

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

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

9. U.S.-GVN Relations (2 Vols.)

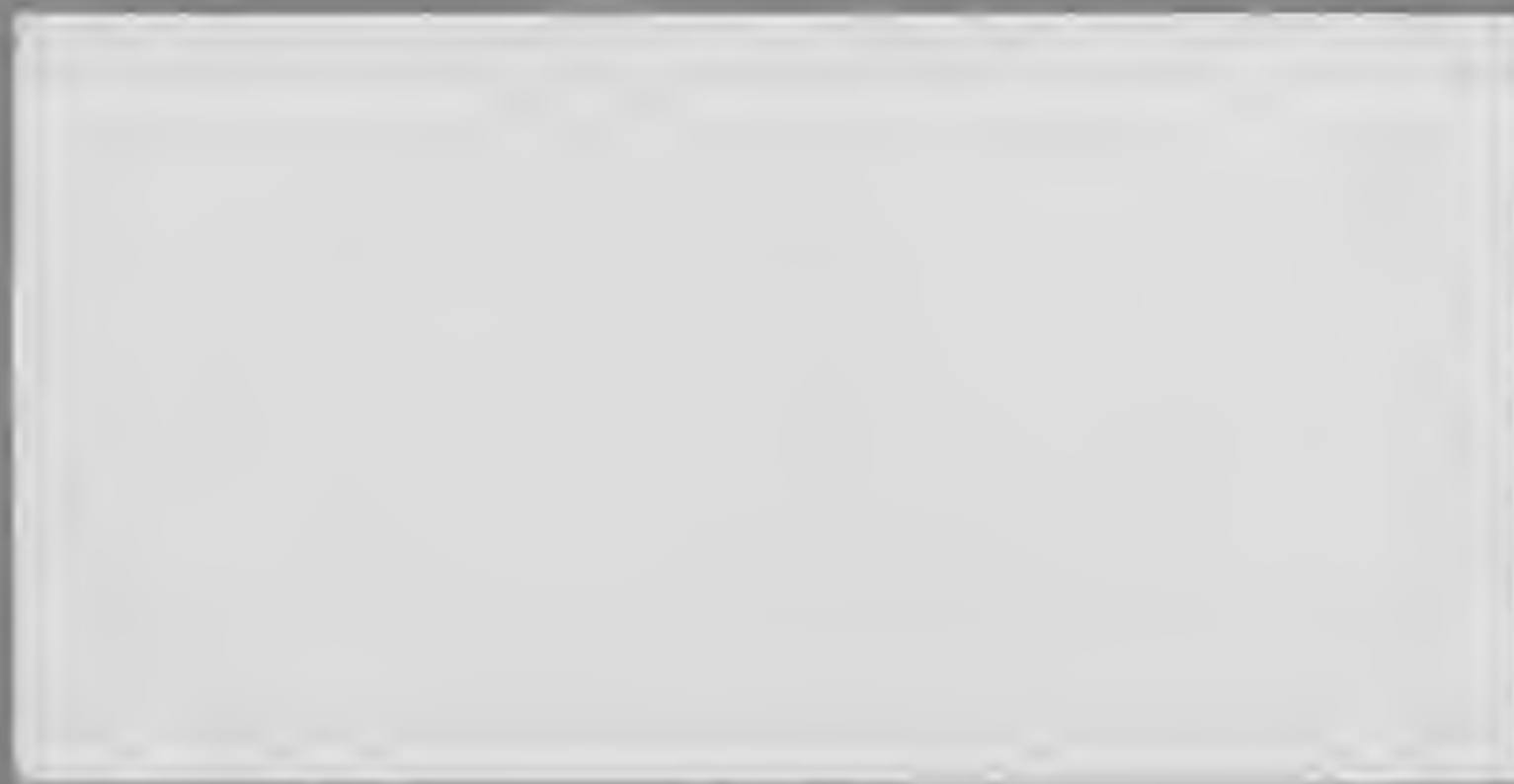
a. Volume 1: December 1963 – June 1965

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# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967



**VIETNAM TASK FORCE**

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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IV. C. 9. (a)

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

US/CVN Relations: 1963-1967

PART I

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SUMMARY  
AND ANALYSIS

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US-GVN RELATIONS: 1964 - JUNE 1965

SUMMARY and ANALYSIS

In 1964 the U.S. tried to make GVN strong, effective, and stable, and it failed. When the U.S. offered more aid, GVN accepted it without improving; they promised to mobilize, but failed to speed up the slow buildup of their forces. When the U.S. offered a firmer commitment to encourage them, including possible later bombing of North Vietnam, the GVN tried to pressure us to do it sooner. When the U.S. endorsed Khanh, he overplayed his hand, provoked mob violence, and had to back down to a weaker position than before. When Taylor lectured them and threatened them, the ruling generals of GVN defied him, and allied themselves with the street rioters. After several changes of government in Vietnam, the U.S. could set no higher goal than GVN stability. During this period, the USG was already starting to think about doing the job ourselves if our Vietnamese ally did not perform.

At first the U.S. thought that the power of the Vietnamese generals would make GVN strong and effective. In fact, the U.S. preference, at this time, was for military leadership in the GVN. However, the generals proved to be less than perfectly united. They found they had to bow to the power of student and Buddhist street mobs, and they lacked the will and the ability to compel the civil government to perform. Yet, the U.S. saw no alternative but to back them -- to put up with Vietnamese hypersensitivity, their easy compliance combined with non-performance, and their occasional defiance. Moreover, MACV was even less ready to pressure the generals than was the Embassy and the Embassy less willing than Washington. MACV controlled the resources that mattered most to the South Vietnamese.

Pacification lagged, and the military picture steadily worsened. Planning of pressures against the North became more urgent, and the prospect of increasing U.S. inputs to all phases of the war loomed larger. The U.S. was more and more abandoning the hope that the Vietnamese could win the war by themselves. At the same time, the U.S. was preparing itself internally (NSAM 288 with the objective of an "independent non-communist Vietnam") and readying the American people (the Tonkin Gulf Resolution) for deeper commitments.

The period saw six major changes of government. At the end of January, 1964, Khanh seized power from the Minh government. In August, after his attempt to formalize military control, mob violence forced him to give way and to join a Triumvirate. It presided over formation of the civilian High National Council, which wrote a Constitution and elected the civilian President Suu and Prime Minister Huong to replace the Triumvirate. In December the military dissolved the High National Council, and in January, 1965 they dismissed Huong, replacing him by Khanh as caretaker. In February,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

they appointed a new civilian government, with Suu still President and with Quat as Prime Minister. In June, Ky took over. Besides all this, coup groups seized Saigon twice before being faced down each time.

During the first few months of this period the U.S. abandoned the plan for the phased withdrawal of most of our military assistance personnel, and stopped believing that the main-force war would come to a successful end by the close of 1965. With the start of planning pressures against the North, the U.S. first hoped that repeated preliminary signals to Hanoi would bring a response before bombing began; and we hoped that the promise of U.S. force commitments would strengthen Vietnamese unity and resolve. Both hopes proved vain, and we started bombing North Vietnam systematically without getting anything from either Hanoi or GVN. Then the bombing itself failed to stop Hanoi's intervention. Seeing no other choice, the U.S. poured troops into the country.

Throughout 1964, the U.S. pursued the objective of a strong, effective GVN like the Holy Grail. Increasingly, we felt we had to reassure our Saigon ally about the U.S. resolve, and hoped that a firm U.S. commitment through extending advisors and through bombing would improve GVN performance. Recurrently, we looked to the military as the one coherent, anti-communist force in the country. We leaned on them and on their strong-man, who for most of the period was Khanh, at first hoping that he or Minh would play the role that Magsaysay did in the Philippines. We were interested in legitimacy and democratic forms only as a long-run deferrable proposition; although more and more we recognized the need for broad political support -- especially after the Buddhist crisis in August, 1964, had proved its importance.

As early as the Honolulu Conference in June, 1964, we worried about the possible emergence of a hostile government or anarchy; and the South Vietnamese played effectively on our fears. We lectured them repeatedly on the importance of national unity, both in periods of political calm and in crises. When the mobs in the streets faced down the generals, we then clung to the position that no one should rock the boat.

Yet, well beyond our control, General Khanh was a central figure in most of these changes. He took over in a coup in January, 1964, and played one role after another, for over twelve turbulent months. Then when a coup attempt failed against a newly installed government in February, 1965, the generals turned on Khanh and exiled him. Only the final coup, in which Ky took over, saw Khanh absent from the scene.

Withall, the military improved their hold on GVN machinery. The high turnover of district and province officials around the time of the Khanh coup put ARVN officers everywhere; and the corps commanders gradually consolidated their power throughout 1964. This tendency reached a climax and received a temporary setback in the rebellion that followed the August constitution. As a result of the successful Buddhist opposition, cabinet changes and the charter of the government in Saigon required Buddhist acquiescence.



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

These problems were aggravated by the clear and growing lack of legitimacy of GVN. The generals led by Minh, who overthrew Diem, gained an aura of respectability by this act because Diem had so completely alienated the people. Whatever their "respectability" may have been worth went down the drain, however, when Khanh seized power and then later maneuvered Minh out of the country. Khanh's position as a brash usurper gave him little room for maneuver among Saigon's complex political currents, although for a time the U.S. counted on his "raw power." With subsequent shifts in the form and composition of government, the expediency and lack of legitimacy of GVN grew more conspicuous and more debilitating.

#### Leverage

U.S. attempts to strengthen the GVN's will to govern and to pacify the countryside failed. Moreover, the attempts, conceived in haste, often backfired. In contrast to the steady discussion of alternatives among Washington agencies, the Embassy, and MACV on the subject of pressures on the North, the idea of pressures on GVN seldom surfaced. When it did surface, it was either brushed aside or rushed into. Leverage planning failed to receive even that quality and quantity of attention that pressures against North Vietnam planning did.

As a general rule, Washington was more interested in putting pressure on GVN than was the Embassy, with the notable exception of Taylor's initiatives in December, and MACV was the least interested of all. But these differences were less notable than was the almost universal consensus (most of the time) that the Vietnamese were too sensitive for such pressures to work, and that we had to accept the GVN's non-performance as the best available.

Starting with Rusk's conversation with Khanh at the end of May, 1964, and ending with Taylor's initiative in early December, the U.S. tried to use the prospect of U.S. force commitment as an inducement to the Vietnamese to do better. However, Taylor said that if this inducement were to fail, the U.S. should go ahead with its pressures against the North anyway. Taking this position meant that the attempted inducement was bluff. There is every sign, both in their non-performance and in their December-January defiance, that the GVN sized it up that way and called the bluff.

Our attempted leverage included both inducements and threats at one time and another; and neither worked out well. Rusk's May, 1964, conversation with Khanh, the intensification of pressures planning following the Honolulu Conference in June, and the shift of the Chairman, JCS to the post of Ambassador to SVN, all showed U.S. commitment. We hoped these measures and talks would directly contribute to GVN morale and effectiveness. However, they were followed by the July press leaks and by direct pressure to bomb North immediately. The July public endorsement of Khanh was intended to reassure all concerned of our support, and so to strengthen GVN. Then,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the Gulf of Tonkin incidents were followed promptly by Khanh's Constitution, which backfired against him and against us, weakening rather than strengthening GVN.

Taylor's bill of particulars against GVN in December was followed immediately by attacks on GVN by the Buddhists, and then shortly by the military, bringing down the government. Taylor's stern lecture to the Young Turks at this time met only with their defiance. They agreed to a compromise solution to the crisis when Taylor held up the GVN Defense Budget, and then reversed themselves after he released it. The first Flaming Dart raids, opening the deliberate U.S. bombing campaign against the North, were followed shortly by another coup attempt.

There was no disagreement among Washington, the Embassy, and MACV that U.S. commitments should be used to improve GVN's morale and performance. In contrast, however, they often disagreed about putting pressure on GVN. In January, 1964, State showed far more interest than did Lodge in using the AID negotiations to press GVN for more effort; in the upshot we gave them an AID increase with no strings attached. This disagreement continued for several months. McNamara leaned consistently toward giving GVN whatever it needed; only later did he begin to mention increasing our influence. But McNamara and JCS did prod Lodge into asking GVN why they were not progressing well. In May, 1964, Sullivan proposed direct entry of U.S. personnel into the Vietnamese chain of command; his idea was watered down considerably in the State Department, and disappeared at the Honolulu Conference because of opposition by Lodge and Westmoreland. Other proposals agreed to at the conference, relating to new actions and improved programs by GVN, interested State far more than they did the Embassy and MACV, as revealed in the follow-up.

By and large the same contrasts prevailed when Taylor was the Ambassador, although in December he was far more willing to press GVN than Lodge ever was. Even then, at the peak of the crisis, Taylor expressly rejected sanctions. MACV generally rejected sanctions also, and seemed less willing to apply leverage in day-to-day matters than were U.S. civilians in the field. MACV studies on GVN ineffectiveness usually proposed more studies and never proposed pressure on GVN.

If U.S. force commitments and the record of GVN non-performance reflect the failure of leverage, what does the record tell us about how leverage could be made to work? Regrettably, the record tells us nothing about that; it merely shows that everything we tried went wrong. As noted, attempts at leverage or pressure on GVN were seldom thought through and studied carefully. One searches in vain for studies, memoranda, or widespread discussion of alternative techniques for leverage and of what our experience shows about how they might work. Pressures against the North, whose results have disappointed us, were a model of planning, foresight, and detailed consideration, compared to the subject of pressures on GVN. Yet GVN's failure was the heart of our policy problem throughout the period, as many feel it still is.



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The Embassy's Lack of Political Contact

The shifts of political loyalties, coups, rebellions, and major changes of public figures often caught the Embassy by surprise. It had no effective system, either through overt or covert contacts, for finding out what was going on. CAS people talked to a few official contacts, who told them things the Vietnamese wanted the U.S. to believe; but CAS had and has no mandate or mission to perform systematic intelligence and espionage in friendly countries, and so lacks the resources to gather and evaluate the large amounts of information required on political forces, corruption, connections, and so on. Moreover, there is no sign that the Embassy understood events after the fact, or saw the connection between what we did and what the Vietnamese did next. It appears that the U.S. had few people experienced at maneuvering and manipulating among oriental politicians.

In the following cases the Embassy was in the dark. (1) We had no information on the degree of truth of Khanh's charges against the four "pro-neutralist" generals plus Minh, and we knew about his coup a day in advance only because he sounded us out on it. (2) During the months of maneuvering between Khanh and Minh after the coup, we had no way to evaluate the coup rumors that always went around, and that peaked around moments of crisis like the trial of the four generals in May. (3) Khanh's complaints of Vietnamese war-weariness starting in late May, in retrospect a transparent tactic to pressure the U.S. to bomb North, took in the USG completely; we eagerly went ahead and planned to bomb "to improve their unity and resolve." (4) Khanh's defiant leaks on cross-border operations in July surprised and perplexed the Embassy; Taylor described them as an attempt to improve his own people's morale, not as an attempt to stampede us. (5) When Khanh asked for our public endorsement and then talked about "reorganization," we failed to see the connection. When he tried to reorganize Minh out of the government, Taylor made no move to save Minh until after street rioting had broken up the whole plan. (6) The September 13 coup attempt surprised everybody. (7) The HNC decision to make Suu President and Huong Prime Minister surprised and angered us. (8) Taylor's December plan to strengthen GVN by lecturing to it about its failures provoked a completely unexpected reaction; both Buddhists and the military turned against the GVN. Taylor's subsequent stern lecture to the Young Turks likewise produced the opposite of the desired result. (9) The generals' January, 1965, moves to renege on the agreed crisis settlement and to dismiss Huong surprised us. (10) The February 19 coup attempt surprised everybody. (11) We did not know what to think of the alleged coup attempt in May, 1965.

In some noteworthy cases we did better. (1) Taylor correctly foresaw that Khanh's August constitution would cause trouble. (2) Westmoreland detected Ky's budding coup attempt in November and, with Embassy authority, squelched it. (3) Taylor foresaw (and tacitly accepted) the Ky coup.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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### The MACV Role

The MACV organization played an important, mostly hidden, role in US/GVN relations. At every level from Saigon to the districts, the advisory structure was the most pervasive instrument of intergovernmental contact. ARVN officers were accustomed to being spoon-fed military advice; so when military dominance of GVN brought these same officers to high positions in government, the advisor relationship conferred a latent diplomatic role upon MACV. Advisors were used as channels of communications on political matters and became the most reliable sources of information on impending coups. (On occasions such as the Rhade uprising and Ky's first attempt at a coup, senior MACV officers openly became diplomatic emissaries.)

We have less record than we would like of COMUSMACV's influence. He reported regularly to his military seniors only on strictly military matters. Detailed reports of his routine, daily dealings with counterparts were not required of MACV as they were of the Embassy.

From time to time COMUSMACV revealed his own independent objectives. He sought protection of the ARVN officer corps from political machinations and from unfavorable press stories in order to preserve their solidarity and morale; he pressed zealously for early introduction of U.S. ground forces and for their rapid build-up; he opposed encadrement and combined command with ARVN; he resisted exclusion of the military from pacification; he rejected sanctions against ARVN; he objected to the initial constraints on the use of American forces and wanted to be free to operate independently of ARVN.

General Westmoreland's strong position usually assured that his view prevailed. Extension of advisors, increased MAP resources, and the introduction of U.S. ground forces enhanced his relative position. His freedom from detailed reporting of daily contacts was itself an element of strength. When he received unwanted advice and directives, he set up studies (as in the Civic Action Program) to stall for time; when he lacked authority to operate freely, he planned ahead with the Vietnamese (as in the use of U.S. forces for independent offensive operations) and then presented the matter to Washington as a virtual fait accompli.

### Vietnamese Non-Performance and Sensitivity

Throughout this period the GVN failed to perform in almost every constructive respect. Pacification lagged, when not visibly retreating, even though the GVN was always willing to issue decrees, set up organizations we suggested, and so on. Khanh's promise to mobilize came to nothing. The VC defeated ARVN in bigger and bigger battles, until the military assessment of the situation permitted Westmoreland to call for over 200,000 U.S. troops.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Moreover, on issues purportedly relating to sovereignty or "face," the Vietnamese were and are quite sensitive, and the U.S. was consistently afraid to inflame this sensitivity. Both sides avoided many delicate topics. A prime example is the matter of the lack of a bilateral treaty. The U.S. operated, and still operates, under a Pentilateral protocol signed by the French and Bao Dai under the U.S. military assistance program to France before 1954. It gave U.S. advisers and officials virtual diplomatic status, which was reasonable back when there were less than two hundred of them in all Indochina. But it now applies to all U.S. personnel, and no one has wanted to stir things up.

The sensitivity problem cropped up often. For a time early in 1964, the GVN backed off from an agreement to extend U.S. advisors to district level, and when GVN did approve, they insisted that the advice be strictly military and that the advisors be labelled "subsector." In like manner, the III Marine Expeditionary Force became the III Marine Amphibious Force, because the French had called their Indochina force "expeditionary." But the GVN, and especially the military, agreed readily to new U.S. troop commitments.

The Vietnamese would often greet a U.S. representative, in moments of tension, with false or exaggerated stories of U.S. dealings, such as a complaint in January, 1964, about U.S. training and CIA contacts with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. In contrast, on cabinet appointments they often asked the Ambassador's opinion, and he customarily leaned over backward to avoid giving specific recommendations. Shared sensitivity, closely related to the lack of a treaty governing status of U.S. forces, prevented any move toward joint command and U.S. control of all military operations in Vietnam; both Westmoreland and the Vietnamese preferred to operate separately. The Embassy looked the other way from repressive police measures and political arrests unless these led to embarrassing press stories. When the Ambassador would raise this type of issue with the GVN, it proved always to be touchy.

Vietnamese sensitivity sometimes led to open displays of anti-Americanism. These happened on three main occasions: (1) when Khanh grumbled about being a puppet after the go-North leaks in July, 1964; (2) in the open rupture between Khanh and Taylor in December-January; and (3) in the January riots when rioters overran USIS buildings in Saigon and Hue.

#### Vietnamese Compliance More in Form Than in Substance

The Vietnamese nevertheless showed a ready willingness throughout the period to declare new policies, sign decrees, and engage in joint studies at our request. But as noted above, that did not mean we got the substance of what we wanted on such matters. The most important case of this kind was Khanh's ready agreement in March to "mobilize" South Vietnam. He promptly made a token announcement; and while students and other potential draft-eligibles waited anxiously to learn what he meant (as did we), he delayed



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

several weeks before any further announcement. Starting in May, he began announcing specifics and signing decrees, and kept the idea live for several months. However, strength of the RVNAF rose less in 1964 than it did in 1963\*, and the talk of non-military mobilization came to nothing.

The military and the more militant civilians, on whom the U.S. counted most heavily and regularly supported, turned out to have far more enthusiasm for going North and for other external adventures than they did for getting on with the job of effective government and pacification. They promised much on this latter score, but could not or would not deliver. Knowing that we had no one else to turn to, they continued their old habits and often openly did what they pleased about important matters. The go-North problem was particularly troublesome because the militants rejected the permanent division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel, upheld in practice by the U.S.

The following are interesting instances, among many, of their superficial compliance. They agreed readily to use U.S. advisers at the ministerial level (the brain trust), although there is no sign that the brain-trusters accomplished anything. Indeed, on all ten suggestions that accompanied President Johnson's 1964 New Year's Message to Minh, only the one on amnesty found them hesitant to express their full agreement. They regularly agreed on budgetary limits to keep inflation from getting out of hand, but never satisfied us on specifics through 1964 or the first half of 1965. They repeatedly agreed to relieve ineffective, corrupt commanders and officials, but delayed endlessly on doing it and generally promoted those whom they relieved. At Westmoreland's request, Khanh created the Hop Tac plan for pacification around Saigon; but it foundered, and eventually the Vietnamese killed it. When Lodge left Vietnam in June, 1964, he sealed his tour with a general agreement with Khanh on concept, scope, and organization of the pacification efforts; obtaining such agreements presented absolutely no problem. In December, 1964, the JGS issued a directive containing every MACV suggestion on how RVNAF should help pacification.

\* The end-year figures are as follows:

<u>South Vietnam</u>	<u>1962</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1964</u>
Infantry-type Battalions	107	123	133
RVNAF Strength ('000)	397	514	571
Total Armed Strength ('000) (Included CIDG, police, etc.)	526	612	692

SOURCE: OSD SEA Statistical Summary, Tables 1 and 2

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In July, 1964, Khanh created a National Security Council similar to ours, and it met regularly with the top group of Embassy people to talk agreeably about pacification and manpower problems. MACV set up joint inspection teams and joint studies with JGS people several times a year. The only thing of this class that had any visible follow-through was the joint planning group on bombing North and on other cross-border operations. Two battalions specifically declared ineffective by MACV suffered no penalty or improvement.

The militants' predilection for external adventures began to show in May, 1964, after the Embassy started pressing Khanh about his March agreements with McNamara. Khanh responded within a few days by saying he wanted to declare war, bomb the North with U.S. participation, bring 10,000 U.S. Army Special Forces troops into South Vietnam, "get rid of the politicians," and put Saigon strictly on a war footing. Lodge tried to cool him off, but Khanh brought up a less extreme version again with Rusk at the end of the month, saying that his government could not win without action outside South Vietnam. When Lodge returned from the Honolulu Conference in early June, Khanh responded to discussions of ARVN strength by trying to draw Lodge out on actions against the North. Then, when we did not move fast enough to suit him and Ky, they started a press campaign on the subject, and pressed Taylor more insistently. Finally, in December, when Taylor told GVN all the many ways they should improve to justify further U.S. involvement, their immediate reply included the comment that the U.S. program said nothing about Viet Cong use of Cambodia.

The press leaks about going North were the first major instance of their defiantly going ahead as they pleased against our wishes. Khanh's August constitution was a less flagrant case, because Taylor's words of caution were comparatively diffident. (Moreover, in the following August-September turbulence, Khanh let himself become clearly dependent on the Embassy when he talked to the Buddhist leaders.) In the December crisis the Young Turks defied Taylor at every turn following their dissolution of the HNC; and after a temporary agreement in January double-crossed Taylor, dismissed Huong, and took control of the formation of a new government. They guessed correctly that we saw no choice but to go along.



CHRONOLOGY

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1 Jan 64	State to Saigon 1000 30 Dec 63	President's New Year's message to Minh contains reassurance; advice also rendered. Brain trust approved.
10 Jan 64	Lodge to State 1287 10 Jan	Lodge and Minh discuss President's advice agree they're doing fine except on amnesty. GVN backs away from previously agreed extension of advisors to districts.
30 Jan 64	Saigon to State 1433 30 Jan	Khanh seizes power, arrests four top generals of MRC, but lets Minh continue as President at USG urging.
13 Feb 64	Memorandum to Secretary of State	Rostow recommends enforcing NVN compliance with 1962 Geneva agreement.
21 Feb 64	COMUSMACV to CINCPAC 25104Z Feb 64	GVN accepts advisors in 13 districts of the Delta.
21 Feb 64	Saigon to AID 2334 21 Feb	GVN asks USG for rice standby commitment, for the first time.
8 Mar 64	SD PM 16 Mar Sec. III; and Memorandum of Conversation at JGS Hqtrs. 12 Mar	Secretary McNamara arrives in Saigon for several days of talks, including talks with GVN. Goes away pessimistic, recommends more AID and larger RVNAF, plus unqualified backing for Khanh. Khanh promises mobilization.
17 Mar 64	NSAM 288	President approves Secretary of Defense recommendations, directs their execution.
20 Mar 64	White House Press Release	White House announces Khanh's mobilization plan.
4 Apr 64	State to Saigon 1602 4 Apr	Mobilization decree, dissolution of Council of Notables, promise of eventual Constituent Assembly and civil government.
10 Apr 64	Saigon to State 1964 11 Apr	Beginning of AID and related economic negotiations for fiscal 1965.
29 Apr 64	Saigon to State 2089 30 Apr	Khanh renews request for brain trust; Lodge euphoric.
30 Apr 64	Saigon to State 2091 30 Apr	USOM and GVN badger each other on pacification and economic delays.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

4 May 64	Saigon to State 2108 4 May	Khanh wants to bomb NVN, have 10,000 US troops, and set up all-military government in SVN. Lodge says no, no, yes.
13 May 64	Saigon to State 2203 14 May	McNamara sees Khanh in Saigon; they reach agreement on desirability of progress.
13-27 May 64	Saigon to State DTG 271200Z May	Forrestal of White House staff "negotiates" AID with GVN, gives GVN AID increases.
25 May 64	Memorandum to President	McGeorge Bundy recommends force against NVN as the only path to success.
27 May 64	State to Saigon 1251 18 Feb.	Sullivan distributes proposal for semi-encadrement of GVN as a necessary step for progress.
28-29 May 64	Saigon to State 2332 and 2338 28 May	MRC censures four "neutralist plot" generals that had been arrested in Khanh coup. Keeps Minh, as urged by Lodge.
30 May 64	CINCPAC to State 37 2 Jun	Rusk sees Khanh, leaves nothing to the imagination on possible US all-the-way commitment, stresses need for GVN unity.
2-3 Jun 64	Memo for the Record, Special Meeting on SE Asia. CINCPAC 000211 DTG 8 Jun and Memo for Secretary (State) "Highlights of Honolulu Conference" from W. P. Bundy DTG 3 Jun	Honolulu Conference. Conferees (include Rusk, McNamara, Lodge, Taylor and Westmoreland) agree on increased advisory effort, agree to refine plans for pressures on NVN.
4 Jun 64	Saigon to State 2405 4 Jun	Lodge hints to Khanh that USG will prepare US public opinion for actions against NVN.
29 Jun 64	COMUSMACV Command History 1964, p. 69.	AID sets up sector adviser fund, with troika signoff to bypass GVN-Saigon.
30 Jun 64	COMUSMACV 011057Z Jul	US and GVN agree to joint planning for cross-border operations in Laos.
8 Jul 64	Saigon to State 56 8 Jul	Ambassador Taylor presents his credentials to Khanh.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

9 Jul 64	Saigon to State 65 9 Jul	Ambassador Taylor hears the complaints of civilian cabinet members.
17 Jul 64	Saigon to State 124 17 Jul	USOM starts periodic meetings with GVN's National Security Council.
19 Jul 64	Saigon to State 185 23 Jul	Khanh and Ky lobby publicly for cross-border operations and air strikes into Laos and NVN.
23 Jul 64	Saigon to State 185 23 Jul	Khanh presses Taylor for action, keeps up the lobbying.
24 Jul 64	Saigon to State 203 24 Jul	Khanh asks Taylor if he (Khanh) should resign; Taylor says no. Khanh asks for publicly stated US backing and gets it.
25 Jul 64	Saigon to State 232 27 Jul	Khanh promises to quit lobbying, reacts favorably to proposed joint planning for air strikes on NVN, and says he plans GVN reorganization.
2-4 Aug 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , p. 269	Gulf of Tonkin incidents, US retaliation.
7 Aug 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , p. 270	Khanh proclaims state of emergency, with press censorship.
8 Aug 64	COMUSMACV to CINCPAC DTG 080715Z Aug	Westy and Khanh discuss joint planning, agree not to discuss combined command.
12 Aug 64	Saigon to State 393 12 Aug	Khanh's "reorganization" is a new constitution with military openly on top, and with Khanh President. Taylor sceptical, counsels caution.
16 Aug 64	Saigon to State 415 15 Aug	Khanh gets MRC approval of constitution after hurried USOM drafting assistance.
18 Aug 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 270-71	Ambassador Taylor firmly recommends plans for gradual pressures North to start 1 January contingent on improved GVN performance, or not contingent if things get bad enough. Suggests the package include Marines at Danang.
21-27 Aug 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 272-74.	Student demonstrations followed by general rioting.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

24 Aug 64	Saigon to State 542 24 Aug	Taylor advises Khanh to move fast on new cabinet.
25 Aug 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 274-75	One o'clock A.M. Taylor advises Khanh to make some concessions but keep constitution. Khanh does and riots continue. Khanh "resigns." Riots continue.
27 Aug 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 275-78	MRC revokes constitution, keeps Khanh now as member of temporary triumvirate (including Minh and Khiem.) New HNC to be appointed.
29 Aug 64	State to Saigon 555 29 Aug	Paratroopers with bayonets restore order in Saigon.
6 Sep 64	Saigon to State 785 8 Sep	Taylor takes off on a trip to Washington. Recommends pressures on NVN to begin 1 December.
10 Sep 64	NSAM 314 10 Sep	Says strengthen GVN.
13 Sep 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 287-290; Saigon to State 836 13 Sep; Saigon to State 878 16 Sep	Abortive coup attempt temporarily captures Saigon. Ky and Thieu back Khanh, defeat coup forces.
20 Sep 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , p.290; Saigon to State 923 22 Sep; 936 23 Sep 937, 952, and 954 24 Sep; 985 29 Sep; and 1046 7 Oct. COMUSMACV to CINCPAC DTG 031137Z Oct	Rhade tribesmen in 4 CIDG camps rebel against GVN.
24 Sep 64	Saigon to State 938 24 Sep	The new HNC begins deliberations to write a constitution.
30 Sep 64	NYTimes Article	W. Bundy predicts publicly that bombing NVN would cut down the threat to GVN in a matter of months.
27 Oct 64	Saigon to State 1292 27 Oct; State to Saigon 944 29 Oct. Shaplen <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 290-9.	HNC finishes on time, surprises by naming Suu President, not Minh.



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

5

30 Oct 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , p.293; State to Saigon 978 1 Nov; CINCPAC to JCS DTG 020400Z Nov; Saigon to State 1382 2 Nov	Mortar attack on Bien Hoa airbase. State rejects Taylor's recommendation of immediate reprisal raid on NVN.
11 Nov 64	Saigon to State 1452 and 1460 10 Nov	MRC publishes military reorganization without MACV review; MACV protests and MRC withdraws it for changes.
26 Nov 64	COMUSMACV to CINCPAC DTG 0260945Z Nov	Westmoreland slaps Ky down just before apparent coup attempt. Taylor is in Washington.
7 Dec 64	Embassy to State Airgram A-468 15 Dec	Taylor, just back from Washington with fresh guidance, presents GVN with a candid statement of its failures and couples demands for progress in stated areas to promises of US escalation.
8-20 Dec 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 294-95	Student and Buddhist demonstrations against Huong government and growing crisis.
20 Dec 64	Saigon to State 1869, 1870, and 1874 20 Dec; MACV to CINCPAC rec'd NMCC 200816Z Dec	Khanh and Generals disregard Taylor's protests, dissolve HNC and arrest opposition; "Young Turks" (Ky, Thieu, Thi and Cang) consolidate their dominance by creating a small Armed Forces Council (AFC) as the top governing body. Taylor reads them the riot act.
21 Dec 64	Saigon to State 1881 21 Dec	Taylor asks Khanh to resign and leave the country.
23 Dec 64	Saigon to State 1914 23 Dec; 1929 and 1930 24 Dec	Young Turks attack Taylor publicly, and privately seek his recall.
24 Dec 64	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 295-97.	Taylor tells press that Khanh has overstayed his usefulness.
25 Dec 64	COMUSMACV Com- mand History 1965, p. 229.	Vietnamese JGS issues Directive A-B 139, at MACV request, on how RVNAF should be employed to improve pacification program.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

7 Jan 65	Saigon to State 2081 7 Jan 2089 8 Jan 2102 9 Jan	AFC Generals decide to give way by restoring civilian government under a new name (i.e. without HNC) leaving Suu-Huong combination in.
9 Jan 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 297-98	With Taylor's reluctant concurrence, the AFC announces the 7 January decision.
11 Jan 65	Saigon to State 2112 and 2120 11 Jan	US and GVN publicly patch up relations. Young Turks will enter cabinet.
12 Jan 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 298-99	New demonstrations begin, demanding Huong's resignation.
14 Jan 65	Saigon to State 2155 14 Jan	Khanh shows Taylor a new cabinet list; Taylor tries to slow him down.
18 Jan 65	Saigon to State 2176 18 Jan	Khanh gives Taylor completed cabinet list and schedules installation for the next day.
19 Jan 65	COMUSMACV to CINCPAC DTG 191235Z Jan	Khanh tries to reassure Westmoreland on military repercussions of tying up some generals in the cabinet; then Khanh suddenly "postpones" cabinet installation.
19-24 Jan 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 298-99	Buddhist demonstrations build up, including sacking of USIS buildings in Saigon and Hue. Buddhist merchants respond to campaign to boycott Americans. Buddhists demand military take-over.
25 Jan 65	Saigon to State 2276 and 2283 25 Jan	Khanh tells Deputy Ambassador Alex Johnson that Huong and Suu want to resign and let the military take over. Johnson says no.
27 Jan 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 299-302; Saigon to State 2322 27 Jan; State to Saigon 1542 27 Jan and 1565 29 Jan	AFC topples Suu-Huong government, openly puts Khanh back in charge. JCS approves COMUSMACV request to use US jet aircraft in a strike role in-country in emergencies, subject to Embassy approval in each instance.
3-4 Feb 65	Saigon to State 2399 4 Feb	McGeorge Bundy visits Saigon, has tea with Khanh and the generals.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

7-12 Feb 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 305-6 State to Saigon 1438 6 Feb; Saigon to State 2426 7 Feb 2495 11 Feb	Flaming Dart bombings in North Vietnam. All US dependents ordered to leave Vietnam.
7 Feb 65	Memorandum to the President	McGeorge Bundy says the military are the backbone of the country, that the Buddhists should be constructive, and that Vietnam needs a social revolution.
16 Feb 65	Saigon to State 2617 16 Feb	After two false starts, AFC selects Quat to form a new cabinet.
18 Feb 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 306-7	Quat cabinet installed; Buddhists acquiesce.
19 Feb 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 307-12	New coup groups seizes Saigon, then bows to superior AFC force.
20 Feb 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 307-12	AFC votes Khanh out.
24 Feb 65	Saigon to State 2685 20 Feb; 2698 22 Feb; 2720 23 Feb; 2731 24 Feb; and COMUSMACV to CINCPAC DTG 241600Z Feb	Khanh goes abroad; Rolling Thunder rolls.
27 Feb 65	Saigon to State 2787 27 Feb	USOM resumes action level meetings with GVN; both sides agreed to prepare proposals for accelerating pacification and to go forward together with effective execution.
28 Feb 65	Saigon to State 2800 1 Mar	State issues White Paper on Vietnam.
6 Mar 65	COMUSMACV Com- mand History, 1965, p. 132	MACV gives budget guidelines to RVN Ministry of Defense.
8 Mar 65	Saigon to State 2991 8 Mar	Quat discusses sensitive combined-command issue with Taylor.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

8-9 Mar 65	Saigon to State 2908 1 Mar	Two battalions of Marines land at Danang.
24 Mar 65	Saigon to State 2065 24 Mar	Ambassador Taylor formulates a 41-point program for stability and pacification.
26 Mar 65	COMUSMACV Com- mander's Estimate of the Situation 26 Mar	Westmoreland issues Commander's Estimate of the Situation, which treads lightly on combined-command issue.
1-2 Apr 65	NSAM 328 6 Apr	Taylor (in Washington) talks to President and NSC, who approve Taylor's 41-point program and General Johnson's 21 recommendations.
15 Apr 65	Saigon to State 3419 17 Apr	Taylor objects to proposed Peers mission.
15 Apr 65	DOD 9164 15 Apr	The 7-point message from State/Defense tells Saigon to encadre RVNAF/GVN and to expect additional US forces, with new missions.
17 Apr 65	Saigon to State 3421, 3422 and 3423 17 Apr	Taylor objects to 7-point message, and Westmoreland objects to encadrement.
19-20 Apr 65	ASD McNaughton's Minutes of Honolulu Meeting 23 Apr	Honolulu Conference meets to resolve disagreements on 7-point message. Conferees agree on force increase and medcap, scuttle encadrement, and agree on studies of combined command.
5 May 65	Saigon to State 3097 and 3100 26 Mar; and 2140 31 Mar	AFC dissolves itself.
20-21 May 65	Saigon to State 3878 25 May	Abortive coup attempt alleged by GVN, though not firmly confirmed by US observers.
22 May-12 Jun 65	Shaplen, <u>Lost Revolution</u> , pp. 342-45	Suu-Quat disagreement on cabinet changes.
27 May 65	Joint State/ Defense 80466 27 May	State/Defense message agrees to defer approaching GVN on combined command.
12 Jun 65	COMUSMACV MAC J-3, 19912 to CINCPAC DTG 120828Z Jun	Westmoreland presses for commitment of US forces to offensive operations, has already planned it hand-in-hand with our Vietnamese ally.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

12 Jun 65

Shaplen, Lost  
Revolution,  
pp. 345-46.  
Saigon to State  
4065 4 Jun, 4119  
9 Jun. 4156 11 Jun,  
4190 14 Jun, 4312  
21 Jun.

Generals fire Suu and Quat, create  
National Leadership Council of ten  
Generals chaired by Thieu, and make  
Ky Prime Minister. Taylor reluctantly  
acquiesces to Ky's appointment.



TABLE OF CONTENTS  
AND TEXT

SENSITIVE

~~TOP SECRET~~

US-GVN RELATIONS, 1964-JUNE 1965

	<u>Page</u>
I. <u>AFTERMATH OF THE DIEM COUP, First Half of 1964</u>	1
1. The Inheritance from 1963	1
2. The First Minh Government Goes Down	5
3. The USG accepts Khanh and opens the Bidding Against the North	8
4. McNamara's March Trip and NSAM 288	10
5. Opening bids on advice, leverage, and AID, April-May	17
6. The political climate and prevailing views of the war, May	19
7. The Honolulu Conference and Its Follow-up, June, 1964	25
II. <u>AMBASSADOR TAYLOR'S FIRST SEVEN MONTHS: Planning For "Bomb North" Amid Turbulence in the South</u>	31
1. Taylor's Initiation, July, 1964	31
2. The Tonkin Incidents and the policy prognoses, August	34
3. The Rise and Fall of Khanh's Constitution	39
4. GVN acquires a civilian flavor, and the USG reviews priorities	41
5. The HNC goes to work amid further turbulence	45
6. The HNC installs civilian leadership, October	46
7. A quiet November	48
8. A Lecture and A Program for GVN	50
9. The Government's support vanishes, and Taylor confronts the generals	54
10. Ongoing programs, Second Half 1964	60
11. January, 1965: Prelude to the Bombing	63
III. <u>THE US ENTERS THE WAR: Flaming Dart to the Steady Influx of US Forces, June 1965</u>	65
1. "Phase II" begins and coups continue, February, 1965	65
2. The continuing civilian interregnum and first US ground forces, March-May	66
3. First moves on command and control, March-April	68
4. The rise and decline of encadrement, April	70
5. The Honolulu Conference, April 19-20, 1965; encadrement and combined command fade out	72
6. The Ky coup, June 1965	75

~~TOP SECRET~~ - SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

I

AFTERMATH OF THE DIEM COUP

First Half of 1964

1. The Inheritance From 1963

The top ruling body of the Government of Vietnam at the end of 1963 was a Military Revolutionary Council of twelve generals, under the chairmanship of the affable and popular but seak General Duong Van "Big" Minh. The Council governed through an all-civilian cabinet headed by Premier Tho, having forbade all military officers to engage in politics. A Council of Notables served as a pseudo-parliament, with a purely advisory role; it included well-known Vietnamese politicians, but could not claim support of a broad popular base or the main political forces in Vietnam. While Premier Tho's previous connection with the Diem government was now a political liability, there was a shortage of national figures who were not tarred with this brush one way or another. 1/

On the U.S. side, General Harkins, COMUSMACV, who had long been known to be pro-Diem, was clearly on his way out, although his departure was to be delayed until the middle of 1964. Ambassador Lodge had replaced Nolting just before the Diem coup, and was held in that cautious respect appropriate to the widespread belief among Vietnamese that he had engineered it.

In the last weeks of 1963, the U.S. government reassessed the progress of the counterinsurgency effort and the policy options. Plans for phased withdrawal of 1,000 U.S. advisers by end-1963 went through the motions by concentrating rotations home in December and letting strength rebound in the subsequent two months. A realistic appraisal by Secretary McNamara showed that the VC were continuing to gain steadily, especially in the Delta. 2/ U.S. policy continued to be to provide U.S. resources and personnel to the extent necessary. 3/

The tone of USG internal documents and of its dealings with GVN was that of a benevolent big brother anxious to see little brother make good on his own -- but with the benefit of extensive advice. U.S. pressure induced the GVN to break up the palace guard and to move coup-protection Ranger units out into the countryside, though it turned out that other units stayed near Saigon for this purpose. A proposal to put all ammunition stocks in Vietnam under U.S. control surfaced in November, only to sink without a trace. 4/ There was gentle pressure to persuade the GVN to allow USOM economics staffs to share the offices of their counterparts, and to let them get involved extensively in GVN budgeting. 5/ The USIS and Ambassador

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TOP SECRET - Sensitive  
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Lodge tried to persuade General Minh to travel around the countryside to build a following and convince the people that the government cared about them, but with little success. 6/ The overall USG appraisal was that the GVN was weak and drifting at the top level, failing to set firm national policies and to issue detailed instructions, and that at lower levels it was in complete turmoil because of the turnover of personnel following the coup and because of the lack of firm national leadership. 7/

Whether to push the GVN harder was a subject of disagreement between State and Ambassador Lodge. The State view was that the GVN must prove its resolution to adopt economic, social and political measures to support the effort against the VC, and must move toward self-support. Moreover, State said:

"We will obscure the actual need for GVN adjustments if we yield too easily at this stage to GVN pressure for more commercial import aid." 8/

In contrast, Lodge said it was essential

"to provide some increase in overall level of economic aid...It is in my view politically unacceptable and psychologically impossible to tell Big Minh that he is going to get less than Diem." 9/

Besides wanting to go easy on the GVN on aid leverage, he opposed pressure for early elections. Lodge's position is clear from the Honolulu Conference (November 1963) Report, which stated:

"The Ambassador...considers it essential that the U.S. not press the new government unduly. He stated that they are in a most delicate state, and are not ready for a system which replaces governments by elective process rather than by violence; that this is beyond their horizon at this time and we should not seek to recreate in Vietnam our image of the democratic ideal."

Early in January, 1964, Lodge restated this view in a cable:

"It is obvious that [the Vietnamese generals] are all we have got and that we must try as hard to make them into successful politicians as we are trying to make them into successful military men." 10/

Behind these differences within the USG and between the USG and the GVN lay a certain lack of confidence in future behavior. Some in the U.S. were concerned that the GVN might drift toward a "neutralism" like that of Laos. 11/ At the same time, the GVN feared the U.S. would negotiate behind its back or force it to accept an unfavorable settlement. 12/ These concerns made it appropriate for the President to issue his New Year's greeting to the GVN:



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"As we enter the New Year of 1964, I want to wish you, your revolutionary government, and your people full success in the long and arduous war which you are waging so tenaciously and bravely against the Viet Cong forces directed and supported by the Communist regime in Hanoi...Our aims are, I know, identical with yours: to enable your government to protect its people from the acts of terror perpetrated by Communist insurgents from the North. As the forces of your government become increasingly capable of dealing with this aggression, American military personnel in South Viet-Nam can be progressively withdrawn.

"The United States Government shares the view of your government that 'neutralization' of South Viet-Nam is unacceptable. As long as the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam persists in its aggressive policy, neutralization of South Viet-Nam would only be another name for a Communist take-over. Peace will return to your country just as soon as the authorities in Hanoi cease and desist from their terrorist aggression."

In keeping with the attitude of concern but not alarm about the GVN's conduct of the war, SecState's cable transmitting the President's message directed Lodge to offer the following eleven points of confidential advice on behalf of the President:

"1. It is vitally important to act now to reverse the trend of the war as rapidly as possible.

2. We trust that personnel changes are now virtually complete and that both military commanders and province chiefs can now get down to the job at hand.

3. We hope that General Minh can designate a Chief of the Joint General Staff and a commander of the III Corps who will have no other responsibilities and can devote themselves exclusively to these mammoth tasks.

4. We assume that, as General Don promised Secretary McNamara, the GVN will make available sufficient troops in the six key provinces in the III Corps to give its forces the necessary numerical superiority.

5. We have been glad to learn of the stress which General Minh places on small-unit actions, particularly in the Mekong Delta. We hope that equal stress will be placed on night actions, both for ambushing Viet Cong and for relieving villages under attack. To win the support of the population it needs to be emphatically demonstrated that the Viet Cong are being beaten precisely at their own game.

6. We consider it extremely important that the necessary civil-military coordinating machinery for clear-and-hold operations



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

followed by an effective program to give the villages protection and security be established in Saigon.

7. It is likewise extremely important that program directives be issued at an early stage by the central government to lower echelons for proper implementation of all aspects of the program for giving villagers protection.

8. We also urge early revitalization of the amnesty program.

9. We are encouraged by the exploratory talks which the Vietnamese Government has held with Cambodian Government officials for improving relations between the two countries. We hope that both Governments can proceed to actual negotiations for the settlement of their bilateral problems.

10. We accept with pleasure General Minh's invitation to set up an American brain-trust to work with his government and we are prepared to furnish any personnel needed for this purpose.

11. General Minh can also be sure that he has the complete support of the United States Government as the leader of Viet-Nam. We believe he can magnetically rally the Vietnamese people if he will really try to do so. He should be told leadership is an essential political ingredient of victory such as was the case with Magsaysay in the Philippines." 13/

In this overall context the U.S. had already moved discreetly toward greater involvement in Vietnamese administration at lower levels. Late in 1963, the USG and GVN agreed on a "Decentralization of Action" package. Using AID de facto control of AID commodities to the province level (even though they passed to Vietnamese ownership at the dock), U.S. advisers could assure that no AID commodities came out to the province without their consent. They could and did extend this control to cover releases of these commodities from province warehouses. U.S. officials controlled the distribution of AID commodities because they controlled all Saigon warehouses set aside for these commodities, even though the warehouses, like the commodities, belonged to the Vietnamese. 14/

Among the many problems that were to keep recurring was that of freedom of the press. Following an initial honeymoon period after the coup, trouble broke out between GVN and the U.S. press corps. This reached a climax with the temporary barring of the New York Times from Vietnamese distribution channels when it ran a story reporting dissension among the Vietnamese Generals. 15/ In general, Lodge sided with GVN on this issue, as shown in his reported views at the November, 1963, Honolulu Conference:

"The U.S. press should be induced to leave the new government alone. They have exerted great influence on

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

events in Vietnam in the past, and can be expected to do so again. Extensive press criticism, at this juncture, could be disastrous." 16/

On January 1, 1964, there were 15,914 U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam. Fewer than 2,000 of these were advisors to RVNAF, but the advisor structure extended down to ARVN line battalions, and advisors accompanied combat units on operations. 17/ The MAP budget for South Vietnam in FY 1964 was \$175 million, although it was expected that an additional \$12.5 million would be required before the end of the year. 18/

In summary, the USG's decisions near the end of 1963 started modest changes in our Vietnam programs. Program levels held even, and earlier hopes of immediate phasedown faded. The USG moved toward more involvement in Vietnamese day-to-day administration, particularly at the province level. The move was gentle, and stopped far short of a takeover; nothing of the sort was contemplated at that time. The USG was sceptical of GVN's leadership and administration at all levels, and continued to offer extensive and detailed advice, but had no drastic policy changes in mind.

## 2. The First Minh Government Goes Down, January, 1964

The year began with increasing Vietnamese criticism of the Minh government. It had done little to gain popularity in the country, and felt the sting of accusations of discrimination from both Buddhists and Catholics. Buddhists attacked Prime Minister Tho, who was Vice President under Diem. Catholics accused the GVN of having gone too far to placate the Buddhists in reaction to repressions under Diem. There were also accusations of secret negotiations with the French to neutralize South Vietnam. 19/

A spate of news stories about U.S. advisor disgust over ARVN's timid attitude toward combat provoked a cable from State to Saigon asking the Ambassador to prevent such stories in the future. (This standard phrase meant to tell the advisors to stop talking to the press.) Thus the Department aligned itself with Lodge's view of bad press stories, which emphasized news silence rather than corrective action. 20/

The Lodge idea of making politicians out of the members of the Military Revolutionary Council translated into a plan for them to send out carefully watched political action teams. (He also suggested ways for the generals to improve their speech-making style.) For example, he proposed there should be three teams of eight men each in each district of Long An Province. He pressed the MRC to produce a program along these lines with priority attention to security. "The workers would be technically government employees, but most of the work they will do would be what we would call political work." On the U.S. role, he said, "U.S. personnel should inspect, without looking as though they were doing it, and see to it that a very high standard is set." 21/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

When discussing general objectives, Lodge and his team got on smoothly with GVN. In a meeting with all the top members of General Minh's government early in January to discuss the eleven points transmitted with President Johnson's New Year's greeting, they persuaded Lodge that they were moving effectively on all points except number 8, relating to amnesty. This one evoked little enthusiasm, but they said they had it under study. 22/ The USOM team that discussed economic policy matters with GVN economists with the objective of limiting the GVN budget deficit and drawing down its dollar balances found them willing to talk frankly and to examine alternatives freely. GVN was also willing to set up joint working committees to analyze the budget, the import program, and agricultural policy. However, the U.S. team found that getting jointly agreed bench mark data and a clear line of authority for policy actions "may yet prove difficult." 23/

Moreover, a snag developed on the previously agreed plan to extend U.S. advisors to district level. In a one hour meeting January 10 between Ambassador Lodge and General Minh and other top Vietnamese officers and officials, General Kim stressed the extreme undesirability of Americans going into districts and villages. It would play into the hands of the VC and make the Vietnamese officials look like lackeys. There would be a colonial flavor to the whole pacification effort. Minh added that even in the worst and clumsiest days of the French they never went into the villages or districts. Others present went on to add that they thought the USIS should carry out its work strictly hand-in-hand with the province chief. When Lodge pointed out that most of the USIS teams were Vietnamese, Minh said, "Yes, but they are considered the same as Vietnamese who worked for the Japanese and the same as the Vietnamese who drive for Americans and break traffic laws." General Minh went on to complain about the U.S. hand in the training of Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. This was bad because they then became American type soldiers, not Vietnamese soldiers. Later in the discussion, General Minh complained that the ICA had made direct contacts with the above groups. "We simply cannot govern this country if this kind of conduct continues," he said. 24/

In reply to the report of this meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cabled CINCPAC on January 14:

"SecDef seriously concerned regarding...General Don's earlier agreement on district level advisors as well as Minh's assertion that no advisors are desired beyond the regimental level. The Secretary considers, and JCS agree, that this would be an unacceptable rearward step. State is preparing a response...in which SecDef and JCS will have a hand." 25/

The State guidance to Lodge on January 17 said:

"...We deem it essential to retain advisors down to sector and battalion level as we now have them, and consider establishment of subsector advisors as highly desirable improvement from our viewpoint. Such advisors



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

are best assurance that the U.S. material we supply is used to full advantage. Beyond this, we cannot give adequate justification for our great involvement in Vietnam...if we are to be denied access to the facts."

However, State indicated a willingness to limit subsector advisors to an experimental program in a few districts, as suggested by Col. Thang, with a review of the question to follow a few weeks later. State suggested that General Minh's erroneous statement regarding U.S. training of Cao Dai and Hoa Hao deserved prompt refutation. "It is suggested Harkins accompany you to meetings where military matters may come up." 26/

In contrast to their reticence about extending U.S. advisors to lower levels, Minh's government had volunteered the idea in December of a group of high-level U.S. advisors to work with the top levels of the GVN. The State Department replied enthusiastically:

"In elaboration of the brain trust concept suggested by General Minh and accepted by President Johnson (DepTel 1000), our view is that high-level advisors may be essential key to ingredient most sorely lacking in GVN: Efficiency and urgency of action. Minh's invitation to establish brain trust and readiness to accept U.S. advice and cooperate...should be seized upon...We have in mind advisors working directly with VN officials on day-to-day implementation of agreed policy lines. They would of course be completely responsible to you for policy guidance and would in no sense supplant your policy role with top GVN officials nor would they infringe direct and comprehensive military advisory role of COMUSMACV...We recognize such advisors must operate behind the scenes and that their persistent prodding must be done with great tact...."

The guidance continued that the department specifically had in mind the assignment of three experienced full-time advisors (and senior assistants) to work with top levels of GVN. One senior FSO would work with Minh and Tho on broad program implementation, one ranking AID official would be with GVN counterinsurgency and economic officials, one high-ranking military would work with the Minister of Defense and JGS. Both advisors and assistants would have office space in a GVN building close to the office they would advise. Authority was given to discuss this with GVN. Lodge was told to ask them whom they would like for these positions. 27/

Meanwhile, political tension increased. Then on January 28, General Nguyen Khanh told his U.S. advisor and friend, Col. Jasper Wilson, that a group of generals, including Minh and Don, were plotting with the French to stage a pro-neutralist "coup" by January 31. He asked whether the U.S. would support him in staging a counter-coup which would assure a stepped-up GVN effort against the Viet Cong. There is no record of an official U.S. reply before Khanh resolved to act. 28/ The evening of January 29, Khanh told Wilson he would take over the GVN at 4 a.m. the next morning. Lodge informed State, which directed him to keep a hands-off attitude and

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

to make it clear that the USG had nothing to do with the coup. It also directed Lodge to try to keep "Big Minh" in the government, at least as a figurehead. 29/ The next morning, right on schedule, Khanh took over.

3. The USG Accepts Khanh and Opens the Bidding Against the North, February, 1964

Keeping Minh was to prove difficult. Khanh wanted to try four arrested generals for conspiring with the French to neutralize SVN; and not only were these officers Minh's close friends, but Khanh said Minh was a party to the plot also. 30/ The affair was to drag on into September, adding to the political uncertainties and thus to the paralysis of government. 31/

To improve government stability, Khanh broadened his government to make the cabinet more representative of all the political and religious groups, and expanded the MRC to include 17 generals and 32 other officers. (By the end of March the MRC had 53 members.) Partly at USOM urging, General Minh travelled around the country and reportedly gained popularity. The Council of Notables continued in its advisory role. 32/

Following the coup, the USG reopened the question of extending U.S. advisors into the districts. On February 7, 1964, the State Department told Saigon:

"Inasmuch as recently displaced government evidently took no definitive position on extension U.S. advisory structure to subsector level...we believe [the] Ambassador and General Harkins should raise this subject at early date with General Khanh. It might be useful to point out to Khanh that in addition reasons cited in our 1072, proposed extension U.S. advisory structure would represent expansion U.S. commitment to support GVN in war against VC."

State anticipated that Khanh might object but believed the possible harm would be more than counterbalanced by improved effectiveness of GVN operations in countryside:

"...if Khanh will not accept subsector advisors on scale originally envisaged he should be urged to agree at least to their establishment on experimental basis in few districts in order to lay basis for determining whether there is any substantial ill effect in political sense from their presence." 33/

Two weeks later COMUSMACV reported Vietnamese acceptance of district advisors in 13 districts of central Delta provinces. MACV J-3 had casually arranged it with General Khiem, apparently without any new top-level U.S./GVN discussion. 34/

Khanh's government was as receptive at first to top-level U.S. advice as it was to advisors at lower levels, although the "brain trust"



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

idea dropped between the cracks. General Khanh made two requests for U.S. recommendations of Vietnamese persons to be members of his cabinet. Ambassador Lodge furnished a list from which a panel could be picked, but refused to make specific recommendations for particular positions. 35/

However, there was still no sign of effective GVN action, with or without U.S. advice. In mid-February JCS recommended a concentrated "counterinsurgency offensive" in Long An province to restore GVN control and to make that a model for other critical provinces. 36/ Deputy Ambassador Nes, in Lodge's absence, objected strongly; for he said such a proposal was based on the false assumptions that:

"(1) Indigenous Communist insurgency with full external support could be defeated by an 'offensive' of finite duration.

(2) GVN had adequate political cohesion, leadership, etc., to launch an offensive.

(3) The U.S. Mission had sufficient influence and control over GVN to persuade it to do so." 37/

A February 19 report from COMUSMACV tells of continuing delay on pacification because the Dien Huang (or Dong Hien) had to be revalidated by the new government. A new plan was presented to General Khanh on the 17th and was to be called Chien Thang ("struggle for victory"). 38/

On February 21, 1964, Ambassador Lodge, Admiral Felt, and General Harkins saw Khanh with a proposal for creating a corps of civil administrators to take over the villages and hamlets as soon as pacification was complete. Khanh replied that he was just about to put into effect a program in the seven key provinces around Saigon which would provide the help of doctors, teachers, and government advisors from Saigon. 39/

The subject of funds for ARVN and para-military pay increases came up because counterpart and PL 480 proceeds were U.S. contributions to the GVN budget. Washington requested additional facts and recommendations on how added U.S. input could best be channeled but advised that an outright U.S. grant would be highly undesirable. USOM and MAAG were told to analyze the situation and develop joint U.S./GVN action to meet the threat of inflation. 40/ Saigon replied that their analysis indicated (1) the budget deficits would probably be smaller than originally expected, and (2) the economic consequences were extremely difficult to predict. Economic Minister Oanh shunned any immediate "complex study" of the economic outlook because he was completely tied up with a series of important planning exercises for the government, and Oanh felt the potential cost of the pay raise (700 million piasters in 1964) could be absorbed within the present expenditure levels. 41/

The Embassy reported being informed on February 21 by the Minister of National Economy of a threatened Saigon rice shortage. He requested that

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the U.S. stand ready to provide 40,000 tons under title II PL 480 for distribution to the Armed Forces. No U.S. commitments were made. Talks were exploratory. 42/

Although the USG recognized the weaknesses of GVN, as noted at the end of Section 1, these merely aroused concern at the highest levels, not alarm. An extreme example of the emphasis of this period is found in W.W. Rostow's memorandum to the Secretary of State dated February 13, 1964. In a context emphasizing the importance of success in Vietnam to U.S. interests everywhere, Rostow wrote only about the role of North Vietnam in the insurgency, relegating South Vietnam's governmental problems (and those of Laos) to a vague clause in one sentence:

"South Vietnam is in danger. The internal position in South Vietnam created by the systematic operations conducted from North Vietnam is precarious...although difficult tasks would still be faced in South Vietnam and Laos if North Vietnamese compliance with the 1962 agreement was enforced, we see no possibility of achieving short-run or long-run stability in the area until it is enforced."

In a cable to the President, Lodge expressed the same view. In addition, he compared the sanctions used against Diem with the sanctions being considered against the North, and thus by implication treated the fall of Diem as the end of the problem of good government in the South. 43/ Rightly or wrongly, the USG viewed North Vietnamese support and direction of the insurgency as the overriding problem, not merely in its public posture (as represented by President Johnson's new year's greeting to General Minh, quoted on page 3, above, and by the State White Paper, "Aggression From the North," issued February 27), but also in its internal policy discussions. Rostow's statement says that there is no way to achieve short-run or long-run stability in Southeast Asia without putting a stop to this support and direction, and gives short shrift to GVN reform. To the extent that this view was accepted, it tended to set the face of U.S. policy looking outward across South Vietnam's borders, putting South Vietnamese weaknesses in the background, mainly to be dealt with after the 1962 Agreement is enforced.

When the issue came up of the GVN's internal military and political failures, all agreed that these were serious, but there was seldom any action. Occasional references (e.g., Honolulu, 1964), and conversations with some of the principals, make it clear that the explanation for this lack of action was the fear that the GVN was a house of cards, which would collapse if we pushed too hard. This fear of GVN weakness proved to be a consistent source of strength to GVN in its negotiations with the Embassy and with the USG.

#### 4. McNamara's March Trip and NSAM 288

For several days beginning on March 8, 1964, Secretary McNamara conferred with GVN leaders and with U.S. officials in Saigon. The trip

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

reinforced his pessimistic views of the previous December. In his trip report to the President, he said:

"C. The situation has unquestionably been growing worse, at least since September:

1. In terms of government control of the country-side, about 40% of the territory is under Viet Cong control or predominant influence....

2. Large groups of the population are now showing signs of apathy and indifference, and there are some signs of frustration within the U.S. contingent:

a. The ARVN and paramilitary desertion rates, and particularly the latter, are high and increasing.

b. Draft dodging is high while the Viet Cong are recruiting energetically and effectively.

c. The morale of the hamlet militia and of the Self Defense Corps, on which the security of the hamlets depends, is poor and falling.

3. In the last 90 days the weakening of the government's position has been particularly noticeable....

4. The political control structure extending from Saigon down into the hamlets disappeared following the November coup. Of the 41 incumbent province chiefs on November 1, 35 have been replaced (nine provinces had three province chiefs in three months; one province had four). Scores of lesser officials were replaced. Almost all major military commands have changed hands twice since the November coup. The faith of the peasants has been shaken by the disruptions in experienced leadership and the loss of physical security. In many areas, power vacuums have developed causing confusion among the people, and a rising rate of rural disorders."

"D. The greatest weakness in the present situation is the uncertain viability of the Khanh government...After two coups, as was mentioned above, there has been a sharp drop in morale and organization, and Khanh has not yet been able to build these up satisfactorily. There is a constant threat of assassination or of another coup, which would drop morale and organization nearly to zero. Whether or not French nationals are actively encouraging such a coup, de Gaulle's position and the continuing pessimism and anti-Americanism of the French community in South Vietnam provide constant fuel to neutralist sentiment and the coup possibility. If a coup is set underway, the odds of our detecting and preventing it in the tactical sense are not high.



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"E. On the positive side, we have found many reasons for encouragement in the performance of the Khanh government to date. Although its top layer is thin, it is highly responsive to U.S. advice, and with a good grasp of the basic elements of rooting out the Viet Cong. Opposition groups are fragmentary, and Khanh has brought in at least token representation from many key groups hitherto left out. He is keenly aware of the danger of assassination or coup and is taking resourceful steps to minimize these risks. All told, these evidences of energy, comprehension, and decision add up to a sufficiently strong chance of Khanh's really taking hold in the next few months for us to devote all possible energy and resources to his support." 44/

A memorandum of the conversation held at Joint General Staff (JGS) headquarters between Secretary McNamara and General Khanh, the Prime Minister, on March 12, shows that the U.S. pressed for a national service act. General Khanh agreeably assured the Secretary that the GVN was prepared to embark on a program of national mobilization. The principal question raised by the Vietnamese was the desirability of raising the Civil Guard to the same relative status as ARVN on such matter as salary, pensions, and survivor benefits at a total additional cost of 1 billion piasters. Mr. McNamara's reply that he thought this highly desirable was obviously interpreted by the Vietnamese as an agreement to underwrite much of the bill. 45/

After considering various options in his reports, McNamara recommended the following basic U.S. posture:

"1. The U.S. at all levels must continue to make it emphatically clear that we are prepared to furnish assistance and support for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.

"2. The U.S. at all levels should continue to make it clear that we fully support the Khanh government and are totally opposed to any further coups. The ambassador should instruct all elements, including the military advisors, to report intelligence information of possible coups promptly, with the decision to be made by the ambassador whether to report such information to Khanh....

"3. We should support fully the Pacification Plan now announced by Khanh...This so-called "oil spot" theory is excellent, and its acceptance is a major step forward. However, it is necessary to push hard to get specific instructions out to the provinces, so that there is real unity of effort at all levels....

Many of the actions described in succeeding paragraphs fit right into the framework of the Plan as announced by Khanh. Wherever possible, we should tie our urging of such actions to Khanh's own formulation of them, so that he will

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

be carrying out a Vietnamese plan and not one imposed by the U.S.

"4. To put the whole nation on a war footing...a new National Mobilization Plan (to include a National Service Law) should be urgently developed by the Country Team in collaboration with the Khanh Government....

"5. The strength of the Armed Forces (regular plus paramilitary) must be increased by at least 50,000 men....

"6. A Civil Administrative Corps is urgently required to work in the provincial capitals, the district towns, the villages, and the hamlets...The U.S. should work with the GVN urgently to devise the necessary recruiting plans, training facilities, financing methods, and organizational arrangements, and should furnish training personnel at once, under the auspices of the AID Mission....

"7. The paramilitary forces are now understrength and lacking in effectiveness. They must be improved and reorganized.

d. Additional U.S. personnel should be assigned to the training of all these paramilitary forces.

e. The National Police require special consideration. Their strength in the provinces should be substantially increased and consideration should be given to including them as part of an overall 'Popular Defense Force'....

"8. An offensive guerrilla force should be created to operate along the border and in areas where VC control is dominant...." 46/

He recommended more military equipment for ARVN, which along with the expansion recommendations above, added up to a total cost to the U.S. of some \$50-60 million in the first year and \$30-40 million thereafter. He reasoned:

"There were and are sound reasons for the limits imposed by present policy -- the South Vietnamese must win their own fight; U.S. intervention on a larger scale, and/or GVN actions against the North, would disturb key allies and other nations; etc. In any case, it is vital that we continue to take every reasonable measure to assure success in South Vietnam. The policy choice is not an 'either/or' between this course of action and possible pressures against the North; the former is essential without regard to our decision with respect to the latter. The latter can, at best, only reinforce the former.



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"The following are the actions we believe can be taken in order to improve the situation both in the immediate future and over a longer term period. To emphasize that a new phase has begun, the measures to be taken by the Khanh government should be described by some term such as 'South Vietnam's Program for National Mobilization.'" 47/

Two courses of action that Secretary McNamara considered and rejected were destined to come up time and again. With respect to the suggestion that the U.S. furnish an American combat unit to secure Saigon, the Secretary reported "It is the universal opinion of our senior people in Saigon, with which we concur, that this action would now have serious adverse psychological consequences and should not be undertaken."

On U.S. assumption of command, he said:

"...the judgments of all senior people in Saigon, with which we concur, is that the possible military advantages of such action would be far outweighed by its adverse psychological impact. It would cut across the whole basic picture of the VN running their own war and lay us wide open to hostile propaganda both within SVN and outside. Moreover the present responsiveness of the GVN to our advice -- although it has not yet reduced military reaction time -- makes it less urgent. At the same time MACV is steadily taking actions to bring U.S. and GVN operating staff closer together at all levels, including joint operating rooms at key command levels." 48/

The President met with the National Security Council on March 17 and approved McNamara's recommendations; NSAM 288 of that date directed all agencies to execute the parts applying to them. To underline one point further, State cabled USOM Saigon on March 18 to make sure to report all rumors of coups heard by any U.S. personnel to the Ambassador at once; and it gave the Ambassador full reaction authority. 49/ Then the President summarized his view of the main thrust of the new policy, in a cable to Lodge on March 20:

"As we agreed in our previous messages to each other, judgment is reserved for the present on overt military action in view of the consensus from Saigon conversations of McNamara mission with General Khanh and you on judgment that movement against the North at the present would be premature. We here share General Khanh's judgment that the immediate and essential task is to strengthen the southern base. For this reason our planning for action against the North is on a contingency basis at present, and immediate problem in this area is to develop the strongest possible military and political base for possible later action." 50/

Anticipating great things, the White House announced Khanh's "mobilization plan" on March 17, and implied USG support for him:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"To meet the situation, General Khanh and his government are acting vigorously and effectively. They have produced a sound central plan...To carry out this plan...General Khanh has informed us that he proposes in the near future to put into effect a National Mobilization Plan....

"The policy should continue of withdrawing United States personnel where their roles can be assumed by South Vietnamese and of sending additional men if they are needed. It will remain the policy of the United States to furnish assistance and support to South Vietnam for as long as it is required....

"Secretary McNamara and General Taylor reported their overall conclusion that with continued vigorous leadership from General Khanh and his government, and the carrying out of these steps, the situation can be significantly improved in the coming months." 51/

In a speech in Washington on March 26, Secretary McNamara more explicitly supported the Khanh government, and gave the accepted priorities of U.S. policy:

"...In early 1963, President Kennedy was able to report to the nation that 'the spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in South Vietnam.' It was evident that the Government had seized the initiative in most areas from the insurgents. But this progress was interrupted in 1963 by the political crises arising from troubles between the Government and the Buddhists, students, and other non-Communist oppositionists. President Diem lost the confidence and loyalty of his people; there were accusations of maladministration and injustice. There were two changes of government within three months. The fabric of government was torn. The political control structure extending from Saigon down into the hamlets virtually disappeared. Of the 41 incumbent province chiefs on November 1 of last year, 35 were replaced. Nine provinces had three chiefs in three months; one province had four. Scores of lesser officials were replaced. Almost all major military commands changed hands twice. The confidence of the peasants was inevitably shaken by the disruptions in leadership and the loss of physical security...Much therefore depends on the new government under General Khanh, for which we have high hopes.

"Today the government of General Khanh is vigorously rebuilding the machinery of administration and reshaping plans to carry the war to the Viet Cong. He is an able and energetic leader. He has demonstrated his grasp of the basic elements -- political, economic and psychological, as well as military -- required to defeat the Viet Cong. He is planning a program of economic and social advances for the welfare of his people.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

He has brought into support of the government representatives of key groups previously excluded. He and his colleagues have developed plans for systematic liberation of areas now submissive to Viet Cong duress and for mobilization of all available Vietnamese resources in the defense of the homeland.

"At the same time, General Khanh has understood the need to improve South Vietnam's relations with its neighbors... In short, he has demonstrated the energy, comprehension, and decision required by the difficult circumstances that he faces....

"The third option before the President [after withdrawal and neutralization, both rejected] was initiation of military actions outside South Vietnam, particularly against North Vietnam, in order to supplement the counterinsurgency program in South Vietnam.

"This course of action -- its implications and ways of carrying it out -- has been carefully studied.

"What ever ultimate course of action may be forced upon us by the other side, it is clear that actions under this option would be only a supplement to, not a substitute for, progress within South Vietnam's own borders.

"The fourth course of action was to concentrate on helping the South Vietnamese win the battle in their own country. This, all agree, is essential no matter what else is done....

"We have reaffirmed U.S. support for South Vietnam's Government and pledged economic assistance and military training and logistical support for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.

"We will support the Government of South Vietnam in carrying out its Anti-Insurgency Plan...." 52/

The next day McNamara formally ended the hope of phased withdrawal, by stopping the lower-echelon joint planning activities that had aimed at replacing U.S. elements in Vietnam by Vietnamese. Although the Vietnamese knew that the "withdrawal" of 1000 men in December 1963 had been a pretense, his action now removed any remaining doubt about our intentions. The message was brief:

"Model Plan projection for phasedown of U.S. forces and GVN forces is superseded. Policy is as announced by White House on 17 March 64." 53/



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

5. Opening Bids on Advice, Leverage, and AID, April-May, 1964

Armed with our declaration of support and with the promised further material assistance, General Khanh signed a mobilization decree on April 4; at the time the decree satisfied the USG as meeting McNamara's recommendation on the subject. 54/ However, Khanh delayed signing implementing decrees for the mobilization decree indefinitely; and it has never become clear what it would have meant, if implemented. In May, Khanh purportedly broadened the draft to include older and younger men, and announced formation of a new "Civil Defense Corps"; but neither came to anything. On April 4, Khanh also abolished the Council of Notables. This latter step he did on his own, without prior discussion with Lodge. As noted in section 1, Lodge, who always believed in the need and importance of constitutional government in SVN, felt no urgency for creating a democratic form of government, although many in State may have wanted to object to Khanh's actions. 55/ Such actions without prior consultation were to become a sore point later on with both State and the Embassy. Thus, what the USG actually got for the recognition and material support it gave Khanh in March was the dissolution of the Council of Notables. 56/

During April, Lodge and State continued to debate how hard to push GVN using AID leverage. Lodge agreed with the general principle that the Commercial Import Program (CIP) should not be increased until increased GVN expenditures quickened the economy and drove imports up. However, he noted that GVN had been given to understand that they could expect at least the \$95 million CIP in 1964 that Diem had in 1963, and that McNamara had said in Saigon and Washington that U.S. assistance to Vietnam would increase by about \$50 million. These assurances had spurred Oanh, Minister of National Economy, to ask for specific increases in CIP. Lodge thought the time unpropitious for detailed joint planning and for austerity measures as conditions for the last increment of 1964 CIP. Oanh received credit for being too busy with pacification planning and other matters to discuss such matters. Therefore, Lodge proposed to use the planning of the CY 1965 program as the right place to apply leverage. 57/

State reacted sharply, questioning whether the USG should let GVN off the hook on its March commitments that easily. Nevertheless, State acknowledged that "formal negotiations may not be desirable at this time," and settled instead for "constant dialogue to keep GVN aware of U.S. adherence to the new approach and of firm desire to see it implemented." The desired GVN actions included drawdown of foreign exchange reserves, promotion of exports, import austerity, and an anti-inflationary domestic policy. 58/

USOM then talked to Oanh about the commitments on the two sides. USOM felt that Oanh understood that GVN was to move first and be backed up by the USG as needed, but thought that some segments of GVN were dragging their heels to avoid living up to their commitments. USOM estimated a \$15-30 million drawdown of GVN foreign exchange reserves in 1964. 59/

In the last week of April, General Khanh asked Lodge for one American expert each in the fields of Finance-Economics, Foreign Affairs,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

and Press relations to be assigned to him personally and to have offices in "a convenient villa...We Vietnamese want the Americans to be responsible with us and not merely as advisors." This request revived the "brain trust" concept discussed with the Minh government around the first of the year. Commenting, Lodge noted that he had opposed pushing Americans into GVN because of Colonialist overtones; they would cause resentment, and a lessening of effort by the GVN, placing the blame on the U.S. Therefore, he had avoided raising the idea with Khanh. However, that Khanh himself now proposed it removed that objection, and Lodge felt that the U.S. should respond because it was an urgent necessity.

Late in the same meeting, Lodge told Khanh of a State Department proposal for civil administrators on a crash basis in partially pacified areas. His quick reply, "Yes...if you will accept losses."

Lodge recommended a Civil Administrative advisor to join the three others mentioned above, but he advised against more. He said there was no sense dumping several hundred advisors out there. In view of the "trail-blazing" nature of the move, he requested a member of the White House staff, possibly Forrestal, to come out for a conference. 60/ Ordinarily, it would be surprising that Lodge would make such a big issue of Khanh's revival of an idea that GVN had already advanced through Lodge and that the President himself had approved. However, his effusive reaction in this case merely underlines his oft-repeated reluctance to push GVN. Lodge presented the first three advisors to Khanh on May 6. 61/

On April 30, Lodge, Westmoreland, and USOM Director Brent met with several top members of GVN to discuss GVN's failure to disburse operating funds to the provinces, sectors and divisions and to correct the manpower shortage in ARVN and the paramilitary units. Lodge argued that the McNamara program was failing, not because U.S. support lagged, but because the necessary piaster support was missing. Moreover, he said, there was no shortage of piasters available to GVN. In reply, Oanh of the GVN said they had inherited a bad system from the French, and that he was now trying to implement new procedures. Khanh replied on the manpower problem that to raise the strength would require an ultimatum to the Corps Commanders, but then he also said that remedial moves were underway and were known to MACV. Khanh countered the budgetary argument by saying that he had still not received money from the U.S. to support increased pay for the paramilitary; Lodge replied that if he went ahead with the increased pay, the U.S. would meet the bill. Overall, the meeting was one of thrust and parry rather than of consultation. 62/ This meeting followed prodding from McNamara and JCS in a cable sent April 29. 63/

On May 4, Khanh told Lodge he wanted to declare war, bomb North Vietnam with U.S. bombers, put the country on a war footing, including "getting rid of the so-called politicians and having...a government of technicians," and bring in 10,000 U.S. Army special forces to "cover the whole Cambodian-Laotian frontier." Lodge was non-committal on U.S. forces, but said that the war came first and that democratic forms could wait. 64/ However, Khanh publicly called for an election by October of a Constitutional Assembly, apparently to bolster his public support; he had his share of rumors and political infighting. 65/



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

On May 13, during a trip to Saigon to review progress on the March decisions, McNamara met with Khanh to express his concern over GVN inaction. McNamara's main complaints were that RVNAF was failing to reach authorized strength levels and that budget delays were holding up pacification. He felt that GVN should announce that failure to disburse funds is a crime. He also expressed concern about the replacement of incompetent officers, such as the Commanding General of the ARVN Fifth Division. The meeting went agreeably, and produced the following consensus:

- (1) All present expressed satisfaction at Khanh's having accepted the importance of speeding up disbursements.
- (2) The case of the commander of the Fifth Division "presented something of an internal problem, but it would be arranged." (This was the second time around for the Fifth Division case. As the result of a personnel request from General Harkins, Khanh had agreed on April 25 to change this same officer "immediately." 66/)
- (3) Khanh hoped to spend more time on military and pacification matters if only "this political stomach trouble" that took so much of his time could be quieted. 67/

MACV presented McNamara with a proposal to give the province advisors a total of \$278,000 in petty cash and "seed money," to be used solely at the U.S. advisors' discretion. This initial proposal suggested putting the money under control of the psychological operations committee. The idea received mixed reactions, and went on the agenda of the Honolulu Conference in June. 68/

M. Forrestal of the White House Staff came with McNamara, and led a negotiating team that met Minister Oanh and his staff to discuss budgetary and economic matters. The U.S. team wanted GVN to keep its budget under strict control; GVN wanted the USG to increase CIP, and to give it an additional \$18 million from fiscal 1964 funds. On May 27, when the talks ended, the USG had released the requested \$18 million, and committed itself to a fiscal 1965 CIP of \$135 million, \$40 million more than in fiscal 1964, plus a standby arrangement for an additional \$30 million. GVN protested that this commitment was not enough to prevent inflation, and did what it pleased about its own budget; the talks ended with an agreement to disagree. 69/

#### 6. The Political Climate and Prevailing Views of the War, May 1964

Khanh's "political stomach trouble" was merely a fresh case of a chronic Vietnamese problem. His troubles with General Minh over the four jailed generals continued, and coup rumors abounded. On May 21, Lodge told him of the harmful effects of such rumors, and suggested he talk tough with his cabinet. When their conversation turned to General Minh, Khanh insisted that Minh could be proved to have conspired with the others and with the French to make Vietnam neutral. Khanh and the MRC planned to try the four generals in Dalat by the 29th of May. State then directed Lodge to try to prevent the trial, and failing that to soften its effects and prevent Minh's deposition. Lodge put this position to Khanh on May 28, asserting the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

*under State 5  
on 11/15/64. PP*

special need for unity in view of possible cross-border problems with Laos; Khanh accepted the point and agreed to soften the blow on the generals. He flew immediately to Dalat, and the next day announced to Lodge an amicable settlement of the problem, with lenient treatment of the generals and new-found complete unity among the members of the ruling MRC. State and Lodge were gratified, and agreed that the thing to do was to press for unity in support of getting on with the war. 70/ However, it was soon common knowledge that the "settlement," amounting to censure of the accused officers, satisfied no one; and the problem festered on. 71/

In May the first sign appeared of varying emphasis at the highest levels on particular necessary steps for success against the VC. In a DPM dated May 25, 1964, McGeorge Bundy restated the theme of the Rostow memorandum to SecState of February 13:

"It is recommended that you make a Presidential decision that the U.S. will use selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam...on these premises:

(1) That the U.S. cannot tolerate the loss of Southeast Asia to Communism;

(2) That without a decision to resort to military action if necessary, the present prospect is not hopeful, in South Vietnam or in Laos."

Of course, Bundy knew of the GVN's weaknesses and on other occasions asserted the need to reform GVN; but here he focussed exclusively on using force against NVN.

In contrast, Chairman Sullivan of the newly-created inter-agency Vietnam Committee 72/ said in a proposed memorandum for the President (May, 1964; undated):

"The Vietnamese Government is not operating efficiently enough to reverse the adverse trend in the war with the Viet Cong. The Khanh Government has good intentions; it has announced good general plans and broad programs; but these plans are not being translated into effective action against the Viet Cong on either the military or the civil side. It has, therefore, become urgently necessary to find a means to infuse the efficiency into the governmental system that it now lacks."

To remedy the GVN's lack of efficiency, Sullivan proposed that Americans assume de facto command of GVN's machinery.

"American personnel, who have hitherto served only as advisors, should be integrated into the Vietnamese chain of command, both military and civil. They should become direct operational components of the Vietnamese Governmental structure. For cosmetic purposes American personnel would not assume titles which would show command functions, but would

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

rather be listed as 'assistants' to the Vietnamese principals at the various levels of government...

"Americans should be integrated to all levels of the Vietnamese Government...Americans would be integrated into the Central Government to insure that decisions are taken, orders are issued and funds, supplies and personnel are made available for their implementation, and execution actually takes place. At the regional level Americans, both military and civilian, would also be introduced...Americans would likewise be brought into the government machinery at province and district level to insure that the counterinsurgency programs are actually executed at the level at which the people live.

"Aside from the command aspect which Americans would assume, the principal other new element in this concept would be the introduction of American civilians at the district level. Their purpose would be to insure that programs are put into effect at the village and hamlet level to gain the support of the people....

"Personnel at the district level would confront a maximum risk and casualties are virtually certain. Since the U.S. should take any feasible measure to assure their security, it is important that Vietnamese units of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, which operate at this level, be encadred with an adequate number of American military personnel to insure that they will operate effectively."

This DPM also proposed extensive reshuffling of the lines of authority in the GVN itself, including the elimination of divisions from the Vietnamese military structure and placing all authority for pacification, military and civilian, in the hands of the province chiefs under the corps commanders. 73/

The Vietnam Committee watered down this proposal immediately, however. On May 27, it went to four high-level addressees as a talking paper, with the second sentence of the above recommendation altered to say, "They should become more than advisors, but should not become an integral part of the chain of command." (Emphasis added.) Recognizing Vietnamese sensitivities and the GVN's political vulnerability, the revised paper recommended a gradual, phased approach. But even the watered-down version was termed "radical" in the cable putting it on the agenda for the upcoming Honolulu Conference. 74/

In the new advisory program already underway, MACV reported a big improvement by late May in the experimental districts with U.S. advisors. People rather than messages moved back and forth. Economic and social bonds were reported improved. Further extension of advisors to districts was put



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

on the agenda. 75/ In preliminary communications, General Taylor, Chairman of the JCS, assumed that their mission would be to supervise unit training, operational performance, and operational planning of para-military units in the districts; but he also suggested discussion of other ways in which military personnel could be used to advantage in forwarding the pacification program. 76/

The month ended with a Rusk-Khanh meeting that re-emphasized the accepted priorities of U.S. policy, and unquestionably confirmed to the Vietnamese how far we were thinking of going. First, Rusk emphasized to Khanh the effect of Vietnamese quarreling on the U.S. and on other potential allies in the struggle. Second, they discussed immediate extensions of the war, such as attacking the Laotian corridor, and the various further extensions that might follow. Third, Khanh pushed hard on the idea, which as noted above had already been discussed in Washington, that he could not win without extending the war. Finally, Khanh pledged to keep all these matters secret until the U.S. agreed to overt statement or action.

The language of the cable reporting this meeting is candid and revealing:

"1. Solidarity Within South Vietnam

"...Secretary [Rusk] stated one of main problems President faces in justifying to American people whatever course of action may be necessary or indicated as matter of internal solidarity of SVN. Secretary noted that if struggle escalates, only U.S. will have the forces to cope with it.

"This basic reality means President has heavy responsibility of making vital decisions and leading American public opinion to accept them. Difficult to do this if SVN appears hopelessly divided and rent by internal quarrels.

"...Secretary said he was not thinking in terms of displaying solidarity so as to convince Paris that struggle could be won, but rather was thinking in terms of sustaining the faith in the possibilities of ultimate success of our Vietnamese effort among those nations we hoped 'would be in the foxholes with us' if escalation became necessary and if enemy forces reacted in strength. For example, UK, Australia, New Zealand. Solidarity and unit of purpose in SVN was keystone of whole effort. Was General Khanh doing all he could to bring about such national unity?

"Khanh replied affirmatively, saying he fully aware of importance of unity. His recent handling of the case of the arrested Generals showed this. His clemency showed he was primarily interested in protecting unity of Army. But there were many problems. Underlying structure and heritage of country was such that only Army could lead Nation in unity. Only

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Army had the requisite organization, cadres, discipline, and sense of purpose. The intellectuals would never be able to adopt a common point of view unless it was imposed by a dictatorship -- by a party as the Communists did, or a 'family dictatorship' such as Diem's. This situation was made worse because of disproportion between measure of political and civil liberties granted in wartime situation on one hand and lack of background and sense of responsibility of recipients on [the] other...He was aware he had perhaps given more freedom than really prudent handling of situation would have dictated, but he had to be mindful of oft-proclaimed democratic goals of the Vietnamese revolution. All in all, this disunity would not be fatal because Army itself was united, and no potentially disruptive force could hope to oppose Army and overthrow GVN. (N.B. No reference to religious problems, sects, or labor under this heading.)

"2. Need for Action Outside South Vietnam.

"...Khanh dwelt at length on this, laying out some fairly precise ideas about the kind of action that might be taken.

"Basically, he said that despite the pacification plan and some individual successes he and his government were 'on the defensive' against the Viet Cong. He said pretty flatly that they could not win unless action was taken outside South Vietnam, and that this needed a firm U.S. decision for such action.

"...He [Khanh] then said that the 'immediate' response should be to clean out the Communists in Eastern Laos, who were the same kind of threat to him, and that we should not get bogged down in negotiations but act.

"...Secretary then noted we could never predict enemy reaction with certainty. How would SVN people react if NVN and China responded by attacking SVN? Khanh replied this would have even more favorable effect on SVN national unity and faith in victory, and would mobilize usual patriotic reactions in face of more clearcut external threat.

"3. Timing of Action Against the North and Necessary Prior Action Within South Vietnam.

"Khanh asked if Secretary and Ambassador believed he should proclaim state of war existed during next few days and now that Generals' case was settled. Both advised him to wait at least until after Honolulu Conference and in no case ever to take action on such matter without consulting. He agreed, and remarked that if he proclaimed state



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of war, NVN would know this was preparatory to some form of escalation and he would never act unilaterally and thereby run risk of tipping America's hand. Although the matter was not specifically mentioned, Khanh appeared to accept as entirely natural that he would not necessarily know in advance if U.S. decided to strike outside VN.

"...Some question as to how enemy camp will react. At various points in conversation Khanh was obviously seeking some more definite statement of specific American intentions in immediate future. Secretary told him he could say nothing on this because he simply did not know. The Honolulu meeting would produce some firm recommendations to the President and some plans, but ultimately only President could decide. His decision would be influenced by consideration of all implications of escalation: On our forces, on our allies, and perhaps even on mankind itself if nuclear warfare should result. Only U.S. had the means to cope with problems escalation would pose, and only President could make the ultimate decisions.

"Nevertheless, Secretary said he wished to emphasize the following:

A. Since 1945 U.S. had taken 165,000 casualties in defense of free world against Communist encroachments, and most of these casualties were in Asia.

B. U.S. would never again get involved in a land war in Asia limited to conventional forces. Our population was 190,000,000. Mainland China had at least 700,000,000. We would not allow ourselves to be bled white fighting them with conventional weapons.

C. This meant that if escalation brought about major Chinese attack, it would also involve use of nuclear arms. Many free world leaders would oppose this. Chiang Kai-Shek had told him fervently he did, and so did U Thant. Many Asians seemed to see an element of racial discrimination in use of nuclear arms; something we would do to Asians but not to Westerners. Khanh replied he certainly had no quarrel with American use of nuclear arms, noted that decisive use of Atomic bombs on Japan had in ending war saved not only American but also Japanese lives. One must use the force one had; if Chinese used masses of Humanity, we would use superior fire power.

D. Regardless what decisions were reached at Honolulu, their implementation would require positioning of our forces. This would take time. Khanh must remember we had other responsibilities in Asia and must be able react anywhere we had forces or commitments. Not by chance

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

was this Conference being held at Honolulu; the combined headquarters of all American forces in Pacific was there.

"...6. Comment

"As can be seen, the Secretary let Khanh develop his ideas fairly fully and do most of the talking.\* Khanh talked firmly and effectively, and responded well to the Secretary's several points. He showed clearly that he was aware of the gravity of the decisions (tho he did seem a touch cavalier about the political problems of hitting eastern Laos at once), and did not seem to want a firm U.S. answer the day after tomorrow. But it seemed clear that he did want it pretty soon, and was now convinced he could not win in South Vietnam without hitting other areas including the North. He was careful to point out that the pacification campaign was making gains and would continue do so. Still, it was essentially defensive.

"On the timing, the Secretary said that any action would be preceded in any event by some period of time for force deployments. (He did not refer to diplomatic steps re Laos, the UN side, the U.S. Congressional problem, or other types of factors). Khanh understood this, and also accepted the Secretary's point that we would need to consult very closely with Khanh himself, try to bring the British and Australians aboard (the Secretary referred only to these two possible active participants), and generally synchronize and work out the whole plan with great care." 77/

Thus although the USG had pressed GVN on many details of economic policy, administration, and pacification, contacts at the highest level told GVN that if the Vietnamese leaders would only stick together to prosecute the war, and if we compelled the North Vietnamese to cease and desist, everything would be all right. Provided the GVN didn't embarrass the USG too much, there was no limit to how far we would go to support them; and apart from "unity" and a reasonable show of effort, there was no onus on them to deliver the goods. Khanh's claim that he could not win without extending the war, and that the Vietnamese were tired of the long dreary grind of pacification, met no U.S. objection.

#### 7. The Honolulu Conference and Its Follow-Up, June, 1964

The Honolulu Conference met on short notice with an air of urgency; principals included McNamara, Rusk, Lodge, Taylor, and Westmoreland. Presentations of the current situation preceded consideration of additional measures to be taken. Lodge briefed those present on the political status. He said the situation could "jog along," but he thought that some external action would be a big lift to South Vietnamese morale. Lodge's prediction was more optimistic than later events, in August, proved justified; he said "if we bombed Tchepone or attacked the [NVN torpedo] boats and the Vietnamese people knew about it, this would...unify their efforts and reduce [their] quarreling." In reply to a question by Rusk, he opposed the idea of a more

\*Comment: Nevertheless, as can be seen, the Secretary spoke freely.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

formal joint USG/GVN organization at the top; McNamara hoped that a more formal organization would evolve. Lodge felt that the USG/GVN relationship was harmonious, and that GVN was responsive to advice. He like the present methods of dealing with them. Westmoreland called the military picture "tenuous but not hopeless" and added that a few victories were badly needed. Both were more optimistic than was the prevailing Washington view. 78/

All present agreed that the emergence of a hostile government or anarchy would be a major threat to the U.S. position. 79/ The fear of this threat undoubtedly helps explain the USG's persistent hesitancy to apply leverage to GVN.

Westmoreland circulated a working paper calling for moderate increases in U.S. personnel, both civilian and military, for eight critical provinces. He reported that the GVN had recently responded to massive advisory pressure by increasing the tempo of their military operations. He felt they would similarly respond to a continuing advisory program oriented toward pacification. Both Lodge and Westmoreland rejected, as both unwise and unacceptable to GVN, any major plan for "inter-larding" or "encadrement" which would move U.S. personnel directly into decision-making roles. Their opposition ended conference consideration of the proposals advanced by the Sullivan memorandum.

In a long draft memorandum, dated June 13, 1964, Sullivan added some further insight into US/GVN relations and into the views of Lodge and Westmoreland about national priorities, beyond what is shown in the CINCPAC record of the Conference.

"In attempting to accomplish many of these programs, we have encountered resistance both from the Vietnamese and from our own U.S. Mission. Ambassador Lodge...fears that the increased introduction of Americans would give a colonial coloration to our presence there and would cause the Vietnamese to depend more and more on our execution of their programs. The Vietnamese...have some fear of appearing to be American puppets...Finally, there is some indication that they are reluctant to associate themselves too closely with the Americans until they feel more confident of ultimate American intentions.

"At the current moment, there is great doubt and confusion in Vietnam about U.S. determination...As a leading Saigon newspaper said on June 12: 'We must be vigilant and we must be ready to meet any eventuality so as to avoid the possible shameful sacrifice and dishonor to our country as in the past.'

"Given this sort of atmosphere in South Vietnam, it is very difficult to persuade the Vietnamese to commit themselves to sharp military confrontations with the communists if they suspect that something in the way of a negotiated deal is being



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

concocted behind their backs. Consequently, many of the actions which we are pressing on the South Vietnamese are flagging because of this uncertainty...

"Both Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland, at the Honolulu Conference expressed the opinion that the situation in South Vietnam would 'jog along' at the current stalemated pace unless some dramatic 'victory' could be introduced to put new steel and confidence into the Vietnamese leadership. General Westmoreland defined 'victory' as a determination to take some new vigorous military commitment, such as air strikes against Viet Cong installations in the Laos corridor. Ambassador Lodge defined 'victory' as a willingness to make punitive air strikes against North Vietnam. The significant fact about both... suggestions was that they looked toward some American decision to undertake a commitment which the Vietnamese would interpret as a willingness to raise the military ante and eschew negotiations begun from a position of weakness.

"While it is almost impossible to establish measurements of Vietnamese morale, we are able to say that there is not at the current moment a single galvanized national purpose, expressed in the government leadership and energizing all elements of the country with a simple sense of confidence." 80/

The selective Westmoreland plan offered hope and was sufficiently general to avoid specific opposition. The conference agreed that Saigon should complete the plan and work urgently on its implementation.

Several more minor decisions were made on unilateral matters. 'Czar' powers for information were put in the hands of Zorthian. It was agreed that the DCM should be strengthened with a "truly executive man," and there was to be a clearing-of-decks on the military side in Saigon through reductions in social activities and cut-downs in dependents. None of these measures was expected to affect the dubious prognosis for the next 3-6 months. The best that could be hoped for was a slight gain by the end of the year.

There was serious discussion of military plans and intelligence estimates regarding wider actions outside South Vietnam. Subjects included the conduct of military operations in Laos, a major build-up of forces, and planning of possible air strikes against North Vietnam. The conclusion reached was that the somewhat less pessimistic estimate of the present situation afforded the opportunity to further refine these plans.

The conference concluded that the crucial actions for the immediate future were (1) to prosecute an urgent information effort in the United States toward dispelling the basic doubts of the value of Southeast Asia which were besetting key members of Congress and the public in the budding "great debate," and (2) to start diplomatic efforts with the Thais, Australians, New Zealanders, Philippines, and the French on matters within



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

their cognizance which impinged on our effort in South Vietnam.

Upon his return to Washington, the Secretary of State cabled Saigon a specific listing of the Washington understanding of the ten actions that were to be taken to expand U.S. and Vietnamese activities in the super-critical provinces. The gist of the actions is as follows:

- (1) Move in additional VN troops to assure numerical superiority over VC.
- (2) Assign control of all troops in province to province chief.
- (3) Develop and execute detailed hamlet by hamlet "oil spot" and "clear and hold" operations plans for each of the approximate 40 districts.
- (4) Introduce a system of population control (curfews, ID papers, intelligence network).
- (5) Increase the province police force.
- (6) Expand the information program.
- (7) Develop a special economic aid program for each province.
- (8) Add additional U.S. personnel (initially from within SVN).

320	military province and district advisors
40	USOM province and district advisors
74	battalion advisors (2 from each of
	37 battalions)
<u>434</u>	

- (9) Transfer military personnel to fill existing and future USOM shortages.

- (10) Establish joint US/GVN teams to monitor the program at both national and provincial level.

The message concluded by asking Saigon to forward specific proposals to effect these decisions and a time schedule, "earliest." 81/ The plan to give province advisors a petty cash fund (above, p.19) received so little support that there is no mention of it in either the CINCPAC or the State Conference Record.

Upon his return to Saigon on June 4, Ambassador Lodge went straight from the airport to call on General Khanh. While Lodge mentions in his report that the subject of low ARVN strength was raised as a matter to be

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

improved upon, the main thrust of his talk with Khanh was to hint that the USG would in the immediate future be preparing U.S. public opinion for actions against North Vietnam. Khanh was reported to be eager to learn more about the details. 82/

On June 13, Saigon replied to the State request for specific proposals. A MACV study had been completed on point 1 and the RVNAF would be approached. On point 2, it was noted that RF and PF were already under the province chiefs; ARVN would be approached on province command of regulars. A wordy description of "concept" spoke to the remainder of State's ten points. 83/ It provoked a long series of specific questions from Washington about the 8 provinces, asking in short, "How soon can action be initiated?" 84/

On June 25, COMUSMACV sent his request to JCS for an increase of 4,200 U.S. personnel to implement this expanded advisory effort. He viewed these as efforts to "influence the successful planning and execution of the National Pacification Plan." Subsector advisors were to be "a general reinforcement of the pacification effort at district level." 85/ Consequently, the MACV terms of reference for subsector advisors were developed to provide that teams would extend the capabilities of USOM and USIS. Guidance was intentionally not specific.

The same day General Westmoreland reported that, with the Ambassador's concurrence, he had called on General Khanh to discuss three military matters: (1) Augmentation of advisors at battalion level and extension of larger advisory teams to most districts; (2) The urgent need to coordinate pacification efforts in the provinces surrounding Saigon; and (3) The necessity of moving a regiment to Long An (the pacification show-case) as soon as possible. General Khanh's reply was very receptive and agreeable on all matters. 86/

On June 26, Lodge sent his last message as Ambassador reporting that he and General Westmoreland had that day met with General Khanh and had reached "general agreement" on the concept, scope, and organization set forth in the Saigon reply of June 13 (referred to above). 87/

Meanwhile the proposal for a province advisors' fund reappeared in a new form, and won quick approval. USOM agreed that AID should spend \$200,000 from its contingency funds for direct purchase of piasters, to allocate to sector advisors for small expenditures (usually less than \$25 at a time). The funds were to buy local materials and services for projects using AID commodities; and their use was to be coordinated with the Vietnamese Province Chief. 88/ By subsequent US/GVN agreement, all uses of these funds and commodities, and requisitions of the commodities from Saigon warehouses, required unanimous approval of a three-man ("troika") Provincial Coordinating Committee consisting of the Province Chief, the U.S. AID Provincial Representative and the MACV Sector Advisor. The troika sign-off had already applied to the commodities, as the means to the U.S. veto on their use mentioned above in Section 1. Except for a high-level agreement each year on the size and overall allocation of these resources,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Saigon allowed the Provinces full freedom of action in their use. The intent of this arrangement was to permit prompt action on urgent projects, unaffected by the delays in the GVN administration that plagued regular GVN operations. It also interfered with corrupt misuse of the AID commodities and of purchase plasters.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR'S FIRST SEVEN MONTHS:

Planning for "Bomb North" Amid Turbulence in the South

1. Ambassador Taylor's Initiation, July, 1964

Ambassador Taylor arrived in Saigon amid the start of planning to extend the war outside the borders of South Vietnam. Rusk had discussed the options with Khanh on June 1, and the participants of the Honolulu Conference had mulled them over further. Although there was no formal decision to recommend new operations in Laos or North Vietnam, there was an atmosphere of expectation. A joint State-Defense message on June 27 authorized joint planning with the Vietnamese Joint General Staff for cross border operations in Laos; on June 30, Westmoreland discussed it with General Khiem, who agreed to initiate joint planning. 1/

Taylor came with a letter of support from the President that cleared up any previous doubt about the Ambassador's control over MACV:

"I want you to have this formal expression not only of my confidence but of my desire that you have and exercise full responsibility for the effort of the United States in South Vietnam...I wish it clearly understood that this overall responsibility includes the whole military effort in South Vietnam and authorizes the degree of command and control that you consider appropriate." 2/

Either the letter was intended to prevent confusion of authority such as existed among Lodge, Felt, and Harkins, or the expectation of greater militarization of the war made it appropriate to appoint Taylor Ambassador and to give him unchallenged authority.

Taylor met Khanh and presented his credentials on July 8. Khanh promised him "the frank cooperation of a soldier." He said the U.S. should not merely advise, but should participate in making and implementing plans; in this he still held the view he had expressed to Taylor when he, Khanh, was still a Corps Commander. (By referring to Zorthian's contacts with the Minister of Information, Khanh made it clear he had the brain trust idea in mind.) However, he noted that this degree of involvement should be kept secret, because of the criticism it would attract if known. They discussed Minh's trips around the country, and agreed these were useful and constructive. Finally, Taylor stressed the importance of Vietnamese unity and resolve. 3/

The next day Taylor called on the three Vice Premiers, Hoan, Do Mau, and Oanh, and received the civilian point of view. Hoan did most



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of the talking, saying that civilian politicians like himself wanted the Army to be supported by the people, but that Khanh and the MRC were difficult to work with: The ruling generals control everything. He said the II Corps Commander lived like a playboy, and that the people were outraged; "ever since we came to power we have been telling population we are soon going to have change, but it never comes. The people are becoming impatient." Moreover, he said, something must be done to raise the standard of behavior of the armed forces toward the population. Taylor received these views diplomatically. 4/

For a while there was a serious effort to go through with close meshing of USOM and GVN planning. On July 17 USOM met with Khanh, Hoan, Oanh and others as a group, which Khanh designated the National Security Council. They discussed joint planning and further meshing of US/GVN organizations, putting the stamp of approval on the arrangement in the Ministry of Information. On July 23 Taylor met Khanh and discussed a second meeting of the NSC. Khanh said the Vietnamese had some difficulty in adjusting their ministerial organization to the requirements of meshing with the U.S. mission subdivisions. Taylor responded that reciprocal adjustments were possible. 5/ Planning and discussion of cross-border operations continued actively. Offensive guerrilla operations in Laos were a major idea; small operations had already begun into North Vietnam, under OPLAN 34A. In the meeting on July 23, Khanh told Taylor he wanted to intensify the operations under 34A and to start air strikes against North Vietnam. He said again, as he had to Rusk on June 1, that he didn't like to look forward to the long, indecisive pull of the in-country pacification program, and doubted that the Army and the people would carry on indefinitely. 6/

The events of July 19-23 made it clear that GVN was straining at the leash; it started public lobbying for cross-border operations. On July 19 Air Marshal Ky spilled the beans to reporters on plans for operations into Laos. Khanh committed a similar indiscretion at a "Unification Rally" on the 19th, and these were followed by GVN press releases and editorials in the Saigon press urging a "march to the North." All these leaks directly violated Khanh's promises to Rusk on June 1 (above, p. 24). Taylor spoke to Khanh sharply about them, and pointed out that they could be interpreted as a campaign to force the USG's hand. Khanh insisted that such a campaign was the furthest thing from his mind; and then confirmed that it was exactly what he had in mind. Following a long, eloquent repetition of his remarks of other occasions on Vietnamese war-weariness, he asked: Why does not the USG recognize that the appearance of North Vietnamese draftees among the prisoners taken in the I Corps meant that the war had entered a new phase and the USG and GVN must respond with new measures? He said Vietnamese spirits had been raised by President Johnson's firm statements earlier in the year (specifically, Los Angeles, January 21), but that following them nothing had happened. The effect was wearing off, and the communists would conclude they were only words. Then Khanh took the offensive and complained to Taylor that U.S. officials were contradicting him

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

in public statements. For example, MACV had denied that there was an invasion of I Corps by DRV units, as Khanh had claimed in a speech at Danang. Zorthian soothed him by saying that MACV merely corrected a misquotation of one of MACV's own officials; Taylor said no U.S. official would knowingly contradict Khanh. 7/

Taylor took all this patiently, as he did an intelligence report that said Khanh was trying to incite the USG to action against North Vietnam. (The report also said that Ky was saying privately that the GVN should go it alone, because the USG was stalling on account of the U.S. election.) USOM conjectured that Goldwater's nomination had precipitated the "go North" movement. Moreover, within two hours after Khanh's long meeting with Taylor, the Ministry of Defense let fly another press release in the teeth of USOM disapproval, when Khanh ordered the Ministry to reject Zorthian's suggested changes. The only explanation offered was that GVN was extremely sensitive about appearing to be a U.S. puppet. 8/

In an analysis of these events, Taylor argued for tolerance and patience with GVN, and showed no hint of a desire to get tough. He noted that political sniping and maneuvering pressed Khanh to do something dramatic to bolster his support. Taylor feared the GVN might get tired and want to negotiate if they could not get the U.S. more involved. He proposed joint contingency planning for bombing North Vietnam as a means to cool GVN off and to reopen communications with them. 9/

In a long conversation on July 24 Khanh discussed his political problems with Taylor and asked him point blank if he should resign. Taylor flatly said no, that the USG still supported him and definitely wanted no further change in GVN. Khanh then asked for a declaration of support and for pressure on the generals to continue to support him; Taylor agreed. (Comment: Much of Khanh's political problem still revolved around Minh, who had long had good relations with Taylor. This relationship may have worried Khanh, and led him to approach Taylor in this way. However, it may have merely been a way to keep up the pressure on USG on the matter of bombing North. A couple of days later Khanh was again grumbling publicly about being a U.S. puppet.) 10/

In response to Taylor's discussion of GVN motives and of ways to make them happy, State authorized him to tell Khanh the USG had considered attacks on North Vietnam that might begin, for example, if the pressure from dissident South Vietnamese factions became too great. He must keep this confidential. It said to tell him that the USG position had not changed, and that it never excluded the possibility of wider action. When Taylor brought this matter to Khanh for discussion, they first agreed on a GVN announcement of an increase in U.S. personnel and discussed the press leaks on going North. Khanh then took the offensive, complaining to Taylor about press stories suggesting the USG was negotiating with the Chinese through the Pakistani Government, behind the back of GVN. Taylor soothed him by saying that the USG was merely letting China know how firm our policy was. When Taylor asked Khanh his views of U.S. policy, Khanh

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

said he wanted pressure on the North, meaning a bombing campaign. Taylor replied with the position that State had authorized on joint planning. Khanh acted pleased and surprised, promised to think it over, and promised to hold it tightly. He also said he wanted to reorganize GVN to strengthen his own position; Taylor asked for specifics, and urged him not to do anything drastic that would stir up trouble. 11/

2. The Tonkin Incidents and the Policy Prognoses, August, 1964

Within a week, North Vietnamese PT boats attacked the U.S. destroyer Maddox, in admitted retaliation for an attack by South Vietnamese boats on two North Vietnamese islands. Then a disputed further attack of North Vietnamese PT boats on the Maddox and the Turner Joy on August 4 provoked a U.S. retaliatory raid on the main North Vietnamese PT boat base and its support facilities. The raids lifted GVN's spirits, as expected, and encouraged Khanh to clamp down internally. On August 7, he proclaimed a state of emergency, the idea he had been discussing for some time with both Lodge and Taylor. He reimposed censorship and restricted movement; but he left politicians and potential coup-plotters alone. 12/ Also on August 7, the U.S. Congress in joint session passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

On August 8, Westmoreland discussed overall joint planning with Khanh; the question of combined command came up, and Westmoreland mentioned the example of Korea. Both agreed to postpone this issue. 13/

On August 14, State directed Saigon to avoid actions that could be called provocative, like the DESOTO patrols (which the Maddox and the Turner Joy had been doing when attacked) and 34A operations. State noted that the U.S. retaliatory raid's effect on GVN's morale would be temporary, and took a pessimistic view of the USOM reports:

"Mission's montly report (Saigon 377) expresses hope of significant gains by end of year. But also says Khanh's chances of staying in power are only 50-50, that leadership... has symptoms defeatism and hates prospect of slugging it out within country, that there will be mounting pressures for wider action 'which, if resisted, will create frictions and irritations which could lead local politicians to serious consideration negotiated solution or local soldiers to military adventure without U.S. consent'...Our actions of last week lifted...morale temporarily, but also aroused expectations, and morale could easily sag back again if VC have successes and we do nothing further."

The cable went on to state that an essential element of U.S. policy was, to devise the best possible means of action -- minimum risks for maximum results in terms of SVN morale and pressure on DRV. In the context of a possible new Geneva conference on Laos, its prognosis was that pressure on the North would be the main vehicle for success:



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"Basically solution in both South Vietnam and Laos will require combination military pressure and some form of communication under which Hanoi (and Peiping) eventually accept idea of getting out. Negotiation without continued military action will not achieve our objectives in foreseeable future...After, but only after, we have established clear pattern pressure hurting DRV and leaving no doubts in South Vietnam of our resolve, we could even accept conference broadened to include Vietnam issue." (Underlining in original.)

On the touchy aspect of US/GVN relations, it simply said:

"Joint US/GVN planning already covers possible actions against DRV and the Panhandle. It can be used in itself to maintain morale of GVN leadership, as well as to control and inhibit any unilateral GVN moves." 14/

The Taylor reply to the above message differed only in emphasis.

"...Underlying our analysis is the apparent assumption of DepTel 439 (which we believe is correct) that the present in-country pacification plan is not enough in itself to maintain National morale or to offer reasonable hope of eventual success. Something must be added in the coming months.

"Statement of the problem - A. The course which U.S. policy in South Vietnam should take during the coming months can be expressed in terms of four objectives. The first and most important objective is to gain time for the Khanh government to develop a certain stability and to give some firm evidence of viability. Since any of the courses of action considered in this cable carry a considerable measure of risk to the U.S., we should be slow to get too deeply involved in them until we have a better feel of the quality of our ally. In particular, if we can avoid it, we should not get involved militarily with North Vietnam and possibly with Red China if our base in South Vietnam is insecure and Khanh's Army is tied down everywhere by the VC insurgency. Hence, it is to our interest to gain sufficient time not only to allow Khanh to prove that he can govern, but also to free Saigon from the VC threat which presently rings it and assure that sufficient GVN ground forces will be available to provide a reasonable measure of defense against any DRV ground reaction which may develop in the execution of our program and thus avoid the possible requirement for a major U.S. ground force commitment.

"A second objective in this period is the maintenance of morale in South Vietnam, particularly within the Khanh government. This should not be difficult in the case of the government if we can give Khanh assurance of our readiness to bring added pressure on Hanoi if he provides evidence of ability



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

to do his part. Thirdly, while gaining time for Khanh, we must be able to hold the DRV in check and restrain a further buildup of Viet Cong strength by way of infiltration from the North. Finally, throughout this period, we should be developing a posture of maximum readiness for a deliberate escalation of pressure against North Vietnam, using January 1, 1965, as a target D-Day. We must always recognize, however, that events may force us to advance D-Day to a considerably earlier date..."

"In approaching the Khanh Government, we should express our willingness to Khanh to engage in planning and eventually to exert intense pressure on North Vietnam, providing certain conditions are met in advance. In the first place before we would agree to go all out against the DRV, he must stabilize his Government and make some progress in cleaning up his operational backyard. Specifically, he must execute the initial phases of the Hop Tac Plan successfully to the extent of pushing the Viet Cong from the doors of Saigon. The overall pacification program, including Hop Tac, should progress sufficiently to allow earmarking at least three division equivalents for the Defense in I Corps if the DRV step up military operations in that area.

"Finally, we should reach some fundamental understandings with Khanh and his Government concerning war aims. We must make clear that we will engage in action against North Vietnam only for the purpose of assuring the security and independence of South Vietnam within the territory assigned by the 1954 agreements; that we will not repeat not join in a crusade to unify the North and South; that we will not repeat not even seek to overthrow the Hanoi Regime provided the latter will cease its efforts to take over the South by subversive warfare.

"With these understandings reached, we would be ready to set in motion the following:

(1) Resume at once 34A (with emphasis on Marine operations) and Desoto patrols. These could start without awaiting outcome of discussions with Khanh.

(2) Resume U-2 overflights over all NVN.

(3) Initiate air and ground strikes in Laos against infiltration targets as soon as joint plans now being worked out with the Khanh Government are ready..."

"Before proceeding beyond this point, we should raise the level of precautionary military readiness (if not already done) by taking such visible measures as introducing U.S. hawk units to Danang and Saigon, landing a Marine force

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

at Danang for defense of the airfield and beefing up MACV's support base. By this time (assumed to be late fall) we should have some reading on Khanh's performance.

"Assuming that his performance has been satisfactory and that Hanoi has failed to respond favorably, it will be time to embark on the final phase of course of action A, a carefully orchestrated bombing attack on NVN, directed primarily at infiltration and other military targets...

"Pros and cons of course of action -- A. If successful, course of action A will accomplish the objectives set forth at the outset as essential to the support of U.S. policy in South Vietnam. I will press the Khanh Government into doing its homework in pacification and will limit the diversion of interest to the out-of-country ventures... It gives adequate time for careful preparation estimated at several months, while doing sufficient at once to maintain internal morale. It also provides ample warning to Hanoi and Peking to allow them to adjust their conduct before becoming over-committed.

"On the other hand, course of action A relies heavily upon the durability of the Khanh Government. It assumes that there is little danger of its collapse without notice or of its possible replacement by a weaker or more unreliable successor... Also, because of the drawn-out nature of the program, it is exposed to the danger of international political pressure to enter into negotiations before NVN is really hurting from the pressure directed against it.

"Statement of the Problem -- B. It may well be that the problem of U.S. policy in SVN is more urgent than that depicted in the foregoing statement. It is far from clear at the present moment that the Khanh Government can last until January 1, 1965, although the application of course of action A should have the effect of strengthening the Government internally and of silencing domestic squabbling. If we assume, however, that we do not have the time available which is implicit in course of action A (several months), we would have to restate the problem in the following terms. Our objective avoid the possible consequences of a collapse of National morale. To accomplish these purposes, we would have to open the campaign against the DRV without delay, seeking to force Hanoi as rapidly as possible to desist from aiding the VC and to convince the DRV that it must cooperate in calling off the VC insurgency.

"Course of action -- B. To meet this statement of the problem, we need an accelerated course of action, seeking to

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

obtain results faster than under course of action A. Such an accelerated program would include the following actions:

"Again we must inform Khanh of our intentions, this time expressing a willingness to begin military pressures against Hanoi at once providing that he will undertake to perform as in course of action A. However, U.S. action would not await evidence of performance.

"Again we may wish to communicate directly on this subject with Hanoi or awaiting effect of our military actions. The scenario of the ensuing events would be essentially the same as under Course A but the execution would await only the readiness of plans to expedite, relying almost exclusively on U.S. military means.

"Pros and cons of Course of Action B. This course of action asks virtually nothing from the Khanh Government, primarily because it is assumed that little can be expected from it. It avoids the consequence of the sudden collapse of the Khanh Government and gets underway with minimum delay the punitive actions against Hanoi. Thus, it lessens the chance of an interruption of the program by an international demand for negotiations by presenting a fait accompli to international critics. However, it increases the likelihood of U.S. involvement in ground action, since Khanh will have almost no available ground forces which can be released from pacification employment to mobile resistance of DRV attacks.

"Conclusion: It is concluded that Course of Action A offers the greater promised achievement of U.S. policy objectives in SVN during the coming months. However, we should always bear in mind the fragility of the Khanh Government and be prepared to shift quickly to Course of Action B if the situation requires. In either case, we must be militarily ready for any response which may be initiated by NVN or by CHICOMS.

"Miscellaneous: As indicated above, we believe that 34A operations should resume at once at maximum tempo, still on a covert basis; similarly, Desoto patrols should begin advance operating outside 12-mile limit. We concur that a number of VNAF pilots should be trained on B-57's between now and first of year. There should be no change now with regard to policy on evacuation of U.S. dependents.

"Recommendations: It is recommended that USG adopt Course of Action A while maintaining readiness to shift to Course of Action B." 15/



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

3. The Rise and Fall of Khanh's Constitution

In a state of euphoria after the U.S. reprisals, Khanh broached the subject of a new constitution with Taylor on August 12; presumably this was what he had in mind on July 27 when he mentioned reorganization (above, p. 34). He proposed three branches of government beneath the MRC. The Assembly would have 90 appointed members and 60 elected; Khanh would be the President (and Minh wouldn't). Taylor urged Khanh to go slowly, and to handle the matter gently. Taylor feared renewed political instability if sweeping government changes were announced; but Khanh said that the country could not progress under the existing government. Taylor expressed his scepticism, but objected no further than to caution Khanh on the need to explain these changes adequately in advance. 16/

On August 14, after an NSC joint planning session, Khanh showed Taylor a rough English translation of his proposed new constitution. Taylor expressed reservations:

"We found it brusque in language and suggested to Khanh that in present form it could raise criticism in U.S. and world press. We stressed to him that internal problems of acceptance in Vietnam were his own affair, and we could only offer observations on the objective issue of international reactions."

Khanh allowed Sullivan and Manful to work briefly with his drafting committee, the same day, but they worked in such haste that they had little influence. Taylor commented:

"We conclude that Khanh and his military colleagues have decided that this sort of change is indispensable. It is of course still not determined what General Minh's view will be. We have considered possibility of seeking legal aid from Washington to review this charter, but feel this would not repeat not be useful because this document departs so widely from U.S. experience and because time is so short, we have decided that our best efforts would be devoted to (1) making wording of document less brusque and more palatable both in VN and abroad, and (2) assisting in proclamation and other sources of public relations nature explaining necessity for this sort of change. Whether we like it or not, this is the constitutional form which the MRC repeat MRC fully intends to impose, and we see no repeat no alternative but to make the best of it." 17/

When Khanh secured MRC approval of the final draft on August 16, they also elected him President, displacing Minh. Khanh had earlier complained to Taylor that he had kept Minh, a big source of trouble to him, only at Lodge's urging, as indeed he had. 18/ Inasmuch as Khanh had seized power using charges against four generals and using unproved allegations against Minh,



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

and inasmuch as Minh was still a popular figure, Khanh was bound to regard Minh as a threat to his personal prospects. 19/

For several days following the announcement of the new constitution, a head of steam built up among students and Buddhists. There is no sign that the Embassy did anything to anticipate or head off the coming trouble, other than the previously mentioned words of caution that Khanh disregarded. On August 21, student demonstrations broke out. Violence built up in the streets, organized and orchestrated by the Buddhists and the VC. 20/

Taylor called on Khanh on August 24 in his Dalat retreat to tell him how seriously the Embassy viewed the demonstrations. The discussion revolved around "public information" and completion of arrangements for the new government. Khanh agreed to announce the members of the new government by Thursday, the 27th, and to meet the Buddhist leadership to hear their complaints and to try to enlist their help. He also promised to meet some student demands, to crack down on the demonstrations, and to enforce the old mobilization decrees plus new ones.

State responded to these events with a public announcement of support for Khanh in more direct language than any previously used:

"The United States government fully recognizes the need for national unity in South Vietnam and is, therefore, supporting the Khanh government as the best means of building such unity at the same time that the war effort is being prosecuted. Obviously anything of a divisive nature is neither in the interest of the Vietnamese government nor its people." 21/

That evening Khanh met three top Buddhists leaders in Saigon, after they refused to go to Dalat. Their principal demands, among eight, were the immediate abrogation of the August 16 charter and the holding of free elections by November 1, 1965. Khanh made the mistake of telling them he would have to consult the Americans.

Taylor and others met Khanh at 1:00 a.m. August 25. Observing diplomatic propriety, Taylor said his tentative personal views as an interested third party were that Khanh should not knuckle under to a minority group on such an important issue as the August 16 charter, especially under an ultimatum. Khanh agreed and proposed to issue a more limited proclamation immediately (which he did at 5:00 a.m.) that would meet certain concerns of the Buddhists and students. 22/

Khanh's proclamation promised to revise the constitution, diminish censorship, rectify local abuses of government, and permit orderly demonstrations. The Buddhists and students were not satisfied; they formed a mob outside his office, to which he spoke briefly without further concession. The mob failed to disperse, and the authorities left them alone. Then without advance notice, military headquarters (Khanh) announced that afternoon that Khanh had resigned, that the August 16 charter would be

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

withdrawn, and that the MRC would meet the next day to choose a new Chief of State and would then dissolve itself. 23/

Taylor had made it clear to Minh, Khiem, Lam and Khanh that the U.S. favored retaining Khanh as head of the GVN. Both Tri Quang and Tam Chau, fearing a Dai Viet takeover, supported Khanh. Aligned against Khanh were elements of the military angered by Khanh's "down with military dictatorship" statement made from a truck top and the Dai Viet (including Khiem, Hoan and Minh) angered by his appeasement of the Buddhists. 24/

On August 26 and 27, the MRC met, while violence erupted in the streets of Saigon. The evening of the 27th they announced that a triumvirate consisting of Generals Khanh, Minh, and Khiem would rule as an interim government while they tried to form a new one. Khanh withdrew to Dalat, and Vice-Premier Oanh became acting Prime Minister. Violence continued, and coup rumors became especially active. 25/

On August 29, a State Department official briefed the press, interpreting events. He said Buddhists and students interpreted the August 16 charter as a return to Diemism and repression; in meeting their demands the MRC had worried some Catholics, but balanced things out by creating the triumvirate with all views represented. He said the charter had not been the USG's idea, but that we had been consulted and had urged delay. The demonstrations did not contain appreciable anti-Americanism, he said, nor did they arise from differences between the "go North" feelings of the military and refugee Catholics, on the one hand, and neutralist sentiments of students and Buddhists, on the other. However, the cable reporting the press conference to the Embassy showed concern on both these latter points. 26/

#### 4. GVN Acquires a Civilian Flavor, and the USG Reviews Priorities

On August 29th, Vietnamese paratroopers armed with bayonets restored order in Saigon. Khanh rested in Dalat; Taylor called on him on the 31st to try to persuade him to return to Saigon quickly to prove he was in charge. Westmoreland went to see Khanh the next day to urge him to keep ARVN on the offensive and to press on with Hop Tac and other pacification; in exchange for reassurances, Westmoreland revised a previous position 27/ and promised that U.S. advisors through MACV would alert Khanh to unusual troop movements. Westmoreland also obtained reassurances from General Khiem. Rusk suggested a letter from President Johnson urging Khanh to return to Saigon, and then cabled the text of such a letter. A Dai Viet coup attempt was blocked by the junior members of the MRC, who had now become powerful. Several Generals went to Dalat to persuade Khanh to return as Prime Minister, which he promised to do in a few days. Khanh did return to Saigon on September 4. 28/ Minh was to be chairman of the triumvirate, and would appoint a new High National Council to represent all elements in the population. The Council was to prepare a new constitution and return the government to civilian leadership within a month or so. Khanh was taking the line that he wanted to get the Army out of politics. When Taylor cautioned Khanh, just before the latter's return to Saigon, that an all-civilian government

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

would be too weak and would tend toward neutralism, Khanh replied that the Army would be vigilant. Taylor again advised Khanh to lay the groundwork better before any more changes in government structure. When the Triumvirate announced the creation of the NHC, they also ended the state of emergency and press censorship, which they had declared on September 6. 29/

On the morning of September 6, as he was leaving for Washington, Taylor sent Rusk a full review of the crisis and of its effects on the Embassy-State military and political appraisal of mid-August. He said that the USG now had to give up on the idea of using a plan for pressures on the North as leverage to get the GVN to press on with pacification, and should go ahead with these pressures in the hope that they would raise Vietnamese morale enough to keep up their war effort:

"...While we must be disappointed by the political turmoil of recent days, we cannot consider it totally unexpected. The very nature of the social, political and ethnic confusion in this country makes governmental turbulence of this type a factor which we will always have with us.

"What has emerged from these recent events is a definition within fairly broad limits of the degree to which perfectability in government can be pushed. It should be remembered that the recent fracas started when Khanh sought to make his broad and cumbersome government more tractable and more effective. His motives were of the best even though his methods were clumsy. But now, after this recent experience at government improvement we must accept the fact that an effective government, much beyond the capacity of that which has existed over the past several months, is unlikely to survive. We now have a better feel for the quality of our ally and for what we can expect from him in terms of ability to govern. Only the emergence of an exceptional leader could improve the situation and no George Washington is in sight.

"Consequently, we can and must anticipate for the future an instrument of government which will have definite limits of performance. At the very worst, it will continue to seek a broadened consensus involving and attempting to encompass all or most of the minority of popular front. This amalgam, if it takes form, may be expected in due course to become susceptible to an accommodation with the liberation front, which might eventually lead to a collapse of all political energy behind the pacification effort.

"At best, the emerging governmental structure might be capable of maintaining a holding operation against the Viet Cong. This level of effort could, with good luck and strenuous American efforts, be expanded to produce certain limited pacification successes, for example, in the territory covered by the Hop Tac plan. But the willingness and ability of such a government to exert itself or to attempt to execute an all-out



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

National pacification plan would be marginal. It would probably be incapable of galvanizing the people to the heightened level of unity and sacrifice necessary to carry forward the counter-insurgency program to final success. Instead, it would look increasingly to the United States to take the major responsibility for prying the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese off the backs of the South Vietnamese population. The politicians in Saigon and Hue feel today that the political hassle is their appropriate arena: The conflict with the VC belongs to the Americans.

"We may, therefore, expect to find ourselves faced with a choice of (A) passively watching the development of a popular front, knowing that this may in due course require the U.S. to leave Vietnam in failure; or (B) actively assuming increased responsibility for the outcome following a time-schedule consistent with our estimate of the limited viability of any South Vietnamese government.

"An examination of our total world responsibilities and the significance of Vietnam in relationship to them clearly rules out the option of accepting course (A). If we leave Vietnam with our tail between our legs, the consequences of this defeat in the rest of Asia, Africa and Latin America would be disastrous. We therefore would seem to have little choice left except to accept course (B).

"Our previous views on the right course of action to follow in South Vietnam are set forth in EMBTEL 465. The discussion in this present cable amounts to a recognition that course of action A repeat A of EMBTEL 465 no longer corresponds with the realities of the situation. Recent events have revealed the weakness of our ally and have convinced us of the improbability of attaining the level of governmental performance desired under course A before embarking on a campaign of pressure against the DRV. We are forced back on course of action B with certain revised views on timing."

He went on to recommend that escalating pressures on the DRV begin around December 1. 30/

Taylor brought with him General Westmoreland's assessment of the military situation; it included a look at the political situation from a completely different viewpoint from Taylor's:

"...1. In preparation for your trip to Washington, I thought it might be useful to give you my assessment of the military situation. In subsequent paragraphs I outline in some detail the rather substantial progress which we have



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

already made and, more importantly, the great potential for additional progress. I also describe military problem areas. These, as you know, are many; but all are susceptible to solution assuming that political stability can be achieved, and that armed forces, particularly the Army, remains intact and unified in its purpose. Under the present circumstances, however, the continued solidarity of the armed forces is in doubt. As all else depends on holding the armed forces together, I address this matter first.

"The Key Military Issue.

"2. It seems to me there are certain conditions which must be met in order to preserve the structure and effectiveness of the RVNAF:

A. The officers of the RVNAF must be protected against purge, solely by reason of religious or political affiliation. The Commander in Chief, the officers of the Joint General Staff and commanders down the line, must be given some assurance that their careers and reputations will not be sacrificed, for political expediency to the ambitions or interests of political or religious blocs.

B. The Officers' Corps must be assured that its members will not be punished or expelled from the armed forces if they faithfully execute the orders of constituted authority in connection with the maintenance of law and order. They must be assured that their superiors will not accede to the arbitrary demands of pressure groups whose interest it is to destroy the discipline of the armed forces and to render ineffective the forces of law and order.

"3. If I interpret correctly the events of the past two weeks, neither of these minimum conditions have been met. To the contrary, actions best calculated to destroy the morale, the unity, the pride and confidence of the armed forces have transpired in a manner which leads me to believe that a relative free hand has been given to those who aim to destroy the armed forces. The demands of the Buddhists for the resignation of the Commander in Chief, the Chief of Staff, Commander of II Corps, the Prefect of Saigon and the Director of National Police, to name a few, appear to be blows directed at the heart of the security forces which stand between the Viet Cong and victory. I cannot believe that it is in the interests of the Nation to accede to these demands. To the contrary, I am persuaded that acceptance is a formula for political and military disaster. While aware that the insurgency cannot be overcome by military means alone, I am equally aware that without a strong military foundation no program will ever achieve

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

victory. I am concerned that the Government of Vietnam has already moved some distance down the wrong road in dealing with its Armed Forces. I do not know whether the Armed Forces will collapse or whether, finding the present course intolerable, they will make a desperate move to regain power. Neither course of action is compatible with the objective we seek." 31/

In Washington, Taylor, Rusk, McNamara and Wheeler reached a consensus that (1) Khanh and GVN were too exhausted to be thinking about moves against the North, (2) GVN needs reassurance, and (3) Khanh is likely to stay in control, but not to get much done on the pacification program. 32/ There followed NSAM 314, whose main point was that "first order of business at present is to take actions which will help strengthen the fabric of the GVN." 33/

5. The HNC Goes to Work Amid Further Turbulence

Helping strengthen the fabric of GVN proved to be easier said than done.

Another coup attempt on September 13 failed when Ky and Thi, along with other young officers, supported the existing government. The USG opposed the coup, and also opposed overt violence to suppress it; in particular, USG opposed VNAF bombing of Saigon, which was threatened at one point when the coup generals gained control of much of the city. 34/ When Khanh and Ky asked for U.S. Marines, the USG refused; State authorized a strong line in favor of the Triumvirate, and against internecine war:

- "(A) It is imperative that there not be internecine war within VN Armed Forces.
- (B) The picture of petty bickering among VN leaders has created an appalling impression abroad.
- (C) The U.S. has not provided massive assistance to SVN, in military equipment, economic resources and personnel, in order to subsidize continuing quarrels among SVN leaders...
- (G) Emphasize that VN leaders must not take the U.S. for granted.

"2. In line with above you should make it emphatically clear whenever useful, that we do not believe a Phat/Duc government can effectively govern the country or command the necessary popular support to carry forward the effort against the VC. U.S. support for the GVN is based on the triumvirate and its efforts to bring about a broadly based and effective government satisfactorily reflecting the interests and concerns of all groups." 35/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

After the coup failed, the Embassy pressed Khanh to exile the coup leaders quietly; and in the upshot they were acquitted of the charges against them. 36/

A fresh problem blew up on September 20 when Rhade tribesmen in four CIDG camps advised by U.S. Special Forces revolted against Saigon's authority. It arose from a long-festering mistrust and contempt between the Montagnards, encouraged by the VC, and the lowland Vietnamese. This problem also vexed US/GVN relations, because the U.S. Special Forces advisors generally got along well with the tribesmen, and some may have sympathized with them; and in particular, it added to Khanh's suspicions of U.S. intentions. Two or three Rhades had become officers in ARVN, and Westmoreland suggested using them as intermediaries with the rebelling units; but Khanh turned the idea down flat. He also declined to make concessions to Montagnard discontent. Then Taylor sent General DePuy as his intermediary to tell the Rhades they were off the payroll until they submitted to GVN authority. This move produced a temporary settlement, but trouble continued to boil up for another two or three weeks. 37/

The High National Council began its deliberations on September 24; Taylor took the occasion to comment that Khanh conceded too much to organized pressure groups. Noting that GVN effectiveness and morale had virtually collapsed, he disliked the purely civilian makeup of the Council, and hoped that it would take its time about writing a permanent constitution. GVN set a deadline of October 27 for this exercise. 38/ Watching on the sidelines, here as at other times, Taylor opposed unsettling change, and opposed excessive civilian influence because of their presumed factionalism and lack of fervor in prosecuting the war.

#### 6. The HNC Installs Civilian Leadership, October, 1964

The view that bombing the North was the key to success received a fresh airing, this time in a public revelation of what USG was thinking. Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy said in a speech delivered in Tokyo on September 30 that such bombing would cut down the threat to GVN in a matter of months.

Early in October, Khanh succeeded in exiling General Khiem, a member of the triumvirate; whom he had suspected of instigating the September 13 coup attempt; Khiem became Ambassador to the U.S. 39/

As the HNC deliberated, State sent Taylor its guidance on the USG position during the formation of the new government-to-be:

"1. We concur that we must...avoid any public espousal of charter or people, although we will undoubtedly be charged in any event with considerable responsibility for the selection of the form and personnel of any new government...We cannot privately disclaim any preference for individuals or form of government because of our intense interest in seeing a new government having sound organization, able members, and broad basis of popular support. We also



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

want to avoid any private impression that we are dumping Khanh and that as far as we are concerned everything is up for grabs...

"2. As seen from here, evolving political situation in Saigon contains at least two major problems for U.S. EmbTel 1054 strongly suggests HNC is leaning toward parliamentary form of government with all the weaknesses which were so apparent in the French 4th Republic. The second problem, highlighted in EmbTel 983, is to avoid a sharp split between the only real powers in the country, the military, and the civilian HNC. This split could occur over form of government or its personnel. U.S. must try to bring stable government of persons acceptable to both military and civilian."

Then there followed three suggestions on form of government and a paragraph on people.

"7. Finally, there is a delicate problem, during this transition period, in our relations with General Khanh and his military supporters. The present truth is they hold such power as exists in SVN. Their acceptance is prerequisite to any successful constitution of a new government. Our problem is that we must not abandon one horse before there is another horse which can run the course. I would suggest: That you have full and frank discussion with General Khanh about how he sees the development of the situation so that what we ourselves do is in consonance with the consensus among military and civilian leadership which it is now our highest purpose to build...The important thing is that during this period we not find ourselves in a position where there is no one with whom we can work." 40/

Meanwhile, Minh allied himself with the High National Council to put provisions for civilian control in the new constitution opposed by Khanh and the now powerful junior membership of the MRC. Taylor tried to persuade them to resolve their differences quietly, and to make sure a widely acceptable document was cleared all around before publication. Thinking that things were more likely to get worse rather than better, Secretary Rusk suggested that the USG should prefer Khanh and the "Young Turks" to Minh and the HNC:

"Bob McNamara and I have following reaction to political moves you have reported during last week.

"A struggle seems to be developing between Minh and HNC on one hand and Khanh and Young Turk military on the other. Between these two groups it seems to us our best interests are served if Khanh comes out on top...Problem is to get



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

government with Khanh in a leading role, ideally as chief executive unless some strong civilian shows up who is not now apparent. At least Khanh should remain as leader of Army with co-equal position to civilians in a government, whose mandate will run for at least 18 months...We believe it should be made clear that U.S. does not repeat not support Minh as powerful chief executive.

"This is consensus here and we would much appreciate your comment." 41/

Once again the policy was to limit change and to limit civilian influence. Taylor replied:

"The views which you and Bob McNamara express...are very much the same conclusions we have reached and acted upon here." 42/

Minh expected to be the new Chief of State and to name the Prime Minister. Taylor talked to him about the selection problem, saying that he wished to be consulted. Minh asked Taylor's view of Saigon's Mayor Huong and of Minister of the Interior Vien. Taylor diplomatically gave his very high opinion of Vien. 43/ State urged Taylor to use his influence freely while he could still influence the shape of the new government. 44/

The High National Council finished on schedule on October 27, and surprised the Embassy by electing its chairman, Phan Khac Suu, an elderly and respected politician, to be the new Chief of State. Religious group leaders pressured the HNC into this decision at the last minute. Taylor had hoped and expected Minh would be elected; although the action met Khanh's promise in August that the military would get out of politics. Khanh and his cabinet resigned and went into caretaker status. The HNC stayed on as the legislative body. Taylor tried to make the best of it, but protested to Suu about the failure of the HNC to consult him about Suu's election; Suu responded by discussing the composition of the new cabinet with him, naming Huong as Prime Minister. Taylor also gave Suu the usual polite lecture about the need for strong government. State went along reluctantly with the new government; Khanh and the Young Turks also went along. 45/

#### 7. A Quiet November, 1964

At the end of October, the VC staged a mortar attack on the Bien Hoa air base, destroying several U.S. aircraft and killing four Americans. Taylor urged a reprisal bombing like the one in August following the Tonkin Gulf incidents, but Washington declined to approve. Huong told Taylor he hoped the U.S. would respond, in a meeting to consult on Huong's pending cabinet appointments, but the issue was already decided and Taylor had to discourage the idea. 46/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The new cabinet froze out Minh, no doubt to improve the palatability of the new government to the dominant group in the MRC. Minh then packed up and went abroad on a good will tour; Taylor found the cash cost to the U.S. running high, but recommended paying it. 47/ In his overall assessment of the balance of power in the new government, Taylor thought that the MRC had allowed civilians to get power (as promised in August) because the MRC feared mob violence, and thought it expedient to let the civilians make a mess of it so that military rule would again become acceptable. That is, he hoped and expected that a military return to power would become widely acceptable. Taylor thought the overall political prospects were "faintly encouraging." Commenting in reply, State once again emphasized the accepted links between U.S. commitment and GVN morale and efforts:

"A key element in either the immediate program or the long-range course of action will be the nature of our discussions with the GVN. Sullivan has impressed on us the seriousness of SVN doubts as to U.S. intentions...More basically, we believe no course of action can succeed unless we are able to stiffen GVN to set its house in order and take every possible measure for political stability and to push forward the pacification program." 48/

These links received a full airing between Taylor and State and between Taylor and Huong. To State, Taylor said:

"We have had a great deal of discussion here as to the minimum level of government required to justify mounting military pressure against the North. I would describe that minimum government as one capable of maintaining law and order in the urban areas, of securing vital military bases from VC attacks, and giving its efforts with those of USG. As Reference B indicates we do not expect such a government for 3 to 4 months...perhaps not then if the current attempts to chip away at the Huong government continue....However, if the government falters and gives good reason to believe that it will never attain the desired level of performance, I would favor going against the North anyway. The purpose of such an attack would be to give pulmotor treatment for a government in extremis and to make sure that the DRV does not get off unscathed in any final settlement." 49/

In his conversation with Huong, the latter requested:

"That I obtain a reaffirmation of U.S. policy toward VN. Huong referred to U.S. action in Gulf of Tonkin and the lift in morale VN had received at this display of determination by the U.S. to strike against the North. Subsequently, however, U.S. had appeared to emphasize almost exclusively necessity considering war within SVN

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

itself. I responded that reciprocal responsibilities were involved. On the GVN side it was essential that a stable government be established capable of directing affairs of the Nation and particularly of directing the national pacification effort...Should his government demonstrate it was capable of achieving satisfactory degree of government stability and effectiveness a wider range of possibilities would undoubtedly be open for discussion...Huong indicated his complete understanding of the situation." 50/

At this time another case of non-consultation blew up. RVNAF reorganization plans had passed back and forth between the MRC and MACV since July. Then, on November 10, the MRC produced a plan that differed materially from the last one MACV had seen, Huong signed it, and it was published on November 11 before MACV could review it. Westmoreland and Taylor both protested to their respective contacts in the strongest terms; the decrees were withdrawn, changed to MACV's satisfaction, and reissued. 51/

On November 26, Westmoreland squelched an apparent coup planned by Ky. He heard of unusual activity at VNAF headquarters and asked Ky to his office. Ky bluntly stated a case for a change of leadership. Westmoreland said:

"After patiently listening to the foregoing, I informed Ky in no uncertain terms that the U.S. government would not support a change of command by other than orderly and legal process. (This statement was cleared in advance with Ambassador Johnson.) Ky was obviously impressed by my statement and said that he would not take action for three months, but if the situation continued to deteriorate he would be constrained to act in national interest." 52/

This episode was the first sign of Young Turk action against the new government, and the first recorded sign of Ky's own ambitions. The U.S. reaction underlined the USG's opposition to sudden change without broad support, even though it was expected that the military would return to power eventually.

#### 8. A Lecture And a Program For GVN

NSAM 314, September 10, which had called for actions to strengthen GVN, had set wheels in motion toward spelling out a U.S. program within SVN to complement the contemplated actions against the North. Taylor returned to Washington for consultations at the end of November. In the NSC, he argued that a strong message to GVN about its problems would most likely produce the optimum response. He said a threat by the U.S. to withdraw unless they improve would be too much of a gamble. There was no discussion of intermediate leverage or sanctions between this extreme threat and none at all. The discussion also highlighted the fear that GVN might collapse or be replaced by neutralists who would ask the U.S. to withdraw; all agreed that neutralism could not be accepted, and that



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the U.S. should minimize this risk by full backing of the existing GVN. 53/

Taylor returned to Saigon with an approved statement and program for GVN that embodied his principal recommendations. Its public aspect was an across the board increase in the approved strengths of all elements of RVNAF and the paramilitary, in support of the Hop Tac pacification plan and its outgrowths that had been in the works since July. Its unannounced aspect included a rationale showing a clear shift of emphasis from the views at the highest levels that had developed in the first half of the year. As presented to GVN, it said:

"It was the clear conclusion of the recent review in Washington of the situation in South Vietnam that the unsatisfactory progress being made in the Pacification Program was the result of two primary causes from which many secondary causes stem. The primary cause has been the governmental instability in Saigon, and the second the continued reinforcement and direction of the Viet Cong by the Government of North Vietnam. It was recognized that to change the downward trend of events, it will be necessary to deal adequately with both of these factors.

"However it was the clear view that these factors are not of equal importance. First and above all, there must be a stable, effective Vietnamese Government able to conduct a successful campaign against the Viet Cong even if the aid from North Vietnam for the Viet Cong should end. It was the view that, while the elimination of North Vietnam intervention would raise morale on our side and make it easier for the Government of Vietnam to function, it would not in itself bring an end to Viet Cong insurgency. It would rather be an important contributory factor to the creation of conditions favoring a successful campaign against the Viet Cong within South Vietnam.

"Thus, since action against North Vietnam would only be contributory and not central to winning the war against the Viet Cong, it would not be prudent to incur the risks which are inherent in an expansion of hostilities until there were a government in Saigon capable of handling the serious problems inevitably involved in such an expansion, and capable of promptly and fully exploiting the favorable effects which may be anticipated if we are successful in terminating the support and direction of the Viet Cong by North Vietnam."

Then it went to the point:

"...In the view of the United States, there is a certain minimum condition to be brought about in South Vietnam before new measures against North Vietnam would be either justified or practicable. At the minimum, the Government in Saigon



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

should be able to speak for and to its people who will need special guidance and leadership throughout the coming critical period. The Government should be capable of maintaining law and order in the principal centers of population, assuring their effective execution by military and police forces completely responsive to its authority. The Government must have at its disposal means to cope promptly and effectively with enemy reactions which must be expected to result from any change in the pattern of our operations.

"To bring about this condition will require a demonstration of far greater national unity against the Communist enemy at this critical time than exists at present. It is a matter of greatest difficulty for the United States Government to require great sacrifices by American citizens on behalf of South Vietnam when reports from Saigon repeatedly give evidence of heedless self-interest and shortsightedness among so many major political groups.

As a quid pro quo, it said:

"...While the Government of Vietnam is making progress toward achieving the goals set forth above, the United States Government would be willing to strike harder at infiltration routes in Laos and at sea. With respect to Laos, the United States Government is prepared, in conjunction with the Royal Laos Government, to add United States air power as needed to restrict the use of Laotian territory as a route of infiltration into South Vietnam. With respect to the sea, the United States Government would favor an intensification of those covert maritime operations which have proved their usefulness in harassing the enemy. The United States would regard the combination of these operations in Laos and at sea as constituting Phase I of a measured increase of military pressures directed toward reducing infiltration and warning the Government of North Vietnam of the risks it is running.

"...If the Government of Vietnam is able to demonstrate its effectiveness and capability of achieving the minimum conditions set forth above, the United States Government is prepared to consider a program of direct military pressure on North Vietnam as Phase II...

"As contemplated by the United States Government, Phase II would, in general terms, constitute a series of air attacks on North Vietnam progressively mounting in scope and intensity for the purpose of convincing the leaders of North Vietnam that it is to their interest to cease aid to the Viet Cong and respect the independence and security of South Vietnam..." 54/

In short, the USG offered to add some of its aircraft immediately to the Vietnamese ones already bombing the Laotian corridor, in exchange for a

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

GVN promise of a shift to more energy and effectiveness; then when such energy and effectiveness actually became visible, the USG promised, the USG would begin bombing North Vietnam.

The program included the following areas in which progress would aid pacification and would measure the GVN's effectiveness:

1. and 2. Increasing RVNAF, paramilitary, and police to and above existing authorized strengths.
3. Better performance by civilian and military officials.
4. Speeding up budgetary procedures and spending in the provinces.
5. Strengthening the province chiefs.
6. Strengthening police powers.
7. More vigor in Hop Tac.
8. After a delay, "review cases of political prisoners from previous regimes." 55/

To leave no doubt about what it wanted, the program said:

"Better performance in the prosecution of the war against the Viet Cong needs to be accompanied by actions to convince the people of the interest of their government in their well-being. Better performance in itself is perhaps the most convincing evidence but can be supplemented by such actions as frequent visits by officials and ranking military officers to the provinces for personal orientation and "trouble shooting." The available information media offer a channel of communication with the people which could be strengthened and more efficiently employed. The physical appearance of the cities, particularly of Saigon, shows a let-down in civic pride which, if corrected, would convey a message of governmental effectiveness to their inhabitants. Similarly, in the country an expanded rural development program could carry the government's presence into every reasonably secure village and hamlet.

"If governmental performance and popular appeal are significantly improved, there will be little difficulty in establishing confidence in the government. However, this confidence should be expressed, not merely implied. It is particularly important that the military leaders continue to express public confidence in the government and the firm intention to uphold it. While not giving an impression of submitting to pressure, the government might explore honorable

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

ways of conciliating its most important opponents among the minority groups. The United States Government is prepared to help by oral statements of support and by further assistance to show our faith in the future of South Vietnam." 56/

Taylor, Westmoreland, and Johnson met Huong, Deputy Premier Vien, and Khanh on December 7 to present them with the new U.S. program. The Vietnamese group politely suggested that they did not know what the USG meant by a stable effective government able to campaign successfully against the Viet Cong, and able to speak for and to its people. Moreover, they noted that the U.S. program said nothing about Viet Cong use of Cambodia. At the next meeting, on December 9, Taylor gave them the paper "Actions Designed to Strengthen the Government of Vietnam," covering the eight areas of desired progress and measures of GVN effectiveness listed above. The Prime Minister replied that the issue of political prisoners from previous regimes was a very delicate matter; Khanh said there was no problem about military support of the existing government. Taylor cabled President Johnson that the USG proposals:

"have been received with an understanding reasonable-ness in the light of the current situation but without great enthusiasm since they necessarily omit some of the more dramatic actions which the Vietnamese desire."

The only decisions reached were for joint study and consultation. 57/ This was the last time the USG tried to set GVN performance preconditions for U.S. force use and deployments. Its effect, if any, was the opposite of that intended.

9. The Government's Support Vanishes, and Taylor Confronts the Generals

A new threat of crisis boiled up immediately; first, the leading Buddhists declared their opposition to the government and went on a forty-eight hour hunger strike. Huong stood fast, but then the Young Turks picked a fight through a sudden demand that the HNC dismiss nine generals and thirty other officers. (These included some, like Minh and the "Dalat" generals expelled by Khanh, who no longer had jobs but still held their rank and received Army pay.) Taylor backed Huong and the HNC against all comers, and tried to get Buddhists and others to support them. The HNC refused to retire the 39 officers. But the Young Turks, playing for Buddhist support, would not be denied. In the early morning hours of Sunday, December 20, they arrested twenty-two or more officials and politicians, including several members of the HNC, and made dozens of other political arrests. They also created an "Armed Forces Council" over or replacing the MRC, to consolidate their power. 58/

Through Huong and indirect contacts, Taylor found out about the dissolution of the HNC several hours before Khanh announced it at a press conference; and one hour before the conference Khanh spoke to Taylor about it. Taylor protested in the strongest terms, but without effect; Khanh went ahead with the announcement. Taylor and Johnson also met with the



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Young Turk leaders, Ky, Thieu, Thi, and Cang, and gave them a stern lecture, speaking, as he later put it, "as one soldier to another." As recorded just afterward by the U.S. participants, the meeting went as follows:

"...AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: Do all of you understand English? (Vietnamese officers indicated they did, although the understanding of General Thi was known to be weak.) I told you all clearly at General Westmoreland's dinner we Americans were tired of coups. Apparently I wasted my words. Maybe this is because something is wrong with my French because you evidently didn't understand. I made it clear that all the military plans which I know you would like to carry out are dependent on governmental stability. Now you have made a real mess. We cannot carry you forever if you do things like this. Who speaks for this group? Do you have a spokesman?

"GENERAL KY: I am not the spokesman for the group but I do speak English. I will explain why the Armed Forces took this action last night.

"We understand English very well. We are aware of our responsibilities, we are aware of the sacrifices of our people over twenty years. We know you want stability, but you cannot have stability until you have unity...But still there are rumors of coups and doubts among groups. We think these rumors come from the HNC, not as an organization but from some of its members. Both military and civilian leaders regard the presence of these people in the HNC as divisive of the Armed Forces due to their influence.

"Recently the Prime Minister showed us a letter he had received from the Chairman of the HNC. This letter told the Prime Minister to beware of the military, and said that maybe the military would want to come back to power. Also the HNC illegally sought to block the retirement of the generals that the Armed Forces Council unanimously recommended be retired in order to improve unity in the Armed Forces.

"GENERAL THIEU: The HNC cannot be bosses because of the Constitution. Its members must prove that they want to fight.

"GENERAL KY: It looks as though the HNC does not want unity. It does not want to fight the Communists.

"It has been rumored that our action of last night was an intrigue of Khanh against Minh, who must be retired. Why do we seek to retire these generals? Because they had their chance and did badly...



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"Yesterday we met, twenty of us, from 1430 to 2030. We reached agreement that we must take some action. We decided to arrest the bad members of the HNC, bad politicians, bad student leaders, and the leaders of the Committee of National Salvation, which is a Communist organization. We must put the trouble-making organizations out of action and ask the Prime Minister and the Chief of State to stay in office.

"After we explain to the people why we did this at a press conference, we would like to return to our fighting units. We have no political ambitions. We seek strong, unified, and stable Armed Forces to support the struggle and a stable government. Chief of State Suu agrees with us. General Khanh saw Huong who also agreed.

"We did what we thought was good for this country; we tried to have a civilian government clean house. If we have achieved it, fine. We are now ready to go back to our units.

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: I respect the sincerity of you gentlemen. Now I would like to talk to you about the consequences of what you have done. But first, would any of the other officers wish to speak?

"ADMIRAL CANG: It seems that we are being treated as though we were guilty. What we did was good and we did it only for the good of the country.

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: Now let me tell you how I feel about it, what I think the consequences are: first of all, this is a military coup that has destroyed the government-making process that, to the admiration of the whole world, was set up last fall largely through the statesman-like acts of the Armed Forces.

"You cannot go back to your units, General Ky. Your military are now back in power. You are up to your necks in politics.

"Your statement makes it clear that you have constituted yourselves again substantially as a Military Revolutionary Committee. The dissolution of the HNC was totally illegal. Your decree recognized the Chief of State and the Huong Government but this recognition is something that you could withdraw. This will be interpreted as a return of the military to power...

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: Who commands the Armed Forces? General Khanh?

"GENERAL KY: Yes, sir...

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"GENERAL THIEU: In spite of what you say, it should be noted that the Vietnamese Commander-in-Chief is in a special situation. He therefore needs advisors. We do not want to force General Khanh; we advise him. We will do what he orders...

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: Would your officers be willing to come into a government if called upon to do so by Huong? I have been impressed by the high quality of many Vietnamese officers. I am sure that many of the most able men in this country are in uniform. Last fall when the HNC and Huong Government was being formed, I suggested to General Khanh there should be some military participation, but my suggestions were not accepted. It would therefore be natural for some of them now to be called upon to serve in the government. Would you be willing to do so?...

"GENERAL KY: Nonetheless, I would object to the idea of the military going back into the government right away. People will say it is a military coup.

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR and AMBASSADOR JOHNSON: (Together)  
People will say it anyway....

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: You have destroyed the Charter. The Chief of State will still have to prepare for elections. Nobody believes that the Chief of State has either the power or the ability to do this without the HNC or some other advisory body. If I were the Prime Minister, I would simply overlook the destruction of the HNC. But we are preserving the HNC itself. You need a legislative branch and you need this particular step in the formation of a government with National Assembly...

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: It should be noted that Prime Minister Huong has not accepted the dissolution of the HNC...

"GENERAL THIEU: What kind of concession does Huong want from us?

"Ambassador Taylor again noted the need for the HNC function.

"GENERAL KY: Perhaps it is better if we now let General Khanh and Prime Minister Huong talk.

"GENERAL THIEU: After all, we did not arrest all the members of the HNC. Of nine members we detained only five. These people are not under arrest. They are simply under controlled residence...

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: Our problem now, gentlemen, is to organize our work for the rest of the day. For one thing, the government will have to issue a communique.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"GENERAL THIEU: We will still have a press conference this afternoon but only to say why we acted as we did.

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: I have real troubles on the US side. I don't know whether we will continue to support you after this. Why don't you tell your friends before you act? I regret the need for my blunt talk today but we have lots at stake...

"AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: And was it really all that necessary to carry out the arrests that very night? Couldn't this have been put off a day or two?...

"In taking a friendly leave, Ambassador Taylor said: You people have broken a lot of dishes and now we have to see how we can straighten out this mess." 59/

Amid the hustle and bustle of meetings between MACV officers, Embassy officials, and their Vietnamese counterparts, Khanh and the Young Turks, stood fast. 60/

On the next day, December 21, Taylor suggested to Khanh that he resign and leave the country. This meeting brought to a head the Khanh-Taylor personal feud which then became public and continued for the balance of Khanh's tenure. Taylor's report of the meeting said his suggestion that Khanh leave the country came in response to Khanh's asking whether he should leave. But Khanh told a different story to the AFC, who were still smarting from the sharp interchange that Ky, Thieu, Thi and Cang had had with Taylor. Immediately they accused Taylor of interfering in GVN affairs. Commenting afterward, he said:

"If the military get away with this irresponsible intervention in government and with flaunting proclaimed U.S. policy, there will be no living with them in the future."

State supported Taylor in taking a strong line to bring the situation under control. It approved a Westmoreland proposal, sent by military channels to State, that Huong get the credit for dismissing Khanh and that MACV should bargain with the Armed Forces Council to offer a quid pro quo for reinstating the HNC. State spelled out the quid pro quo in detail:

"In support of your efforts persuade military to at least partially undo damage [Sunday's] actions, we have also been considering possible leverage we might apply in event you conclude it was necessary.

"If dispute continues unresolved, most obvious action might be withholding approval any pending U.S. assistance actions and letting this become known. You are in best position to evaluate whether these would impress generals or

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

conversely hurt Huong's position. In addition, following steps aimed more specifically at military have occurred to us:

1. Suspend operation Barrel Roll -- not certain it would affect generals -- might have wrong impact on Hanoi -- obviously generals couldn't be told because that would imply commitment to resume if they behave.
2. Instruct all or selected Corps or division advisors make known our dissatisfaction, perhaps suspending for time being further contacts with counterparts.
3. Stand down FARMGATE.
4. Suspend logistical airlift where critical supply shortages do not exist.

"On balance, we inclined believe none except possibly 1st and 2nd steps would produce desired results. Obviously any would hamper over-all war effort, especially if continued for very long.

"We have also considered and rejected possibility of cutting essentials POL and direct military supplies. Similarly we do not favor suspension or interruption CIP, since it would primarily affect civilian confidence in Huong government." 61/

Although Khanh talked to Taylor about travel arrangements for himself and several other generals on the 22nd, the Young Turks had their backs up (or were convinced they could do what they pleased), and all stood fast. Khanh having rallied the military behind him, attacked Taylor for his undiplomatic actions. He spoke to the nation attacking communism and colonialism, the latter an inference to the domineering position of Taylor. In a message to the President on the 22nd, Taylor commented:

"Generals acting greatly offended by my disapproval of their recent actions privately expressed to four of their number and resent our efforts to strengthen Huong government against their pressures. One unfortunate effect has been to drive them closer to Khanh who has sensed the opportunity to solidify his position." 62/

He feared Khanh would air the quarrel publicly. Rusk cabled support:

"I wish to compliment you on the vigor with which you have pursued this issue of unity since your return from Washington." 63/



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

But Taylor backed off from the sanctions idea. Possibly still hoping that Khanh would go, he said there was no need for action but that the option should be kept open. In particular, he saw no value in suspending the bombing of Laos. 64/

Also on the 22nd, while talking to Taylor of leaving, Khanh met with the Young Turks and agreed to break openly with Taylor by seeking his recall. State continued to back a tough line with them, and rejected Taylor's suggestion of a diversion in the form of a reprisal bombing on North Vietnam for the Brinks BOQ bombing early in the week.

"Hanoi would hardly read into it any strong or continuing signal in view overall confusion in Saigon...There might be suspicion, at least internationally, that BOQ bombing was not in fact done by VC."

Taylor urged Huong to insist on restoration of the HNC and declare the generals insubordinate if they refused. Khanh and the generals attacked Taylor publicly on December 23, as Taylor had feared, charging him with insulting them and abusing his power. Then on December 24, Taylor responded in kind, telling the press his version of the December 20 confrontation, and suggesting that Khanh had overstayed his usefulness.

Khanh then threatened privately to declare Taylor persona non grata; the Embassy replied that asking Taylor to leave was equivalent to asking the U.S. to leave. The implied threat of U.S. withdrawal was enough to stop the Khanh move, if he was ever serious about it. Taylor then suggested that Alex Johnson and the generals should form an ad hoc joint arbitration committee to resolve the differences between Khanh and Taylor. The idea was evidently novel enough to distract Khanh and the generals or to satisfy their dignity; it disconnected the buttons that had been pushed when Khanh and Taylor each said he wanted the other to leave the country. The ad hoc committee never met, but the proposal generated calm discussion between the Embassy and the generals for several days and allowed them to cool off gracefully. 65/

However, the basic issue of the future of the HNC and of civilian government remained unresolved. Huong consulted with Taylor continuously, and followed some of his advice, but stopped short of taking the strong public stance he urged. On December 31, Taylor said to Washington that the USG might have to accept a military government in Saigon, though he said that Khanh must not head it. He said that plans for "Phase II" (bombing the North) should take into account various possibilities within GVN. 66/ Although Taylor had earlier favored the military's return to power, he objected to the means and to the timing of their present action.

#### 10. Ongoing Programs, Second Half 1964

While the political crises of Ambassador Taylor's first six months in Saigon built up to comic opera proportions, MACV and the country team struggled valiantly to conduct business as usual.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In March, MACV J-1 had completed a comprehensive review of ARVN personnel policies, the Murday Report, and forwarded it to JGS for action. A tally at the end of the year indicated progress on only 16 of 28 specific recommendations. One that received no response was the suggestion that the officer appointment base be expanded. 67/ In May, the Secretary of Defense had ordered COMUSMACV to develop, jointly with GVN, procedures for programming pacification operations with time-phased requirements for manpower and money. A joint, combined (MACV-USOM-GVN) committee was established. It had completed a programming document in June. After approval by RVNAF and MACV, joint US-GVN teams visited each Corps to acquaint selected personnel with the documents. As of August 31, fewer than half the provinces had submitted pacification plans; so the teams again visited each province to reinstruct province chiefs and sector advisors. All province reports were finally received by October. 68/ In July, the first Senior Advisors Monthly Report (SAME) was submitted. These put MACV in a better position to advise, and in October it sent a detailed letter of deficiencies to CINCRVNAF.

A joint combat effectiveness inspection team started its work, and at year's end the ARVN IG faced the question whether the refresher course at the National Training Center was needed for two battalions declared ineffective by COMUSMACV. In October, U.S. advisors to RVNAF units submitted the first semi-annual report of their personal observations of the treatment and use of MAP equipment. Deficiencies were noted in a letter to JGS. In one instance it was found that ordnance vans were being converted into rolling quarters for generals. After a threat to withdraw the vans, the fault was corrected and the vans were returned to their authorized use.

On October 5, COMUSMACV forwarded to the Embassy the report of a month-long study instigated by the Ambassador on how to revitalize the entire civic action program. It recommended that a USOM-USIS-MACV study group develop a joint, integrated mechanism to guide and coordinate civic action. The groups' recommendations were to provide a basis for discussions with the Vietnamese on how best to channel and revitalize the combined civic action effort.

On the subject of command relationships, JCS looked ahead to the possible deployment of U.S. ground forces and anticipated operational control of RVN forces in combined operations. However, that idea would be dropped later. 69/

Following a Taylor-Khanh agreement to launch "Hop Tac" on October 1, USOM and the Vietnamese NSC met on September 25 to discuss pacification, after which Taylor commented:

"In general, I consider the meeting was satisfactory continuation of our bilateral effort and that top priority is at last being given to Hop Tac operation. Also that general result of meeting focused attention on priority problems. The pay-off will be quality of follow-up." 70/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

State suggested decentralization of pacification control to Corps and Province, to bypass the central government; USOM disagreed. MACV contacted all senior RVNAF officers and found them taking a responsible attitude toward continuing the war effort; however, MACV noted that the coup leaders had talked the same way just before the September 13 coup attempt. Therefore MACV was candidly sceptical. 71/

In response, a COMUSMACV memorandum of November 14 entitled "Assumption by US of Operational Control of the Pacification Program in SVN," states his position on the US role and is indicative of his later views on combined command. He recognized that any plan to encourage GVN in its efforts should include measures for developing US approved plans, as well as means for controlling money and people during execution of plans, and he envisaged an arrangement whereby GVN agencies would be provided complete planning guidance. He saw a danger of exerting influence over GVN which might be interpreted as excessive and which might boomerang on US interests. Instead, he suggested, "as a less drastic alternative, the Hop Tac idea might be extended to each of the other three tactical zones."

As discussed more fully in Re-emphasis on Pacification 1965-67, Hop Tac (working together) was formally proposed at a high level in the US government by Ambassador Lodge on his way home in July 1964. Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland implemented the idea. It tied together the pacification plans of the seven provinces around Saigon to insure security and extend government control. A headquarters for US Hop Tac elements was established in Saigon. The Vietnamese set up a parallel organization primarily to satisfy the US, for their group had no authority or influence.

Meanwhile, the US/GVN study and planning activity continued and gave the impression of accomplishment. A US/GVN Survey Team reviewed RVNAF structure requirements for supporting the GVN National Pacification Plan. After visits to each corps headquarters, it proposed two alternative force increases, one to achieve progress in priority one Hop Tac areas, the other to attain more overall progress. On November 24, COMUSMACV formally requested approval of the first alternative from CINCPAC while at the same time the US Embassy recommended approval to the State Department. 72/ Meetings of USOM/NSC mentioned above (pp. 32 and 39) continued till December 5, after which the crisis of the Ambassador's return and its sequel stopped all pretense of joint pacification planning for several weeks. 73/

But the Joint General Staff accepted all MACV suggestions on how RVNAF should be employed to improve the pacification program and issued its implementing Directive A-B 139 as a Christmas present on December 25, 1964, in mid-crisis. 74/

The USMACV staff reviewed the RVN Defense Budget for 1965 and US Mission approval was received in late 1964. However, on order of the Ambassador, due to the political crisis, MACV withheld the budget from GVN until January 13, 1965. 75/



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

11. January 1965: Prelude to the Bombing

The first week of January was filled with comings and goings with the issue of the HNC's dissolution still unresolved. The Embassy supported Huong publicly and privately, but stopped short of threatening U.S. withdrawal and admitted indirectly to Huong that the U.S. might be forced to accept military government. Then on January 7, the generals backed off slightly and reached a compromise solution, which they announced January 9 amid rumors of a military takeover. The Armed Forces Council and Khanh agreed to release the HNC prisoners and to continue backing civilian government, referring to their August promises; the civilian GVN would convene a new civilian group to legislate and write a new constitution, preparatory to Assembly elections. Taylor saw the statement before its release, and accepted it as the best available compromise. It was followed by a statement agreed on January 11 to patch up US/GVN relations, at which time Khanh agreed also to put several of the Young Turks in the cabinet. The crisis seemed to be over. 76/

However, the end was not yet in sight. The Buddhists started demonstrating and demanding that Huong resign. On January 14, Taylor reacted to Khanh's proposals on the new cabinet by suggesting that he was moving with unseemly haste. Taylor received a complete cabinet list on January 18, and Khanh conferred with Westmoreland on the effects of cabinet roles for the generals on the 19th. Cabinet installation was scheduled for the 19th. However, at almost the last minute Khanh asked for postponement of the cabinet installation, saying afterward that Huong had defaulted on promises to change some of the civilian ministers. Leading Buddhists went on another hunger strike, and a new crisis built up; in Hue the USIS building was sacked and burned, and the USIS building in Saigon was sacked. On the 24th, they demanded that all Vietnamese businessmen, night clubs, etc., refuse to sell to Americans, and a majority apparently complied. On the 25th, Khanh, having allied himself with the Buddhists, told Deputy Ambassador Johnson that Huong and President Suu wanted to resign and let the military take over, as demanded by the Buddhists. Johnson replied that the Buddhists must not be allowed to veto the government, and that the military must not take over. 77/

Then on January 27, the AFC voted no confidence in the Suu-Huong government and directed Khanh to take charge and resolve the crisis. Taylor's comments to State made it clear that events were entirely out of his control; again he objected to the means and to the timing of the military return to power. When he raised the possibility of non-recognition, State authorized him to use his own judgment but advised him to play along with Khanh for the time being, while scouting around for fresh options. Although Suu was technically ousted, he stayed on at Khanh's request; and Oanh again became acting Prime Minister. 78/

In the midst of the crisis Westmoreland obtained his first authority to use U.S. forces for combat within South Vietnam. Arguing that the VC might go for a spectacular victory during the disorders, he asked for and received authority to use U.S. jet aircraft in a strike role



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

in emergencies, subject to Embassy approval in each instance. This move finessed all previous ideas of using potential U.S. force commitments as leverage to bring the GVN into line; but these ideas had no doubt been abandoned anyhow. 79/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

### III

#### THE U.S. ENTERS THE WAR:

##### Flaming Dart to the Steady Influx of U.S. Forces, June, 1965

##### 1. "Phase II" Begins and Coups Continue, February, 1965

While the Embassy stood by doing what little it could to undercut Khanh's personal position, VC attacks on the American advisors' barracks at Pleiku, and on three other installations, provided the pretext for US/VNAF bombing attacks on infiltration staging areas in the southernmost province of North Vietnam, February 7-8. Acting Prime Minister Oanh spoke for GVN during the coordination of the attacks and announcements. (The raids were called reprisals, as was the subsequent raid on February 12 following the attacks on the American barracks at Quihon.) U.S. dependents were ordered to leave SVN. 1/

McGeorge Bundy was in town, and in keeping with the going tactics, stayed at arms length from Khanh, though meeting him and the generals socially. As an aside at this point, Taylor gave one last bow to the idea that cutting off the flow of help from the North would turn the tide of the war against the VC: He remarked that perhaps the smell of victory within six months would now lead Khanh to take over again.

On his return to Washington, McGeorge Bundy wrote a Memorandum to the President, dated February 7, 1965. In evaluating the U.S. team and policy, he stated, "U.S. mission is composed of outstanding men and U.S. policy within Vietnam is mainly right and well directed." However, he proceeded to point out two important differences between his current assessment and that of the mission. Taylor had concluded that: (1) the Khanh government was impossible to work with, and (2) the Buddhists (Khanh's ally in the recent struggle) must be confronted and faced down, using force if necessary. Bundy disagreed on both points, stating that Khanh was still the best hope in sight in terms of pursuing the fight against the communists and that the Buddhists should be accommodated and incorporated rather than confronted.

With respect to the scheduled reprisal actions, he stated, "For immediate purposes, and especially for the initiation of reprisal policy, we believe the government need be no stronger than it is today with General Khanh as the focus of raw power, while a weak caretaker government goes through the motions. Such a government can execute military decisions and it can give formal political support to joint US-GVN policy. That is about all it can do." He further stated that reprisal actions themselves

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

should produce a favorable reaction which would provide an opportunity for increased U.S. influence in pressing for a more effective government.

He acknowledged the latent anti-American sentiments in the country and their potential explosiveness, as had been evidenced in Hue the preceding week. He noted that these feelings limited the pressure that the U.S. could bring to bear on ambitious forces like Khanh and the Buddhists.

On February 9, Taylor again firmly recommended that the program of continuous graduated attacks on North Vietnam should begin. Nothing but political turmoil had followed his early-December attempt to induce the GVN to do better by promising these attacks as a quid pro quo. Now he disregarded this idea, and spoke only of the hope that the attacks would convince North Vietnam to abide by the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962, and would unify and encourage the South Vietnamese. On February 13, State cabled authority to begin the plan of graduated strikes with Vietnamese participation. It directed Taylor to get GVN approval and to get their agreement to appear at the UN if that should prove necessary; the condition of stopping the bombing would be the halting of aid by North Vietnam to the VC.

State's guidance to Taylor on political matters was that the U.S. hand should not be too obvious in the government-shuffling outcome and that the power of the Buddhists and of the military must be reflected in the new government being formed. After two political hopefuls failed to round up enough support, Quat formed a cabinet starting February 16. The AFC chose to keep Suu as Chief of State and appointed a National Legislative Council of twenty members balanced to represent all interests including the military. The Buddhists quietly acquiesced in the new government, installed just in time to be greeted by a coup attempt. 2/

On February 19, a new coup group (consisting of Thao and Phat among other neo-Diem proponents) seized most of Saigon, Tan Son Nhut airfield, and the radio station. In this instance, as in September, 1964, MACV had to intervene to stop Ky's threat of VNAF bombing; this time it would have been the airfield, with several thousand Americans in the area. By midnight the leading members of the AFC had rallied forces and faced down the coup group; and the next day they voted Khanh out. On February 24, Khanh left the country; the Embassy and Saigon settled back in relief. The bombing phase of graduated pressures on the North (Rolling Thunder) began, and the decision to land Marines at Danang was in the works. Taylor now opposed the introduction of U.S. combat forces in SVN -- except for base security. His acquiescence in the Marine deployment to Danang was in large part due to Westmoreland's strong recommendation to do so. 3/

## 2. The Continuing Civilian Interregnum and First U.S. Ground Forces, March-May, 1965

For several weeks an unaccustomed calm settled over US/GVN relations. The USG white paper on Vietnam issued February 28 without prior clearance with GVN caused no visible upset. The proposal to land the first two BLI's of Marines received prompt approval in an amicable atmosphere in the first few days of March, and the III MEF became the III MAF

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

without fanfare. An abortive Buddhist "peace" movement died away, and religious groups generally laid low. 4/

Following a State message expressing renewed concern, the USOM resumed meetings with the Vietnamese Internal Security Council (an enlargement of its old NSC) on February 27 to discuss pacification.

"It was agreed that both sides would prepare joint proposals for accelerating pacification and for solving manpower problems and go forward together in program for effective execution of agreed programs."

At a March 13 meeting, General Thang gave a "pessimistic but realistic" account of Binh Dinh Province, and Quat said measures would be taken to prevent the situation from spreading. The USG and GVN reverted to the pattern of a year earlier of urging and advice politely received. 5/

Throughout early 1965, it was evident that Pacification plans were failing. Even Hop Tac was at a standstill. When a stop gap allocation of 3 million piasters per province was made, pending release of regular funds, province chiefs were reluctant to spend the funds. They wanted specific authority and direction from higher authorities.

Planning continued unabated between MACV and GVN. Development of a revised budget began on March 6, 1965, when guidelines for budget preparation were furnished the RVN Ministry of Defense. The proposed revision was duly received from RVN. 6/

On March 24, Ambassador Taylor formulated a 41-point program for stability and pacification in preparation for a trip to Washington. This program, without any hint of leverage on GVN, in fact put pacification on the back burner, while main attention focused on bombing and deployments. 7/

In April 1965, General "Little" Minh, Minister of Armed Forces, directed I, II, and IV Corps commanders to develop Hop Tac plans for their areas. The delay between the COMUSMACV memorandum of the previous December that recommended the extension and the order itself is not explained, but in May the Vietnamese indicated to the U.S. Ambassador their dissatisfaction with the Hop Tac program. The Vietnamese wanted to make Region A of the Hop Tac area part of the Capital Military Region and the remaining regions part of the III Corps Commander's area of responsibility. COMUSMACV told the mission council that the Hop Tac organization should be retained for the foreseeable future because Hop Tac had been unique in providing a forum for military and civil authorities to address common problems.

Quiet consultation continued on the evaluation of Vietnamese counterparts in the provinces, on Third Country Forces, on military and paramilitary pay, and so on. Following Taylor's return from Washington early in April, he presented his pacification ideas (now having the stamp of President Johnson's approval), and discreetly got approval for the



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

deployment of the third of the Marine BLT's. Quat discussed the military leadership frankly with Taylor and Westmoreland, and around the middle of April started considering a move to clip their wings. On May 5, the AFC obligingly dissolved itself, and seemed to give Quat a free hand. 8/

The Honolulu Conference of April 20, which rebuffed the idea of encadrement and U.S. takeover (discussed later), approved additional deployments and U.S. force to about 80,000 men and to introduce Korean and Australian troops. After several days of hesitation, Quat approved the increases. Pacification, under the new name "Rural Construction," still gave no cause for rejoicing; and GVN resisted Taylor's proposal to install some civilians as province chiefs. 9/

Analysis by members of the U.S. mission council of a RVNAF J-3 paper, "The Organization and Operations of the Pacification System," revealed considerable variance between U.S. and GVN views on:

- (1) The role of the corps commander in pacification.
- (2) The relationship of provinces with a proposed Bureau for Pacification Affairs.
- (3) The position of Minister of Interior in pacification.

MACV forwarded requirements to increase the number of subsector advisory teams to 180, of which 33 in particularly remote locations would be filled initially by Special Forces teams. It was envisioned that in case of escalation by the VC, these teams would perform appropriate civil affairs functions, provide intelligence, and support allied forces in many ways. Should the VC refrain from extensive overt action, the teams would push vigorous rural construction.

In the last half of May, fresh trouble blew up. After an alleged abortive coup attempt on May 20-21, and disorders in the streets, Quat tried to reshuffle his cabinet, without first clearing it with Suu. Suu objected, and the two disagreed on who had the right to decide; such a misunderstanding was understandable, in view of the lack of any recognized constitution and in view of the chaos of the preceding months. The crisis simmered past the end of May, and Taylor correctly predicted the end of civilian government, with evident relief. 10/

### 3. First Moves on Command and Control, March and April, 1965

When the Marines arrived in March, the control measure devised for the employment was the TAOR. Under the overall suzerainty of the VN Corps Commander, the Marines were given a well defined geographical area in which U.S. forces exercised command authority over military forces and for which the U.S. accepted defensive responsibility." 11/

On March 3, Ambassador Taylor cabled his fears that GVN would "shuck off greater responsibility on the USG," 12/ and the same day, in another message, he said he had no idea what the GVN attitude to a Marine Landing Force might be. 13/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The first battalion of Marines splashed ashore at Danang about 0900, March 8. The next day a second battalion came in by air.

The trip of Army Chief of Staff Johnson to Saigon in mid-March, 1965, signalled the beginning of consideration and planning for the introduction of significant numbers of ground combat forces. General Johnson observed in closing his report:

"In order for the USG to evaluate his (COMUSMACV's) request properly when submitted, a policy determination must be made in the very near future that will answer the question, what should the VN be expected to do for themselves and how much more the U.S. must contribute directly to the security of VN." 14/

Secretary McNamara answered on the margin of his copy of the report, "Policy is: Anything that will strengthen the position of the GVN will be sent." 15/

On March 8, Taylor talked with Prime Minister Quat about his concept of joint command, a matter which had been raised with General Johnson on the occasion of his visit March 6 (EmbTel 2877). Taylor found Quat's ideas very hazy, but:

"his purpose was very clear. He hopes by some joint command device to bring his maverick generals under the steadying influence of General Westmoreland. Taylor told him he sympathized with motive but had never hit upon a command relationship which offered much hope of accomplishing this end. Although Quat's ideas hard to disentangle, he seems to have in mind a mixed US/ARVN staff element reporting to General Westmoreland and a VN C/Staff. He visualizes the staff element as a clearing house for joint studies which would pass recommendations on to the two senior officers. By implication General Westmoreland would have the power of ultimate decision based upon an unofficial understanding which Quat hopes generals would accept. Quat concedes their acceptance far from certain." 16/

Washington was looking toward combined command arrangements that would recognize that the U.S. was no longer limited to the role of advisors to RVNAF. When asked for his input COMUSMACV replied that gradual transition would be more palatable to GVN and suggested only cooperation in the initial phase, followed by establishment of a small combined coordinating staff headed jointly by himself and CINCRVNAF. The staff's powers would be limited solely to coordinating combined operations. 17/

These comments were sketchy, but indicative, for in Saigon COMUSMACV and his staff were putting together the Commander's Estimate of the Situation, a standard document in the military planning process. Started on March 13, the day after General Johnson left Saigon and issued on March 26, it more clearly revealed the MACV concept of command. While

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

recognizing that there was no longer an effective ARVN chain of command because of the irresponsible game of musical chairs among the top leadership, the estimate cautioned that the Vietnamese generals would accept integrated command only to the extent that the United States contributed troops; and it advised against U.S. commitment to any rigid arrangement because GVN and RVNAF had not achieved sufficient political and military maturity. MACV omitted further discussion of the function or authority of such integrated staffs. When command arrangements were covered in the detailed description of the most likely course of action, the intent was clear. U.S. commanders would control American troops except in certain clearly defined zones within which they would also be responsible for "controlling and coordinating" operations of both U.S. and RVN forces. A collateral function envisioned for each U.S. division command was that of Deputy Command Support to the ARVN Corps Commander. 18/

#### 4. The Rise and Decline of Encadrement, April, 1964

Ambassador Taylor returned to Washington in late March and was present at the April 1-2 NSC meeting at which General Johnson's 21 recommendations and Taylor's 41 points were approved. 19/ Almost as soon as Taylor returned to Saigon wide differences of opinion developed on what should happen next.

The State/Defense "7 point message" of April 15 to Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland set the pot boiling, following Westmoreland's urgent request via military channels for more forces. The message directed:

- (1) Experimental encadrement of U.S. troops into RVNAF.
- (2) The introduction of a brigade force into Bien Hoa/Vung Tau for security and later counterinsurgency.
- (3) The introduction of several additional U.S. battalions into coastal enclaves.
- (4) Expansion of Vietnamese recruiting, using proven U.S. techniques.
- (5) Expansion of the MEDCAP program using mobile dispensaries.
- (6) Experimentation in 2 or 3 provinces with a team of U.S. civil affairs personnel.
- (7) Supplement of low RVNAF pay through provision of a food ration. 20/

Taylor objected to the new forces, to encadrement, and to the whole tone of the 7 point message. He sent two principal messages with these objections, one setting out a reasoned comment on the message and a second, personal to McGeorge Bundy, saying how he really felt about it:

"I am greatly troubled by DOD 152339Z April 15. First, it shows no consideration for the fact that, as a result of



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

decisions taken in Washington during my visit, this mission is charged with securing implementation by the two month old Quat government of a 21 point military program, a 41 point non-military program, a 16 point Rowan USIS program and a 12 point CIA program. Now this new cable opens up new vistas of further points as if we can win here somehow on a point score. We are going to stall the machine of government if we do not declare a moratorium on new programs for at least six months.

"Next, it shows a far greater willingness to get into the ground war than I had discerned in Washington during my recent trip. Although some additional U.S. forces should probably be introduced after we see how the Marines do in counter-insurgency operations, my own attitude is reflected in Emb-Tel 3384, which I hope was called to the attention of the President.

"My greatest concern arises over para 6 reftel which frankly bewilders me. What do the authors of this cable think mission has been doing over the months and years? We have presumably the best qualified personnel the Washington agencies (State, AID, DOD, USIA and CIA) can find working in the provinces seven days a week at precisely the tasks described in para 6. It is proposed to withdraw these people and replace them by Army civil affairs types operating on the pattern of military occupation? If this is the thought, I would regard such a change in policy which will gain wide publicity, as disastrous in its likely effects upon pacification in general and on US/GVN relations in particular.

"Mac, can't we be better protected from our friends? I know that everyone wants to help, but there's such a thing as killing with kindness. In particular, we want to stay alive here because we think we're winning -- and will continue to win unless helped to death." 21/

Another State/Defense message told the Ambassador to discuss with Quat several possible uses of U.S. combat forces beyond the NSC decisions of April 2. He replied, "I cannot raise these matters with Quat without further guidance...I need a clarification of our purpose for the large scale introduction of foreign troops unless the need is clear and explicit." 22/

The plaintive words did not sound convincing to the JCS, for they told SecDef, almost cavalierly, in JCSM 281/65, "JCS is confident the Ambassador will be able to accomplish such measures as are required for an appropriate acceptance of these deployments as approved by the highest authority."

As directed in the 7 point message, study commenced in Saigon on the matter of combined command. The message suggested two approaches:



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Integration of substantial numbers of U.S. combat personnel (e.g., 50) into each of several ARVN battalions (e.g., 10); or combined operations of three additional U.S. battalions with three or more ARVN battalions. General Westmoreland asked his Deputy to give detailed study to three methods:

(1) Assumption of officer and senior NCO command positions within the ARVN battalion by U.S. personnel.

(2) Assignment of U.S. personnel as staff officers, and in technical and specialists positions, within the ARVN battalion.

(3) Employment of U.S. troops as fire support elements within the ARVN battalion.

These approaches were studied in relation to: language, security, support, mutual US/GVN acceptance, conditions and capabilities within ARVN units. Problems common to all three were the language barrier, increased exposure of U.S. personnel, difficulty of U.S. personnel adapting to ARVN living conditions, and the greatly expanded support requirement that would be generated. The following conclusions were reached:

Method (1) was not feasible nor desirable owing to the language barrier, as well as to probable non-acceptance by GVN.

Method (2) would not materially improve ARVN capabilities.

Method (3), therefore, was the only concept that would benefit ARVN and not detract from GVN morale. A fire support element of six U.S. officers and 49 enlisted men was suggested for each ARVN battalion.

Because of the difficulties of supply and service support, medical support, leadership in ARVN battalions, and anticipated morale problems amongst those U.S. personnel assigned to ARVN battalions, Deputy COMUSMACV opposed the adoption of the principle of encadrement. He recommended that COMUSMACV not support it and that if it were directed, it be initially applied to only one battalion. 23/

At the same time, as a result of the Warrenton conference of mid-January, serious consideration was being given in Washington to the use of military government by means of Army civil affairs procedures. A straw in the wind which indicated what the Saigon reaction was to be at the forthcoming Honolulu conference was the response by Ambassador Taylor on April 15 to notification that General Peers was coming to Saigon. "If GVN gets word of these plans to impose U.S. military government framework on their country...it will have a very serious impact on our relations. We are rocking the boat at a time when we have it almost on an even keel." 24/

##### 5. Honolulu Conference, April 19-20, 1965; Encadrement and Combined Command Fade Out

At Honolulu General Westmoreland had his way with respect to military encadrement. Notes of the meetings reveal:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"General Westmoreland states that individual encadrement of ARVN units neither required nor feasible."

Instead the plan was to "brigade" U.S. forces with ARVN troops. Consideration of the issue was ended with the understanding that General Westmoreland "will submit a written statement describing the command relationships which will prevail when U.S. forces are engaged in offensive combat actions, alone or with Vietnamese or other forces."

The introduction of U.S. Army Civil Affairs teams into the provincial government structure was also considered at Honolulu. It was decided to experiment in three provinces with U.S. teams designed to provide ample civil as well as military initiative and advice. At least one of the three teams was to be headed by a civilian. Ambassador Taylor was instructed to seek the concurrence of GVN, "recognizing that a large number of questions must be worked out subsequently." 25/

Early in May, General Westmoreland submitted his detailed command concept. It traced the evolution of the relationship between U.S. and ARVN armed forces. Initially, U.S. forces were strictly advisory. In the period from 1960 to 1962 the U.S. had in addition provided military capabilities such as helicopters and tactical air support. The advisory effort was extended to ARVN battalions, and advisors accompanied units into combat. With the large scale commitment of U.S. ground forces in Vietnam, a logical extension of this evolution was the suggested command concept of coordination and cooperation. Operational control of each nation's forces was normally to be exercised by commanders of that nation.

COMUSMACV envisioned that the initial mission of U.S. forces would be security of base areas, a function to be coordinated through senior ARVN commanders. Subsequent deep patrolling and offensive operations by U.S. forces would occur within specified Tactical Areas of Responsibility (TAOR's) with ARVN in separate and clearly defined areas. Eventually, on search and destroy operations, U.S. forces would provide combat support at the request of the senior RVNAF commander. The U.S. commander would move to the RVNAF command post to agree on details, but close and intricate maneuver of units of the two nations' forces was to be avoided. 26/

This Saigon proposal did not settle the matter. SecDef urged formation of a joint command with GVN and the creation of a "small combined coordinating staff to be jointly headed by COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF" as a useful device at this stage of development of the U.S. force structure. 27/

There were continuing indications from USG representatives in Saigon of a sensitivity to South Vietnamese criticism that the United States acted as though we were fighting all by ourselves. On May 17, Ambassador Taylor felt it wise to relay to Washington a Saigon Post column to that effect. 28/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

On May 24, both the Ambassador and COMUSMACV sent lengthy messages to their seniors discussing the matter of combined military command. Ambassador Taylor referenced both the JCS and MACV proposals and said, "I must say we are far from ready to propose to GVN anything like a plan for a more formal combined command authority...If USG intends to take the position that U.S. command of GVN forces is a prerequisite to the introduction of more U.S. combat troops, that fact would constitute an additional strong reason for recommending against bringing in the reinforcements." 29/

COMUSMACV also voiced strong opposition to the Washington proposal for combined command. He recalled recent discussion of the subject with General Minh who seemed agreeable at first but then moved perceptibly away from anything suggestive of a combined headquarters. Press reports of the views of General Thieu and Air Marshall Ky, as well as the recent Saigon Post column, were referenced to substantiate that there was no prospect of such a combined staff evolving. Instead, a U.S. Army brigadier general staff. "The positioning and accrediting of Brig. General Collins is as far as we can go." 30/

There appears to have been no strong objection by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In JCSM 516-65 they reviewed the course of events and recommended augmentation of MACV by seven billets (1 Brigadier General, 3 officers, and 3 enlisted) to provide "the requisite staff assistance on combined and operational planning matters associated with the coordinated operations of U.S., RVN, and third country forces in Vietnam."

A joint State/Defense message to Saigon on May 27 deferred any approach to GVN on combined command until it was politically feasible and directed that no planning discussion be undertaken with RVNAF without Ambassador Taylor's approval. 31/

There were two major battles in late May and early June, Ba Gia and Dong Zoai. Although U.S. troops were available to assist in both instances they were not committed and in both cases RVNAF were defeated.

General Westmoreland continued to press Washington for greater freedom of discretion in the use of U.S. ground forces with RVNAF. A June 12 message recalled the three stages envisioned in his May 8 discussion of combined command. So far, in view of statements in Washington by the Secretary of State and by the White House, movement from stage 2 to 3 had been deferred, but it sounded as though some measure of joint planning was in progress.

"The fact is we have moved some distance down the road toward active commitment of U.S. combat forces and have done so hand-in-hand with our Vietnamese ally. They and we recognize that the time has come when such support is essential to the survival of any government of South Vietnam and the integrity of RVNAF." 32/



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The message concluded with a request for modification of the letters of instructions on use of U.S. troops.

A minor note, not unrelated to combined command, was raised in May when Prime Minister Quat pressed within GVN for a status of forces agreement. The matter arose because of concern about Vietnamese sovereignty over areas where U.S. forces were stationed. Relations were being governed by the 15 year old Pentilateral agreement, clearly inapplicable to the present situation. U.S. military forces in Vietnam were enjoying virtual diplomatic immunity; so the MACV senior judge advocate developed arguments to demonstrate that raising the issue was not in the interests of either government. They were passed to the SVN source of the information for use at ministerial meetings on the subject. There is no indication that GVN formally discussed status-of-forces with the Embassy. 33/

6. The Ky Coup, June, 1965

After extended negotiations between Quat, Suu, and other leaders failed to end the government crisis that started in late May, on June 9 Quat asked the generals to mediate the dispute. They did. On June 12 they forced Quat to resign and took over the government. After several days of jockeying among themselves, the generals formed a National Leadership Council of ten members and made Ky Prime Minister. Taylor was out of town at the critical time, and the Embassy found out about the main decisions after they were taken. However, Taylor was back in time to object unsuccessfully to Ky's appointment as Prime Minister before it was announced. Once things had settled down and the USG felt it had no choice but to accept the new government, Taylor cabled State:

"...It will serve our best interests to strengthen, support and endorse this government." 34/

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I.

FOOTNOTES

1. Shaplen, Lost Revolution, pp. 213-218, 223
2. Secretary of Defense Memoranda to the President, 6 and 21 December 1963
3. Secretary of Defense Presidential Memorandum, 21 December 1963, paragraph 8
4. Report of the Honolulu Conference of 20 November 1963, Military Section, pp. 10 and 13
5. Ibid., Brent Summary, p. 5; Message, Lodge to State 975, 8 November 1963
6. USOM Quarterly Report to State for October-December, 1963; Secretary of Defense Presidential Memorandum, 6 December 1963
7. Ibid., October-December, 1963; Secretary of Defense Presidential Memorandum, 21 December 1963
8. Message, State to Saigon 803, 15 November 1963
9. Message, Lodge to State 975, 8 November 1963
10. Message, Lodge to State 1257, 6 January 1964
11. Secretary of Defense Presidential Memorandum, 21 December 1963
12. Message, State to Saigon 781, 13 November 1963, and 922, 9 December 1963; Lodge to State 1142, 11 December; State to Saigon 931, 12 December 1963
13. Message, State to Saigon 1000, 30 December 1963
14. Vincent Puritano memorandum to James P. Grant (both were officials in Vietnam Section of AID), "Joining Provincial Sign-Off Authority," with attachment, 25 September 1965; additional information obtained in conversation with Puritano, February, 1968
15. Op. cit., October-December, 1963
16. Honolulu Report, Op. cit., p. 5
17. JCS, SACS memorandum to Secretary of Defense Military Aide, 20 February 1964
18. Presentation by M. G. Timmes, MAAG, at Honolulu Conference, 20 November 1963
19. Shaplen, Op. cit., pp. 220-232
20. Message, State to Saigon 1025, 6 January 1964



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III.

FOOTNOTES

1. Shaplen, Op. cit., pp. 305-306; Message, State to Saigon 1438, 6 February; Saigon to State 2426, 7 February and 2495, 11 February 1965
2. Message, State to Saigon 1601, 3 February and 1677, 10 February; Saigon to State 2399, 4 February; 2409, 6 February; 2583, 14 February and 2617, 16 February. Shaplen, Op. cit., pp. 302-303, 306-307. SNIE 53-65, "Short-Term Prospects in SVN," 4 February 1965
3. Shaplen, Op. cit., pp. 307-312; Message, MACV telecon to NMCC, 19 February; CAS FVS 11388, 19 February; Saigon to State 2685, 20 February; 2698, 22 February; 2720, 23 February, 2731, 24 February, 2747, 25 February and 2789, 28 February; COMUSMACV to CINCPAC 241600Z February
4. Shaplen, Op. cit., pp. 318-322; Message, Saigon to State 2800, 1 March; 2810, 2 March; 2822, 3 March and 2908, 11 March 1965
5. Message, State to Saigon 1820, 25 February; Saigon to State 2787, 27 February; 2953, 13 March; and 3046, 22 March 1965
6. COMUSMACV Command History 1965, p. 132
7. Message, Saigon to State 2065, 24 March 1965
8. Message, Saigon to State 3097 and 3100, 26 March; 2140, 31 March 1965
9. Message, Saigon to State 3559, 28 April, 3599 and 3606, 1 May; and 3681 7 May 1965
10. Shaplen, Op. cit., pp. 342-345; Message, Saigon to State 3878, 25 May and 3989, 1 June; State to Saigon 2752, 29 May 1965
11. Edwin H. Simmons Monograph, "The Marine Corps Response to Vietnam," Santa Domingo, 15 May 1965, pp. 44-45
12. Message, EMBTEL 3112, 3 March 1965
13. Message, EMBTEL 2014, 3 March 1965
14. General Harold K. Johnson, "Report on Trip to Vietnam," 14 March 1965
15. Secretary of Defense margin notes on copy of Johnson Trip Report in Task Force File 381
16. Message, Saigon to State 2991, 8 March 1965
17. Message, COMUSMACV 1463, 17 March and 1566, 21 March 1965
18. Message, COMUSMACV MAC J-3 9714, 27 March 1965

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

19. NSAM 328, 6 April 1965
20. Message, Department of Defense 9164, 15 April; State to Saigon 2332, 15 April 1965
21. Message, Taylor (Saigon) to McGeorge Bundy 3421, 17 April 1965
22. Message, Saigon to State 3423, 17 April 1965; Saigon to State 3373, 3374, and 3384, 14 April, and 3419, 3422, and 3432, 17 April 1965
23. COMUSMACV Command History 1965, p. 81; Message, COMUSMACV 2145 190635Z April
24. Message, Saigon to State 3419, 17 April 1965
25. Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton's Minutes of Honolulu Meeting, 23 April 1965
26. Message, COMUSMACV 080700Z May
27. Message, JCS 2159 201806Z May
28. Message, Saigon to State 3622, 3 May 1965
29. Message, Saigon to State 3855, 24 May 1965
30. Message, COMUSMACV JOO 17292, 240603Z May
31. Message, Joint State/Defense Message 80466, 27 May 1965
32. Message, COMUSMACV MAC J-3 to CINCPAC 19912 120828Z June
33. Message, Saigon to State 4105, 8 June 1965
34. Shaplen, Op. cit., pp. 345-346; Message, Saigon to State 4065, 4 June; 4119, 9 June; 4156, 11 June, 4190, 14 June; and 4312, 21 June 1965