27 Dec 62, Subj: Senator Mansfield's Reactions After Visiting Viet-Nam, Doc. No. 334, in ibid.

46. Heavner Rpt, 11 Dec 62, Doc. No. 328.

47. Hilsman Memo, 3 Dec 62, Doc. 32, *NY Times, Pentagon Papers*, p. 155.

48. US Senate Historical Office, "Senate Leaders, Mike Mansfield, Quiet Leadership in Troubled Times," www.senate.gov/artandhistory.

49. Report by the Senate Majority Leader to the President of the United States, Southeast Asia—Vietnam, 18 Dec 62, Doc. 330, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 2.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. David Kaiser, *American Tragedy, Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 180. Hereafter, Kaiser, *American Tragedy*. Kaiser cites as his source an interview with Senator Mansfield.

53. Quoted in Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, A History* (New York: Penquin edition, 1984), p. 268.

54. Editorial Note, Doc. No. 1, vol. 3, Kennedy Admin, Jan–Aug 63, *FRUS*. Hereafter, Editorial Note, Doc. No. 1, vol. 3. For contrasting accounts of the battle, see Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie, John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), pp. 203–65. Hereafter Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*. Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, pp. 186–205. For a Communist perspective see *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 119–20.

55. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, pp. 264–65.

56. Neil Sheehan, "Costly Viet-Nam Battle Angers US Advisers," *The Washington Post*, 4 Jan 63, p. A–1.

57. David Halberstam, "Vietnam Defeat Shocks US Aides," *New York Times*, 7 Jan 63, p. 1.

58. William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968, United States Army in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1988), p. 32. Hereafter, Hammond, *The Military and the Medium*, p. 32.

59. See Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, passim; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, passim; Hammond, *The Military and the Medium*, pp. 29–38. See also Editorial Note, Doc. No. 1, vol. 3.

60. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 92.

61. Ibid., p. 99.

62. Ibid., pp. 218–20, 245–50.

63. Ibid., p. 276.

64. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 182–83. Kaiser cites as his source a msg in Kennedy Library National Security File.

65. David Halberstam, "Harkins Praises Vietnam Troops," *New York Times*, 11 Jan 63, p. 1.

66. Oral History Interview with Gen. Paul C. Harkins, 13 Jun 1983, LBJ Library, pp. 12–13.

67. Sheehan, *A Bright Shinning Lie*, pp. 330–1, 336, and 383.

68. Quoted in Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 182.

69. JCS (Wheeler) Team Report on South Vietnam, Jan 1963, Doc. No. 26, *FRUS*, vol. 3. Hereafter, Wheeler Report, Doc. 26. See also Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 298. Sheehan mentions in his source material notes that he conducted extensive interviews with several members of this team about their mission including both Generals Krulak and Forsythe. See pp. 806–07.

70. Sheehan, *A Shining Bright Light*, pp. 299–301; Wheeler Report, Doc. No. 26.

71. Wheeler Report, Doc. 26; CinCPac memo to JCS, dtd 25 Jan 63, with enclosures including ComUSMACV, Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam (CPSVN) dtd 19 Jan 63, Doc. No. 18 in ibid. Hereafter, ComUSMACV, CPSVN, Doc. No. 18.

72. Ibid. For General Harkins' description of his explosion concept incorporated into the National Campaign Plan, see Roger Hilsman, Memo for the Record, dtd 2 Jan 63, Subj: Country Team Meeting, Doc. No. 5, in ibid.

73. Ibid. and Chairman JCS memo to SecDef, dtd 7 Mar 63, Subj: Comprehensive Plan, South Vietnam in ibid.

74. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, pp. 301–02. Sheehan cites as his source a transcript of a tape of the briefing at CinCPac.

75. Wheeler Report, Doc. No. 26.

76. Bagley's memorandum is quoted in Editorial ftnt 5 in ibid.

77. Roger Hilsman, Memo for the Record, 2 Jan 63, Doc. No. 2, in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3.

78. Roger Hilsman, Memo for the Record, [2] Jan 63, Doc. No. 8, in ibid.

79. Roger Hilsman and Michael V. Forrestal, Memo to the President, dtd 25 Jan 1963, Subj: A Report on South Vietnam, Doc. No. 19 in ibid. Hereafter, Hilsman and Forrestal, Memo to the President, 25 Jan 63, Doc. No 19.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Michael V. Forrestal memo to President, dtd 28 Jan 63, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No. 19, in ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Forrestal memo to President, dtd 1 Feb 63, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No. 27 in ibid.

87. Forrestal memo to President, dtd 4 Feb 63, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No. 29 in ibid.

88. Editorial note 1, Wheeler Report, Doc. 26. The note cites Kennedy Library Oral History Program, Earle G. Wheeler interview, July 11, 1964, for the Wheeler quote on the meeting.

89. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 187–88.

90. LtCdr Bagley memo to Chairman JCS, dtd 17 Jan 63, Doc. No. 15, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol 3.

91. Wheeler Report, Doc. 26.

92. Ibid. and Hilsman and Forrestal, Memo to the President, 25 Jan 63, Doc. No 19 in ibid.

93. Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2000), p. 358.

94. Harriman ltr to Nolting, 30 Jan 63, Doc. No. 24, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3.

95. Harriman memo of Conversation with General Wheeler, dtd 9 Feb 1963, Doc. 36 in ibid. Hereafter, Harriman conversation with Wheeler, Doc. 36.

96. Ibid. See editorial note 2 in the document which discusses Wheeler's remarks on command relations quoting from another Harriman memorandum on the subject.

97. Harriman ltr to Gen Taylor, dtd 9 Feb 63, Doc. No. 37 in ibid. The Taylor response is quoted in editorial note 3 of the document.

98. JCS draft History, note 44, pp. 5–29–30, citing JCS 2343/203, 4 Mar 63.

99. Harkins ltr to President Diem, 23 Feb 63, Doc. 41, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3.

100. Special Group for Counterinsurgency, Minutes of Meeting, dtd 14 Mar 63, Doc. 59 in ibid. Hereafter, Special Group Counterinsurgency Minutes, 14 Mar 63, Doc. 59.

101. Taylor, Memo for the Record, dtd 2 Apr 63, Subj: Meeting with Under Secretary Harriman, Doc. 75 in ibid.

102. JCS Draft History, chap. 5, p. 26 citing Special Assistant for Counter-Insurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) rpt to JCS, dtd 1 Feb 63, Subj: "Facts Bearing on the Progress of the Counterinsurgency in South Vietnam," JMF 9155.3/3360 (31 Dec 62).

103. Special Group Counterinsurgency Minutes, 14 Mar 63, Doc. 59.

104. Harriman conversation with Wheeler, Doc. 36.

105. Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect, The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 103. See also H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty, Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 59.

Chapter 11. From Laotian Crisis to Buddhist Revolt

1. See Hilsman and Forrestal, Report on Laos, n.d. [Jan 63], Doc. No. 440, *FRUS, 1961–63*, Kennedy Administration, Laos Crisis, vol. 24 Hereafter, *FRUS, Laos*, vol. 24.

2. Ibid.

3. Director of Intelligence and Research (Hughes), Memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman), dtd 3 Apr 63, Subj: Implications of Quinims Assassination, Doc. No. 448 in ibid.

4. Dept of State, Memorandum for Consideration by the National Security Council on 10 April 1963, and attachments, n.d. Doc. No. 451 in ibid.

5. Summary Record of the 511th National Security Council Meeting, dtd 10 Apr 63, Doc. 452 in ibid. See editorial note 6 in the document for the quotation from the National Security Action Memo.

6. Embassy Laos msg to Dept of State, 14 Apr 1963, Doc. No. 433 in ibid.

7. Michael Forrestal memo to President, dtd 19 Apr 63, Subj. Conference on Laos, Doc. No. 456 in ibid. Hereafter, Forrestal memo to President, 19 Apr 63, Doc. No. 456.

8. The Presidents remarks are quoted in editorial note 2 in Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and President Kennedy, dtd 19 Apr 62, Doc. No. 455 in ibid.

9. Forrestal memo to President, 19 Apr 63, Doc. No. 456 in ibid.

10. Memorandum for the Record, dtd 19 Apr 63, Subj: Presidential Conference on Laos, Doc. No. 457 in ibid.

11. Ibid. See editorial note 5 for McNamara comments.

12. Ibid.

13. Summary Record of the 512th National Security Council Meeting, dtd 20 April 63, Subj: US Policy Toward Laos, Doc. 459 No. in ibid. Hereafter, 512th NSC Meeting, 20 Apr 63, Doc. 459.

14. Ibid. See also National Security Council Record of Action No. 2465, dtd 20 Apr 63, Doc. No. 461 in ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between President Kennedy and the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman), dtd 21 Apr 63, Doc. No. 462 in ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Memorandum of Conversation [between] Khrushchev et al. and Harriman, dtd 26 Apr 63, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 466 in ibid. See also Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 200.

19. Ibid.

20. Summary Record of the 513th National Security Council Meeting, dtd 22 Apr 63, Doc. No. 463 in *FRUS, Laos*, vol. 24.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Hilsman memo to SecState, n.d. [early April 63], Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No. 72, in *FRUS 1961–63*, Kennedy Administration, *Vietnam*, Jan–Aug 63, vol. III. Hereafter, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

24. Memo of Conversation with Harriman et al., dtd 1 Apr 63, Subj: Situation in Vietnam, Doc. No. 73 in ibid. Hereafter, Harriman Conversation, Doc. 73. Thompson described his meeting with McNamara in this document.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Memorandum of Conversation, White House, dtd 4 Apr 63, Doc. No. 77 in ibid. Hereafter, White House Conversation, Doc. 77.

28. Harriman Conversation, Doc. 73 in ibid.

29. White House Conversation, Doc. 77 in ibid. For the previous request on defoliation review, see Michael Forrestal memo to Harriman, dtd 13 Mar 63, Subj: Defoliation and Crop Destruction, Doc. No. 58 in ibid.

30. Minutes of Meeting of the Special Group for Counterinsurgency, dtd 4 Apr 63, Doc. No. 78 in ibid.

31. Wood ltr to Nolting, dtd 4 Apr 63, Doc. No. 79 in ibid.

32. Forrestal telegram to President at Palm Beach, Fla., dtd 16 Apr 63, Doc. No. 89 in ibid.

33. Forrestal memo to President, dtd 22 Apr 63, Subj: Chemical Defoliation and Crop Destruction, Doc. No. 98 in ibid. See also JCS memorandum to SecDef, dtd 17 Apr 63, Subj: Defoliation and Crop Destruction in South Vietnam, Doc. No. 93 and State Dept memo to President, dtd 18 Apr 63, Subj: Chemical Defoliation and Crop Destruction in South Vietnam, Doc. No. 96 in ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. SecState msg to Embassy in Vietnam, 7 May 63, Doc. No. 110 in ibid.

36. National Intelligence Estimate, 53-63, dtd 17 Apr 63, Subj: Prospects in South Vietnam, Doc. No. 94 in ibid.

37. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 28 Mar 63, Doc. No. 68 and Rusk msg to Nolting, 29 Mar 63, Doc. No. 69 in ibid.

38. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 5 Apr 63, Doc. No. 81 in ibid.

39. Nolting msg to Dept, dtd 13 Apr 63, Doc. No. 89 in ibid.

40. Nolting msg to Dept, dtd 26 Apr 63, Doc. No. 101 in ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Editorial note 5 in ibid.

44. Information Report, dtd 22 Apr 63, Subj: Indications of Government of Vietnam Plan to Request Reduction of American Personnel in Vietnam, Doc. No. 99 in ibid.

45. AsstDir for Rural Affairs, USOM memo to Director of the Mission, dtd 1 May 63, Subj: An Evaluation of Progress in the Strategic Hamlet-Provincial Rehabilitation Program, Doc. No. 102 in ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Heavner, DepDir of Vietnam Working Group to Director, Memo to Wood, dtd 2 May 63, Doc. No. 105 in ibid.

51. Heavner memo to Wood, dtd 2 May 63, Subj: Forrestal Meeting on Contingencies, Doc. No. 105 in ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Memorandum to Ambassador in Vietnam and the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, dtd 3 May 63, Doc. No. 106 in ibid. See editorial note 1 for the meeting between the President and Mecklin as well as the drafting of the memo by Salinger.

55. Memorandum for the Record of the Secretary of Defense Conference, dtd 6 May 63, Subj: Notes and Necessary Actions Resulting from SecDef Conference..., Doc. No. 107 in ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. SecDef McNamara memo to AsstSecDef ISA Nitze, dtd 8 May 63, Doc. No. 111 in ibid.

65. Editorial note 4 in ibid. citing JCS msg 9820 to CinCPac, dtd 9 May 63.

66. Tom Wicker, "President Drops his Naval Chief in Surprise Move," *The New York Times*, 7 May 63, pp. 1 and 22.

67. Ibid. Upon Andersons retirement in August, President Kennedy nominated him to be US Ambassador to Portugal.

68. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 117; Felix Belair, Jr., "US and Vietnam Agree on Costs," *The New York Times*, 10 May 63, p. 1.

69. See Helble memos to Dept of State, 9 May 63, Doc. No. 112; 10 May 63, Doc. No. 116; 10 May 63, Doc. No. 117 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3.

70. Ibid.

71. See Doc. No. 117 in ibid.

72. Manifesto of Vietnamese Buddhist Clergy and Faithful, dtd 10 May 63, Doc. No. 118.

73. Nolting msg to Dept of State, dtd 18 May 63, Doc. No. 129 in ibid. The message cites the interview with the Buddhist clergy in the semi-official *Vietnam Presse*, 17 May 63, for its description of the meeting with the President.

74. Ibid.

75. Walter Unna, "Viet-Nam Wants 50% of GIs Out," *The Washington Post*, 12 May 63, p. 1. See also editorial note 2 in Rusk msg to Nolting, dtd 13 May 63, Doc. No. 122 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3. Hereafter, Doc. No. 122, vol. 3.

76. Doc. No. 122, vol. 3. See editorial note 4 for reference to Hilsman message.

77. Harkins ltr to President Diem, 15 May 63, Doc. No. 123 in ibid.

78. Nolting msg to Dept of State, dtd 17 May 63, Doc. No. 126 in ibid.

79. Editorial note, Doc. No. 127 in ibid. The note contains the agreement between Diem and Nolting.

80. Dept of State msg to Embassy, dtd 17 May 63, Doc. No. 128 in ibid.

81. Ibid. See editorial note 3 for quotation from Nolting msg 20 May 63.

82. Ball msg to Embassy in Vietnam, dtd 21 May 1963, Doc. No. 130 in ibid.

83. See *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* for period 8 May 1963–29 May 1963.

84. David Halberstam, "Buddhists Mourn Vietnam Victims," *The New York Times*, p. 5.

85. Dept of State msg to Embassy in Laos, dtd 24 May 1963, Doc. No. 472 in *FRUS, Laos*, vol. 24. See editorial note 3 in the document citing Legere memo to McGeorge Bundy for his comments on the contingency planning.

86. Taylor memo to Secretary McNamara, JCSM–330-63, dtd 23 Apr 63, Subj: Military Options to Stabilize the Situation in Laos, Doc. No. 465 in ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Michael Forrestal memo to President Kennedy, dtd 4 Jun 63, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 474 in ibid. Editorial note 2 in the document provides the listing of the suggested contingency actions. The reference to Lebanon type operation refers to President Eisenhower ordering Marines and Army forces into Lebanon in 1958 to calm an internal political crisis as a result of a revolution in Iraq that appeared to upset the status quo in the Middle East.

90. Ibid.

91. Forrestal memo to President, dtd 7 Jun 63, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 475 in ibid. See chap. 7 for discussion of the different variations of SEATO Plan 5.

92. Forrestal memo to President, dtd 14 Jun 63, Subj: Laos, Doc. No. 476 in ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Forrestal memo to President Kennedy, dtd 18 Jun 63, Subj: Laos Planning, Doc. No. 477 in ibid.

96. Memo prepared for McCone, n.d. [19 Jun 63], Subj: Operational Planning on Laos, Presidential Meeting, Doc. No. 479 in ibid.

97. Forrestal Memo for the Record, dtd 19 Jun 63, Subj: Laos Planning, Doc. No. 478 in ibid.

98. Passim in ibid.

Chapter 12. From Crisis to Crisis

1. Michael V. Forrestal, Oral History transcript, interviewed by Paige E. Mulhollan, 3 Nov 69, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, NARA, pp. 2–3 and 6. Hereafter, Forrestal Oral History.

2. Ibid. p. 5. See also Hilsman, Memo of Conversation, White House Meeting, dtd 4 July 1963, Doc. No. 205, *FRUS 1961–63*, Kennedy Administration, *Vietnam*, Jan–Aug 63, vol. 3. Hereafter, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

3. Amb Nolting ltr to Hilsman, dtd 23 May 63 with attached contingency plan, Subj: Eventual Change of Government in Vietnam, Doc. No. 133, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

4. Editorial note 2 in Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 23 May 63, Doc. No. 134 in ibid.

5. See Trueheart's msgs to State Dept, 1 Jun 63, Doc. No. 141; 5 Jun 63, Doc. No. 153; and 6 Jun 63, Doc. No. 153 in ibid. See also Current Intelligence Memo, 3 Jun 63, Subj: Buddhist Demonstrations in South Vietnam in ibid.

6. See Trueheart's msgs to State Dept, 8 Jun 63, Doc. No. 157; 9 Jun 63, Doc. No. 160; 10 Jun 63, Doc. No. 162 in ibid. See also A. J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam, 1954–1975* (NY, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 214–15, 259.

7. State Dept msg to Trueheart, dtd 11 Jun 63, Doc. No. 167 and Trueheart msg to State Dept, dtd 12 Jun 63, Doc. No. 169. Hereafter, Trueheart msg, Doc. No. 169 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63. The Kennedy quote is from editorial note 5 in Trueheart msg citing White House Memo for the Record, dtd 14 Jun 63.

8. Trueheart msg, Doc. No. 169 and Dir, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, memo to SecState, dtd 21 Jun 63, Subj: Implications of the Buddhist Crisis in Vietnam, Doc. No. 183, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

9. MajGen Krulak (USMC), Report to Gen. Taylor] n.d. [Jul 63] Subj: Visit to Vietnam, Doc. No. 207 in ibid.

10. Ibid. Hereafter, Krulak Report [Jul 63] Doc. No. 207, in ibid. See chap. 5 for Operation Sunrise.

11. See chap. 10 for Phillips views on the Strategic Hamlet program.

12. Krulak Report [Jul 63] Doc. No. 207 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

13. Trueheart msg to Dept of State, 6 Jul 63, Doc. No. 209 in ibid.

14. Krulak Report [Jul 63] Doc. No. 207 in ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Forrestal memo to McGeorge Bundy, dtd 1 July 63, Doc. No. 195 in ibid.

18. State Dept msg to US Embassy, Saigon, dtd 2 Jul 63, Doc. No. 199; Trueheart msg to Dept of State, 3 Jul 63, Doc. No. 200; Trueheart ltr to President Diem, dtd 3 Jul 63; all three documents are in ibid.

19. Roger Hilsman, Memorandum of Conversation, dtd 4 Jul 63, Subj: Situation in South Viet-Nam, Doc. No. 205, in ibid. Hereafter, Hilsman Memo 4 Jul 63, Doc. No. 205. For Forrestal message and memo see Forrestal msg to Bundy in Rome, dtd 1 Jul 63, Doc. No. 195 and memo to President, dtd 3 Jul 63, Doc. No. 202 in ibid.

20. Hilsman memo, 4 Jul 63, Doc. No. 205 in ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. State Department, Memorandum of a Conversation, 5 Jul 63, Subj: Current Situation in Viet-Nam, Doc. No. 208 in ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Trueheart msg to State Dept, dtd 4 Jul 63, Doc. No. 203 in ibid.

26. Transcript of Oral History Interview with Gen. Paul D. Harkins, dtd 10 Nov 81, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, NARA, p. 23. Hereafter, Harkins Transcript, Nov 81.

27. David Halberstam, "Nolting, Back in Saigon," *New York Times*, dtd 12 July 63, p. 3.

28. SNIE, 53-2-63, dtd 10 Jul 63, reproduced in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 12, pp. 530–35.

29. Ibid.; Information Report, dtd 8 Jul 63, Subj: Appraisal of the Political Situation as of 1200 hours on 6 July, Doc. No. 212, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63. See editorial note 2 relative to the quote from General Don.

30. David Halberstam, "Some US Officials in Saigon Dubious About Diem Regime," *New York Times*, 3 July 1963, pp. 1 and 8.

31. David Halberstam, "Police in Saigon Jostle Newsmen" in ibid., p. 3. See also Trueheart msg to Dept of State, dtd 7 Jul 63, Doc. No. 210, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

32. Note 4 in ibid. See also Browne, Halberstam, Kalischer, and Sheehan, telegram to President, 7 July 63, Doc. No. 211, in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

33. Nolting msg to State Dept, 15 Jul 63, Doc. No. 219 in ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. David Halberstam, "Buddhists Renew Vietnam Protest," *NY Times*, dtd 16 Jul 63, p. 1.

36. Halberstam, "Vietnam Orders Rein on Protests" and Special to the *Times*, "Kennedy Urging Accord," *NY Times*, dtd 17 Jul 63, pp. 1 and 3.

37. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 17 Jul 63, Doc. No. 223, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

38. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 17 Jul 63, Doc. No. 224 in ibid.

39. Halberstam, "Saigon Police Seal Off Shrines to Control Buddhists' Agitation," *NY Times*, 18 Jul 63, p. 3.

40. "Diem Offers Concessions," Reuters, *NY Times*, dtd 19 Jul 63, in ibid., p. 3. See also editorial note, Doc. No. 228, and Nolting msg to State Dept., dtd 19 Jul 63, Doc. No. 229. *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

41. Nolting msg, Doc. No. 229, and Dept msg to Nolting, dtd 19 Nov 63, ftnt 2, Doc. No. 30 in ibid. The information from Nolting's 2nd message that day is quoted in ftnt 2, above.

42. Rusk msg to Nolting, dtd 19 Jul 63, Doc. No. 230, in ibid.

43. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 20 July 63, Doc. No. 232 in ibid.

44. Dept of State msg to Embassy in Vietnam, dtd 20 Jul 63, Doc. No. 233 in ibid.

45. Dept of State msg to Embassy in Vietnam, dtd 23 Jul 63, Doc. No. 234 in ibid.

46. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 25 Apr 63, Doc. No. 237 in ibid.

47. AsstSecState Public Affairs, Report to the President, n.d. [26 Jul 63] Subj: "Report on the Saigon Press Situation," Doc. No. 239 in ibid. Hereafter, "Saigon Press Situation," Doc. No. 239.

48. Ibid. For Manning's briefing of Lodge, see Memorandum of Conversation, dtd 26 Jul 63, Subj: Press Problems in Viet-Nam, Doc. No. 238 in ibid.

49. "Saigon Press Situation," Doc. No. 239 in ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. "Kennedy Assures Editors of Efforts on Vietnam," AP, 2 Aug 63, *NY Times*, 3 Aug 63, p. 3.

52. "Vietnam Buddhists Criticize US Envoy," *NY Times*, 1 Aug 63, p. 3. See also informational ftnt 2 of memo of telephone conversation between Under Secretary Harriman and AsstSec Hilsman, dtd 1 Aug 63, Doc. No. 243 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

53. Ibid.

54. David Halberstam, "Mrs. Nhu Assails Saigon Buddhists," *NY Times*, 4 Aug 63, pp. 1 and 15.

55. Reuters, "Anti-US Coup Hinted," in ibid., p. 15.

56. Ball msg to Nolting, dtd 5 Aug 1963, Doc. No. 245 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

57. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 7 Aug 63, Doc. No. 247 in ibid.

58. David Halberstam, "Charges Threat by Embassy," *NY Times*, 8 Aug 63, pp. 1 and 3.

59. Ibid. and Ted Szulc, "Concern Rises on Diem" in ibid.

60. Ball msg to Nolting, 8 Aug 63, Doc. No. 248 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

61. Hilsman memo to Ball, dtd 6 Aug 63, Subj: Buddhist Problem in Vietnam, Doc. No. 246 in ibid. Hereafter, Hilsman memo to Ball, 6 Aug 63, Doc. No. 246. For Kattenburg information, see "Biographical Note," Paul M. Kattenburg Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, The University of South Carolina.

62. Hilsman memo to Ball, 6 Aug 63, Doc. No. 246.

63. Ibid.

64. Forrestal memo to the President, dtd 9 Aug 63, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No. 249 in ibid. It is not clear when the President read this memo as he was in Massachusetts attending the funeral of his baby boy Patrick, who died two days after a premature birth.

65. Ibid. It is not clear when the President may have looked at this memo as he was in Massachusetts attending the funeral of his baby boy Patrick, who died two days after a premature birth.

66. Forrestal Oral History, p. 6.

67. Nolting msg to Dept of State, 10 Aug 63, Doc. No. 250 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63. See ftnt 2 in ibid. for the reference about the Department's agreement to Nolting's request.

68. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 12 Aug 63, Doc. No. 251 in ibid.

69. Rusk msg to Nolting, dtd 13 Aug 63, Doc. No. 252 in ibid.

70. Nolting msg to State Dept, dtd 14 Aug 63, Doc. No. 253 in ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. See ftnts 3 and 4 in ibid.

73. David Halberstam, "Thousands of Buddhists Rally," *New York Times*, dtd 19 Aug 63, pp. 1 and 3.

74. Ibid. and UPI, "Buddhists Seized," in ibid. dtd 21 Aug 63, pp. 1 and 3. Hereafter, "Buddhists Seized."

75. "Buddhists Seized." Editorial note referring to President's Intelligence Checklist, 21 Aug 63, Doc. No. 262, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

76. Trueheart msg to State Dept, dtd 21 Aug 63, Doc. No. 261 in ibid.

77. CIA Agency Station msg to Agency, dtd 24 Aug 63, Doc. No. 275 in ibid. Hereafter, Agency Station msg, Doc. No. 275. At this time, General Le Van Ty, the Chief Joint General Staff was being treated for lung cancer at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington. See "LtGen Le Van Ty, Chief JGS, AFRVN," Information Book, 11 Sep 63, Records of Gen. Maxwell Taylor, RG 218, NARA, Records of the JCS, Box 12, Folder Aug 63–Oct 63.

78. Agency Station msg, Doc. No. 275.

79. Lodge msgs dtd 24 Aug 63 to StateDept, Docs. No. 273 and No. 274 in ibid., respectively contain the interviews between Phillips and Thuan and Phillips and General Kim.

80. David Halberstam, "Plan Said to be Nhu's," *NY Times*, 23 Aug 63, pp. 1 and 3 and Tad Szulc, "Kennedy Weighs Policy," in ibid., pp. 1 and 2.

81. For the President's directions to General Taylor, see Chairman of the JCS memo to SecState, dtd 23 Aug 63, Subj: Attached Cable from General Harkins, Doc. No. 270, in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63. Hereafter, Chairman's msg, Doc. No. 270, *FRUS* and "JCS Draft History," p. 6–19, citing JCS msg 3284 to MACV, dtd 21 Aug 63. For President's orders to Ambassador Lodge and US protest, see "The Major Events of the Day," The *NY Times*, dtd 22 Aug 63, p. 18 and ftnt 3 to Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 23 Aug 63, Doc. No. 269, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

82. JCS, Special Asst for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak), Memo for the Record, dtd 21 Aug 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 265 in *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

83. Ibid.

84. Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect, The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) p. 54. Hereafter, McNamara, *In Retrospect*.

85. Harkins msg Taylor, dtd 22 Aug 63, attachment to Chairman's msg, Doc. No. 270, *FRUS*.

86. Ibid.

87. Office of Current Intelligence, dtd 21 Aug 63, Subj: Rumors in South Vietnam, Doc. No. 266 in ibid.

88. Transcript of telephone conversation between Adm. Felt and Hilsman, AsstSecState(FE), Folder Aug 63–Sep 63, Box 12, Taylor Records, NARA, RG 218. Hereafter, Felt and Hilsman Telephone Transcription, Box 12, NARA RG 218.

89. Acting SecState (Ball) memo to USecState for Political Affairs (Harriman), dtd 22 Aug 63, Doc. No. 267 in ibid.

90. StateDept msg to Amb Lodge, dtd 22 Aug 63, Doc. No. 268 in ibid.

91. Lodge msg to State Dept., dtd 24 Aug 63, Doc. No. 276 in ibid.

92. Michael Forrestal memo to the President, dtd 24 Aug 63, Doc. No. 278 in ibid. See also David Halberstam, "Anti-US Feeling Rises in Vietnam as Unrest Grows; Nhu's Power in Regime Gains ..." *New York Times*, 24 Aug 63, p. 1.

93. Felt and Hilsman Telephone Transcription, Box 12, NARA RG 218.

94. Ibid.

95. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 24 Aug 63, Doc. No. 276, *FRUS*, vol 3.

96. Secretary Ball quoted in A. J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam, The War, 1954–1975* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 223–4.

97. Interview of Roswell Gilpatric by Ted Gittinger, dtd 2 Nov 82, Oral History Transcript, LBJ Library, Internet Copy, p. 3. Hereafter, Gilpatric interview.

98. MajGen Victor H. Krulak, Memo for the Record, dtd 24 Aug 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 282, *FRUS*, vol 3.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid. Roger Hilsman had another perspective. According to Hilsman, "Krulak located General Maxwell Taylor at a restaurant, and Taylor cleared the August 24 cable for the military side of the Defense Department. Although Taylor did not know it at the time he cleared the cable, Forrestal had already released it. General Krulak had telephoned that he had located Taylor and that everything was all right—from which Forrestal had assumed that Krulak had already obtained Taylor's approval, which he did not actually get for another hour and a half." Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 488.

101. Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster, McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Times Books Henry Holt and Company, 2008), p. 78 citing Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, dtd 20 Oct 63 and Goldstein interview with Bundy, 5 Dec 1995. Hereafter, Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster*.

102. Lodge's message was quoted in full in Michael Forrestal's telegram to President Kennedy in Hyannis Port. See Forrestal msg to President, dtd 25 Aug 63, Doc. No. 285, *FRUS, 1963*, vol. 3.

103. Harkins Transcript, Nov 81, pp. 24–28.

104. State Dept msg to Lodge dtd 25 Aug 63, Doc. No. 286 in *FRUS, 1963*, vol. 3.

105. Voice of America Broadcast, 26 Aug 63, Doc. No. 287 in ibid.

106. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 26 Aug 63, Doc. No. 288 in ibid. Hereafter, Lodge msg, Doc. No. 288.

107. MajGen Krulak, Memo for the Record, dtd 26 Aug 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 289 in ibid. Hereafter, Krulak memo, Doc. No. 289. Secretary Rusk in response later in the day to Lodge's complaint about the broadcast told the Ambassador that the Department "deeply regret[ted]" the incident and that the Department and the Voice of America would in the future do their "utmost to avoid any comment not coordinated with you." See note 5 in Lodge msg, Doc. No. 288.

108. Krulak memo, Doc. No. 289. See note 5 for Hilsman's recollection in his notes.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid. See note 5 for the reprimand of Admiral Felt.

114. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 234.

115. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster*, p. 79. Goldstein cites an interview with Bundy in 1995.

116. Rusk msg to Lodge, 26 Aug 63, Doc. No. 293, *FRUS, Vietnam*, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

117. Chairman, JCS msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 26 Aug 63, Doc. No. 295 in ibid.

118. Lodge msg to Department of State, dtd 26 Aug 63, Doc. No. 295 in ibid.

119. Lodge msg to Department of State, dtd 27 Aug 63, Doc. No. 297 in ibid.

120. Harkins msg to Chairman, JCS, dtd 27 Aug 63, Doc. No. 300 in ibid.

121. Ibid.

122. Ibid.

123. Memo of telephone conversation, Harriman and Hilsman, dtd 27 Aug 63, Doc. No. 301 in ibid.

124. Michael Forrestal memo to the President, dtd 27 Aug 63, Subject: Vietnam, Doc. No. 302, in ibid.

125. Bromley Smith, Memo of Conference with the President, dtd 27 Aug 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 303 in ibid.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid.

129. SecState msg to Lodge, dtd 27 Aug 63, Doc. No. 305 in ibid.

130. Taylor msg to Harkins, dtd 28 Aug 63, Doc. No. 309 in ibid.

131. Ibid. See editorial note 1 for Harriman quote and distribution of message.

132. Bromley Smith, Memorandum of Conference with the President, dtd 28 Aug 63, Subj. Vietnam, Doc. No. 1, *FRUS*, vol. 4, *Kennedy Years*, *Aug–Dec 63*. Hereafter, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

133. Ibid. For Lodge's reply see also Lodge msg to Dept of State, 28 Aug 63, Doc. No. 306, *FRUS*, vol. 3, Kennedy Years, Jan–Aug 63.

134. ComUSMACV msg to Chairman, JCS dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 4, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

135. Memo of Telephone conversation between Rusk and Bundy, 17:16, dtd 28 Aug 63, Doc. No. 5 in ibid.

136. Hilsman, Memo of Conversation, dtd 28 Aug 63, Doc. No. 6 in ibid.

137. Taylor msg to Harkins, dtd 28 Aug 63, Doc. No. 7 in ibid.

138. President Kennedy msg to Ambassador Lodge, dtd 28 Aug 63, Doc. No. 9 in ibid.

139. State Dept msg to US Embassy, dtd 28 Aug 63, Doc. No. 8 in ibid.

140. Harkins msg to Chairman, JCS, dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 13 in ibid.

141. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 12 in ibid.

142. Kattenburg msg to Hilsman, dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 10 in ibid.

143. Roger Hilsman, Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between the President and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 14 in ibid. See also Tad Szulc, "Long Crisis Seen on Vietnam Rule," and "US Spurns Denial by Diem on Crisis," *NY Times*, 28 Aug 63, pp. 1 and 2 and 29 Aug 63, pp. 1 and 3 respectively.

144. Bromley Smith, Memorandum of Conference with the President, dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 15 in *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

145. Dept of State msg to Embassy, dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 16, in ibid. Hereafter, Dept of State msg, 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 16 in ibid.

146. Rusk msg to Lodge, dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 17 in ibid. Hereafter, Rusk msg, Doc. No. 17 in ibid.

147. President msg to Lodge, dtd 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 18 in ibid. Hereafter, President msg, Doc. No. 18 in ibid.

148. Editorial note 3 in Dept of State msg, 29 Aug 63, Doc. No. 16 in ibid.

149. Editorial note 2 in President msg, Doc. No. 18 in ibid.

150. Lodge msg to Rusk, dtd 30 Aug 63, Doc. No. 20 in ibid.

151. Ibid.

152. Hilsman, Memorandum of Conversation, dtd 30 Aug 63, Doc. No. 26 in ibid.

153. Rusk msg to Lodge, 30 Aug 63, Doc. No. 30 in ibid.

154. Gen. Harkins msg to Gen. Taylor, dtd 31 Aug 63, Doc. No. 33 in ibid.

155. Ibid.

156. Ibid.

157. Lodge msg to Secretary Rusk, dtd 31 Aug 63, Doc. No. 34.

158. Ibid.

159. Roger Hilsman, Memorandum of Conversation, dtd 31 Aug 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 37, in ibid. Hereafter, Hilsman Memo, 31 Aug 63, Doc. No. 37. See also Victor H. Krulak, Memorandum of Meeting, 31 Aug 63, Doc. No. 44, reproduced in *The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times* (New York, New York: 1971), pp. 202–5. Hereafter, Krulak Memo, 31 Aug 63, Doc. No. 44, *NY Times, Pentagon Papers*.

160. Hilsman Memo, 31 Aug 63, Doc. No. 37.

161. Ibid.

162. Ibid. See also Krulak Memo, 31 Aug 63, Doc. No. 44, *NY Times, Pentagon Papers*, p. 204.

163. Ibid. p. 205.

164. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 497.

165. Harkins Transcript, Nov 81, pp. 28–29.

Chapter 13. The Aftermath

1. VADM Herbert Riley, Director, Joint Staff, memo to Joint Staff, dtd 30 Aug 63, Subj: Studies on Situation in Vietnam, Records of Gen. Maxwell Taylor, RG 218, NARA, Records of the JCS, Box 12, Folder Aug 63–Oct 63.

2. "JCS Draft History," pp. 37–38. See also chap. 10 for discussion of contingency plans during Laotian crisis and May Honolulu Conference and Robert S. McNamara, with Brian VanDeMark. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 103.

3. Chairman JCS (Taylor) memo to Sec McNamara, dtd 20 Aug 63, Subj: Withdrawal of 1,000 US Military from Vietnam, with CinCPac Plan (attached) Doc. No. 260 in *FRUS*, Vietnam, vol. 3, Jan–Aug 63.

4. VADM Riley, Director, Joint Staff, memo to President, dtd 30 Aug 63, Subj: Availability of Forces for Deployment to Saigon, Doc. No. 30, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Kennedy Years, Aug–Dec 63. Hereafter, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

5. Interview with the President, 2 Sep 63, Doc. No. 50 in ibid. On 1 Sept, NSC advisor Bundy forwarded a memo to the President in preparation for his interview with CBS. In this memo drafted by Bundy based upon discussion with Hilsman and Forrestal who generally concurred, he concluded, "it is hard to see how we could continue this effort if the essential conditions for success were no longer present.... But it is too soon to conclude that we cannot find a good way out of the present difficulties. Our support for the people of South Vietnam against the Communist aggressors will continue as long as it is wanted and can be effective." Bundy msg to President, dtd 1 Sep 1963, Doc. No. 43 in ibid.

6. Bundy memo to President, dtd 2 Sep 63, Subj: Draft Telegram to Lodge, Doc. No. 51 in ibid. Hereafter, Bundy memo, 2 Sep 63, Doc. No. 51.

7. Lodge msg to SecState, dtd 2 Sep 63, Doc. No. 44 in ibid.

8. Attachment to Bundy memo, 2 Sep 63, Doc. No. 51 in ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation dtd 3 Sep 63, Doc. No. 52 in ibid.

11. Bromley Smith, Memorandum of Conference with the President, dtd 3 Sept 1963, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 54 in ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Rusk msg to Lodge, dtd 3 Sep 63, Doc. No. 56 in ibid.

14. Ibid. and Dept of State to Ambassador Lodge, dtd 3 Sep 6, Doc. No. 57 in ibid. Hereafter, Doc. No. 57.

15. See editorial ftnt 3 in Doc. No. 57; see also Lodge msg to Rusk, dtd 4 Sep 63, Doc. No. 58 in ibid.

16. Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie, John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (NY, NY: Random House, 1988), pp. 359–60.

17. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 4 Sep 63, Doc. No. 58.

18. Ibid.

19. Rusk msg to Lodge, dtd 4 Sep 63, Doc. No. 59 in ibid.

20. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 5 Dec 63, Doc. No. 60 in ibid.

21. Ibid. See ftnt 4 citing Dept of State msg 337 to Saigon, dtd 5 Sep 63.

22. Draft memo of telephone conversation between Hilsman and President, dtd 5 Sep 63 in ibid.

23. Bromley Smith, Memo of Conversation with President, dtd 6 Sep 63, Doc. No. 66 in ibid. Hereafter, "Conversation with President," 6 Sep 63, Doc. No. 66.

24. Taylor memo to President, n.d. (3 Sep 63?), Subj: Summary of Military Operations in Vietnam, Doc. No. 53 in ibid.

25. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 63.

26. "Conversation with President," 6 Sep 63, Doc. No. 66, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

27. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 501.

28. "Conversation with President," 6 Sep 63, Doc. No. 66, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid. and Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 501.

31. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 501.

32. Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days, John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965, Mariner edition 2002), p. 992.

33. State Dept msg to Ambassador Lodge, dtd 6 Sep 63, Doc. No. 70, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

34. State Dept msg to Ambassador Lodge, dtd 6 Sep 63, Doc. No. 71 in ibid.

35. Transcript of Oral History Interview with Gen. Paul D. Harkins, dtd 10 Nov 81, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, NARA, p. 30.

36. Mendenhall msg to Hilsman, dtd 9 Sep 63, Doc. No. 78 in *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug-Dec 63.

37. Robert W. Komer memo to McGeorge Bundy, dtd 9 Sep 63, Doc. No. 79 in ibid.

38. Maj Gen Victor H. Krulak, "Visit to Vietnam," 6–10 Sep 63, dtd 10 Sep 63, Doc. No. 82 in ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Roger Hilsman, Memorandum of a Conversation, dtd 10 Sep 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 83 in ibid. Hereafter, Hilsman, Memorandum, 10 Sep 63, Doc. No. 83, *FRUS*, vol. 4.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid. See ftnt 5 in the document for General Krulak's remarks.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid. See ftnt 7 for the exchange between Phillips and Secretary Rusk.

46. Ibid.

47. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 504.

48. Hilsman, Memorandum, 10 Sep 63, Doc. No. 83, *FRUS*, vol. 4.

49. Bromley Smith, Memorandum of Conversation, dtd 10 Sep 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 85 in ibid. The editors in ftnt 3 of the document quote the conversation between McNamara and Harriman, citing minutes kept by General Krulak.

50. Ibid.

51. Hilsman, Draft telegram from the Dept of State to Embassy, Vietnam, n.d., encl. 2, to Hilsman memo to SecState, dtd 16 Sep 63, Doc. No. 114, Subj: Viet-Nam. The quote from Phase 4 is from editorial note 4 citing a 16 Sept draft paper by Hilsman entitled "persuasion and pressure against the Diem regime." Phase 4 was not incorporated into the draft instruction to the US Embassy in Vietnam.

52. Lodge msg to Rusk, dtd 11 Sep 63, Doc. No. 86 in ibid.

53. Dept of State, Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Secretary Rusk and National Security Advisor Bundy, dtd 11 Sep 63, Doc. No. 88 in ibid.

54. Bromley Smith, Memorandum of Conversation, dtd 11 Sep 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 93 in Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Bromley Smith, Memorandum of Conference with the President, dtd 11 Sep 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 94 in ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Draft of cable from Rusk to Ambassador Lodge, dtd 12 Sep 63, Doc. No. 98 in ibid. For the conversation between Rusk and Hilsman see editorial note 1 in the document which cites and quotes from the record of the telephone conversation.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid. and Dept msg to Embassy, 12 Sep 63, Doc. No. 97 in ibid.

65. Ibid. and Harkins msg to Krulak, dtd 12 Sep 63, Doc. No. 96 in ibid.

66. Krulak, Memorandum for the Record of Meeting, dtd 12 Sep 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 99, in ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. President Kennedy msg to Lodge, dtd 12 Sep 63, Doc. No. 101 in ibid.

69. Lodge msg to Rusk, dtd 13 Sep 63, Doc. No. 102 in ibid. See also memo of telephone conversation between Under Secretary Harriman and CIA Director McCone where both expressed concern over reports of "the possibility of Nhu making a deal up north."

70. Harriman ltr to Lodge, dtd 14 Sep 63, Doc. No. 107 in ibid.

71. Hilsman memo to SecState, dtd 16 Sep 63, Doc. No. 114, Subj: Viet-Nam with enclosures. See also Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 506.

72. Krulak, Memo for the Record of a Meeting, dtd 16 Sep 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 113, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63. Hereafter, Krulak, Memo for the Record, 16 Sep 63, Doc. No. 113.

73. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 507.

74. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 65–68.

75. Lodge ltr to Rusk, dtd 13 Sep 63, Doc. No. 104, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63. The mention of the possible coup in the text is quoted from ftnt 4 in the document referencing Lodge ltr to Rusk, dtd 24 Sep 63. It is not clear whether Lodge was referring to the August aborted attempt or to a possible new initiative. After some hesitation on the part of CIA Director McCone, he finally replaced the Intelligence Chief in early October. See SecState msg to Lodge, dtd 4 Oct 63, Doc. No. 176 in ibid.

76. White House msg to Ambassador Lodge, dtd 17 Sep 63, Doc. No. 125, in ibid. See editorial note 1 for the quote from Bundy. For Forrestal's influence, see Forrestal memo to Bundy, dtd 16 Sep 63, Subj: South Vietnam, Doc. No. 116 in ibid. Interestingly, General Krulak made much the same observation about the parallel between the two policies as did Forrestal. See Krulak memo to General Taylor, dtd 17 Sep 63, "Reconciliation versus Pressures and Persuasion," Doc. No. 121 in ibid. According to the State Department historians, they were unable to find any minutes of the meeting on the 17th, but they cite the record of a telephone conversation between John McCone and Secretary Rusk that refers to the meeting and provides the names of the participants. See State Dept, Memo of Telephone Conversation, dtd 17 Sep 63, Subj: Telephone Call from Mr. McCone, Doc. No. 120 in ibid.

77. Memo of Telephone Conversation between Harriman and Forrestal, dtd 17 Sep 63, Doc. No. 124 in ibid.

78. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 507–08.

79. Lodge msg to President, dtd 18 Sep 63, Doc. No. 126, *FRUS*, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63. Hereafter, Lodge msg, 18 Sep 63, Doc. No. 126.

80. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Harriman and Bundy, dtd 18 Sep 63, Doc. No. 127, in ibid.

81. Lodge msg, 18 Sep 63, Doc. No. 126. See editorial note 3 for the Bundy-Rusk conversation.

82. President's msg to Lodge, dtd 18 Sep 63, Doc. No. 128 in ibid.

83. Lodge msg to President, dtd 19 Sep 63, Doc. No. 130 in ibid. See editorial note 5 in the document for Thuan reference.

84. MACV msg to CinCPac, dtd 19 Sep 63, Doc. No. 134 in ibid.

85. Editorial Note, Doc. No. 117 in ibid.; Taylor memo to McNamara, dtd 21 Sep 63, Subj: David Halberstam article, "Rift with Saigon War Tactics," Records of Gen. Maxwell Taylor, RG 218, NARA, Records of the JCS, Box 12, Folder Aug 63–Oct 63. Hereafter, Taylor memo, David Halberstam, 21 Sep 63. David Halberstam, *New York Times*, 15–16 Sep 63, see especially article "Rift with Vietnam on Strategy...," 16 Sep 63, p. 2.

86. Taylor memo, David Halberstam, 21 Sep 63.

87. Editorial note, Doc. No 141, *FRUS*, Vietnam, 1963, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63, citing McNamara memo to President, dtd 21 Sep 63. See also Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 366 for Kennedy's discussion with Sulzberger. Sheehan states that this incident occurred on 22 Oct 63.

88. Memo for the Record, dtd 19 Sep 63, Subj: Chairman's Meeting with SecDef, Records of Gen. Maxwell Taylor, RG 218, NARA, Records of the JCS, Box 12, Folder Aug 63–Oct 63. Hereafter, Chairman's Meeting with SecDef, 19 Sep 63, Taylor Records, RG 218, NARA, Records of the JCS, Box 12, Folder Aug 63–Oct 63.

89. Ibid.

90. President Memo to SecDef McNamara, dtd 21 Sep 63, Doc. No. 142, *FRUS*, Vietnam, 1963, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63. See also DepAsstSecDef for ISA William R. Bundy memo to SecDef McNamara, dtd 19 Sep 63 in ibid.

91. Taylor msg to Harkins, dtd 21 Sep 63 and Harkins msg to Taylor, dtd 22 Sep 63, in Taylor Records, RG 218, NARA, Records of the JCS, Box 12, Folder Aug 63–Oct 63.

92. SecDef msg to Lodge, dtd 21 Sep 63, in ibid.

93. OSD msg to CinCPac and MACV, dtd 22 Sep 63 in ibid.

94. McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, dtd 23 Sep 63, Subj: Meeting on McNamara/Taylor Mission to South Vietnam, Doc. No. 143, *FRUS*, Vietnam, 1963, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

95. Ibid.

96. SecDef msg to US Ambassador, Vietnam, dtd 20 Sep 63, in Taylor Records, RG 218, NARA, Records of the JCS, Box 12, Folder Aug 63–Oct 63.

97. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Harriman and Forrestal, dtd 23 Sep 63, Doc. No. 145, *FRUS*, Vietnam, 1963, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

98. Hilsman ltr to Lodge, dtd 23 Sep 63, Doc. No. 144 in ibid. See ftnt 3 for the Lodge response, dtd 26 Sep 63.

99. LtCol Sidney Berry, Memorandum for the Record, dtd 23 Sep 63, Subj: Secretary McNamara Instructions to Party Delivered Aboard Plane, Doc. No. 146 in ibid.

100. SecDef McNamara, Report of Interview with Professor Smith [Honey], dtd 26 Sep 63, Doc. No. 150 in ibid. See also McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 74.

101. SecDef McNamara, Report by SecDef of Interview, n.d. (27 Sep 63?) Doc. No. 154 and Memorandum of a Conversation, dtd 30 Sep 63, Doc. No. 160 in ibid. See also McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 74–75.

102. JCS Chairman Taylor, ltr to President Diem, dtd 1 Oct 63, Doc. No. 163 in ibid. The letter was approved by Secretary McNamara "with the concurrence of Ambassador Lodge." See note 1 of the document.

103. Taylor, Memo for the Record, dtd 1 Oct 63, Subj: Farewell Call on Major General Duong Van Minh (Big Minh), Doc. No. 162 in ibid. Hereafter, Taylor Memo, 1 Oct 63, Farewell Call, Doc. No. 162. See note 1 for the description of the tennis match and the resulting misunderstanding.

104. US Embassy, Vietnam, Memorandum of Conversation, dtd 29 Sep 63, Doc. No. 158 in ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid. See also McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 75–77.

107. Taylor Memo, 1 Oct 63, Farewell Call, Doc. No. 162 in ibid.

108. McNamara and Taylor, Memorandum to the President, dtd 2 Oct 1963, Subj: Report of McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam, Doc. No. 167 in ibid. See also McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 77–79.

109. Ibid.; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 81.

110. Ibid.

111. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 79. McNamara cites a Presidential recording of the meeting for his quote.

112. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 79–80.

113. Ibid. and Summary Record of the 519th Meeting of the National Security Council, dtd 2 Oct 63, Doc. No. 169. Hereafter, Record of the NSC Meeting, 2 Oct 63, Doc. No. 169 and Record of NSC Action 2472, 519th Meeting, dtd 2 Oct 63, Doc. No. 170 in ibid.

114. Record of the NSC Meeting, 2 Oct 63, Doc. No. 169 in ibid.

115. Sullivan memo to Hilsman, dtd 3 Oct 63, Doc. No. 173 in ibid.

116. Bromley Smith, Memorandum of Meeting, dtd 3 Oct 63, Subj: Vietnam, Doc. No. 172 in ibid.

117. Krulak, Memo for the Record, Subj: Meeting of the Executive Council, dtd, 4 Oct 63, Doc. No. 179 in ibid.; Forrestal, Memo for the Files, dtd 5 Oct 63, Subj: Presidential Conference on South Vietnam, Doc. No. 179, in ibid; Rusk msg to Lodge (Instructions), dtd 5 Oct 63, Doc. No. 181, in ibid. Hereafter, Rusk (Instructions) to Lodge, 5 Oct 63, Doc. No. 181; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 81.

118. Rusk (Instructions) to Lodge, 5 Oct 63, Doc. No. 181.

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121. David Kaiser, *American Tragedy, Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), p. 265.

122. McGeorge Bundy msg to Bundy, dtd 5 Oct 62, Doc. No. 182, and Lodge msg to Bundy, dtd 25 Oct 62, Doc. No. 216, *FRUS*, Vietnam, 1963, vol. 4, Aug–Dec 63.

123. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 6 Oct 62, Doc. No. 184 in ibid.

124. Lodge msg to Rusk and McNamara, dtd 7 Oct 63, Doc. No. 186 and Lodge msg to Rusk and Harriman, dtd 10 Oct 63, Doc. No. 193 in ibid. Hereafter, Lodge msg 10 Oct 63, Doc. No. 193. See also Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 126 for the treatment of Madame Nhu.

125. Intelligence Information Report, dtd 14 Oct 63, Subj: Situation Appraisal as of 12 Oct 63, Doc. No. 196 in ibid.

126. Intelligence Reports Saigon, dtd 3 and 5 Oct 63, Docs. Nos. 171 and 177 in ibid.

127. Lodge msg to State Dept, dtd 5 Oct 63, Doc. No. 178 in ibid.

128. President Kennedy msg to Lodge, dtd 14 Oct 63, Doc. No. 195 in ibid. Hereafter, Kennedy msg to Lodge, 14 Oct 63, Doc. No. 195. See editorial ftnt 3 in document for discussion of proposed meetings.

129. Kennedy msg to Lodge, 14 Oct 63, Doc. No. 195.

130. Neubert memorandum to Hilsman, dtd 18 Oct 63, Subj: Maintaining Momentum in out Vietnam Policy, Doc. No. 200 in ibid.

131. Ibid.

132. Louis G. Sarris, "McNamara's War and Mine," Op Ed, *NY Times*, 5 Sep 1995, reprinted in the "Appendix to the Vintage edition," McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 391–395.

133. Hughes, Dept of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Research Memo, RFE 90 dtd 22 Oct 63 to SecState, Subj: Statistics on the War Effort in South Vietnam Show Unfavorable Trends, reprinted in *Pentagon Papers*, Book 12, pp. 579–589.

134. Hilsman memo to SecState, dtd 8 Nov 63, Subj: JCS Comments on Department of State Research Memorandum RFE-90, Doc. No. 306 in *FRUS* 1963, vol. 4. See editorial note 1 which quotes the Rusk ltr to McNamara, 8 Nov 63. Tab A of the document is the JCS Draft memo for McNamara.

135. Lodge msg to President, Doc. No. 207 in ibid. Hereafter, Lodge msg, Doc. No. 207. Most historical accounts accept the Intelligence and Research Bureau numbers, e.g. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 268; Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 401. One major exception is Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 462, endnote 15. Moyar disputes the report's use of the data and argues that a strong case can be made to support the Defense Department position. Given, however, the fragility and unreliability of much of the South Vietnamese statistics, Lodge's point that one could pick and choose and prove any case is probably very valid. In fact, Secretary McNamara in his report to President Johnson in Dec 63 admitted that the situation in Vietnam had deteriorated in the countryside "since July to a far greater extent than we realized due to our undue dependence on distorted Vietnamese reporting." McNamara Report to President Johnson, dtd 21 Dec 63, Situation in Vietnam 1963, Doc. No. 62, reproduced in *The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times*, pp. 271–73.

136. See editorial note 5 in Lodge msg, Doc. No. 207.

137. Editorial note Doc. No. 209 in ibid.

138. Harkins msgs to Taylor, dtd 24 Oct 63, Docs. Nos. 213 and 214 in ibid.

139. Bundy msg to Lodge, dtd 24 Oct 63, Doc. No. 211 in ibid.

140. Taylor's comment is quoted in note 5, Harkins msg to Taylor, dtd 24 Oct 63, Doc. No. 214 in ibid.

141. Memo of telephone conversation between Harriman and Forrestal, dtd 24 Oct 63, Doc. 211 in ibid.

142. Lodge msg to Bundy, dtd 25 Oct 63, Doc. No. 216 in ibid.

143. Ibid.

144. Bundy msg to Lodge, dtd 25 Oct 63, Doc. No. 217 in ibid.

145. JCS, Draft History of the Vietnam War, 1960–1968, chap. 7, p. 24–25. See also David Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 268–69.

146. Taylor msg to Harkins, dtd 29 Oct 63, Doc. No. 227, *FRUS*, vol. 4, 1963.

147. Harkins msgs to Chairman JCS, dtd 30 Oct 63, Docs. 240 and 246 in ibid.

148. Bromley Smith, Memorandum of Conference with President Kennedy, dtd 29 Oct 63, Doc. No. 234 in ibid.

149. Bromley Smith, Memos of Conference with the President, dtd 29 Oct 63, Docs. Nos. 234 and 235 in ibid.

150. Bundy msg to Lodge, dtd 29 Oct 63, Doc. No. 236 in ibid.

151. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 30 Oct 63, Doc. No. 242 in ibid.

152. Ibid.

153. Ibid.

154. Harkins msg to Taylor, dtd 30 Oct 63, Doc. No. 240 in ibid.

155. Harkins msg to Taylor, dtd 30 Oct 63, Doc. No. 247 in ibid.

156. Kaiser, *American Intelligence*, p. 272.

157. Harriman, Memo of telephone conversation with McGeorge Bundy, dtd 30 Oct 63, Doc. No. 248, *FRUS*, vol 4, 1963.

158. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 272–73. In note 80, p. 533, Kaiser cites, "Tape recording, Meeting of Oct. 30 [1963], JFK [Library], Tape 118/A-54. Mark Moyar in his history criticizes Kaiser's account, stating that the latter implied that Kennedy favored a coup attempt by taking the President's remarks out of context. According to Moyar, Kaiser omitted from the quote the phrase that Lodge was for a "coup for what he thinks are very good reasons." Actually Moyar does a little bit of context omission himself, by not including Kaiser's follow-on quotation from the President declaring that he admired Lodge's "nerve, not his prudence." The last phrase was hardly an endorsement of Lodge's attitude. Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, note 86, p. 466.

159. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, referencing once more the tape recording of the presidential conference on 30 October, p. 273.

160. Bundy msg to Lodge, dtd 30 Oct 63, Doc. No. 249, *FRUS*, vol 4, 1963.

161. Ibid. The Lodge quote is from editorial note 7 in ibid.

162. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 31 Oct 63, Doc. No. 250 in ibid.

163. Lodge msg to Dept of State, dtd 1 Nov 62, Doc. No. 262 in ibid.

164. Harkins interview, pp. 31–32.

165. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*.

166. Transcript of Recording, "President Kennedy Dictates His Thoughts on the Coup in Vietnam," dtd 4 Nov 63, Attached to JFK Presidential Library News Release, dtd 2 Nov 2009, "White House Recordings of President Kennedy Debating Vietnam Coup," www.jfklibrary.org. David Kaiser also quotes from this recording, see: Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 276–77.

167. Ibid.

168. Ibid.

169. Quote is from ibid.

Chapter 14. Conclusion

1. Simmons Interview, dtd 27 Feb 1980, quoted in Howard Jablon, "David Monroe Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps, 1960–1963" in Millett and Shulimson, *Commandants of the Marine Corps*.

2. See Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster, McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Times Books Henry Holt and Company, 2008), p. 78 citing Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, dtd 20 Oct 63 and Goldstein interview with Bundy, 5 Dec 1995; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 488.

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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