24

UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

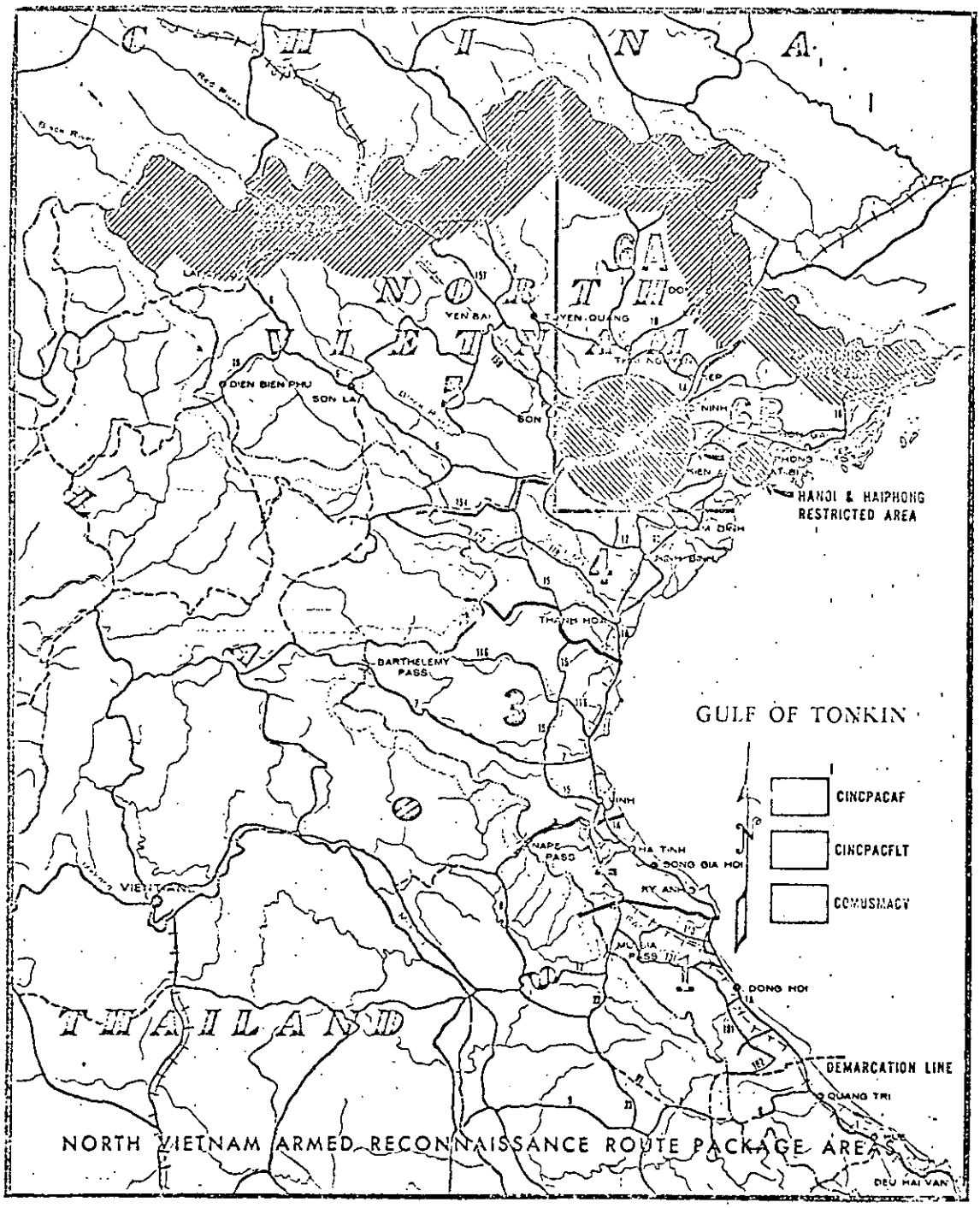
1945 - 1967

IV. C. 7.(a)

Volume I

THE AIR WAR IN NORTH VIETNAM

#538


CHINA
NORTH VIETNAM
LAOS
THAILAND
GULF OF TONKIN
YEN BAI
TUYEN QUANG
DIEN BIEN PHU
SON LA
BARTHELEMY PASS
NAPE PASS
MU GIA PASS
HA TINH
SONG GIA HOI
DONG HOI
QUANG TRI
DEU HAI VAN
HANOI & HAIPHONG RESTRICTED AREA
CINCPACAF
CINCPACFLT
COMUSMACV
DEMARCATION LINE
NORTH VIETNAM ARMED RECONNAISSANCE ROUTE PACKAGE AREAS

CHRONOLOGY

1 Jul 65	Under SecState George Ball memo to the President	Ball argues for "cutting our losses" in Vietnam and negotiating an end to the war. A massive US intervention would likely require complete achievement of our objectives or humiliation, both at terrible costs.
	Rusk memo to the President	US had to defend South Vietnam from aggression even with US troops to validate the reliability of the US commitment.
	McNamara DPM (revised 20 Jul)	The gravity of the military situation required raising 3rd country troops in SVN from 16 to 44 battalions and intensifying the air war through the mining of Haiphong and other ports, destruction of rail and road bridges from China, and destruction of MIG airfields and SAM sites.
2 Jul 65	JCSM 515-65	The JCS advocate virtually the same air war program as the DPM adding only attacks on "war-making" supplies and facilities. Sorties should increase from 2,000 to 5,000.
13 Jul 65	McNaughton draft memo	Negotiations are unlikely, but even 200,000-400,000 men may only give us a 50-50 chance of a win by 1968; infiltration routes should be hit hard to put a "ceiling" on infiltration.
14-21 Jul 65	McNamara trip to Vietnam	After a week in Vietnam, McNamara returned with a softened version of the DPM.

20 Jul 65	McNamara memo to the President	Backing away from his 1 July views, McNamara recommended mining the harbors only as a "severe reprisal." Sorties should be raised to 4,000. Political improvement a must in SVN; low-key diplomacy to lay the groundwork for a settlement.
30 Jul 65	McNamara memo for the President	Future bombing policy should emphasize the threat, minimize DRV loss of face, optimize interdiction over political costs, be coordinated with other pressures on the DRV, and avoid undue risks of escalation.
4-6 Aug 65	McNamara before Senate Armed Services and Appropriation Comte and HASC.	McNamara justifies the Administration's bombing restraint, pointing to the risk of escalation in attacks on POL, airfields or Hanoi-Haiphong areas.
2 Sep 65	JCSM-670-65	The JCS recommend air strikes against "lucrative" NVN targets -- POL, power plants, etc.
15 Sep 65	McNamara memo to CJCS	JCSM 670 is rejected as a dangerous escalatory step.
12 Oct 65	Amb. Thompson memo to McNamara	Thompson, discussing the possibility of a pause, notes need to tell Hanoi we'd resume if the effort failed.
3 Nov 65	McNamara memo to the President	McNamara urges the approval of the bombing "pause" he had first suggested in his 20 Jul memo to test NVN's intentions.
9 Nov 65	State Dept. memo to the President	A State memo to the President, written by U. Alexis Johnson with Rusk's endorsement, opposes a pause at a time when Hanoi has given no sign of willingness to talk. It would waste an important card and give them a chance to blackmail us about resumption.

10 Nov 65	JCSM-810-65	The Chiefs propose a systematic air attack on the NVN POL storage and distribution network.
17 Nov 65	DIA memo to McNamara	General Carroll (Dir. DIA) gives an appraisal of the bombing with few bright spots.
28-29 Nov 65	McNamara-Wheeler trip to Vietnam	McNamara and General Wheeler make a hurried trip to Vietnam to consider force increases.
30 Nov 65	McNamara report to the President	Among other parts of the report, McNamara urges a pause in the bombing to prepare the American public for future escalations and to give Hanoi a last chance to save face.
1 Dec 65	W. Bundy draft memo to the President	Bundy summarizes the pros and cons with respect to a pause and concludes against it.
3 Dec 65	McNaughton memo	McNaughton favors a "hard-line" pause with resumption unless the DRV stopped infiltration and direction of the war, withdrew infiltrators, made the VC stop attacks and stopped interfering with the GVN's exercise of its functions.
6 Dec 65	State Dept. memo to the President	Rusk having apparently been convinced, this new draft by Bundy and Johnson recommends a pause.
8 Dec 65	McNamara memo to the President	McNamara states that he is giving consideration to the JCS proposal for attacking the NVN POL system.
24 Dec 65	State msg 1786 to Lodge	The bombing pause begins. It lasts for 37 days until the 31st of January.

26 Dec 65	CINCPAC msg 262159Z Dec 65	CINCPAC, dissenting from the pause from the outset, argues for the resumption of the bombing promptly.
27 Dec 65	MACV msg 45265	Westmoreland argues that "immediate resumption is essential."
28 Dec 65	Helms memo to DepSecDef Vance	Estimates that neither the Soviets nor Chinese will actively intervene in the war if the POL system is attacked.
12 Jan 66	CINCPAC msg 120205Z Jan 66	Admiral Sharp urges that the bombing be resumed at substantially higher levels immediately.
15 Jan 66	Bundy "Scenario for Possible Resumption"	Bundy urges that the resumption be at a low level building up again gradually before major new targets like POL are struck.
18 Jan 66	JCSM-41-66	"...offensive air operations against NVN should be resumed now with a sharp blow and thereafter maintained with uninterrupted, increasing pressure." Specifically, the Chiefs called for immediate mining of the ports.
	McNaughton draft, "Some Observations about Bombing..."	Purposes of the bombing are (1) to interdict infiltration; (2) to bring about negotiation; (3) to provide a bargaining counter; and (4) to sustain GVN morale.
24 Jan 66	McNamara memo to the President	McNamara, drawing on the language of McNaughton's earlier memo, recommends resumption with sorties to rise gradually to 4,000 per month and stabilize. Promises are all cautious.

25 Jan 66	Ball memo to the President	Ball warns that resumption will pose a grave danger of starting a war with China. He points to the self-generating pressure of the bombing for escalation, shows its ineffectiveness and warns of specific potential targets such as mining the harbors.
31 Jan 66	Bombing resumes	After 37 days the bombing is resumed but with no spectacular targets.
4 Feb 66	SNIE 10-1-66	This special estimate states that increasing the scope and intensity of bombing, including attacks on POL, would not prevent DRV support of higher levels of operations in 1966.
19 Feb 66	JCSM 113-66	The Chiefs urge a sharp escalation of the air war with maximum shock effect.
1 Mar 66	JCSM 130-66	Focusing their recommendations on POL, the Chiefs call it "highest priority action not yet approved." It would have a direct effect in cutting infiltration.
10 Mar 66	JCSM 153-66	Again attacks on POL are urged.
late Mar 66	McNamara memo to the President	This memo to the President contained McNamara's bombing recommendations for April which included hitting 7 of 9 JCS recommended POL storage sites.
28 Mar 66	White House Tuesday Lunch	McNamara's POL recommendation is deferred by the President because of political turmoil in SVN.

9 Apr 66	White House Review	A general policy review at the White House includes most of the second-level members of the Administration. Meetings and paper drafting continued until the political crisis in SVN abated in mid-April.
14 Apr 66	JCSM 238-66	The JCS forwarded a voluminous study of the bombing that recommends a much expanded campaign to hit the Haiphong POL, mine the harbors, hit the airfields.
16 Apr 66	Policy debate continues	The high-level policy review continues. Bundy, McNaughton, Carver & Unger draft position papers on the alternatives if the GVN collapses.
26 Apr 66	JCS msg 9326	CINCPAC is informed that RT50 will not include the POL.
27 Apr 66	Taylor memo to the President	General Taylor in a major memo to the President discusses the problem of negotiations describing the bombing and other US military actions as "blue chips" to be bargained away at the negotiation table not given away as a precondition beforehand.
4 May 66	W. Bundy memo to Rusk	Bundy, commenting on Taylor's "blue chip" memo takes a harder position on what we should get for a bombing halt -- i.e. both an end of infiltration and a cessation of VC/NVA military activity in the South.
6 May 66	W. W. Rostow memo to Rusk and McNamara	Rostow urges the attack on POL based on the results such attacks produced against Germany in W.W. II.

10 May 66	CINCPAC msg 100730Z May 66	Admiral Sharp again urges the authorization of POL attacks.
22 May 66	MACV msg 17603	General Westmoreland supports CINCPAC's request for strikes on the POL system.
3 Jun 66	UK PM Wilson opposes POL State Dept msg 48 to Oslo.	The President, having decided sometime at the end of May to approve the POL attacks, informs UK PM Wilson. Wilson urges the President to reconsider.
7 Jun 66	Brussels msg 87	Rusk, travelling in Europe, urges the President to defer the POL decision because of the forthcoming visit of Canadian Ambassador Ronning to Hanoi and the possibility of some peace feeler.
8 Jun 66	CIA SC No. 08440/66	"It is estimated that the neutralization of the bulk petroleum storage facilities in NVN will not in itself preclude Hanoi's continued support of essential war activities."
14 Jun 66	CINCPAC msg 140659Z Jun 66	Having been informed of high level consideration of the POL strikes by McNamara, CINCPAC assures they will cause under 50 civilian casualties.
14-18 Jun 66	Ronning Mission	Canadian Ambassador Ronning goes to Hanoi and confers with top DRV leaders. He returns with no message or indication of DRV interest in talks.
22 Jun 66	JCS msg 5003	CINCPAC is ordered to strike the POL at first light on 24 June.
24 Jun 66	POL deferred	Bad weather forces rescheduling of the strikes for 25 June.
25 Jun 66	JCS msg 5311	The POL execute order is rescinded because of a press leak.

28 Jun 66	JCS msg 5414	The POL order is reinstated for 29 June.
29 Jun 66	POL attacks	At long last the POL facilities are struck with initially highly positive damage reports.
8 Jul 66	ROLLING THUNDER Conference in Honolulu	After having been briefed by CINCPAC on the effects of the POL strikes to date, McNamara informs Admiral Sharp that the President wants first priority given to strangulation of the NVN POL system.
	CINCPAC msg 080730Z Jul 66	RT 51 specifies a program for intensive attacks on POL as 1st priority.
24 Jul 66	CINCPAC msg 242069Z Jul 66	As a part of a comprehensive attack on POL storage, Sharp recommends attacks on Kep and Phuc Yen airfields.
1 Aug 66	DIA Special Intelligence	70% of NVN's large bulk POL storage capacity has been destroyed along with 7% of its dispersed storage.
4 Aug 66	SNIE 13-66	NVN was using the POL attacks as a lever to extract more aid from the Chinese and the Soviets.
13-14 Aug 66	Westmoreland sees LBJ	General Westmoreland spends two days at the ranch conferring with the President on the progress of the war and new troop requirements
20 Aug 66	CINCPAC msg 202226Z Aug 66	CINCPAC emphatically opposes any standdown, pause or reduction in the air war.
29 Aug 66	JASON studies	IDA's JASON Division submits four reports on the war done by a special study group of top scientists who stress the ineffectiveness of the bombing, including POL, and recommend the construction of an anti-infiltration barrier across northern South Vietnam and Laos.

3 Sep 66	McNamara memo to CJCS	McNamara requests the views of the Chiefs on the proposed barrier.
4 Sep 66	CINCPAC msg 042059Z Sep 66	RT is redirected from a primary POL emphasis to "attrition of men, supplies, equipment...."
8 Sep 66	CM-1732-66	General Wheeler agrees to the creation of a special project for the barrier under General Starbird, but expresses concern that funding of the program not be at the expense of other activities.
12 Sep 66	Joint CIA/DIA Assessment of POL Bombing	The intelligence community turns in an overwhelmingly negative appraisal of the effect of POL attacks. No POL shortages are evident, and in general the bombing has not created insurmountable transportation difficulties, economic dislocations, or weakening of popular morale.
13 Sep 66	CINCPAC msg 130705Z Sep 66	CINCPAC ridicules the idea of a barrier.
15 Sep 66	McNamara memo to Lt Gen Starbird	Starbird is designated as the head of a Joint Task Force for the barrier.
7 Oct 66	JCSM 646-66	In a report on the US worldwide force posture the Chiefs express grave concern at the thinness with which manpower is stretched. They recommend mobilization of the reserves.
10-13 Oct 66	McNamara trip to Vietnam	McNamara, Katzenbach, Wheeler, Komer, McNaughton and others spend three days in Vietnam on a Presidential fact-finder.

14 Oct 66	McNamara memo to the President	With Katzenbach's concurrence, McNamara recommended only 40,000 more troops and the stabilization of the air war. Noting the inability of the bombing to interdict infiltration, he recommended the barrier to the President. To improve the negotiating climate he proposed either a bombing pause or shifting it away from the northern cities.
	JCSM 672-66	The Chiefs disagree with virtually every McNamara recommendation. In addition they urge an escalatory "sharp knock" against NVN.
15 Oct 66	George Carver memo for Dir., CIA	Carver concurs in McNamara's assessment of the bombing and agrees with its stabilization at about 12,000 sorties per month but urges the closing of Haiphong port.
23-25 Oct 66	Manila Conference	The President meets with the heads of government of all the troop contributing nations and agreed positions on the war and the framework of its settlement are worked out. In a private conference, Westmoreland opposes any curtailment of the bombing and urges its expansion. He seemed to have reluctantly accepted the barrier concept.
4 Nov 66	JCSM 702-66	The Chiefs in forwarding the CINCPAC force proposals add a rationale of their own for the bombing: to "make it as difficult and costly as possible" for NVN to continue the war, thereby giving it an incentive to end it.
8 Nov 66	Off-Year Election	In an off-year election, the peace candidates in both parties are all resoundingly defeated.

11 Nov 66	McNamara memo to CJCS	The President approved only the modest McNamara force increases and ordered a stabilization of the air war.
17 Nov 66	McNamara DPM on Supplemental Appropriations	McNamara describes for the President the failure of the bombing to reduce infiltration below the essential minimum to sustain current levels of combat in SVN. He argues for the barrier as an alternative.
22 Nov 66	JCSM-727-66	The Chiefs once again oppose holiday standdowns for Christmas, New Year's and Tet citing the massive advantage of them taken by the DRV during the 37-day pause.
13-14 Dec 66	Hanoi attacks hit civilian areas	A series of air attacks on targets in Hanoi in early Dec. culminated in heavy strikes on Dec. 13-14. In the immediate aftermath, the DRV and other communist countries claimed extensive damage in civilian areas. The attacks came at a time when contacts with the DRV through the Poles apparently had appeared promising.
23 Dec 66	10-mile Hanoi prohibited area established	In response to the worldwide criticism for the attacks on civilian areas, a 10-n.m. prohibited area around Hanoi was established with a similar zone for Haiphong. Henceforth attacks within it could only be by specific Presidential authorization.
24 Dec. 66	48-hour truce	A 48-hour truce and bombing pause is observed.
31 Dec 66	New Year's truce	A second 48-hour truce is observed. Heavy communist resupply efforts are observed during the standdown.

2 Jan 67	MACV msg 00163	Westmoreland opposes the Tet truce based on VC violations of the two truces just completed.
4 Jan 67	CINCPAC msg 040403Z Jan 67	CINCPAC endorses Westmoreland's opposition to the Tet truce.
4 Jan 67	JCSM-6-67	The Chiefs note the heavy DRV resupply during the two truces and oppose the proposed 96-hour Tet truce.
18 Jan 67	JCSM-25-67	The Chiefs renew their opposition to the Tet truce.
	CINCPAC msg 182210Z Jan 67	Admiral Sharp recommends six priority targets for RT in 1967: (1) electric power, (2) the industrial plant, (3) the transportation system in depth, (4) military complexes, (5) POL, (6) Haiphong and the other ports.
25 Jan 67	CINCPAC msg 252126Z Jan 67	Sharp again urges the attack of Haiphong and an intensified overall campaign.
28 Jan 67	RT 53	No new target categories are approved.
1 Feb 67	CINCPAC msg 012005Z Feb 67	Keeping up his barrage of cables, Sharp urges the closing of the NVN ports by aerial mining.
2 Feb 67	Marks (Dir., USIA) memo to Rusk	Marks proposes extending the Tet truce for 12 to 24 hours in an effort to get negotiations started.
	JCSM 59-67	The Chiefs propose the mining of selected inland waterways and selected coastal areas to inhibit internal sea transportation in NVN.
3 Feb 67	McNaughton "Scenario"	A handwritten "Scenario" for the pause by McNaughton which notes McNamara's approval calls for extension of the Tet truce to 7 days to get negotiations started

8 Feb 67	President's letter to Ho Chi Minh	The President invites Ho to indicate what reciprocity he might expect from a bombing halt. The letter is transmitted in Moscow Feb. 8.
8-14 Feb 67	Tet truce	While this truce was in effect frantic efforts were undertaken by UK PM Wilson and Premier Kosygin in London to get peace talks started. In the end these failed because the enormous DRV resupply effort forces the President to resume the bombing after having first extended the pause.
15 Feb 67	Ho Chi Minh letter to President	Replying to the President's letter, Ho rejects the US conditions and reiterates that unconditional cessation of the bombing must precede any talks.
19 Feb 67	Moscow msg 3568	Amb. Thompson indicates the Soviets would react extremely adversely to the mining of Haiphong.
21 Feb 67	Vance memo to Katzenbach	Vance sends Katzenbach a package of proposals for the President's night reading. Eight categories of new targets are analyzed; none can seriously undercut the flow of supplies South.
21 Feb 67	W. Bundy memo	Bundy notes that mining of the waterways and coastal areas of the DRV panhandle could be approved without the mining of Haiphong.
	Maxwell Taylor memo to the President	Taylor again considers the question of ceasefire, political settlement and sequencing of agreements. No direct bearing on the situation.

22 Feb 67	Mining waterways approved	The President approved the aerial mining of the waterways and the attack on the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel works.
27 Feb 67	1st aerial mining	The first aerial mining of the waterways begins.
10 Mar 67	Thai Nguyen plant struck	The Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel complex is hit for the first time.
	Bundy gives Thieu assurances	Bundy in Saigon sees Thieu with Lodge and assures him the President believes that more pressure must be applied in the North before Ho will change his position.
20-21 Mar 67	Guam Conference	The President leads a full delegation to a conference with Thieu and Ky. Questions of constitutional progress and war progress in the South dominate the discussions. During the conference Ho releases the exchange of letters during Tet. A decision to base B-52s in Thailand is also taken.
8 Apr 67	RT 55	RT 55 includes the Kep airfield, Hanoi power transformer and other industrial sites.
20 Apr 67	JCSM 218-67	The Chiefs endorse Westmoreland's request for 100,000 more troops and 3 more tactical fighter squadrons to keep up the pressure on the North.
	Haiphong power plants struck	After numerous weather aborts, the two Haiphong power plants are struck for the 1st time.
24 Apr 67	Airfields attacked	Two MIG fields come under first-time attack shortly after their authorization.

24 Apr 67	R. W. Komer memo	Komer leaves behind some views on the war as he leaves for Vietnam. Negotiations are now unlikely, but bombing won't make Hanoi give in, hence the "critical variable is in the South."
	Moscow msg 4566	Amb. Thompson reports the bad effect of the recent Haiphong attacks on Soviet attitudes.
27 Apr 67	Westmoreland sees the President	Back in the US to speak to LBJ about his troop request and address Congress, Westy tells Johnson, "I am frankly dismayed at even the thought of stopping the bombing...."
1 May 67	W. Bundy memo to Katzenbach	As a part of the policy review in progress since 24 April, Bundy writes a strategy paper opposing more bombing (among other things) because of the likely adverse international effects.
4 May 67	SNIE 11-11-67	Soviets will likely increase aid to the DRV but not help get the conflict to the negotiating table.
	McGeorge Bundy letter to the President	Bundy argues for a ceiling on the US effort in Vietnam and no further escalation of the air war, particularly the mining of Haiphong harbor.
5 May 67	CM-3218-67	General Wheeler takes sharp exception to Bundy's views. Haiphong is the single most valuable and vulnerable NVN target yet unstruck. Also explains the rationale for the attack on the NVN power grid.

5 May 67	McNaughton DPM	As a part of the policy review, McNaughton drafts a proposal for cutting the bombing back to 20°. The action was to enhance military effectiveness not improve negotiation prospects, which were dim.
6 May 67	W. W. Rostow memo	After considering three options: closing Haiphong, heavier attacks in the Hanoi-Haiphong area and restriction of bombing to the panhandle only, Rostow recommended concentrating on the panhandle while holding open the option to up the ante farther north if we desired later.
8 May 67	W. Bundy memo	Bundy considers five different bombing packages and finally favors levelling off at current levels with no new targets and more concentration on the panhandle.
12 May 67	CIA Memo Nos. 0642/67 and 0643/67	The bombing has not eroded NVN morale, materially degraded NVN ability to support the war, nor significantly eroded the industrial-military base.
16 May 67	Hanoi power plant authorized	As the debate continues, the President approves the Hanoi power plant.
19 May 67	Hanoi power plant bombed	The power plant, 1 mile from the center of Hanoi, is hit for the first time.
	McNamara DPM (given to the President)	McNamara considered two courses: approval of the military recommendations for escalation in both North and South; de-escalation in the North (20°) and only 30,000 troops in the South. In spite of unfavorable negotiations climate, the second course is recommended because costs and risks of the 1st course were too great.

20 May 67	JCSM 286-67	The Chiefs rebut the DPM and call for expansion of the air war "...to include attacks on all airfields, all port complexes, all land and sea lines of communication in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, and mining of coastal harbors and coastal waters."
20 May 67	McNamara memo	McNamara asks CJCS, Dir. CIA, SecNav, and SecAF to analyze (a) cutting back bombing to 20°; and (b) intensifying attacks on LOCs in route packages 6A and 6B but terminating them against industrial targets.
23 May 67	CIA memo 0649/67	CIA opposes the mining of the harbors as too provocative for the Soviets.
26 May 67	CIA memo	With the recent attacks on NVN's power grid 87% of national capacity had been destroyed.
1 Jun 67	JCSM 307-67	The Chiefs take strong exception to the DPM noting its inconsistency with NSAM 288 and the jeopardy into which it would place national objectives in SEA because of the radical and conceptually unsound military methods it proposed, including any curtailment of the bombing.
	Helms letter to McNamara	Responding to McNamara's May 20 request for analysis of two bombing options, Helms states neither will cut down the flow of men and supplies enough "to decrease Hanoi's determination to persist in the war."
2 Jun 67	W. Bundy memo	Bundy, like the Chiefs, rejected the reformulation of objectives in the May 19 DPM. He leaves aside the question of the courses of action to be followed.

2 Jun 67	JCSM-312-67	The Chiefs, replying to McNamara's May 20 request, again reject all suggestions for a cutback in the bombing.
	SecNav memo to McNamara	The Secretary of the Navy concluded, in reply to the May 20 request, that the cutback to the panhandle would be marginally more productive than the current campaign.
3 Jun 67	SecAF memo to McNamara	Harold Brown favored the expanded campaign against LOCs in northern NVN in his reply to McNamara's May 20 request.
8 Jun 67	Katzenbach memo to McNamara	Katzenbach favors concentrating the bombing against LOCs throughout the country and abandoning attacks on "strategic" targets.
11 Jun 67	Kep Airfield struck	The Kep airfield comes under attack for the 1st time and ten MIGs are destroyed.
12 Jun 67	McNamara DPM	Three bombing programs are offered: (a) intensified attack on Hanoi-Haiphong logistical base; (b) emphasis south of 20°; (c) extension of the current program. McNamara, Vance & SecNav favor B; JCS favor A; SecAF favors C.
15 Jun 67	INR memo to Rusk	Hanoi was possibly reconsidering the desirability of negotiations.
17 Jun 67	Saigon msg 28293	Bunker doubts the effectiveness of bombing at interdiction and therefore urges the rapid completion of the barrier.
21 Jun 67	CINCPAC msg 210430Z Jun 67	Sharp argues that results of the bombing in recent months demonstrate its effectiveness and are a powerful argument for its expansion.

23-25 Jun 67	Glassboro Conference	President Johnson meets Soviet Premier Kosygin at Glassboro, N.J. No breakthrough on the war.
3 Jul 67	SecAF memo to McNamara	In a lengthy analytical memo Brown argues for option C, a general expansion of the bombing.
5 Jul 67	JCSM 382-67	The Chiefs reject a Canadian proposal to exchange a bombing halt for re-demilitarization of the DMZ.
7-11 Jul 67	McNamara trip to Vietnam	During McNamara's five day trip, CINCPAC argues against any further limitation of the bombing.
18 Jul 67	JCS msg 1859	RT 57 will be only a limited extension of previous targets. No cutback is planned.
9 Aug 67	Addendum to RT 57	Sixteen JCS fixed targets are added to RT 57 including six within the 10-mile Hanoi zone.
9-25 Aug 67	Stennis Hearings	The Senate Preparedness Subcommittee hears two weeks of testimony on the air war from Wheeler, Sharp, McConnell and finally McNamara. The committee's report condemns the Administration's failure to follow military advice.
11-12 Aug 67	Hanoi struck	Several of the newly authorized Hanoi targets, including the Paul Doumer Bridge are struck.
19 Aug 67	Attacks on Hanoi suspended	CINCPAC is ordered to susperd attacks on Hanoi's 10-mile zone from 24 Aug to 4 Sep.
20 Aug 67	Largest attack of the war	209 sorties are flown, the highest number in the war to date.

21 Aug 67	US aircraft lost over China	Two US planes are shot down over China after having strayed off course.
1 Sep 67	President's press conference	The President denies any policy rift within the Administration on the bombing.
7 Sep 67	Hanoi prohibition extended	The prohibition of attack in the 10-mile Hanoi zone is extended indefinitely.
10 Sep 67	Campha port struck	For the first time the port of Campha is struck including its docks.
20 Sep 67	CINCPAC msg 202352Z Sep 67	CINCPAC recommends hitting the MIGs at Phuc Yen air field and air defense controls at Bac Mai.
21 Sep 67	CINCPAC msg 210028Z Sep 67	Sharp urges lifting the 10-mile prohibition around Hanoi.
22 Sep 67	CM-2660-67	General Johnson (Acting CJCS) agrees with CINCPAC: hit Phuc Yen and Bac Mai and lift the 10-mile restriction.
29 Sep 67	San Antonio Formula	The President offers a new basis for stopping the bombing in a San Antonio speech: assurance of productive discussions and that no advantage will be taken of the cessation.
6 Oct 67	CM-2679-67	Specific authority to hit the Hanoi power plant is requested.
8 Oct 67	CINCPAC msg 080762Z Oct 67	Sharp again requests authority to strike Phuc Yen.
17 Oct 67	JCSM 555-67	Reviewing the objectives and limitations of the bombing policy for the President, the Chiefs recommended ten new measures against NVN including mining the ports and removal of all current restrictions on the bombing.

20 Oct 67	San Antonio Formula rejected	In an interview with a western communist journalist, NVN's Foreign Minister rejects the San Antonio formula.
21 Oct 67	Pentagon anti-war demonstration	A massive demonstration in Washington against the war ends with a 50,000-man march on the Pentagon.
23 Oct 67	JCSM 567-67	The Chiefs oppose any holiday standdowns or pauses at year's end.
23 Oct 67	JCS msg 9674	Phuc Yen authorized for attack.
25 Oct 67	Phuc Yen struck	Phuc Yen is hit for the 1st time.
27 Oct 67	CM-2707-67	Wheeler proposes reducing the Hanoi-Haiphong prohibited areas to 3 and 1.5 n.m. respectively.
9 Nov 67	Reduction of Hanoi-Haiphong zones refused.	The White House lunch rejects the proposal to reduce the Hanoi-Haiphong prohibited zones.
16 Nov 67	Haiphong bombed	Haiphong's #2 shipyard is hit for the 1st time.
17 Nov 67	Bac Mai hit	Bac Mai airfield near the center of Hanoi is struck for the 1st time.
22 Nov 67	SEACABIN Study	A joint ISA/JS study of the likely DRV reaction to a bombing halt lays stress on the risks to the US.
27 Nov 67	JCSM-663-67	The Chiefs present a plan for the next four months that calls for mining the harbors and lifting all restrictions on Hanoi-Haiphong, except in a 3 and 1.5 n.m. zone respectively. In all, 24 new targets are recommended.

28 Nov 67	McNamara's resignation	McNamara's resignation leaks to the press.
14-15 Dec 67	Hanoi RR Bridge struck	The Paul Doumer island highway bridge in Hanoi is struck again.
16 Dec 67	Rusk-McNamara agreement on new targets	The two secretaries reach agreement on ten of the 24 new targets proposed by the Chiefs in late Nov.
	IDA JASON Study	IDA's JASON Division again produces a study of the bombing that emphatically rejects it as a tool of policy.
	JCSM 698-67	Noting that the SEACABIN study did not necessarily reflect JCS views, the Chiefs advise against any bombing halt.
22 Dec 67	Pope asks bombing halt	The Pope calls on both sides to show restraint and on the US to halt the bombing in an effort to start negotiations. The President visits him the next day to reject the idea.
24 Dec 67	Christmas truce	A 24-hour Christmas truce is observed.
31 Dec 67	New Year's truce	Another 24-hour truce.
1 Jan 67	CINCPAC msg 010156Z Jan 68	CINCPAC's year end wrapup asserts RT was successful because of materiel destroyed, and manpower diverted to military tasks.
2 Jan 68	COMUSMACV msg 02891	Westmoreland describes the bombing as "indispensable" in cutting the flow of supplies and sustaining his men's morale.
3 Jan 68	JCS msg 6402	Bombing is completely prohibited again within 5 n.m. of Hanoi and Haiphong, apparently related to a diplomatic effort.

16 Jan 68	White House meeting	Two new targets are authorized but the 5 n.m. zones are reaffirmed.
25 Jan 68	Clifford testimony	Clark Clifford in his confirmation hearings states that "no advantage" means normal resupply may continue.
29 Jan 68	Tet truce begins	The Tet truce begins but is broken almost immediately by communist attacks.
31 Jan 68	Tet offensive	The VC/NVA attack all major towns and cities, invade the US Embassy and the Presidential Palace. Hue is occupied and held well into Feb.
3 Feb 68	JCSM 78-68	Citing the Tet offensive, the Chiefs ask for reduction of the restricted zones to 3 and 1.5 n.m.
5 Feb 68	Warnke memo to McNamara	Warnke opposes the reduction of the sanctuary because of the danger of civilian casualties. Reduction not approved.
10 Feb 68	Haiphong struck	After a month of restriction, Haiphong is again struck.
23-25 Feb 68	Wheeler visits Vietnam	Gen. Wheeler at the President's direction goes to Vietnam and confers with Westmoreland on required reinforcements.
27 Feb 68	Wheeler Report	Wheeler endorses Westmoreland's request for 200;000 more men.
	CIA memo	Hanoi unlikely to seek negotiations but rather will press the military campaign.
28 Feb 68	Clifford Group	The President asks Clifford to conduct a high-level "A to Z" review of US policy in Vietnam. The Group meets at the Pentagon and work begins. It continues until a DPM is finally agreed on Mar. 4.

29 Feb 68	W. Bundy memo to Warnke, et. al.	Bundy considers several alternative courses including mining the harbors and all-out bombing. Without indicating a preference he indicates no unacceptably adverse Soviet or Chinese reaction to any course except invasion.
29 Feb 68	Taylor memo to the President	Taylor proposes three possible packages of responses to Tet and Westmoreland's request. All three called for removal of the San Antonio formula and no new negotiating initiative.
1 Mar 68	Moscow msg 2983	Thompson gives his assessment of Soviet reactions to various US actions. "...any serious escalation except in South Vietnam would trigger strong Soviet response...."
3 Mar 68	DPM	The 3 Mar. draft memo rejects any bombing escalation, particularly mining the harbors or reducing the Hanoi-Haiphong restriction circles. It also rejects Westmoreland's troop requests.
	Clifford Group meeting	The Clifford Group rejects the DPM's "demographic frontier" tactical concept for SVN and is divided about the bombing. Wheeler is adamant for an escalation.
4 Mar 68	DPM	A new draft is completed and Clifford sends it to the President. It proposes no new peace initiative and includes both the JCS proposal for escalation of the bombing, and the ISA position that it should be stabilized. In transmitting the DPM, Clifford apparently also suggested to the President the idea of halting the bombing north of 20°, an idea discussed in the Clifford Group.

4 Mar 68	SecAF memo to Nitze	Brown presents three alternative air war escalations that might produce better results.
5 Mar 68	Rusk "Draft Statement"	A note to Wheeler for information from Clifford transmits a "draft statement" by Rusk announcing a bombing halt north of 20°. An attached rationale does not foresee negotiations resulting but indicates the time is opportune because of forthcoming bad weather over much of NVN.
11 Mar 68	New Hampshire Primary	President Johnson only narrowly defeats Eugene McCarthy in a great moral victory for anti-Administration doves.
16 Mar 68	Kennedy announces	Robert Kennedy, spurred by the New Hampshire results, announces for the Presidency.
	ISA DPM	An ISA draft memo that never gets SecDef signature proposes the concentration of the bombing south of 20° on the infiltration routes, with only enough sorties northward to prevent relocation of DRV air defenses to the south.
18-19 Mar 68	"Senior Informal Advisory Group"	Nine prestigious former Presidential advisors gather at the White House for briefings on the Vietnam situation. After hearing a report from State, DoD and CIA, they recommended against further escalation in favor of greater efforts to get peace talks started.
22 Mar 68	Westmoreland reassigned	The President announced that Westmoreland would return to become CofS Army in the summer.

25-26 Mar 68	Abrams confers with the President	General Abrams, DepCOMUSMACV, returns unexpectedly to Washington and confers with the President. He is presumably told of his new assignment to replace Westmoreland and of the President's decision for a partial bombing halt.
30 Mar 68	State msg 139431	US Ambassadors to the allied countries are informed of the forthcoming announcement of a partial bombing halt. The likelihood of a DRV response is discounted.
31 Mar 68	The President withdraws	The President announces the partial bombing halt on nationwide TV and ends his speech with the surprise announcement of his own withdrawal as a candidate for re-election.

VOLUME I

THE AIR WAR IN NORTH VIETNAM

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

THE AIR WAR IN NORTH VIETNAM

I. JULY 1965 TO THE YEAR-END BOMBING PAUSE

A. Introduction -- Where We Stood At Mid-Summer

By the summer of 1965, a U.S. campaign of sustained, almost daily air strikes against NVN was well underway, with token GVN participation. Most of the important bombing policy issues had been settled, and the general outlines of the campaign had become clear. Military proposals to seek a quick and decisive solution to the Vietnam War through bombing NVN -- proposals which called for an intensive campaign to apply maximum practicable military pressure in a short time -- had been entertained and rejected. Instead, what was undertaken was a graduated program, nicknamed ROLLING THUNDER, definitely ascending in tempo and posing a potential threat of heavy bombing pressure, but starting low and stretching out over a prolonged period.

U.S. decision-makers apparently accepted the military view that a limited, gradual program would exert less pressure upon NVN than a program of heavy bombing from the outset, and they apparently granted that less pressure was less likely to get NVN to scale down or call off the insurgency, or enter into reasonable negotiations. They felt, however, that all-out bombing would pose far greater risks of widening the war, would transmit a signal strength out of all proportion to the limited objectives and intentions of the U.S. in Southeast Asia, would carry unacceptable political penalties, and would perhaps foreclose the promise of achieving U.S. goals at a relatively low level of violence.

The decision-makers accordingly elected to proceed with the bombing in a slow, steady, deliberate manner, beginning with a few infiltration-associated targets in southern NVN and gradually moving northward with progressively more severe attacks on a wider variety of targets. The pattern adopted was designed to preserve the options to proceed or not, escalate or not, or quicken the pace or not, depending on NVN's reactions. The carrot of stopping the bombing was deemed as important as the stick of continuing it, and bombing pauses were provided for. It was hoped that this track of major military escalation of the war could be accompanied by a parallel diplomatic track to bring the war to an end, and that both tracks could be coordinated.

By the summer of 1965, bombing NVN had also been relegated to a secondary role in U.S. military strategy for dealing with the war. Earlier expectations that bombing and other pressures on NVN would

constitute the primary means for the U.S. to turn the tide of the war had been overtaken by the President's decision to send in substantial U.S. ground forces for combat in SVN. With this decision the main hope had shifted from inflicting pain in the North to proving, in the South, that NVN could not win a military victory there. ROLLING THUNDER was counted as useful and necessary, but in the prevailing view it was a supplement and not a substitute for efforts within SVN. From the first, strike requirements in SVN had first call on U.S. air assets in Southeast Asia.

Nonetheless, ROLLING THUNDER was a comparatively risky and politically sensitive component of U.S. strategy, and national authorities kept it under strict and careful policy control. The strikes were carried out only by fighter-bombers, in low-altitude precision-bombing modes, and populated areas were scrupulously avoided. Final target determinations were made in Washington, with due attention to the nature of the target, its geographical location, the weight of attack, the risk of collateral damage, and the like. Armed reconnaissance was authorized against targets of opportunity not individually picked in Washington, but Washington did define the types of targets which could be hit, set a sortie ceiling on the number of such missions, and prescribed the areas within which they could be flown.

National authorities also closely regulated the rate of escalation by discouraging the preparation of extended campaign plans which might permit any great latitude in the field. They accepted bombing proposals only in weekly target packages. Each target package, moreover, had to pass through a chain of approvals which included senior levels of OSD, the Department of State, and the White House, up to and including the principals themselves.

Within this framework of action the ROLLING THUNDER program had been permitted to grow in intensity. By mid-1965 the number of strikes against targets in the JCS master list of major targets had increased from one or two per week to ten or twelve per week. The geographic coverage of the strikes had been extended in stages, first across the 19th parallel, from there to the 20th, and then up to 20°30' North. The assortment of targets had been widened, from military barracks, ammunition depots, and radar sites at first, to bridges, airfields, naval bases, radio facilities, railroad yards, oil storage sites, and even power plants. The targets authorized for strike by armed reconnaissance aircraft were also expanded from vehicles, locomotives, and railroad cars to ferries, lighters, barges, road repair equipment, and bivouac and maintenance areas; and aircraft on these missions were authorized to interdict LOCs by cratering, restriking, and seeding chokepoints as necessary. The number of attack sorties -- strike and flak suppression -- had risen to more than 500 per week, and the total sorties flown to about 900 per week, four or five times what they had been at the outset.

This early ROLLING THUNDER program had already scored some immediate political and psychological gains. Prior to the bombing, U.S. authorities were coping with what Presidential Assistant McGeorge Bundy called a "widespread belief" that the U.S. lacked the will and determination to do what was necessary in Southeast Asia. The initiation of ROLLING THUNDER, followed by a series of military actions which in effect made the U.S. a full co-belligerent in the war, did much to correct that belief. The South Vietnamese were given an important boost in morale, both by the show of greater U.S. support and by the inauguration of joint retaliation against their enemy in the North. Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia, which had been watching SVN slide rapidly downhill while the U.S. seemed to be debating what to do, no doubt received the same kind of lift as well.

The bombing had also served several unilateral U.S. interests. It gave a clear signal to NVN -- and indirectly to China -- that the U.S. did not intend to suffer the takeover of SVN without a fight. It served notice that if pressed the U.S. would not necessarily recognize privileged sanctuaries. And it provided the U.S. with a new bargaining chip, something which it could offer to give up in return for a reduction or cessation of NVN's effort in the South.

Despite such gains, the overall effect of initiating ROLLING THUNDER was somewhat disappointing. The hopes in some quarters that merely posing a credible threat of substantial damage to come might be sufficient "pressure" to bring Hanoi around had been frustrated. U.S. negotiation overtures had been rejected, and Hanoi's position had if anything hardened. Infiltration South had continued and intensified. The signs indicated that Hanoi was determined to ride out the bombing, at least at the levels sustained up to mid-1965, while continuing to prosecute the war vigorously in the South. It was evident that the U.S. faced a long-haul effort of uncertain duration.

Although the real target of the early ROLLING THUNDER program was the will of NVN to continue the aggression in the South, the public rationale for the bombing had been expressed in terms of NVN's capability to continue that aggression. The public was told that NVN was being bombed because it was infiltrating men and supplies into SVN; the targets of the bombing were directly or indirectly related to that infiltration; and the purpose of attacking them was to reduce the flow and/or to increase the costs of that infiltration. Such a rationale was consistent with the overall position which morally justified U.S. intervention in the war in terms of NVN's own intervention; and it specifically put the bombing in a politically acceptable military idiom of interdiction.

This public rationale for the bombing had increasingly become the most acceptable internal rationale as well, as decision-makers sought to prevent runaway escalation and to hold down the bombing in what they thought should be a secondary role in the war. As a venture in "strategic persuasion" the bombing had not worked. The most obvious reason was that it was too light, gave too subdued and uncertain a signal, and exerted too little pain. Hardly any of the targets most valued by Hanoi -- the "lucrative" targets of the JCS master list -- had been hit. If the main purpose of ROLLING THUNDER was to impose strong pressure on Hanoi's will, the "lucrative" targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area, not those in the barren southern Panhandle, were the ones to go after, and to hit hard. Aerial bombardment could then perform in its proven strategic role, and even if the risks of such a course were greater it was precisely because the potential payoff was greater.

If, however, the emphasis could be shifted toward interdiction, it would be easier to confine targets to those of direct military relevance to the VC/NVA campaign in the South, and it would be easier to contain the pressures to escalate the bombing rapidly into the northern heart of NVN's population and industry. A continuing emphasis on the Panhandle LOCs could be defended more easily, if the main purpose was to actually handicap NVN's efforts to support and strengthen VC/NVA forces in the South, and it was less likely to generate adverse political repercussions.

The interdiction rationale had come to the fore by mid-1965, both within the government and before the public. There were still internal and external pressures to proceed faster and farther, of course, because interdiction effects had not been impressive either. Official spokesmen conceded that complete interdiction was impossible: the flow of men and supplies from the North, however vital to the enemy effort in the South, was quite small and could hardly be cut off by bombing alone. They explained that the bombing had "disrupted" the flow, "slowed" it down, and made it "more difficult" and "costly." They showed dramatic aerial photos of bridges destroyed, and implied that the enemy was being forced "off the rails onto the highways and off the highways onto their feet." They could not, however, point to any specific evidence that bombing the North had as yet had any impact on the war in the South. Almost inevitably, therefore, even within the interdiction rationale, the conclusion was that the bombing had been too restrained. It was argued that the predictably gradual pace had allowed NVN to easily adjust to, circumvent, or otherwise overcome the effects of the disruptions and other difficulties caused by the bombing, and that only an expanded bombing program could produce significant material results.

Thus, the outlook in mid-1965 was for some further escalation of the bombing, with a certain amount of tension between pressures to speed it up and counter-pressures to keep it in check. With the debate increasingly forced into the interdiction context, the prospect was for gradual rather than sudden escalation, and strong resistance to going all the way if necessary to break Hanoi's will could be predicted. There was still a gap between those who thought of the bombing as a primarily political instrument and those who sought genuine military objectives, and this would continue to confuse the debate about how fast and far to go, but the main lines of the debate were set.

Still unresolved in mid-1965 was the problem of the diplomatic track. Could the U.S. continue to escalate the bombing, maintaining a credible threat of further action, while at the same time seeking to negotiate? Could the U.S. orchestrate communications with Hanoi with an intensifying bombing campaign? As of mid-1965 this was an open question.

B. The July Escalation Debate

The full U.S. entry into the Vietnam War in the spring of 1965 -- with the launching of air strikes against NVN, the release of U.S. jet aircraft for close support of ARVN troops in SVN, and the deployment to SVN of major U.S. ground forces for combat -- did not bring an immediate turnabout in the security situation in SVN. The VC/NVA may have been surprised and stunned at first by the U.S. actions, but by the summer of 1965 they had again seized the initiative they held in late 1964 and early 1965 and were again mounting large-scale attacks, hurting ARVN forces badly. In mid-July Assistant Secretary McNaughton described the situation in ominous terms:

> The situation is worse than a year ago (when it was worse than a year before that)....A hard VC push is on....The US air strikes against the North and US combat-troop deployments have erased any South Vietnamese fears that the US will forsake them; but the government is able to provide security to fewer and fewer people in less and less territory, fewer roads and railroads are usable, the economy is deteriorating, and the government in Saigon continues to turn over. Pacification even in the Hop Tac area is making no progress. The government-to-VC ratio overall is now only 3-to-1, and in combat battalions only 1-to-1; government desertions are at a high rate, and the Vietnamese force build-up is stalled; the VC reportedly are trying to double their combat strength. There are no signs that the VC have been throttled by US/GVN interdiction efforts; indeed, there is evidence of further PAVN build-up in the I and II Corps areas. The DRV/VC

seem to believe that SVN is near collapse and show no signs of being interested in settling for less than a complete take-over. 1/

Faced with this gloomy situation, the leading question on the U.S. agenda for Vietnam was a further major escalation of troop commitments, together with a call-up of reserves, extension of military tours, and a general expansion of the armed forces.

The question of intensifying the air war against the North was a subsidiary issue, but it was related to the troop question in several ways. The military view, as reflected in JCS proposals and proposals from the field, was that the war should be intensified on all fronts, in the North no less than in the South. There was political merit in this view as well, since it was difficult to publicly justify sending in masses of troops to slug it out on the ground without at least trying to see whether stronger pressures against NVN would help. On the other hand, there was continued high-level interest in preventing a crisis atmosphere from developing, and in avoiding any over-reaction by NVN and its allies, so that a simultaneous escalation in both the North and the South needed to be handled with care. The bombing of the North, coupled with the deployment of substantial forces should not look like an effort to soften up NVN for an invasion.

During the last days of June with U.S. air operations against North Vietnam well into their fifth month, with U.S. forces in South Vietnam embarking for the first time upon major ground combat operations, and with the President near a decision that would increase American troop strength in Vietnam from 70,000 to over 200,000, Under-Secretary of State George Ball sent to his colleagues among the small group of Vietnam "principals" in Washington a memorandum warning that the United States was poised on the brink of a military and political disaster. 2/ Neither through expanded bombing of the North nor through a substantial increase in U.S. forces in the South would the United States be likely to achieve its objectives, Ball argued. Instead of escalation, he urged, "we should undertake either to extricate ourselves or to reduce our defense perimeters in South Viet-Nam to accord with the capabilities of a limited US deployment."

"This is our last clear chance to make this decision," the Under-Secretary asserted. And in a separate memorandum to the President, he explained why:

The decision you face now, therefore, is crucial. Once large numbers of US troops are committed to direct combat they will begin to take heavy casualties in a

war they are ill-equipped to fight in a non-cooperative if not downright hostile countryside.

> Once we suffer large casualties we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot -- without national humiliation -- stop short of achieving our complete objectives. Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives -- even after we have paid terrible costs. 3/

"Humiliation" was much on the minds of those involved in the making of American policy for Vietnam during the spring and summer of 1965. The word, or phrases meaning the same thing, appears in countless memoranda. No one put it as starkly as Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton, who in late March assigned relative weights to various American objectives in Vietnam. In McNaughton's view the principal U.S. aim was "to avoid a humiliating US defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor)." To this he assigned the weight of 70%. Second, but far less important at only 20% was "to keep SVN (and then adjacent) territory from Chinese hands." And a minor third, at but 10%, was "to permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life." 4/

Where Ball differed from all the others was in his willingness to incur "humiliation" that was certain -- but also limited and short-term -- by withdrawing American forces in order to avoid the uncertain but not unlikely prospect of a military defeat at a higher level of involvement. Thus he entitled his memorandum "Cutting Our Losses in South Viet-Nam." In it and in his companion memorandum to the President ("A Compromise Solution for South Viet-Nam") he went on to outline a program, first, of placing a ceiling on U.S. deployments at present authorized levels (72,000 men) and sharply restricting their combat roles, and, second, of beginning negotiations with Hanoi for a cessation of hostilities and the formation in Saigon of a "government of National Union" that would include representatives of the National Liberation Front. Ball's argument was based upon his sense of relative priorities. As he told his colleagues:

> The position taken in this memorandum does not suggest that the United States should abdicate leadership in the cold war. But any prudent military commander carefully selects the terrain on which to stand and fight, and no great captain has ever been blamed for a successful tactical withdrawal.
>
> From our point of view, the terrain in South Viet-Nam could not be worse. Jungles and rice paddies are not designed for modern arms and, from a military point

of view, this is clearly what General de Gaulle described to me as a "rotten country."

Politically, South Viet-Nam is a lost cause. The country is bled white from twenty years of war and the people are sick of it. The Viet Cong -- as is shown by the Rand Corporation Motivation and Morale Study -- are deeply committed.

Hanoi has a Government and a purpose and a discipline. The "government" in Saigon is a travesty. In a very real sense, South Viet-Nam is a country with an army and no government.

In my view, a deep commitment of United States forces in a land war in South Viet-Nam would be a catastrophic error. If ever there was an occasion for a tactical withdrawal, this is it. 5/

Ball's argument was perhaps most antithetic to one being put forward at the same time by Secretary of State Rusk. In a memorandum he wrote on 1 July, Rusk stated bluntly: "The central objective of the United States in South Viet-Nam must be to insure that North Viet-Nam not succeed in taking over or determining the future of South Viet-Nam by force. We must accomplish this objective without a general war if possible." 6/ Here was a statement that the American commitment to the Vietnam war was, in effect, absolute, even to the point of risking general war. The Secretary went on to explain why he felt that an absolute commitment was necessary:

The integrity of the U.S. commitment is the principal pillar of peace throughout the world. If that commitment becomes unreliable, the communist world would draw conclusions that would lead to our ruin and almost certainly to a catastrophic war. So long as the South Vietnamese are prepared to fight for themselves, we cannot abandon them without disaster to peace and to our interests throughout the world.

In short, if "the U.S. commitment" were once seen to be unreliable, the risk of the outbreak of general war would vastly increase. Therefore, prudence would dictate risking general war, if necessary, in order to demonstrate that the United States would meet its commitments. In either case, some risk would be involved, but in the latter case the risk would be lower. The task of the statesman is to choose among unpalatable alternatives. For the Under-Secretary of State, this meant an early withdrawal from Vietnam. For the Secretary, it meant an open-ended commitment.

Ball was, of course, alone among the Vietnam principals in arguing for de-escalation and political "compromise." At the same time that he and Rusk wrote these papers, Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy and Secretary of Defense McNamara also went on record with recommendations for the conduct of the war. Bundy's paper, "A 'Middle Way' Course of Action in South Vietnam," argued for a delay in further U.S. troop commitments and in escalation of the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, but a delay only in order to allow the American public time to digest the fact that the United States was engaged in a land war on the Asian mainland, and for U.S. commanders to make certain that their men were, in fact, capable of fighting effectively in conditions of counter-insurgency warfare without either arousing the hostility of the local population or causing the Vietnamese government and army simply to ease up and allow the Americans to "take over" their war. 7/

For McNamara, however, the military situation in South Vietnam was too serious to allow the luxury of delay. In a memorandum to the President drafted on 1 July and then revised on 20 July, immediately following his return from a week-long visit to Vietnam, he recommended an immediate decision to increase the U.S.-Third Country presence from the current 16 maneuver battalions (15 U.S., one Australian) to 44 (34 U.S., nine Korean, one Australian), and a change in the mission of these forces from one of providing support and reinforcement for the ARVN to one which soon became known as "search and destroy" -- as McNamara put it, they were "by aggressive exploitation of superior military forces...to gain and hold the initiative...pressing the fight against VC/DRV main force units in South Vietnam to run them to ground and destroy them." 8/

At the same time, McNamara argued for a substantial intensification of the air war. The 1 July version of his memorandum recommended a total quarantine of the movement of war supplies into North Vietnam, by sea, rail, and road, through the mining of Haiphong and all other harbors and the destruction of rail and road bridges leading from China to Hanoi; the Secretary also urged the destruction of fighter airfields and SAM sites "as necessary" to accomplish these objectives. 9/

On 2 July the JCS, supporting the views in the DPM, reiterated a recommendation for immediate implementation of an intensified bombing program against NVN, to accompany the additional deployments which were under consideration. 10/ The recommendation was for a sharp escalation of the bombing, with the emphasis on interdiction of supplies into as well as out of NVN. Like the DPM, it called for interdicting the movement of "war supplies" into NVN by mining the major ports and cutting the rail and highway bridges on the LOCs from China to Hanoi; mounting intensive armed reconnaissance against all LOCs and LOC facilities

within NVN; destroying the "war-making" supplies and facilities of NVN, especially POL; and destroying airfields and SAM sites as necessary to accomplish the other tasks. The JCS estimated that an increase from the then 2000 to about 5000 attack sorties per month would be required to carry out the program.

The elements of greater risk in the JCS proposals were obvious. The recommendation to mine ports and to strike airfields and SAM sites had already been rejected as having special Soviet or Chinese escalatory implications, and even air strikes against LOCs from China were considered dangerous. U.S. intelligence agencies believed that if such strikes occurred the Chinese might deliberately engage U.S. aircraft over NVN from bases in China. CIA thought the chances were "about even" that this would occur; DIA and the Service intelligence agencies thought the chances of this would increase but considered it still unlikely; and State thought the chances "better than even." 11/

Apart from this element of greater risk, however, intelligence agencies held out some hope that an intensified bombing program like that proposed by the JCS (less mining the ports, which they were not asked to consider) would badly hurt the NVN economy, damage NVN's ability to support the effort in SVN, and even lead Hanoi to consider negotiations. An SNIE of 23 July estimated that the extension of air attacks only to military targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area was not likely to "significantly injure the Viet Cong ability to persevere" or to "persuade the Hanoi government that the price of persisting was unacceptably high." Sustained interdiction of the LOCs from China, in addition, would make the delivery of Soviet and Chinese aid more difficult and costly and would have a serious impact on the NVN economy, but it would still not have a "critical impact" on "the Communist determination to persevere" and would not seriously impair Viet Cong capabilities in SVN, "at least for the short term." However:

> If, in addition, POL targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area were destroyed by air attacks, the DRV's capability to provide transportation for the general economy would be severely reduced. It would also complicate their military logistics. If additional PAVN forces were employed in South Vietnam on a scale sufficient to counter increased US troop strength /which the SNIE said was "almost certain" to happen/ this would substantially increase the amount of supplies needed in the South. The Viet Cong also depend on supplies from the North to maintain their present level of large-scale operations. The accumulated strains of a prolonged curtailment of supplies received from North Vietnam would obviously have an impact on the Communist effort in the South. They would certainly inhibit and

might even prevent an increase in large-scale Viet Cong military activity, though they would probably not force any significant reduction in Viet Cong terrorist tactics of harassment and sabotage. These strains, particularly if they produced a serious check in the development of Viet Cong capabilities for large-scale (multi-battalion) operations might lead the Viet Cong to consider negotiations. 11a/

There were certain reservations with respect to the above estimate. The State and Army intelligence representatives on USIB registered a dissent, stating that even under heavier attack the LOC capacities in NVN and Laos were sufficient to support the war in SVN at the scale envisaged in the estimate. They also pointed out that it was impossible to do irreparable damage to the LOCs, that the Communists had demonstrated considerable logistic resourcefulness and considerable ability to move large amounts of war material long distances over difficult terrain by primitive means, and that in addition it was difficult to detect, let alone stop, sea infiltration. On balance, however, the SNIE came close to predicting that intensified interdiction attacks would have a beneficial effect on the war in the South.

Facing a decision with these kinds of implications, the President wanted more information and asked McNamara to go on another fact-gathering trip to Vietnam before submitting his final recommendations on a course of action. In anticipation of the trip, McNaughton prepared a memo summarizing his assessment of the problem. McNaughton wrote that "meaningful negotiations" were unlikely until the situation began to look gloomier for the VC, and that even with 200,000-400,000 U.S. troops in SVN the chances of a "win" by 1968 (i.e., in the next 2½ years) were only 50-50. But he recommended that the infiltration routes be hit hard, "at least to put a 'ceiling' on what can be infiltrated;" and he recommended that the limit on targets be "just short" of population targets, the China border, and special targets like SAM sites which might trigger Soviet or Chinese reactions. 12/

McNamara left for Vietnam on July 14 and returned a week later with a revised version of his July 1st DPM ready to be sent to the President as a final recommendation. The impact of the visit was to soften considerably the position he had apparently earlier taken. His 20 July memorandum backed off from the 1 July recommendations -- perhaps, although it is impossible to tell from the available materials -- because of intimations that such drastic escalation would be unacceptable to the President. Instead of mining North Vietnam's harbors as a quarantine measure, the Secretary recommended it as a possible "severe reprisal should the VC or DRV commit a particularly damaging or horrendous act" such as "interdiction of the Saigon river." But he recommended a gradual

increase in the number of strike sorties against North Vietnam from the existing 2,500 per month to 4,000 "or more," still "avoiding striking population and industrial targets not closely related to the DRV's supply of war material to the VC."

The urgency which infused McNamara's recommendations stemmed from his estimate that "the situation in South Vietnam is worse than a year ago (when it was worse than a year before that)." The VC had launched a drive "to dismember the nation and maul the army"; since 1 June the GVN had been forced to abandon six district capitals and had only retaken one. Transport and communications lines throughout the country were being cut, isolating the towns and cities and causing sharp deterioration of the already shaky domestic economy. Air Marshal Ky presided over a government of generals which had little prospect of being able to unite or energize the country. In such a situation, U.S. air and ground actions thus far had put to rest Vietnamese fears that they might be abandoned, but they had not decisively affected the course of the war. Therefore, McNamara recommended escalation. His specific recommendations, he noted, were concurred in by General Wheeler and Ambassador-designate Lodge, who accompanied him on his trip to Vietnam, and by Ambassador Taylor, Ambassador Johnson, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland, with whom he conferred there. The rationale for his decisions was supplied by the CIA, whose assessment he quoted with approval in concluding the 1 July version of his memorandum. It stated:

> Over the longer term we doubt if the Communists are likely to change their basic strategy in Vietnam (i.e., aggressive and steadily mounting insurgency) unless and until two conditions prevail: (1) they are forced to accept a situation in the war in the South which offers them no prospect of an early victory and no grounds for hope that they can simply outlast the US and (2) North Vietnam itself is under continuing and increasingly damaging punitive attack. So long as the Communists think they scent the possibility of an early victory (which is probably now the case), we believe that they will persevere and accept extremely severe damage to the North. Conversely, if North Vietnam itself is not hurting, Hanoi's doctrinaire leaders will probably be ready to carry on the Southern struggle almost indefinitely. If, however, both of the conditions outlined above should be brought to pass, we believe Hanoi probably would, at least for a period of time, alter its basic strategy and course of action in South Vietnam.

McNamara's memorandum of 20 July did not include this quotation, although many of these points were made elsewhere in the paper. Instead, it concluded with an optimistic forecast:

> The overall evaluation is that the course of action recommended in this memorandum -- if the military and political moves are properly integrated and executed with continuing vigor and visible determination -- stands a good chance of achieving an acceptable outcome within a reasonable time in Vietnam.

Never again while he was Secretary of Defense would McNamara make so optimistic a statement about Vietnam -- except in public.

This concluding paragraph of McNamara's memorandum spoke of political, as well as military, "vigor" and "determination." Earlier in the paper, under the heading "Expanded political moves," he had elaborated on this point, writing:

> Together with the above military moves, we should take political initiatives in order to lay a groundwork for a favorable political settlement by clarifying our objectives and establishing channels of communications. At the same time as we are taking steps to turn the tide in South Vietnam, we would make quiet moves through diplomatic channels (a) to open a dialogue with Moscow and Hanoi, and perhaps the VC, looking first toward disabusing them of any misconceptions as to our goals and second toward laying the groundwork for a settlement when the time is ripe; (b) to keep the Soviet Union from deepening its military in the world until the time when settlement can be achieved; and (c) to cement support for US policy by the US public, allies and friends, and to keep international opposition at a manageable level. Our efforts may be unproductive until the tide begins to turn, but nevertheless they should be made.

Here was scarcely a program for drastic political action. McNamara's essentially procedural (as opposed to substantive) recommendations amounted to little more than saying that the United States should provide channels for the enemy's discrete and relatively face-saving surrender when he decided that the game had grown too costly. This was, in fact, what official Washington (again with the exception of Ball) meant in mid-1965 when it spoke of a "political settlement." (As McNamara noted in a footnote, even this went too far for Ambassador-designate Lodge, whose view was that "'any further initiative by us now [before we are strong] would simply harden the Communist resolve not to stop fighting.'" In this view Ambassadors Taylor and Johnson concurred, except that they would maintain "discreet contacts with the Soviets.") 13/

McNamara's concluding paragraph spoke of "an acceptable outcome." Previously in his paper he had listed "nine fundamental elements" of a favorable outcome. These were:

(a) VC stop attacks and drastically reduce incidents of terror and sabotage.

(b) DRV reduces infiltration to a trickle, with some reasonably reliable method of our obtaining confirmation of this fact.

(c) US/GVN stop bombing of North Vietnam.

(d) GVN stays independent (hopefully pro-US, but possibly genuinely neutral).

(e) GVN exercises governmental functions over substantially all of South Vietnam.

(f) Communists remain quiescent in Laos and Thailand.

(g) DRV withdraws PAVN forces and other North Vietnamese infiltrators (not regroupees) from South Vietnam.

(h) VC/NLF transform from a military to a purely political organization.

(i) US combat forces (not advisors or AID) withdraw.

These "fundamental elements," McNamara said, could evolve with or without express agreement and, indeed, except for what might be negotiated incidental to a cease-fire they were more likely to evolve without an explicit agreement than with one. So far as the difference between a "favorable" and an "acceptable" outcome was concerned, he continued, there was no need for the present to address the question of whether the United States should "ultimately settle for something less than the nine fundamentals," because the force deployments recommended in the memorandum would be prerequisite to the achievement of any acceptable settlement; "a decision can be made later, when bargaining becomes a reality, whether to compromise in any particular."

In summary, then, McNamara's program consisted of first substantially increasing the pressure on the enemy by every means short of those, such as the bombing of population centers in the North, that would run sizeable risks of precipitating Soviet or Chinese direct intervention in the war, and then seeking a de facto political settlement essentially on US/GVN terms.

The July 20 memo to the President was followed up by two others on specific aspects of the problem before the end of July. On July 28, he replied to a series of eighteen points made by Senator Mansfield with respect to the Vietnam war. In so doing, Secretary McNamara informed the President of his doubts that even a "greatly expanded program" could be expected to produce significant NVN interest in a negotiated settlement "until they have been disappointed in their hopes for a quick military success in the South." Meanwhile he favored "strikes at infiltration routes" to impose a ceiling on what NVN could pour into SVN, "thereby putting a ceiling on the size of war that the enemy can wage there." He warned that a greatly increased program would create even more serious risks of "confrontations" with the Soviet Union and China. 14/

McNamara stated that the current bombing program was on the way to accomplishing its purposes and should be continued. The future program, he said, should:

a. Emphasize the threat. It should be structured to capitalize on fear of future attacks. At any time, 'pressure' on the DRV depends not upon the current level of bombing but rather upon the credible threat of future destruction which can be avoided by agreeing to negotiate or agreeing to some settlement in negotiations.

b. Minimize the loss of DRV 'face.' The program should be designed to make it politically easy for the DRV to enter negotiations and to make concessions during negotiations. It may be politically easier for North Vietnam to accept negotiations and/or to make concessions at a time when bombing of their territory is not currently taking place.

c. Optimize interdiction vs. political costs. Interdiction should be carried out so as to maximize effectiveness and to minimize the political repercussions from the methods used. Physically, it makes no difference whether a rifle is interdicted on its way into North Vietnam, on its way out of North Vietnam, in Laos or in South Vietnam. But different amounts of effort and different political prices may be paid depending on how and where it is done. The critical variables in this regard are (1) the type of targets struck, (e.g., port facilities involving civilian casualties vs. isolated bridges), (2) types of aircraft (e.g., B-52s vs. F-105s), (3) kinds of weapons (e.g., napalm vs. ordinary bombs), (4) location of target (e.g., in Hanoi vs. Laotian border area), and (5) the accompanying declaratory policy (e.g., unlimited vs. a defined interdiction zone).

d. Coordinate with other influences on the DRV. So long as full victory in the South appears likely, the effect of the bombing program in promoting negotiations or a settlement will probably be small. The bombing program now and later should be designed for its influence on the DRV at that unknown time when the DRV becomes more optimistic about what they can achieve in a settlement acceptable to us than about what they can achieve by continuation of the war.

e. Avoid undue risks and costs. The program should avoid bombing which runs a high risk of escalation into war with the Soviets or China and which is likely to appall allies and friends. 15/

C. Incremental Escalation

Secretary McNamara's 5 principles prevailed. The bombing continued to expand and intensify, but there was no abrupt switch in bombing policy and no sudden escalation. The high-value targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area were kept off limits, so as not to "kill the hostage." Interdiction remained the chief criterion for target selection, and caution continued to be exercised with respect to sensitive targets. The idea of a possible bombing pause, longer than the last, was kept alive. 16/ The Secretary refused to approve an overall JCS concept for fighting the Vietnam War which included much heavier ROLLING THUNDER strikes against key military and economic targets coordinated with a blockade and mining attack on NVN ports, 17/ and he also continued to veto JCS proposals for dramatic attacks on major POL depots, power plants, airfields, and other "lucrative" targets. 18/

The expansion of ROLLING THUNDER during the rest of 1965 followed the previous pattern of step-by-step progression. The approval cycle shifted from one-week to two-week target packages. New fixed targets from the JCS list of major targets, which grew from 94 to 236 by the end of the year, continued to be selected in Washington. The number of these new targets was kept down to a few per week, most of them LOC-related. Few strikes were authorized in the vital northeast quadrant, north of 21° N. and east of 106° E., which contained the Hanoi/Haiphong urban complexes, the major port facilities, and the main LOCs to China. In addition, de facto sanctuaries were maintained in the areas within 30 nautical miles from the center of Hanoi, 10 from the center of Haiphong, 30 from the Chinese border in the northwest (to 106° E.), and 25 from the Chinese border in the northeast. 19/

The scope of armed reconnaissance missions was also enlarged but kept within limits. The boundary for such missions was shifted to the north and west of Hanoi up to the Chinese buffer zone, but it was kept back from the northeast quadrant, where only individually approved

fixed target strikes were authorized. The operational latitude for armed reconnaissance missions was also widened. They were authorized to strike small pre-briefed fixed military targets not on the JCS list (e.g., minor troop staging areas, warehouses, or depots) in the course of executing their LOC attacks, and to restrike previously authorized JCS targets in order to make and keep them inoperable. An armed reconnaissance sortie ceiling continued in effect. It was lifted to 600 per week by October, but then held there until the end of the year. 20/

By the end of 1965 total ROLLING THUNDER attack sorties had levelled off to about 750 per week and total sorties to a little over 1500 per week. All told, some 55,000 sorties had been flown during the year, nearly half of them on attack (strike and flak suppression) missions, and three-fourths of them as armed reconnaissance rather than JCS-directed fixed target strikes. Altogether, ROLLING THUNDER represented only 30 percent of the U.S. air effort in Southeast Asia during the year, in keeping with the rough priorities set by decision-makers at the outset. 21/

Although bombing NVN had done much to generate, as Secretary McNamara put it, "a new school of criticism among liberals and 'peace' groups," whose activities were reflected in a wave of teach-ins and other demonstrations during 1965, 22/ the bombing also drew abundant criticism from more hawkish elements because of its limited nature. As a result, the Secretary and other officials were frequently obliged to defend the bombing restrictions before Congress and the press.

Most of the hawkish criticism of the bombing stemmed from basic disagreement with an air campaign centered upon a tactical interdiction rationale rather than a punitive rationale more in keeping with strategic uses of air power, a campaign in which the apparent target was the infiltration system rather than the economy as a whole, and in which, as one CIA report put it,

> ...almost 80 percent of North Vietnam's limited modern industrial economy, 75 percent of the nation's population, and the most lucrative military supply and LOC targets have been effectively insulated from air attack. 23/

This kind of criticism of the bombing concentrated on the most conspicuous aspect of the program, the strikes against fixed targets, and it faulted the program for failing to focus on the kinds of targets which strategic bombing had made familiar in World War II -- power plants, oil depots, harbor facilities, and factories.

Such "strategic" targets had not been entirely exempted from attack, of course, but they had been exempted from attack where they counted most, in the sanctuary areas. This occasioned some embarrassment in the Administration because any attack on such targets seemed inconsistent with a purely interdiction rationale, while failure to attack the most important of them did not satisfy a strategic bombing rationale. Secretary McNamara was pressed hard on these points when he appeared before the Congressional armed services and appropriations committees in August 1965 with a major supplemental budget request for the Vietnam War. Senator Cannon asked:

> I know that our policy was to not attack power stations and certain oil depots and so on earlier. But within the past two weeks we have noticed that you have attacked at least one or more power stations. I am wondering if your policy has actually changed now in regard to the targets. In other words, are we stepping up the desirability of certain targets?

Secretary McNamara replied:

> I would say we are holding primarily to these targets I have outlined. This week's program, for example, includes primarily, I would say, 95 percent of the sorties against fixed targets are against supply depots, ammo depots, barracks...but only one or two percent of the sorties directed against [one power plant].
>
> I don't want to mislead you. We are not bombing in the Hanoi...or the Haiphong area. There is a very good reason for that. In Haiphong there is a substantial petroleum dump [for example]. First, there is question whether destruction of that dump would influence the level of supply into South Vietnam. Secondly, General Westmoreland believes that an attack on that would lead to an attack on the petroleum dumps outside of Saigon that contain eighty percent of the petroleum storage for SVN. Thirdly, there is the real possibility that an attack on the Haiphong petroleum would substantially increase the risk of Chinese participation....for all those reasons it seems unwise at this time...to attack that petroleum dump....

In defending the policy of not attacking the powerplants and POL sites concentrated in the Hanoi/Haiphong area, the Secretary did not stress the interdiction purposes of the bombing but rather the risks of widening the war. He explained that an attack on the powerplants and POL sites would require also attacking Phuc Yen airfield and the surrounding SAM sites:

I had better not describe how we would handle it but it would be one whale of a big attack....this might well trigger, in the view of some, would trigger Chinese intervention on the ground....This is what we wish to avoid. 24/

Before the House Committee on Armed Services two days later, Secretary McNamara stressed both the irrelevance of targets like the POL facilities at Haiphong to infiltration into the South and the risks of Chinese intervention:

At present our bombing program against the North is directed primarily against the military targets that are associated with the infiltration of men and equipment into the South, ammo depots, supply depots, barracks areas, the particular lines of communication over which these move into the South. For that reason, we have not struck in the Hanoi area because the targets are not as directly related to the infiltration of men and equipment as those outside the area....As to the Haiphong POL....if we strike that there will be greater pressure on Communist China to undertake military action in support of the North Vietnamese....We want to avoid that if we possibly can. 25/

On other occasions the Secretary put such stress on the limited interdiction purposes of the bombing that it seemed to virtually rule out altogether industrial and other "strategic" targets:

...we are seeking by our bombing in North Vietnam to reduce and make more costly the movement of men and supplies from North Vietnam into South Vietnam for the support of the Viet Cong operations in South Vietnam. That's our primary military objective, and that requires that we bomb the lines of communication primarily and secondarily, the ammunition and supply depots....The great bulk of our bombing...is directed against traffic moving on roads and railroads, and the other portion...is directed against specific targets associated with the lines of communication, primarily supply depots and...bridges....We think our bombing policy is quite properly associated with the effort to stop the insurgency in South Vietnam. We've said time after time: It is not our objective to destroy the Government of North Vietnam. We're not seeking to widen the war. We do have a limited objective, and that's why our targeting is limited as it is.

When asked whether the U.S. refrained from bombing NVN's more vital installations because it would escalate the war, the Secretary added:

> Well, I'm saying that the other installations you're speaking of are not directly related to insurgency in the South, and that's what we're fighting. And that our targeting should be associated with that insurgency....our objective is to show them they can't win in the South. Until we do show that to them it's unlikely the insurgency in the South will stop. 26/

The Secretary's arguments had difficult sledding, however. As 1965 ended, the bombing restrictions were still under attack. The U.S. was heavily engaged in the ground war in the South, and a limited bombing campaign in the North did not make much sense to those who wanted to win it. The hawks were very much alive, and there was mounting pressure to put more lightning and thunder into the air war. At that point, in not very propitious circumstances, the Administration halted the bombing entirely, and for 37 days, from 24 December 1965 to 31 January 1966, pursued a vigorous diplomatic offensive to get negotiations started to end the war.

D. The "Pause" -- 24 December 1965 to 31 January 1966

1. The Pre-Pause Debate

An important element of the program developed by McNamara and his Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, John McNaughton in July 1965 was a pause in the bombing of North Vietnam. There had been a five-day pause in May, from the 13th through the 18th, apparently inspired by the President himself in an effort to see if the North Vietnamese government -- which had previously indicated that any progress towards a settlement would be impossible so long as its territory was being bombed -- would respond with de-escalatory measures of its own. Yet the President also saw a pause as a means of clearing the way for an increase in the tempo of the air war in the absence of a satisfactory response from Hanoi. The May pause had been hastily arranged -- almost, so the record makes it seem, as if on the spur of the moment -- and advance knowledge of it was so closely held, not only within the international community but also within the U.S. government, that no adequate diplomatic preparation could be made. Its most serious shortcoming as an effective instrument of policy, however, lay in its very brief duration. To have expected a meaningful response in so short a time, given the complexity of the political relationships not only within the North Vietnamese government and party, but also between Hanoi and the NLF in the South, and between Hanoi and its separate (and quarrelling) supporters within the Communist world, was to expect the impossible. 27/ Therefore, in his 20 July memorandum to the President,

Secretary McNamara wrote: "After the 44 US/third-country battalions have been deployed and after some strong action has been taken in the program of bombing the North (e.g., after the key railroad bridges north of Hanoi have been dropped), we could, as part of a diplomatic initiative, consider introducing a 6-8 week pause in the program of bombing the North."

The pause which eventually occurred -- for 37 days, from December 1965 until 31 January 1966 -- was somewhat shorter than the six-to-eight weeks McNamara suggested, but it was clearly long enough to allow the North Vietnamese fully to assess the options before them. They were not very attractive options, at least in the way they were seen in Washington. McNamara summarized them in a memorandum to the President on 30 November:

> It is my belief that there should be a three- or four-week pause [note that McNamara himself no longer held to the six-to-eight week duration] in the program of bombing the North before we either greatly increase our troop deployments to Vietnam or intensify our strikes against the North. The reasons for this belief are, first, that we must lay a foundation in the mind of the American public and in world opinion for such an enlarged phase of the war and, second, we should give North Vietnam a face-saving chance to stop the aggression. 28/

In other words, Hanoi should be given the implicit (although, naturally, not explicitly stated) choice of either giving up "its side of the war," as Secretary Rusk often put it, or facing a greater level of punishment from the United States. In an earlier memorandum, dated 3 November, and given to the President on the 7th, McNamara had remarked that "a serious effort would be made to avoid advertising [a pause] as an ultimatum to the DRV," 29/ yet Hanoi could scarcely have seen it as anything else. John McNaughton had perfectly encapsulated the Washington establishment's view of a bombing pause the previous July, when he had noted in pencil in the margin of a draft memorandum the words "RT [i.e., ROLLING THUNDER] (incl. Pause), ratchet." 30/ The image of a ratchet, such as the device which raises the net on a tennis court, backing off tension between each phase of increasing it, was precisely what McNaughton and McNamara, William Bundy and Alexis Johnson at State, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had in mind when they thought of a pause. The only danger was, as McNamara put it in his memorandum of 3 November, "being trapped in a status-quo cease-fire or in negotiations which, though unaccompanied by real concessions by the VC, made it politically costly for us to terminate the Pause."

McNamara and McNaughton were optimistic that, by skillful diplomacy, this pitfall could be avoided. Rusk, Bundy and Johnson, who had to perform the required diplomatic task, and the Chiefs, who were professionally distrustful of the diplomatic art and of the ability of the political decision-makers in Washington to resist the pressures from the "peace movement" in the United States, were not so sure. The Chiefs (echoing General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp) were also opposed to any measures which would, even momentarily, reduce the pressure on North Vietnam. The arguments for and against a pause were summarized in a State Department memorandum to the President on 9 November:

> The purposes of -- and Secretary McNamara's arguments for -- such a pause are four:
>
> (a) It would offer Hanoi and the Viet Cong a chance to move toward a solution if they should be so inclined, removing the psychological barrier of continued bombing and permitting the Soviets and others to bring moderating arguments to bear;
>
> (b) It would demonstrate to domestic and international critics that we had indeed made every effort for a peaceful settlement before proceeding to intensified actions, notably the latter stages of the extrapolated Rolling Thunder program;
>
> (c) It would probably tend to reduce the dangers of escalation after we had resumed the bombing, at least insofar as the Soviets were concerned;
>
> (d) It would set the stage for another pause, perhaps in late 1966, which might produce a settlement.
>
> Against these propositions, there are the following considerations arguing against a pause:
>
> (a) In the absence of any indication from Hanoi as to what reciprocal action it might take, we could well find ourselves in the position of having played this very important card without receiving anything substantial in return. There are no indications that Hanoi is yet in a mood to agree to a settlement acceptable to us. The chance is, therefore, very slight that a pause at this time could lead to an acceptable settlement.
>
> (b) A unilateral pause at this time would offer an excellent opportunity for Hanoi to interpose obstacles to our resumption of bombing and to demoralize South Vietnam

by indefinitely dangling before us (and the world) the prospect of negotiations with no intent of reaching an acceptable settlement. It might also tempt the Soviet Union to make threats that would render very difficult a decision to resume bombing.

(c) In Saigon, obtaining South Vietnamese acquiescence to a pause would be difficult. It could adversely affect the Government's solidity. Any major falling out between the Government and the United States or any overturn in the Government's political structure could set us back very severly (sic).

(d) An additional factor is that undertaking the second course of action following a pause /i.e., "extrapolation" of ROLLING THUNDER/ would give this course a much more dramatic character, both internationally and domestically, and would, in particular, present the Soviets with those difficult choices that we have heretofore been successful in avoiding.

After this summary of the competing arguments, the State paper -- speaking for Secretary Rusk -- came down against a bombing pause. The paper continued:

On balance, the arguments against the pause are convincing to the Secretary of State, who recommends that it not be undertaken at the present time. The Secretary of State believes that a pause should be undertaken only when and if the chances were significantly greater than they now appear that Hanoi would respond by reciprocal actions leading in the direction of a peaceful settlement. He further believes that, from the standpoint of international and domestic opinion, a pause might become an overriding requirement only if we were about to reach the advanced stages of an extrapolated Rolling Thunder program involving extensive air operations in the Hanoi/Haiphong area. Since the Secretary of State believes that such advanced stages are not in themselves desirable until the tide in the South is more favorable, he does not feel that, even accepting the point of view of the Secretary of Defense, there is now any international requirement to consider a "Pause." 31/

Basic to Rusk's position, as John McNaughton pointed out in a memorandum to Secretary McNamara the same day, was the assumption that a bombing pause was a "card" which could be "played" only once. In fact, McNaughton wrote, "it is more reasonable to think that it could be played any number of times, with the arguments against it,

but not those for it, becoming less valid each time." 32/ It was this argument of McNaughton's which lay behind the Defense position that one of the chief reasons for a pause was that even if it were to produce no response from Hanoi, it might set the stage for another pause, perhaps late in 1966, which might be "productive."

The available materials do not reveal the President's response to these arguments, but it is clear from the continuing flow of papers that he delayed positively committing himself either for or against a pause until very shortly before the actual pause began. Most of these papers retraced old ground, repeating the arguments which we have already examined. A State memorandum by William Bundy on 1 December, however, added some new ones. 33/ In summary, they were:

FOR a bombing pause (in addition to those we have already seen):

--Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin had "recently urged a 'pause' on McGeorge Bundy and had pretty clearly indicated the Soviets would make a real effort if we undertook one; however, he was equally plain in stating that he could give no assurance of any clear result."

--"American casualties are mounting and further involvement appears likely. A pause can demonstrate that the President has taken every possible means to find a peaceful solution and obtain domestic support for the further actions that we will have to take."

--"There are already signs of dissension between Moscow, Peking, Hanoi and the Viet Cong. The pause is certain to stimulate further dissension on the other side and add to the strains in the Communist camp as they argue about how to deal with it." Moreover, it would decrease the ability of Hanoi or Peking to bring pressure on Moscow to escalate Soviet support.

--"Judging by experience during the last war, the resumption of bombing after a pause would be even more painful to the population of North Vietnam than a fairly steady rate of bombing."

--"The resumption of bombing after a pause, combined with increased United States deployments in the South, would remove any doubts the other side may have about U.S. determination to stay the course and finish the job."

AGAINST a bombing pause, fewer new arguments were adduced. Those which we have seen, however, were restated with greater force. Thus it was noted that while Hanoi had said it could never "negotiate" so long as the bombing continued, it had given no sign whatsoever that even with a complete cessation (this, the paper pointed out, and not a "pause," was what the DRV really insisted upon) it would be led to "meaningful" negotiations or to de-escalatory actions. It might, for example, offer to enter into negotiations on condition that the bombing not be resumed and/or that the NLF be seated at the conference on a basis of full equality with the GVN. Both of these conditions would be clearly unacceptable to the U.S., which would run the danger of having to resume bombing in the face of what major sectors of domestic and international opinion would regard as a "reasonable" Hanoi offer: "In other words, instead of improving our present peace-seeking posture, we could actually end up by damaging it severely." And in doing so, the U.S. would "lose the one card that we have which offers any hope of a settlement that does more than reflect the balance of forces on the ground in the South." (Here, it may be noted, was the ultimate claim that could be made for the bombing program in the face of criticism that it had failed to achieve its objective of interdicting the flow of men and materials to the South.)

To these arguments, essentially restatements of ones we have previously seen, were added:

--"There is a danger that, in spite of any steps we may take to offset it, Hanoi may misread a pause at this time as indicating that we are giving way to international pressures to stop the bombing of North Vietnam and that our resolve with respect to South Vietnam is thus weakening." This danger had recently increased, the paper noted, because of peace demonstrations in the United States and the first heavy American casualties in South Vietnam.

--Just as a pause would make it more difficult to cope with the domestic "doves," so it would the "hawks" as well: "Pressure from the Rivers/Nixon sector to hit Hanoi and Haiphong hard might also increase very sharply...."

--"If a 'pause' were in fact to lead to negotiations (with or without resumed bombing), we would then have continuing serious problems in maintaining South Vietnamese stability. We must also recognize that, although we ourselves have some fairly good initial ideas of the positions we would take, we have not been able to go over the ground with the GVN or to get beyond general propositions on some of which we and they might well disagree."

These statements amounted, then, to the contention that just as the United States could not afford to initiate a bombing pause that might fail to produce negotiations and a de-escalation, neither could it afford to initiate one that succeeded.

Bundy's memorandum of 1 December contained no recommendations. It was a draft, sent out for comment to Under-Secretary Ball, Ambassadors Thompson and Johnson, John McNaughton, and McGeorge Bundy. Presumably, although there is no indication of it, copies also went to Secretaries Rusk and McNamara. By 6 December, William Bundy and Alexis Johnson were able to prepare another version, repeating the same arguments in briefer compass, and this time making an agreed recommendation. It stated: "After balancing these opposing considerations, we unanimously recommend that you [i.e., the President] approve a pause as soon as possible this month. The decision would, of course, be subject to consultation and joint action with the GVN." 34/ Thus, at some point between 9 November and 6 December (the available documents do not reveal when), Secretary Rusk evidently dropped his objection to a pause.

Getting the agreement of the Ky government to a pause was no easy task. Ambassador Lodge reported that he himself opposed the notion of a pause because of the unsettling effects it would have on the South Vietnam political situation. Only by making very firm commitments for large increases in American force levels during the coming year, Lodge warned, could Washington obtain even Saigon's grudging acquiescence in a pause. This is not the place to describe the process by which the GVN's consent was obtained; it is sufficient to note that nowhere in Saigon, neither within the government nor within the American Embassy and Military Assistance Command, was the prospect of any relaxation of pressure on the North -- for any reason -- greeted with any enthusiasm.

2. Resumption -- When and At What Level?

Implicit in the very notion of "pause," of course, is the eventual resumption of the activity being discontinued. Among the principals in Washington concerned with Vietnam, consideration of the circumstances and conditions in which the bombing of North Vietnam would be resumed went hand-in-hand with consideration of its interruption. Relatively early in this process, in his Presidential memorandum of 3 November, Secretary McNamara distinguished between what he termed a "hard-line" and a "soft-line" pause. "Under a 'hard-line' Pause," he wrote, "we would be firmly resolved to resume bombing unless the Communists were clearly moving toward meeting our declared terms....Under a 'soft-line' Pause, we would be willing to feel our way with respect to termination of the Pause, with less insistence on concrete concessions by the Communists." 35/

McNamara himself came down on the side of a "hard-line" pause -- a "soft-line" pause would make sense, he noted, only if the U.S. sought a "compromise" outcome. The words "hard-line" and "soft-line" became terms of art, employed by all of the principals in their papers dealing with the question of a pause. Throughout this discussion, it was taken for granted that bombing would be resumed. The only point at issue was how. On 3 December, John McNaughton wrote an "eyes only" memorandum (whose eyes was not specified, but presumably they included those of the Secretary of Defense) entitled, "Hard-Line Pause Packaged to Minimize Political Cost of Resuming Bombing." He specified four conditions, all of which would have to be met by the enemy in order to forestall the resumption of bombing:

"a. The DRV stops infiltration and direction of the war.

b. The DRV moves convincingly toward withdrawal of infiltrators.

c. The VC stop attacks, terror and sabotage.

d. The VC stop significant interference with the GVN's exercise of governmental functions over substantially all of South Vietnam." 36/

Clearly it was unlikely that the enemy would even begin to meet any of these conditions, but Hanoi, at least (if not the NLF), might move towards some sort of negotiations. In that event, the resumption of bombing when "peace moves" were afoot would incur a heavy political price for the United States. In order to maintain the political freedom to resume bombing without substantial costs, the U.S. government would have to make clear from the outset that it intended only a pause, certainly not a permanent cessation of the bombing, and that its continuation would depend upon definite actions by the enemy. Yet there was a problem, as McNaughton saw it, as to which definite actions to specify. He recognized that the United States could not easily list the conditions he had put forward earlier in his memorandum. McNaughton expressed his dilemma in the following terms:

Inconsistent objectives. A Pause has two objectives--(a) To influence the DRV to back out of the war and (b) to create a public impression of US willingness "to try everything" before further increases in military action. To maximize the chance that the DRV would decide to back out would require presenting them with an explicit proposal, in a form where some clearly defined conduct on their part would assure them of no more bombings. The truth of the matter, however, is that the hard-line objective is, in effect, capitulation

by a Communist force which is far from beaten, has unlimited (if unattractive) reserves available in China, and is confident that it is fighting for a just principle. To spell out such "capitulation" in explicit terms is more likely to subject us to ridicule than to produce a favorable public reaction. It follows that the hard-line objectives should be blurred somewhat in order to maximize favorable public reaction, even though such blurring would reduce the chances of DRV acceptance of the terms.

If McNaughton was reluctant to spell out U.S. "hard-line" objectives, he was nevertheless anxious not to allow a situation to develop where the enemy could make its mere participation in negotiations a sufficient quid pro quo for a continuation of the pause. Regarding negotiations, McNaughton suggested, the American position should be: "We are willing to negotiate no matter what military actions are going on." Moreover, when bombing was resumed, the ending of the pause should be tied to Hanoi's failure to take de-escalatory actions. "People might criticize our Pause for not having been generous," McNaughton wrote, "but they will be unlikely to attack the US for having failed to live up to the deal we offered with the Pause." 37/

McNaughton recommended that the first strikes after a resumption should be "identified as militarily required interdiction," in order to minimize political criticism. "Later strikes could then be escalated to other kinds of targets and to present or higher levels." (At the time McNaughton wrote, the pause had not yet gone into effect.) Similar advice came from William Bundy, writing on 15 January during the pause:

> Resumed bombing should not begin with a dramatic strike that was even at the margin of past practice (such as the power plant in December). For a period of two-three weeks at least, while the world is digesting and assessing the pause, we should do as little as possible to lend fuel to the charge -- which will doubtless be the main theme of Communist propaganda -- that the pause was intended all along merely as a prelude to more drastic action.
>
> Moreover, from a military standpoint alone, the most immediate need would surely be to deal with the communications lines and barracks areas south of the 20th parallel. A week or two of this would perhaps make sense from both military and political standpoints. After that we could move against the northeast rail and road lines again, but the very act of gradualness should reduce any chance that the Chicoms /the

Chinese Communists/ will react to some new or dramatic way when we do so. Extensions of past practice, such as Haiphong POL /petroleum, oil, and lubricants/, should be a third stage. 38/

McNaughton and Bundy were in essential agreement: the bombing should be resumed; it should be resumed on a low key at first; but after a decent interval it should be escalated at least to the extent of striking at the Haiphong POL storage facilities, and perhaps other high-priority targets as well. In their own eyes the two Assistant Secretaries were cautious, prudent men. Their recommendations were in marked contrast to those of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who (as this paper shows in greater detail later) pressed throughout the autumn and winter of 1965-66 for permission to expand the bombing virtually into a program of strategic bombing aimed at all industrial and economic resources as well as at all interdiction targets. The Chiefs did so, it may be added, despite the steady stream of memoranda from the intelligence community consistently expressing skepticism that bombing of any conceivable sort (that is, any except bombing aimed primarily at the destruction of North Vietnam's population) could either persuade Hanoi to negotiate a settlement on US/GVN terms or effectively limit Hanoi's ability to infiltrate men and supplies into the South.

These arguments of the Chiefs were essentially an extension and amplification of arguments for large-scale resumption received from the field throughout the pause. Apparently, neither Lodge, Westmoreland, nor Sharp received advance intimation that the suspension might continue not for a few days, as in the preceding May, but for several weeks. When notified that full-scale ground operations could recommence, following the Christmas cease-fire, as soon as there was "confirmed evidence of significant renewed Viet Cong violence," they were simply told that air operations against North Vietnam would not immediately resume. They were assured, however,

> We will stand ready to order immediate renewal of ROLLING THUNDER...at any time based on your reports and recommendations. 39/

None of the three hesitated long relaying such recommendations. "Although I am not aware of all the considerations leading to the continuation of the standdown in ROLLING THUNDER," General Westmoreland cabled on December 27, "I consider that their immediate resumption is essential." He continued,

> "...our only hope of a major impact on the ability of the DRV to support the war in Vietnam is continuous air attack over the entire length of their LOC's from the Chinese border to South Vietnam....Notwithstanding the heavy pressure on their transportation system in the

past 9 months, they have demonstrated an ability to deploy forces into South Vietnam at a greater rate than we are deploying U.S. forces....Considering the course of the war in South Vietnam and the capability which has been built up here by the PAVN/VC forces -- the full impact of which we have not yet felt -- the curtailment of operations in North Vietnam is unsound from a military standpoint. Indeed, we should no[w] step up our effort to higher levels. 40/

Ambassador Lodge seconded this recommendation, and Admiral Sharp filed his own pleas not only that ROLLING THUNDER be resumed "at once" but that his previous recommendations for enlarging it be adopted. The aim should be to "drastically reduce the flow of military supplies reaching the DRV and hence the VC," he argued, adding "the armed forces of the United States should not be required to fight this war with one arm tied behind their backs." 41/

One reason for ignorance in Saigon and Honolulu of the bombing suspension's possible continuation was that the President had apparently never fully committed himself to the timetable proposed by McNamara. Replying to Lodge on December 28, Rusk cabled a summary of the President's thinking. As of that moment, said the Secretary of State, the President contemplated extending the pause only "for several more days, possibly into middle of next week," i.e., until January 5 or 6. His aim in stretching out the pause was only in small part to seek negotiations.

We do not, quite frankly, anticipate that Hanoi will respond in any significant way.... There is only the slimmest of chances that suspension of bombing will be occasion for basic change of objective by other side but communist propaganda on this subject should be tested and exposed.

The key reasons for extending the pause, Lodge was told, were diplomatic and domestic. Some hope existed of using the interval to "drive [a] rift between Communist powers and between Hanoi and NLF." Even more hopeful were indications that the government's act of self-abnegation would draw support at home. The latest Harris poll, Lodge was informed, showed 73% favoring a new effort for a cease-fire, 59% in favor of a bombing pause, and 61% in favor of stepping up bombing if the pause produced no result.

The prospect of large-scale reinforcement in men and defense budget increases of some twenty billions for the next eighteen month period requires solid preparation of the American public. A crucial element will be clear demonstration that we have explored fully every alternative but that aggressor has left us no choice. 42/

This message went to Lodge as "EYES ONLY" for himself and Ambassador Porter. To what extent its contents were shared with General Westmoreland or other military or naval personnel, available documents do not indicate. In any case, the Embassy in Saigon had received from the very highest authority the same kind of intimation that opponents of the pause had been given in Washington. If the period of inaction would prepare American and world opinion for more severe measures, it followed that the next stage would see such measures put into effect.

As the pause continued beyond the deadline mentioned to Lodge, military planners in Saigon, Honolulu, and Washington worked at defining what these severe measures ought to be. On January 12, Admiral Sharp sent the Joint Chiefs a long cable, summarizing the conclusions of intensive planning by his staff and that of COMUSMACV.

> We began R/olling/ T/hunder/ with very limited objectives, at a time when PAVN infiltration was of less significance than it is now,

CINCPAC commented,

> ....When RT began, there was considerable hope of causing Hanoi to cease aggression through an increasing pressure brought to bear through carefully timed destruction of selected resources, accompanied by threat of greater losses...But...the nature of the war has changed since the air campaign began. RT has not forced Hanoi to the decision which we sought. There is now every indication that Ho Chi Minh intends to continue support of the VC until he is denied the capability to do so....We must do all that we can to make it as difficult and costly as possible for Hanoi to continue direction and support of aggression. In good conscience, we should not long delay resumption of a RT program designed to meet the changed nature of the war.

Specifically, Admiral Sharp recommended:

1. "....interdiction of land LOC's from China and closing of the ports..../the/ northeast quadrant....must be opened up for armed recce with authority to attack LOC targets as necessary."

2. "Destruction of resources within NVN should begin with POL. Every known POL facility and distribution activity should be destroyed and harassed until the war is concluded. Denial of electric power facilities should begin at an early date and continue until all

plants are out of action....All large military facilities should be destroyed in Northern NVN....

3. We should mount an intensified armed reconnsaissance program without sortie restriction, to harass, disrupt and attrit/e/ the dispersed and hidden military facilities and activities south of 20 deg/rees/....

These three tasks well done will bring the enemy to the conference table or cause the insurgency to wither from lack of support. The alternative appears to be a long and costly counterinsurgency -- costly in U.S. and GVN lives and material resources. 43/

Writing the Secretary of Defense on January 18, the Joint Chiefs offered an equally bold definition of a post-pause bombing campaign. The Chiefs argued that the piecemeal nature of previous attacks had permitted the DRV to adapt itself to the bombing, replenish and disperse its stocks, diversify its transportation system and improve its defenses. Complaining about the geographic and numerical restrictions on the bombing, the Chiefs recommended that "offensive air operations against NVN should be resumed now with a sharp blow and thereafter maintained with uninterrupted, increasing pressure. 44/ The Chiefs further argued that,

These operations should be conducted in such a manner and be of sufficient magnitude to: deny the DRV large-scale external assistance; destroy those resources already in NVN which contribute most to the support of aggression; destroy or deny use of military facilities; and harass, disrupt and impede the movement of men and materials into SVN. 45/

The shutting off of external assistance would require,

...closing of the ports as well as sustained interdiction of land LOCs from China....Military considerations would dictate that mining be conducted now; however, the Joint Chiefs...appreciate the sensitivity of such a measure and recognize that precise timing must take into account political factors. 46/

In addition to endorsing the full-scale attacks on POL, electric power plants, large military facilities in northern NVN, and LOC centers and choke points with intensified armed reconnaissance,

unhampered by the existing restrictions on sortie number, that CINCPAC has recommended, the Chiefs urged the reduction of the size of the sanctuaries around Hanoi, Haiphong and the China border. More importantly, the Chiefs requested authorization to eliminate the airfields if required and permission for operational commanders "to deal with the SAM threat, as required to prevent interference with planned air operations." 47/

The Chiefs acknowledged the likely adverse response to this sharp escalation in the international community, but urged the necessity of the proposed actions. In dealing with the anxieties about Chinese communist entry into the war, they neatly turned the usual argument that China would enter the war in response to escalatory provocation on its head by arguing that a greater likelihood was Chinese entry through miscalculation.

> The Joint Chiefs...believe that continued US restraint may serve to increase rather than decrease the likelihood of such intervention /Chinese/ by encouraging gradual responses on the part of the Chinese Communists. This is in addition to the probable interpretation of such restraint as US vacillation by both the Communist and Free World leadership. 48/

The Chiefs spelled out their specific proposals in their concluding recommendations:

> a. The authorized area for offensive air operations be expanded to include all of NVN less the area encompassed by a ten-mile radius around Hanoi/Phuc Yen Airfield, a four-mile radius around Haiphong, and a twenty-mile China buffer zone. Exceptions to permit selected strikes within these restricted areas, in accordance with the air campaign described herein, will be conducted only as authorized by the Joint Chiefs....
>
> b. Numerical sortie limitations on armed reconnaissance in NVN be removed.
>
> c. No tactical restrictions or limitations be imposed upon the execution of the specific air strikes.
>
> d. The Joint Chiefs...be authorized to direct CINCPAC to conduct the air campaign against the DRV as described herein. 49/

On the same day as the Chiefs' Memorandum, and perhaps in reaction to it, John McNaughton set down what he termed "Some Observations about Bombing North Vietnam." 50/ It is not clear to whom the

paper was addressed, or who saw it. But it comprises perhaps the most effective political case that could have been made for the bombing program in early 1966, by a writer who was intimately involved with every detail of the program and who was fully aware of all its limitations. As such its most important sections are worth extensive quotation here. They were the following:

3. Purposes of the program of bombing the North. The purposes of the bombing are mainly:

a. To interdict infiltration.

b. To bring about negotiations (by indirect third-party pressure flowing from fear of escalation and by direct pressure on Hanoi).

c. To provide a bargaining counter in negotiations (or in a tacit "minuet").

d. To sustain GVN and US morale.

Short of drastic action against the North Vietnamese population (and query even then), the program probably cannot be expected directly or indirectly to persuade Hanoi to come to the table or to settle either (1) while Le Duan and other militants are in ascendance in the politburo or (2) while the North thinks it can win in the South. The only questions are two: (3) Can the program be expected to reduce (not just increase the cost of) DRV aid to the South below what it would otherwise be -- and hopefully to put a ceiling on it -- so that we can achieve a military victory or, short of that, so that their failure in the South will cause them to lose confidence in victory there? (Our World War II experience indicates that only at that time can the squeeze on the North be expected to be a bargaining counter). And (4) is the political situation (vis a vis the "hard-liners" at home, in the GVN and elsewhere) such that the bombing must be carried on for morale reasons? (The negative morale effect of now stopping bombing North Vietnam could be substantial, but it need not be considered unless the interdiction reason fails.)

4. Analysis of past interdiction efforts. The program so far has not successfully interdicted infiltration of men and materiel into South Vietnam (although it may have caused the North to concentrate its logistic resources on the trail, to the advantage of our efforts in support of Souvanna). Despite our armed reconnaissance efforts and strikes on railroads, bridges, storage centers, training bases and other key

links in their lines of communications, it is estimated that they are capable of generating in the North and infiltrating to the South 4500 men a month and between 50 and 300 (an average of 200) tons a day depending on the season. The insufficiency of the interdiction effort is obvious when one realizes that the 110 battalions of PAVN (27) and VC (83) forces in Vietnam need only 20 or so tons a day from North Vietnam to sustain "1964" levels of activity and only approximately 80 tons a day to sustain "light combat" (1/5th of the force in contact once every 7 days using 1/3d of their basic load). The expansion of enemy forces is expected to involve the infiltration of 9 new PAVN and the generation of 7 new VC combat battalions a month, resulting (after attrition) in a leveled-off force of 155 battalions at end-1966. The requirements from the North at that time -- assuming that the enemy refuses, as it can, to permit the level of combat to exceed "light" -- should approximate 140 tons a day, less than half the dry-season infiltration capability and less than three-quarters the average infiltration capability.

5. The effective interdiction program. The flow of propaganda and military communications cannot be physically interdicted. But it is possible that the flow of men and materiel to the crucial areas of South Vietnam can be. The interdiction can be en route into North Vietnam from the outside world, inside North Vietnam, en route from the North by sea or through Laos or Cambodia to South Vietnam, and inside South Vietnam. It can be by destruction or by slow down. The effectiveness can be prolonged by exhausting the North's repair capability, and can be enhanced by complicating their communications and control machinery. The ingredients of an effective interdiction program in North Vietnam must be these:

a. Intensive around-the-clock armed reconnaissance throughout NVN.

b. Destruction of the LOC targets heretofore tar targeted.

c. Destruction of POL.

d. Destruction of thermal power plants.

e. Closing of the ports.

....It has been estimated (without convincing back-up) that an intensive program could reduce Hanoi's capability to supply

forces in the South to 50 tons a day -- too little for flexibility and for frequent offensive actions, perhaps too little to defend themselves against aggressive US/GVN forces, and too little to permit Hanoi to continue to deploy forces with confidence that they could be supplied.

6. Possible further efforts against the North. Not included in the above interdiction program are these actions against the North:

f. Destruction of industrial targets.

g. Destruction of locks and dams.

h. Attacks on population targets (per se).

The judgment is that, because North Vietnam's economy and organization is predominantly rural and not highly interdependent, attacks on industrial targets are not likely to contribute either to interdiction or to persuasion of the regime. Strikes at population targets (per se) are likely not only to create a counterproductive wave of revulsion abroad and at home, but greatly to increase the risk of enlarging the war with China and the Soviet Union. Destruction of locks and dams, however -- if handled right -- might (perhaps after the next Pause) offer promise. It should be studied. Such destruction does not kill or drown people. By shallow-flooding the rice, it leads after time to widespread starvation (more than a million?) unless food is provided -- which we could offer to do "at the conference table."

7. Nature of resumed program against the North. The new ROLLING THUNDER program could be:

a. None, on grounds that net contribution to success is negative.

b. Resume where we left off, with a "flat-line" extrapolation.

c. Resume where we left off, but with slow continued escalation.

d. Resume where we left off, but with fast escalation.

On the judgment that it will not "flash" the Soviet Union or China -- we should follow Course d (fast escalation). Failure to resume would serve none of our purposes and make us appear irresolute. A "flat line" program would reduce infiltration (but not below PAVN/VC needs) and would placate GVN and domestic pressures. But this is not good enough. A fast (as compared with a slow) escalation serves a double purpose -- (1) it promises quickly to interdict effectively, i.e., to cut the DRV level of infiltration to a point below the VC/PAVN requirements, and (2) it promises to move events fast enough so that the Chinese "take-over" of North Vietnam resulting from our program will be a visible phenomenon, one which the DRV may choose to reject. There is some indication that China is "smothering North Vietnam with a loving embrace." North Vietnam probably does not like this but, since it is being done by "salami slices" in reaction to our "salami-slice" bombing program, North Vietnam is not inspired to do anything about it. This condition, if no other, argues for escalating the war against North Vietnam more rapidly -- so that the issue of Chinese encroachment will have to be faced by Hanoi in bigger bites, and so that the DRV may elect for a settlement rather than for greater Chinese infringement of North Vietnam's independence. The objections to the "fast" escalation are (1) that it runs serious risks of "flashing" the Chinese and Soviets and (2) that it gets the bombing program against the North "out of phase" with progress in the South. With respect to the first objection, there are disagreements as to the likelihood of such a "flash"; as for the second one, there is no reason why the two programs should be "in phase" if, as is the case, the main objective is to interdict infiltration, not to "persuade the unpersuadable."

....

9. Criticisms of the program. There are a number of criticisms of the program of bombing North Vietnam:

a. Cost in men and materiel. The program of bombing the North through 1965 cost 100(?) airmen (killed and missing or prisoner) and 178 US or South Vietnamese aircraft (costing about $250 (?) million) in addition to the ammunition and other operating costs. The losses and costs in 1966 are expected to be 200(?) airmen and 300(?) aircraft.

b. Damage to peaceful image of the US. A price paid for because of our program of bombing the North has been damage to our image as a country which eschews armed attacks on other nations. The hue and cry correlates with the kind of weapons (e.g., bombs vs. napalm), the kind of targets (e.g., bridges vs. people), the location of targets (e.g., south vs. north), and not least the extent to which the critic feels threatened by Asian communism (e.g., Thailand vs. the UK). Furthermore, for a given level of bombing, the hue and cry is less now than it was earlier, perhaps to some extent helped by Communist intransigence toward discussions. The objection to our "warlike" image and the approval of our fulfilling our commitments competes in the minds of many nations (and individuals) in the world, producing a schizophrenia....

c. Impact on US-Soviet detente. The bombing program -- because it appears to reject the policy of "peaceful co-existence," because it involves an attack on a "fellow socialist country," because the Soviet people have vivid horrible memories of air bombing, because it challenges the USSR as she competes with China for leadership of the Communist world, and because US and Soviet arms are now striking each other in North Vietnam -- has seriously strained the US-Soviet detente, making constructive arms-control and other cooperative programs more difficult....At the same time, the bombing program offers the Soviet Union an opportunity to play a role in bringing peace to Vietnam, by gaining credit for persuading us to terminate the program. There is a chance that the scenario could spin out this way; if so, the effect of the entire experience on the US-Soviet detente could be a net plus.

d. Impact on Chicom role in DRV. So long as the program continues, the role of China in North Vietnam will increase. Increased Chinese aid will be required to protect against and to repair destruction. Also, the strikes against North Vietnamese "sovereign territories," by involving their "honor" more than would otherwise be the case, increases the risk that the DRV would accept a substantially increased Chinese role, however unattractive that may be, in order to avoid a "national defeat" (failure of the war of liberation in the South).

e. Risk of escalation. The bombing program -- especially as strikes move toward Hanoi and toward China and as encounters with Soviet/Chinese SAMs/MIGs/vessels-at-sea occur -- increases the risk of escalation into a

broader war. The most risky actions are mining of the ports, bombing of cities (or possibly dams), and landings in North Vietnam.

10. Requirements of a program designed to "persuade" (not interdict). A bombing program focused on the objective of "persuasion" would have these characteristics:

a. Emphasize the threat. The program should be structured to capitalize on fear of the future. At a given time, "pressure" on the DRV depends not upon the current level of bombing but rather upon the credible threat of future destruction (or other painful consequence, such as an unwanted increased Chinese role) which can be avoided by agreeing to negotiate or agreeing to some settlement in negotiations. Further, it is likely that North Vietnam would be more influenced by a threatened resumption of a given level of destruction -- the "hot-cold" treatment -- than by a threat to maintain the same level of destruction; getting "irregularity" into our pattern is important.

b. Minimize the loss of DRV "face." The program should be designed to make it politically easy for the DRV to enter negotiations and to make concessions during negotiations. It is politically easier for North Vietnam to accept negotiations and/or to make concessions at a time when bombing of their territory is not currently taking place. Thus we shall have to contemplate a succession of Pauses.

....

e. Maintain a "military" cover. To avoid the allegation that we are practicing "pure blackmail," the targets should be military targets and the declaratory policy should not be that our objective is to squeeze the DRV to the talking table, but should be that our objective is only to destroy military targets.

Thus, for purposes of the objective or promoting a settlement, three guidelines emerge: (1) Do not practice "strategic" bombing; (2) do not abandon the program; and (3) carry out strikes only as frequently as is required to keep alive fear of the future. Because DRV "face" plays a role and because we can never tell at what time in the future the DRV might be willing to talk settlement, a program with fairly long gaps between truly painful strikes at "military" targets would be optimum; it would balance the need to maintain the threat with the need to be in an extended pause when the DRV mood changed. Unfortunately, so long as full VC victory

in the South appears likely, the effect of the bombing program in promoting negotiations or a settlement will probably be small. Thus, because of the present balance in the South, the date of such a favorable DRV change of mood is not likely to be in the near future....

11. Elements of a compromise program. There is a conflict between the objective of "persuading Hanoi," which would dictate a program of painful surgical strikes separated by fairly long gaps, and the objective of interdiction, which would benefit from continuous heavy bombings. No program can be designed which optimizes the chances of achieving both objectives at the same time. The kind of program which should be carried out in the future therefore depends on the relative importance and relative likelihood of success of the objectives at any given time. In this connection, the following questions are critical:

a. How likely is it that the Communists will start talking? The more likely this is, the more emphasis should be put on the "pressure/bargaining counter" program (para 10 above). The judgment is that the Communists are not likely to be interested in talking at least for the next few months.

b. How important to the military campaign is infiltration and how efficiently can we frustrate the flow? The more important that preventable infiltration is, the more emphasis should be put on the interdiction program (para 5 above). Unfortunately, the data are not clear on these points....

12. Reconciliation. The actions which these considerations seem now to imply are these, bearing in mind that our principal objective is to promote an acceptable outcome:

a. Spare non-interdiction targets. Do not bomb any non-interdiction targets in North Vietnam, since such strikes are not consistent with either of the two objectives. Such painful non-interdiction raids should be carried out only occasionally, pursuant to the rationale explained in para 10 above.

b. Interdict. Continue an interdiction program in the immediate future, as described in para 5 above, since the Communists are not likely to be willing to talk very soon and since it is possible that the interdiction program will be critical in keeping the Communist effort in South Vietnam within manageable proportions.

c. Study politically cheaper methods. Conduct a study to see whether most of the benefits of the interdiction campaign can be achieved by a Laos-SVN barrier or by a bombing program which is limited to the Laos-SVN border areas of North Vietnam, to Laos and/or to South Vietnam (and, if so, transition the interdiction program in that direction). The objective here is to find a way to maintain a ceiling on potential communist military activity in the South with the least political cost and with the least interference with North Vietnam willingness to negotiate.

McNaughton prepared a second memorandum complementing and partially modifying the one on bombing. It concerned the context for the decision. Opening with a paragraph which warned, "We...have in Vietnam the ingredients of an enormous miscalculation," it sketched the dark outlines of the Vietnamese scene:

> ...the ARVN is tired, passive and accommodation-prone....The PAVN/VC are effectively matching our deployments....The bombing of the North...may or may not be able effectively to interdict infiltration (partly because the PAVN/VC can simply refuse to do battle if supplies are short)....Pacification is stalled despite efforts and hopes. The GVN political infrastructure is moribund and weaker than the VC infrastructure among most of the rural population....South Vietnam is near the edge of serious inflation and economic chaos. 51/

The situation might alter for the better, McNaughton conceded. "Attrition -- save Chinese intervention -- may push the DRV 'against the stops' by the end of 1966." Recent RAND motivation and morale studies showed VC spirit flagging and their grip on the peasantry growing looser. "The Ky government is coming along, not delivering its promised 'revolution' but making progress slowly and gaining experience and stature each week." Though McNaughton termed it "doubtful that a meaningful ceiling can be put on infiltration," he said "there is no doubt that the cost of infiltration can...be made very high and that the flow of supplies can be reduced substantially below what it would otherwise be." Possibly bombing, combined with other pressures, could bring the DRV to consider terms after "a period of months, not of days or even weeks."

The central point of McNaughton's memorandum, following from its opening warning, was that the United States, too, should consider coming to terms. He wrote:

c. The present US objective in Vietnam is to avoid humiliation. The reasons why we went into Vietnam to the present depth are varied; but they are now largely academic. Why we have not withdrawn from Vietnam is, by all odds, one reason: (1) To preserve our reputation as a guarantor, and thus to preserve our effectiveness in the rest of the world. We have not hung on (2) to save a friend, or (3) to deny the Communists the added acres and heads (because the dominoes don't fall for that reason in this case), or even (4) to prove that "wars of national liberation" won't work (except as our reputation is involved). At each decision point we have gambled; at each point, to avoid the damage to our effectiveness of defaulting on our commitment, we have upped the ante. We have not defaulted, and the ante (and commitment) is now very high. It is important that we behave so as to protect our reputation. At the same time, since it is our reputation that is at stake, it is important that we not construe our obligation to be more than do the countries whose opinions of us are our reputation.

d. We are in an escalating military stalemate. There is an honest difference of judgment as to the success of the present military efforts in the South. There is no question that the US deployments thwarted the VC hope to achieve a quick victory in 1965. But there is a serious question whether we are now defeating the VC/PAVN main forces and whether planned US deployments will more than hold our position in the country. Population and area control has not changed significantly in the past year; and the best judgment is that, even with the Phase IIA deployments, we will probably be faced in early 1967 with a continued stalemate at a higher level of forces and casualties.

2. US commitment to SVN. Some will say that we have defaulted if we end up, at any point in the relevant future, with anything less than a Western-oriented, non-Communist, independent government, exercising effective sovereignty over all of South Vietnam. This is not so. As stated above, the US end is solely to preserve our reputation as a guarantor. It follows that the "softest" credible formulation of the US commitment is the following:

a. DRV does not take over South Vietnam by force. This does not necessarily rule out:

b. A coalition government including Communists.

c. A free decision by the South to succumb to the VC or to the North.

d. A neutral (or even anti-US) government in SVN.

e. A live-and-let-live "reversion to 1959."

Furthermore, we must recognize that even if we fail in achieving this "soft" formulation, we could over time come out with minimum damage:

f. If the reason was GVN gross wrongheadedness or apathy.

g. If victorious North Vietnam "went Titoist."

h. If the Communist take-over was fuzzy and very slow.

Current decisions, McNaughton argued, should reflect awareness that the U.S. commitment could be fulfilled with something considerably short of victory. "It takes time to make hard decisions," he wrote, "It took us almost a year to take the decision to bomb North Vietnam; it took us weeks to decide on a pause; it could take us months (and could involve lopping some white as well as brown heads) to get us in position to go for a compromise. We should not expect the enemy's molasses to pour any faster than ours. And we should 'tip the pitchers' now if we want them to 'pour' a year from now."

But the strategy following from this analysis more or less corresponded over the short term to that recommended by the Saigon mission and the military commands: More effort for pacification, more push behind the Ky government, more battalions for MACV, and intensive interdiction bombing roughly as proposed by CINCPAC. The one change introduced in this memorandum, prepared only one day after the other, concerned North Vietnamese ports. Now McNaughton advised that the ports not be closed. Why he did so is not apparent. The intelligence community had concurred a month earlier that such action would create "a particularly unwelcome dilemma" for the USSR, but would provoke nothing more than vigorous protest. 52/ Perhaps, however, someone had given McNaughton a warning sometime on January 18 or 19 that graver consequences could be involved. In any case, McNaughton introduced this one modification.

The argument which coupled McNaughton's political analysis with his strategic recommendations appeared at the end of the second memorandum:

> The dilemma. We are in a dilemma. It is that the situation may be "polar." That is, it may be that while going for victory we have the strength for compromise, but if we go for compromise we have the strength only for defeat -- this because a revealed lowering of sights from victory to compromise (a) will unhinge the GVN and (b) will give the DRV the "smell of blood." The situation therefore requires a thoroughly loyal and disciplined US team in Washington and Saigon and great care in what is said and done. It also requires a willingness to escalate the war if the enemy miscalculates, misinterpreting our willingness to compromise as implying we are on the run. The risk is that it may be that the "coin must come up heads or tails, not on edge." 53/

Much of McNaughton's cautious language about the lack of success -- past or predicted -- of the interdiction efforts appeared six days later, 24 January, in a memorandum from McNamara for the President. 54/ The memorandum recommended (and its tone makes clear that approval was taken for granted) an increase in the number of attack sorties against North Vietnam from a level of roughly 3,000 per month -- the rate for the last half of 1965 -- to a level of at least 4,000 per month to be reached gradually and then maintained throughout 1966. The sortie rate against targets in Laos, which had risen from 511 per month in June 1965 to 3,047 in December, would rise to a steady 4,500, and those against targets in South Vietnam, having risen from 7,234 in June to 13,114 in December, would drop back to 12,000 in June 1966, but then climb to 15,000 in December. By any standards, this was a large bombing program, yet McNamara could promise the President only that "the increased program probably will not put a tight ceiling on the enemy's activities in South Vietnam," but might cause him to hurt at the margins, with perhaps enough pressure to "condition /him/ toward negotiations and an acceptable /to the US/GVN, that is/ end to the war -- and will maintain the morale of our South Vietnamese allies."

Most of McNamara's memorandum dealt with the planned expansion of American ground forces, however. Here it indicated that the President had decided in favor of recommendations the Secretary had brought back from his trip to Vietnam on 28 and 29 November, and had incorporated in memoranda for the President on 30 November and 7 December. 55/ These were to increase the number of US combat battalions from 34 at the end of 1965 to 74 a year later, instead of to 62 as previously planned, with comparable increases for the Korean and Australian contingents (from nine battalions to 21, and from one to two, respectively). Such an increase in US combat strength would raise total US personnel in Vietnam from 220,000 to over 400,000. At the same time, McNamara noted in his memorandum of 7 December, the Department of Defense would come before the Congress in January to ask for a

supplemental appropriation of $11 billion of new obligational authority to cover increased Vietnam costs.

The Secretary recommended these measures, he said, because of "dramatic recent changes in the situation...on the military side." Infiltration from the North, mainly on greatly improved routes through Laos, had increased from three battalion equivalents per month in late 1964 to a recent high of a dozen per month. With his augmented forces, the enemy was showing an increased willingness to stand and fight in large scale engagements, such as the Ia Drang River campaign in November. To meet this growing challenge the previously planned US force levels would be insufficient. Identical descriptions of the increased enemy capability appeared in both McNamara's 30 November and 7 December memoranda. In the former, but not the latter, the following paragraph also appeared:

> We have but two options, it seems to me. One is to go now for a compromise solution (something substantially less than the "favorable outcome" I described in my memorandum of November 3), and hold further deployments to a minimum. The other is to stick with our stated objectives and with the war, and provide what it takes in men and materiel. If it is decided not to move now toward a compromise, I recommend that the United States both send a substantial number of additional troops and very gradually intensify the bombing of North Vietnam. Ambassador Lodge, General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland concur in this two-pronged course of action, although General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp would intensify the bombing of the North more quickly.

McNamara did not commit himself -- in any of these papers, at least -- on the question of whether or not the President should now opt instead for a "compromise" outcome. The President, of course, decided against it. He did so, it should be noted, in the face of a "prognosis" from McNamara that was scarcely optimistic. There were changes in this prognosis as it went through the Secretary's successive Presidential memoranda on 30 November, 7 December and 24 January. The first of these stated simply:

> We should be aware that deployments of the kind I have recommended will not guarantee success. US killed-in-action can be expected to reach 1000 a month, and the odds are even that we will be faced in early 1967 with a "no decision" at an even higher level. My overall evaluation, nevertheless, is that the best chance of achieving our stated objectives lies in a pause followed, if it fails, by the deployments mentioned above.

In the latter two memoranda, McNamara elaborated on this prognosis, and made it even less optimistic. The versions of 7 December and 24 January

were similar, but there were important differences. They are set forward here with deletions from the 7 December version in brackets, and additions in the 24 January version underlined:

> [Deployments of the kind we have recommended will not guarantee success.] Our intelligence estimate is that the present Communist policy is to continue to prosecute the war vigorously in the South. They continue to believe that the war will be a long one, that time is their ally, and that their own staying power is superior to ours. They recognize that the US reinforcements of 1965 signify a determination to avoid defeat, and that more US troops can be expected. Even though the Communists will continue to suffer heavily from GVN and US ground and air action, we expect them, upon learning of any US intentions to augment its forces, to boost their own commitment and to test US capabilities and will to persevere at a higher level of conflict and casualties (US killed-in-action with the recommended deployments can be expected to reach 1000 a month).
>
> If the US were willing to commit enough forces -- perhaps 600,000 men or more -- we could probably ultimately prevent the DRV/VC from sustaining the conflict at a significant level. When this point was reached, however, the question of Chinese intervention would become critical. (We are generally agreed that the Chinese Communists will intervene with combat forces to prevent destruction of the Communist regime in North Vietnam; it is less clear that they would intervene to prevent a DRV/VC defeat in the South.) 56/ The intelligence estimate is that the chances are a little better than even that, at this stage, Hanoi and Peiping would choose to reduce their effort in the South and try to salvage their resources for another day. [; but there is an almost equal chance that they would enlarge the war and bring in large numbers of Chinese forces (they have made certain preparations which could point in this direction).]
>
> It follows, therefore, that the odds are about even that, even with the recommended deployments, we will be faced in early 1967 with a military stand-off at a much higher level, with pacification [still stalled, and with any prospect of military success marred by the chances of an active Chinese intervention] hardly underway and with the requirement for the deployment of still more US forces. 57/

On 25 January 1966, before the bombing had yet been resumed, George Ball sent to the President a long memorandum on the matter. Its first page warned:

> I recognize the difficulty and complexity of the problem and I do not wish to add to your burdens. But before a final decision is made on this critical issue, I feel an obligation to amplify and document my strong conviction: that sustained bombing of North Viet-Nam will more than likely lead us into war with Red China -- probably in six to nine months. And it may well involve at least a limited war with the Soviet Union. 58/

There were, Ball said, "forces at work on both sides of the conflict that will operate in combination to bring about this result."

The Under-Secretary dealt with the U.S. side of the conflict first. The bombing, he wrote, would inevitably escalate; the passage of time, he contended, had demonstrated "that a sustained bombing program acquires a life and dynamism of its own." For this there were several reasons. First was that the U.S. "philosophy of bombing requires gradual escalation." Ball explained:

> Admittedly, we have never had a generally agreed rationale for bombing North Viet-Nam. But the inarticulate major premise has always been that bombing will somehow, some day, and in some manner, create pressure on Hanoi to stop the war. This is accepted as an article of faith, not only by the military who have planning and operational responsibilities but by most civilian advocates of bombing in the Administration.
>
> Yet it is also widely accepted that for bombing to have this desired political effect, we must gradually extend our attack to increasingly vital targets. In this way -- it is contended -- we will constantly threaten Hanoi that if it continues its aggression it will face mounting costs -- with the destruction of its economic life at the end of the road.

On an attached chart, Ball demonstrated that in the eleven months of bombing target selection had gradually spread northward to a point where it was nearing the Chinese border and closing in on the Hanoi-Haiphong area, "steadily constricting the geographical scope of immunity."

Just as the geographical extent of the bombing would inexorably increase, Ball argued, so would the value of the targets struck. "Unless we achieve dramatic successes in the South -- which no one expects /Ball wrote/ -- we will be led by frustration to hit increasingly more sensitive targets." He listed four categories of likely operations: (1) the mining of Haiphong harbor, and the destruction of (2) North Vietnam's POL supplies, (3) its system of power stations, and (4) its airfields. Each of these targets had already been recommended to the President by one of his principal military or civilian advisors in Washington or Saigon, Ball noted, and each had "a special significance for the major Communist capitals." The mining of Haiphong harbor would "impose a major decision" on the Soviet Union. "Could it again submit to a blockade, as at the time of the Cuban missile crisis," Ball asked, "or should it retaliate by sending increased aid or even volunteers to North Viet-Nam or by squeezing the United States at some other vital point, such as Berlin?" Would Hanoi feel compelled to launch some kind of attack on crowded Saigon harbor or on U.S. fleet units -- perhaps using surface-to-surface missiles provided by the Soviet Union? Similarly, the bombing of North Vietnam's POL supplies might bring in response an attack on the exposed POL in Saigon harbor. Then there were the airfields. Ball wrote:

> The bombing of the airfields would very likely lead the DRV to request the use of Chinese air bases north of the border for the basing of North Vietnamese planes, or even to request the intervention of Chinese air. This would pose the most agonizing dilemma for us. Consistent with our decision to bomb the North, we could hardly permit the creation of a sanctuary from which our own planes could be harassed. Yet there is general agreement that for us to bomb China would very likely lead to a direct war with Peiping and would -- in principle at least -- trigger the Sino-Soviet Defense Pact, which has been in force for fifteen years.

The same process of action-reaction, Ball noted, would also apply to surface-to-air missile sites (SAMs) within North Vietnam. The wider the bombing the greater the number of SAM sites -- manned substantially by Soviet and Chinese technicians -- the North Vietnamese would install. "As more SAMs are installed, we will be compelled to take them out in order to safeguard our aircraft. This will mean killing more Russians and Chinese and putting greater pressure on those two nations for increased effort." Ball summarized this process in general terms: "Each extension of our bombing to more sensitive areas will increase the risk to our aircraft and compel a further extension of bombing to protect the expanded bombing activities we have staked out."

These risks would be run, Ball observed, for the sake of a bombing program that would nevertheless be ineffective in producing the political results being asked of it. Ten days before sending his memorandum to the President, Ball had asked the CIA's Office of National Estimates to prepare an estimate of likely reactions to various extensions of the bombing, and also an assessment of the effects they would be likely to have on North Vietnam's military effort in the south. 59/ He cited the estimate's conclusions in his Presidential memorandum. None of the types of attacks he had specified -- on Haiphong harbor, on the POL, or on power stations -- "would in itself, have a critical impact on the combat activity of the Communist forces in South Viet-Nam." This was, of course, scarcely a new conclusion. In various formulations it had figured in intelligence estimates for the preceding six months. From it Ball was led to the premises which motivated him to write his vigorously dissenting paper: "if the war is to be won -- it must be won in the South," and "the bombing of the North cannot win the war, only enlarge it."

Ball's paper was at its most general (and perhaps least persuasive) in its discussion of "enlargement" of the war. He started from a historical example -- the catastrophic misreading of Chinese intentions by the United States during the Korean war -- and a logical premise:

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

In positing his own notions of possible thresholds, Ball could only reiterate points he had already made: that forcing the North Vietnamese air force to use Chinese bases, by bombing their own airfields, would be likely to escalate into armed conflict between the U.S. and China, and that the destruction of North Vietnam's industry would call in increased Chinese assistance to a point "sooner or later, we will almost certainly collide with Chinese interests in such a way as to bring about a Chinese involvement."

There were, strikingly enough, no recommendations in Ball's memorandum. Given his assumption that "sustained bombing" would acquire "a life of its own," and invariably escalate, the only consistent recommendation would have been that the U.S. should not resume bombing the North, but should instead confine the war to the South. There were no compromise positions. To a President who placed the avoidance of war with China (not to mention with the U.S.S.R.) very high on his list of objectives, and yet who felt -- for military and political reasons -- that he was unable not to resume bombing North Vietnam, but that, once

resumed, the bombing must be carefully controlled, Ball offered disturbing analysis but little in the way of helpful practical advice.

The week including the Tet holidays (January 23-29) saw some final debate at the White House on the question of whether to resume at all in which Ball's memo surely figured. The outcome was a Presidential decision that ROLLING THUNDER should recommence on January 31. The President declined for the time being, however, to approve any extension of air operations, despite the strong recommendations of the military and the milder proposals of the Secretary of Defense for such action.

E. Accomplishments by Year's-End

After 10 months of ROLLING THUNDER, months longer than U.S. officials had hoped it would require to bring NVN to terms, it was clear that NVN had neither called off the insurgency in the South nor been obliged to slow it down. Still, decision-makers did not consider bombing the North a failure. While willing to entertain the idea of a temporary pause to focus the spotlight on the diplomatic track they were pursuing, they were far from ready to give up the bombing out of hand. Why not? What did they think the bombing was accomplishing, and what did they think these accomplishments were worth? What did they hope to achieve by continuing it?

As already noted, certain political gains from the bombing were evident from the start. Morale in SVN was lifted, and a certain degree of stability had emerged in the GVN. NVN and other countries were shown that the U.S. was willing to back up strong words with hard deeds. These were transient gains, however. After the bombing of the North was begun, other U.S. actions -- unleashing U.S. jet aircraft for air strikes in the South, and sending U.S. ground troops into battle there -- had as great or even greater claim as manifestations of U.S. will and determination. Similarly, breaking through the sanctuary barrier had been accomplished, and once the message was clear to all concerned it did not require daily and hourly reinforcement. The acquisition of an important bargaining chip was a gain of uncertain value as yet, since it might have to be weighed against the role of the bombing as an obstacle to getting negotiations underway in the first place. As one high-level group stated in the fall of 1965:

> ...it would be difficult for any government, but especially an oriental one, to agree to negotiate while under sustained bombing attacks. 60/

If this particular chip had to be given up in order to establish what the group called "the political and psychological framework for initiating negotiations," the gain in leverage might be small.

Public opinion about the bombing was mixed. On the hawk side, as Secretary McNamara summed it up for the President:

> Some critics, who advocated bombing, were silenced; others are now as vocal or more vocal because the program has been too limited for their taste. 61/

People who believed that the U.S. was justified in intervening in the war and who identified Hanoi as the real enemy naturally tended to approve of the bombing. People who questioned the depth of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia and who feared that the U.S. was on a collision course with China seemed to be more appalled by the bombing than by any other aspect of the war. The peace fringe attacked it as utterly reckless and immoral. Abroad, in many countries, the U.S. was portrayed as a bully and NVN as a victim. Even U.S. allies who had no illusions about Hanoi's complicity in the South were unhappy with the bombing. As McNamara viewed it:

> The price paid for improving our image as a guarantor has been damage to our image as a country which eschews armed attacks on other nations....The objection to our 'warlike' image and the approval of our fulfilling our commitments competes in the minds of many nations (and individuals) in the world, producing a schizophrenia. Within such allied countries as UK and Japan, popular antagonism to the bombings per se, fear of escalation, and belief that the bombings are the main obstacle to negotiation, have created political problems for the governments in support of US policy. 62/

Bombing NVN, the Secretary added, had also complicated US-Soviet relations, mostly for the worse though conceivably -- barely so -- for the better:

> The bombing program -- because it appears to reject the policy of 'peaceful coexistence,' because the Soviet people have vivid horrible memories of air bombing, because it challenges the USSR as she competes with China for leadership of the Communist world, and because US and Soviet arms are now striking each other in North Vietnam -- has strained the US-Soviet detente, making constructive arms control and other cooperative programs difficult. How serious this effect will be and whether the detente can be revived depend on how far we

carry our military actions against the North and how long the campaign continues. At the same time, the bombing program offers the Soviet Union an opportunity to play a role in bringing peace to Vietnam, by gaining credit for persuading us to terminate the program. There is a chance that the scenario could spin out this way: if so, the effect of the entire experience on the US-Soviet detente could be a net plus. 63/

In addition, the Secretary continued, more countries than before were "more interested in taking steps to bring the war to an end." The net effect of this, however, was generally to increase the international pressures on the U.S. to seek an accommodation, not Hanoi, so that it was hardly an unmixed blessing.

Immediate gains and losses in the domestic and international political arenas were less important, however, than the overall influence of the bombing on the course of the war itself. Short-term political penalties were not hard to bear, at home or abroad, if the bombing could materially improve the prospects for a favorable outcome. This did not necessarily mean that the bombing had to contribute to a military victory. ROLLING THUNDER was begun at a time when the war was being lost and even the minimum task of preventing an outright defeat was far from assured. Almost any military contribution from the bombing could be viewed as a boon.

It was not easy to assess the contribution of ROLLING THUNDER to the war as a whole. Decision-makers like Secretary McNamara received regular monthly reports of measurable physical damage inflicted by the strikes, together with a verbal description of less readily quantifiable economic, military and political effects within NVN, but it was difficult to assess the significance of the results as reported or to relate them to the progress of the war in the South. Reports of this kind left it largely to the judgment or the imagination to decide what the bombing was contributing to the achievement of overall U.S. objectives.

CIA and DIA, in a joint monthly "Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam" which had been requested by the SecDef in August, attempted to keep a running tabulation of the theoretical cost of repairing or reconstructing damaged or destroyed facilities and equipment in NVN. According to this, the first year of ROLLING THUNDER inflicted $63 million worth of measurable damage, $36 million to "economic" targets like bridges and transport equipment, and $27 million to "military" targets like barracks and ammunition depots. 64/ In addition to this measurable damage, the bombing was reported to have "disrupted" the production and distribution of goods; created "severe" problems and "reduced capacity" in all forms of transportation; created more "severe problems" in managing the economy; reduced production; caused "shortages" and "hardships";

forced the diversion of "skilled manpower and scarce resources" from productive uses to the restoration of damaged facilities and/or their dispersal and relocation; and so on.

In terms of specific target categories, the appraisals reported results like the following:

Power plants. 6 small plants struck, only 2 of them in the main power grid. Loss resulted in local power shortages and reduction in power available for irrigation but did not reduce the power supply for the Hanoi/Haiphong area.

POL storage. 4 installations destroyed, about 17 percent of NVN's total bulk storage capacity. Economic effect not significant, since neither industry nor agriculture is large user and makeshift storage and distribution procedures will do.

Manufacturing. 2 facilities hit, 1 explosive plant and 1 textile plant, the latter by mistake. Loss of explosives plant of little consequence since China furnished virtually all the explosives required. Damage to textile plant not extensive.

Bridges. 30 highway and 6 railroad bridges on JCS list destroyed or damaged, plus several hundred lesser bridges hit on armed reconnaissance missions. NVN has generally not made a major reconstruction effort, usually putting fords, ferries, and pontoon bridges into service instead. Damage has neither stopped nor curtailed movement of military supplies.

Railroad yards. 3 hit, containing about 10 percent of NVN's total railroad cargo-handling capacity. Has not significantly hampered the operations of the major portions of the rail network.

Ports. 2 small maritime ports hit, at Vinh and Thanh Hoa in the south, with only 5 percent of the country's maritime cargo-handling capacity. Impact on economy minor.

Locks. Of 91 known locks and dams in NVN, only 8 targeted as significant to inland waterways, flood control, or irrigation. Only 1 hit, heavily damaged.

Transport equipment. Destroyed or damaged 12 locomotives, 819 freight cars, 805 trucks, 109 ferries, 750

barges, and 354 other water craft. No evidence of serious problems due to shortages of equipment. 65/

What did all of this amount to? The direct losses, in the language of one of the monthly appraisals,

> ...still remain small compared to total economic activity, because the country is predominantly agricultural and the major industrial facilities have not been attacked. 66/

The "cumulative strains" resulting from the bombing had "reduced industrial performance," but "the primarily rural nature of the area permits continued functioning of the subsistence economy." The "economic deterioration so far has not affected the capabilities of North Vietnam's armed forces, which place little direct reliance on the domestic economy for material." The bombing had "still" not reduced NVN capabilities to defend itself from attack and to support existing NVA/VC forces in Laos and SVN, but it had "limited" "freedom of movement" in the southern provinces, and it had "substantially curtailed" NVA capabilities to mount "a major offensive action" in Southeast Asia. Altogether, however, "the air strikes do not appear to have altered Hanoi's determination to continue supporting the war in South Vietnam." 67/

An evaluation which had to be couched in such inexact and impressionistic language was of little help in coming to grips with the most important questions about the bombing: (1) How much "pressure" was being applied to NVN to scale down or give up the insurgency, and how well was it working? (2) In what ways and to what degree was the bombing affecting NVN's capacity to wage war in the South? Whether the bombing program was viewed primarily as a strategic-punitive campaign against Hanoi's will or a tactical-interdiction campaign against NVN's military capabilities in the South -- or, as some would have it, both -- these were the questions to address, not the quantity of the damage and the quality of the dislocations.

In dealing with the above questions, it had to be recognized that NVN was an extremely poor target for air attack. The theory of either strategic or interdiction bombing assumed highly developed industrial nations producing large quantities of military goods to sustain mass armies engaged in intensive warfare. NVN, as U.S. intelligence agencies knew, was an agricultural country with a rudimentary transportation system and little industry of any kind. Nearly all of the people were rice farmers who worked the land with water buffaloes and hand tools, and whose well-being at a subsistence level was almost entirely dependent on what they grew or made themselves. What intelligence agencies liked to call the "modern industrial sector" of the economy was tiny even by Asian standards, producing only about 12 percent of a GNP of $1.6 billion

in 1965. There were only a handful of "major industrial facilities." When NVN was first targeted the JCS found only 8 industrial installations worth listing on a par with airfields, military supply dumps, barracks complexes, port facilities, bridges, and oil tanks. Even by the end of 1965, after the JCS had lowered the standards and more than doubled the number of important targets, the list included only 24 industrial installations, 18 of them power plants which were as important for such humble uses as lighting streets and pumping water as for operating any real factories. 68/

Apart from one explosives plant (which had already been demolished), NVN's limited industry made little contribution to its military capabilities. NVN forces, in intelligence terminology, placed "little direct reliance on the domestic economy for material." NVN in fact produced only limited quantities of simple military items, such as mortars, grenades, mines, small arms, and bullets, and those were produced in small workshops rather than large arsenals. The great bulk of its military equipment, and all of the heavier and more sophisticated items, had to be imported. This was no particular problem, since both the USSR and China were apparently more than glad to help.

The NVN transportation system was austere and superficially looked very vulnerable to air attack, but it was inherently flexible and its capacity greatly exceeded the demands placed upon it. The rail system, with single-track lines radiating from Hanoi, provided the main link-up to China and, via the port of Haiphong, to the rest of the world; it was more important for relatively long-haul international shipments than for domestic freight. The latter was carried mostly over crude roads and simple waterways, on which the most common vehicles were oxcarts and sampans, not trucks or steamers. The system was quite primitive, but immensely durable.

Supporting the war in the South was hardly a great strain on NVN's economy. The NVA/VC forces there did not constitute a large army. They did not fight as conventional divisions or field armies, with tanks and airplanes and heavy artillery; they did not need to be supplied by huge convoys of trucks, trains, or ships. They fought and moved on foot, supplying themselves locally, in the main, and simply avoiding combat when supplies were low. What they received from NVN was undoubtedly critical to their military operations, but it amounted to only a few tons per day for the entire force -- an amount that could be carried by a handful of trucks or sampans, or several hundred coolies. This small amount did not have to be carried conspicuously over exposed routes, and it was extremely difficult to interdict, by bombing or any other means.

In sum, then, NVN did not seem to be a very rewarding target for air attack. Its industry was limited, meaningful targets were few, and

they did not appear critical to either the viability of the economy, the defense of the nation, or the prosecution of the war in the South. The idea that destroying, or threatening to destroy, NVN's industry would pressure Hanoi into calling it quits seems, in retrospect, a colossal misjudgment. The idea was based, however, on a plausible assumption about the rationality of NVN's leaders, which the U.S. intelligence community as a whole seemed to share. 69/ This was that the value of what little industrial plant NVN possessed was disproportionately great. That plant was purchased by an extremely poor nation at the price of considerable sacrifice over many years. Even though it did not amount to much, it no doubt symbolized the regime's hopes and desires for national status, power, and wealth, and was probably a source of considerable pride. It did not seem unreasonable to believe that NVN leaders would not wish to risk the destruction of such assets, especially when that risk seemed (to us) easily avoidable by cutting down the insurgency and deferring the takeover of SVN until another day and perhaps in another manner -- which Ho Chi Minh had apparently decided to do once before, in 1954. After all, an ample supply of oriental patience is precisely what an old oriental revolutionary like Ho Chi Minh was supposed to have.

For 1965, at least, these assumptions about Hanoi's leaders were not borne out. The regime's public stance remained one of strong defiance, determined to endure the worst and still see the U.S. defeated. The leadership directed a shift of strategy in the South, from an attempt at a decisive military victory to a strategy of protracted conflict designed to wear out the opposition and prepare the ground for an eventual political settlement, but this decision was undoubtedly forced upon it by U.S. intervention in the South. There was no sign that bombing the North, either alone or in combination with other U.S. actions, had brought about any greater readiness to settle except on their terms.

In the North, the regime battened down and prepared to ride out the storm. With Soviet and Chinese help, it greatly strengthened its air defenses, multiplying the number of AAA guns and radars, expanding the number of jet fighter airfields and the jet fighter force, and introducing an extensive SAM system. Economic development plans were laid aside. Imports were increased to offset production losses. Bombed facilities were in most cases simply abandoned. The large and vulnerable barracks and storage depots were replaced by dispersed and concealed ones. Several hundred thousand workers were mobilized to keep the transportation system operating. Miles of by-pass roads were built around choke-points to make the system redundant. Knocked-out bridges were replaced by fords, ferries, or alternate structures, and methods were adopted to protect them from attack. Traffic shifted to night time, poor weather, and camouflage. Shuttling and transhipment practices were instituted. Construction material, equipment, and workers were prepositioned along key

routes in order to effect quick repairs. Imports of railroad cars and trucks were increased to offset equipment losses.

In short, NVN leaders mounted a major effort to withstand the bombing pressure. They had to change their plans and go on a war footing. They had to take drastic measures to shelter the population and cope with the bomb damage. They had to force the people to work harder and find new ways to keep the economy operating. They had to greatly increase imports and their dependence on the USSR and China. There were undoubtedly many difficulties and hardships involved. Yet, NVN had survived. Its economy had continued to function. The regime had not collapsed, and it had not given in. And it still sent men and supplies into SVN.

II. THE POL DEBATE -- NOVEMBER 1965 - JUNE 1966

A. Background

When the 37-day bombing pause was terminated at the end of January 1966, the principal issue before decision-makers was not whether to intensify the bombing but whether the intensification should be gradual as before or be sharply accelerated.

Some kind of escalation if the bombing pause failed, i.e., if the North Vietnamese did not give "concrete evidence of a willingness to come to terms," was foreshadowed by the October paper from State recommending the pause:

> We would have to convey our intent to reinstitute the bombing if the North Vietnamese refused to negotiate or if their willingness to negotiate is not accompanied by a manifest reduction of VC aggression in the South. If it is necessary to reinstitute bombing, we should be prepared to consider increasing the pressure, e.g. through striking industrial targets, to make clear our continuing, firm resolve. 1/

According to this thinking, failure of the pause would indicate that the bombing had not exerted enough pressure; greater effort was needed to convince Hanoi that the U.S. intended not only to continue the bombing but to do so on an increasing scale. Moreover, the pause had improved the political atmosphere for escalation. U.S. willingness to negotiate and NVN's unreasonableness had been amply and dramatically displayed for all the world to see. If the U.S. now decided to intensify the bombing, the decision could at least be presented as one that was made reluctantly after trying to find a more peaceful alternative.

The debate over the form of escalation in early 1966 was a continuation of the debate over bombing policy which had surfaced again in the fall of 1965, and which had mixed into the debate over the long pause. Regardless of any pause, it was clear by November that even the gradual rate of escalation of 1965 was approaching a point at which any further increase would be possible only by attacking the sensitive targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong sanctuaries and the China buffer zone. As of the end of October, 126 of the 240 existing JCS targets had been struck; and of the remaining 114, two thirds (75) were in the off-limits areas, and 29 of the other 39 remaining were in the touchy northeast quadrant. 2/ As the debate gathered momentum in the winter of 1965 without a clear decision to begin attacking "the hostage," the bombing actually levelled off. During November and December only 8 more JCS targets were struck and armed reconnaissance missions were held to a sortie ceiling of 1200 per two-week period. 3/

Apart from general cautiousness about the next obvious escalatory step, one of the reasons for the Administration's hesitancy was apparently the fear that the timing might not be right. As the bombing drew closer to Hanoi and Haiphong, some officials felt forcing the pace might oblige NVN to confront the issue of negotiations versus greater Chinese and/or Soviet involvement prematurely, i.e. before NVN was sufficiently convinced that it could not outlast the U.S. and win in the South. The theory was that so long as Hanoi was hopeful there was a greater risk that it would opt for escalation rather than a compromise settlement. As the October paper from State put it:

> We may be able to recognize the optimum time for exerting further pressure by increasing the level of our bombing, but an increase in our bombing of the North at the present time may bring matters to a head too soon. 4/

In addition, of course, there was good reason to hold off any escalation until a substantial bombing pause was undertaken, both to test Hanoi's intentions and to disarm critics on the dovish side who felt that the Administration had not gone far enough to meet Hanoi halfway.

1. JCS Recommendations

Dissatisfied with the measured pace of the bombing program from the start, they again began advocating a sharp intensification of the bombing in early November. Diplomatic and political considerations were secondary. Their position was that ROLLING THUNDER had succeeded in making it "substantially" more costly and difficult for NVN to support the insurgents in Laos and SVN, and had "substantially" degraded NVN's capability to conduct a conventional invasion of the South, but they agreed that the campaign had not materially reduced NVN's other military capabilities, damaged its economy, deterred it from supporting the war in the South, or brought it closer to the conference table. It was not because of any difficulty in applying pressure on Hanoi by bombing or in interdicting support South that the program had not been more successful, however; it was because numerous "self-imposed restraints" had limited the potential effectiveness of the program:

> ...we shall continue to achieve only limited success in air operations in DRV/Laos if required to operate within the constraints presently imposed. The establishment and observance of de facto sanctuaries within the DRV, coupled with a denial of operations against the most important military and war supporting targets, precludes attainment of the objectives of the air campaign....Thus far, the DRV has been able and willing to absorb damage and destruction at the slow rate. Now required is an immediate and sharply accelerated

program which will leave no doubt that the US intends to win and achieve a level of destruction which they will not be able to overcome. Following such a sudden attack, a follow-on program of increasing pressures is necessary, but at a rate of increase significantly higher than the present rate. 5/

The JCS accordingly recommended an immediate acceleration in the scale, scope, and intensity of the bombing, beginning with heavy strikes against POL targets and power plants in the Hanoi/Haiphong area and continuing with aerial mining of NVN ports and air strikes against the remaining "military and war-supporting" targets. Specifically, the JCS proposed an immediate sharp blow against the remaining 9 of the original 13 major POL tank farms, most of them in the Hanoi/Haiphong area, and against 5 key power plants, 2 in Hanoi and others at Uong Bi, Thai Nguyen, and Hon Gai, in order to "materially reduce enemy military capabilities." These strikes would be followed by an accelerated program of fixed target and armed reconnaissance strikes to cut down NVN's ability to direct and support the war in the South. The follow-on program would attack first the major airfields in the Hanoi/Haiphong area; then the rail, road, and waterway LOCs throughout NVN, including the major LOC targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area, "at a rate of destruction that would exceed the recuperability rate"; then the ports at Haiphong, Hon Gai, and Cam Pha; and finally military installations and other targets of military significance, such as the Ministry of Defense, the Radio Transmitter Station, and the Machine Tool Plant in Hanoi; the Ammunition Depot at Haiphong; and the Iron-Steel Combine and Army Supply Depot at Thai Nugyen. SAM installations and other antiaircraft defenses would be attacked in order to keep friendly losses down. According to the proposal, most of the significant fixed targets in NVN would be destroyed within three or four months. Thereafter, the effort would concentrate on keeping the targets inoperative and maintaining the pressure on LOCs. 6/

The JCS proposal to escalate all aspects of the bombing was largely oriented toward greatly increasing the pressure on Hanoi's will. On the same day, however, in a separate memorandum, the JCS made a strong pitch for an immediate attack on the NVN POL system as an interdiction measure:

> Attack of this system would be more damaging to the DRV capability to move war-supporting resources within country and along the infiltration routes to SVN than an attack against any other single target system. 7/

It is not surprising that the JCS singled out the POL target system for special attention. NVN had no oil fields or refineries, and had to import all of its petroleum products, in refined form. During 1965, it imported about 170,000 metric tons, valued at about $4.8 million. Nearly all of it came from the Black Sea area of the USSR and arrived by sea at

Haiphong, the only port capable of conveniently receiving and handling bulk POL brought in by large tankers. From large tank farms at Haiphong with a capacity of about one-fourth of the annual imports, the POL was transported by road, rail, and water to other large storage sites at Hanoi and elsewhere in the country. Ninety-seven percent of the NVN POL storage capacity was concentrated in 13 sites, 4 of which had already been hit. The other 9 were still off limits. They were, of course, highly vulnerable to air attack. 8/

In making the recommendation, the JCS emphasized the interdiction effects. They pointed out that the strikes would not hurt the industrial base or the civilian economy very much. They would directly affect the military establishment, which consumed some 60 percent of all POL, and the "government transportation system," which consumed nearly all the rest. Supplying the armed forces in NVN as well as in Laos and SVN depended heavily on POL-powered vehicles, and this dependence had if anything increased as a result of air attacks on the railroads:

> The flow of supplies to all communist military forces, both in and through the country to SVN and Laos, would be greatly impeded since POL-fueled carriers are the principal vehicles for this transport. Further, the interdiction of rail lines and destruction of railroad rolling stock has resulted in the need to move increased tonnages by alternate means, primarily trucks and motor driven water craft. Thus, the most effective way to compound the current interdiction of DRV LOCs, and to offset the introduction and use of substitute modes and routes, is to reduce drastically the available supply of POL. 9/

The JCS also suggested that POL in NVN was becoming increasingly important to the effort in the South. There were now 5 confirmed and 2 suspected NVA regiments in SVN, increasing the load on the supply lines through Laos, and the roads there were being improved, indicating that NVN planned to rely more heavily on trucks to handle the load. Significantly, the importation of trucks was increasing, and despite losses inflicted by ROLLING THUNDER strikes, the size of the truck fleet was growing.

The JCS recommended hitting the most important target, Haiphong POL storage, first, followed closely by attack on the remaining 8 targets. The weight of effort required was 336 strike and 80 flak suppression aircraft, with not more than 10 losses predicted. All POL targets could be destroyed with only light damage to surrounding areas and few civilian casualties (less than 50).

According to the JCS, the destruction of the Haiphong target "would drastically reduce the capability to receive and distribute the major portions of DRV bulk POL imports." Destruction of the others would "force reliance upon dispersed POL storages and improvised distribution methods." Recovery would be difficult and time-consuming. As stated in an annex to the JCSM:

> Recuperability of the DRV POL system from the effects of an attack is very poor. Loss of the receiving and and distribution point at Haiphong would present many problems. It would probably require several months for the DRV, with foreign assistance, to establish an alternate method for importing bulk POL, in the quantities required. An alternative to bulk importation would be the packaging of POL at some point for shipment into NVN and subsequent handling and distribution by cumbersome and costly methods over interdicted LOCs. Loss of bulk storage facilities would necessitate the use of small drums and dispersed storage areas and further compound the POL distribution problem. 10/

Any further delay in carrying out the strikes, on the other hand, "will permit further strengthening of DRV active defenses of the POL, as well as the improvement of countermeasures, such as dispersed and underground storages." On the latter point, the appendix to the JCSM added detailed intelligence information that boded ill for any procrastination:

> Current evidence shows that the DRV has in progress an extensive program of installing groups of small POL tanks in somewhat isolated locations and throughout the Hanoi area. Photographs reveal groups of tanks ranging in number of 16 to 120 tanks per group. The facilities are generally set into shallow excavations and are then earth-covered leaving only the vents and filling apparatus exposed. This construction was observed at several places in the Hanoi area in August and appeared to be an around-the-clock activity.... In addition, considerable drum storage has been identified. 11/

It appeared that NVN had already begun a crash program to drastically reduce the vulnerability of its POL storage and handling system. As in other instances, NVN expected further escalation of the bombing, and was preparing for it.

2. The Intelligence Community Demurs

There was no immediate action on the November 1965 JCS recommendations, but they were taken under study. Secretary McNamara asked for intelligence evaluations, and on 27 November and 3 December, respectively, he received special reports from the Board of National Estimates on (a) U.S. air attacks on NVN petroleum storage facilities, and (b) a generally stepped-up effort involving doubling or tripling U.S. troop commitments, bombing military and industrial targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area, and mining NVN harbors. 12/

The Board reported that strikes against POL targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area would represent "a conspicuous change in the ground rules" which the U.S. had hitherto observed, but would not appreciably change the course of the war:

> ...the Communists would unquestionably regard the proposed US attacks as opening a new stage in the war, and as a signal of US intention to escalate the scale of conflict....We do not believe, however, that the attacks in themselves would lead to a major change of policy on the Communist side, either toward negotiations or toward enlarging the war.... 13/

The strikes would cause strains and embarrassment but would not have a major military or economic impact:

> Hanoi would not be greatly surprised by the attacks. Indeed...it has already taken steps to reduce their impact. It has developed some underground storage facilities, and some capacity for dispersed storage in drums....We believe that the DRV is prepared to accept for some time at least the strains and difficulties which loss of the major POL facilities would mean for its military and economic activity. It is unlikely that this loss would cripple the Communist military operations in the South, though it would certainly embarrass them. 14/

NVN might possibly ask the Chinese to intervene with fighter aircraft to help defend the targets but would probably not ask for ground troops. The Chinese would probably decline to intervene in the air and would not volunteer ground forces, though they would urge NVN to continue the war. The Soviets would be "concerned" at the prospect of a further escalation of the bombing:

> The Soviets would find their difficulties and frustrations increased....They are committed to provide defense for North Vietnam, and...their inability to do so effectively

would be dramatized....We believe that they would not change their basic policy of avoiding overt involvement in combat while giving extensive military equipment and economic assistance to NVN. But their relations with the US would almost certainly deteriorate, for it is the bombing of North Vietnam which is, for Moscow, the most nearly intolerable aspect of /the War-/ 15/

In its estimate of the likely reactions to the wider course of substantially expanding the U.S. effort in the South, together with the bombing and aerial mining of the North, the Board similarly offered little hope that the escalation would produce any marked improvement in the situation. They characterized NVN's will to resist in the North and to persevere in the South as virtually unshakeable in the short run and extremely tough even in the long run:

> Present Communist policy is to continue to prosecute the war vigorously in the South. The Communists recognize that the US reinforcements of 1965 signify a determination to avoid defeat. They expect more US troops and probably anticipate that targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area will come under air attack. Nevertheless, they remain unwilling to damp down the conflict or move toward negotiation. They expect a long war, but they continue to believe that time is their ally and that their own staying power is superior. 16/

Heavier air attacks by themselves would not budge them:

> The DRV would not decide to quit; PAVN infiltration southward would continue. Damage from the strikes would make it considerably more difficult to support the war in the South, but these difficulties would neither be immediate nor insurmountable. 17/

Aerial mining would create serious problems, but NVN would keep supplies moving by resorting to shallow-draft coastal shipping and intensive efforts to keep the rail lines open. As for the South, NVN would accept the challenge:

> Rather than conclude in advance that the tide of battle would turn permanently against them, the Communists would choose to boost their own commitment and to test US capabilities and will to persevere at a higher level of conflict and casualties. Thus the DRV reaction would probably be a larger program of PAVN infiltration. 18/

The Board's picture of Hanoi was one of almost unbelievably strong commitment and dogged determination, by contrast with previous estimates. Thus, if the U.S. committed enough forces in the South to

prevent NVA/VC forces from sustaining the conflict at a significant level -- and the Board would not estimate how many U.S. forces were "enough" --

> ...they might believe it necessary to make a more fundamental choice between resorting to political tactics or enlarging the war. /But/ We believe that it would take a prolonged period of military discouragement to convince the DRV and the VC, persuaded as they are of their inherent advantages, that they had reached such a pass. 19/

Even if it found itself in such straits, however, the chances were close to 50-50 that NVN would bring in Chinese forces rather than quit:

> If this point were reached....Prudence would seem to dictate that Hanoi...should choose...to reduce the effort in the South, perhaps negotiate, and salvage their resources for another day. We think that the chances are a little better than even that this is what they would do. But their ideological and emotional commitment, and the high political stakes involved, persuade us that there is an almost equal chance that they would do the opposite, that is, enlarge the war and bring in large numbers of Chinese forces. 20/

The two CIA intelligence estimates of the probable consequences of the proposed escalatory measures were apparently closely held, but the available documentary evidence does not reveal how influential they may have been. Secretary McNamara's response to the JCS was merely that he was considering their recommendations "carefully" in connection with "decisions that must be taken on other related aspects of the conflict in Vietnam." 21/ He was apparently not satisfied with the estimate of reactions to the POL strikes, however, which was largely confined to an estimate of political reactions, and asked CIA for another estimate, this time related to two options: (a) attack on the storage and handling facilities at Haiphong, and (b) attack on the facilities at Haiphong together with the other bulk storage sites.

The new estimate was submitted by Richard Helms, then Acting Director of CIA, on 28 December (with the comment that it had been drafted without reference to any pause in the bombing "such as is now the subject of various speculative press articles." 22/ The estimate spelled out with greater force than before what "strains" the POL strikes might create in the North and how they might "embarrass" NVA/VC military operations in the South, and its tone was much more favorable to carrying out the strikes.

The estimate made little distinction between the two options. Haiphong was by far the most important and most sensitive of the targets and the closest to a major city; the attacks on the others were

of secondary importance. Neither option was likely to bring about a change in NVN policy, either toward negotiations or toward sharply enlarging the war, but either option would substantially increase NVN's economic difficulties in the North and logistics problems in the South.

First, the estimate said, NVN would have to resort to much less efficient methods of receiving, storing and handling POL:

> Destruction of the storage tanks and bulk unloading equipment at Haiphong would substantially increase the Communists' logistic problems and force them to improvise alternate POL import and distribution channels. These could include, subject to the hazards of interdiction, the use of rail or highway tankers and the transport of POL in drums by road, rail, or coastal shipping. The DRV is already increasing its use of drums because this facilitates dispersal and concealment. However, handling POL this way also requires greater expenditures of time and effort, and very large numbers of drums. Resort to these methods would necessitate transhipping through Chinese ports or transport directly across China by rail, which would in turn not only involve physical delays and difficulties but also increase the DRV's political problems in arranging for the the passage of Soviet supplies through China. 23/

This in turn would interfere with the production and distribution of goods in NVN:

> The economy would suffer appreciably from the resultant disruption of transportation. This...would somewhat curtail the output of the DRV's modest industrial establishment and complicate the problems of internal distribution. 24/

And make it more difficult to support the war in the South (although it would not force a reduction in such support):

> The loss of stored POL and the dislocation of the distribution system would add appreciably to the DRV's difficulties in supplying the Communist forces in the South. However, we have estimated that the Communist effort in South Vietnam, at present levels of combat, does not depend on imports of POL into the South and requires only relatively small tonnages of other supplies (say 12 tons per day, on an annual basis). Accordingly, we believe that adequate quantities of supplies would continue to move by one means or another to the Communist forces in South Vietnam, though the supplies would not move as fast and it would hence require more to keep the pipeline filled.... 25/

But was not likely to break Hanoi's will:

> Although there presumably is a point at which one more turn of the screw would crack the enemy resistance to negotiations, past experience indicates that we are unlikely to have clear evidence when that point has been reached.... Though granting that each increase of pressure on the DRV bears with it the possibility that it may be decisive, we do not believe the bombing of the Haiphong facility is likely to have such an effect. 26/

With the exception of State's INR, other intelligence agencies appeared to look with favor upon escalating the bombing. In a SNIE issued on 10 December, they agreed that intensified air attacks, beginning with POL facilities and key power plants and extending to other targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area and mining the harbors, would not bring about any basic change in NVN policy but would in time hamper NVN's operations and set a lid on the war in the South:

> We believe that Hanoi's leaders would not decide to quit and that PAVN infiltration southward would continue. Though damage from the strikes would make it considerably more difficult to support the war in South Vietnam, these difficulties would not be immediate. Over the long run, the sustained damage inflicted upon North Vietnam might impose significant limitations on the numbers of PAVN and VC main force units which could be actively supported in South Vietnam from North Vietnam. 27/

Mining the ports, despite the dilemma created for the Soviets, would probably succeed in blocking all deep-water shipping:

> The difficulty of clearing such mine fields and the ease of resowing would virtually rule out efforts to reopen the ports. The Soviets would protest vigorously and might try for some kind of action in the UN. We do not believe, however, that the Soviets would risk their ships in mined Vietnamese harbors. Peking and Hanoi would try to compensate by keeping supplies moving in shallow-draft coastal shipping and overland. 28/

DIA, NSA, and the 3 Service intelligence agencies even recorded a judgment that the intensified air strikes, combined with the projected build-up of U.S. ground forces in SVN to about 350,000 troops by the fall of 1966, might ultimately result in a change of heart in Hanoi. In a footnote to the SNIE they said they believed

...that as time goes on and as the impact of sustained bombing in NVN merges with the adverse effects of the other courses of action as they begin to unfold, the DRV would become clearly aware of the extent of US determination and thus might reconsider its position and seek a means to achieve a cessation of the hostilities. 29/

INR dissented. Its Director, Thomas L. Hughes, wrote that the escalation would evoke stronger reactions than indicated in the SNIE, "because it would be widely assumed that we were initiating an effort to destroy the DRV's modest industrial establishment":

The distinction between such operations and all-out war would appear increasingly tenuous. As these attacks expanded, Hanoi would be less and less likely to soften its opposition to negotiations and at some point it would come to feel that it had little left to lose by continuing the fighting.... 30/

B. The Issue Focuses

1. POL and the Pause

Meanwhile, the flow of JCS papers urging POL strikes as the next step continued. Secretary McNamara sent the Chairman, General Wheeler, the 27 November CIA estimate which had suggested that the strikes would not have great impact on the war (they would only "embarrass" operations in the South). General Wheeler commented that the loss of POL storage would do much more:

It would, in fact, have a substantial impact not only on their military operations but also would significantly impede their efforts to support the anticipated build-up of VC/PAVN forces in South Vietnam during the coming months. 31/

General Wheeler also forwarded a Joint Staff-DIA study of the POL target system, with the comment that destruction of the system would force NVN to curtail all but the most vital POL-powered activities and resort to "more extensive use of porters, animal transport, and non-powered water craft." The net result would be to considerably reduce NVN's capability to move large units or quantities of equipment, an important consideration in view of the fact that motorable segments of the Ho Chi Minh trail were being extended. 32/

The Joint Staff-DIA study 33/ showed that NVN's bulk POL storage capacity was greatly in excess of what NVN required to sustain current consumption levels -- 179,000 metric tons available as compared

with 32,000 metric tons needed -- indicating that the strikes would have to be very damaging in order to cause NVN any major difficulties. The study also hinted that an adequate substitute system could be improvised, with lighterage from ocean tankers and dispersed storage, but it nonetheless concluded that the strikes would result in "a reduction of essential transport capabilities for military logistic and infiltration support opeations," i.e., as a result of a deprivation of necessary POL. 34/

As already noted, during the 37-day Pause, the JCS continued to recommend not only the resumption of the bombing but resumption with a dramatic sharp blow on major targets, including POL, followed by uninterrupted, increasing "pressure" bombing. They wished, in short, to turn the limited bombing program into a major strategic assault on NVN. In mid-January 1966 they sent Secretary McNamara a memo reiterating old arguments that the current ROLLING THUNDER program would not cause NVN to stop supporting the war in the South, and that the piecemeal nature of the attacks left NVN free to replenish and disperse its supplies and contend with interdictions. The way to achieve U.S. objectives, the JCS said, was to implement the bombing program they had recommended long ago, in JCSM 982-64 of 23 November 1964, which called for the rapid destruction of the entire NVN target system. In order to get the program started, the JCS recommended extending armed reconnaissance to all areas of NVN except the sanctuaries, which they would shrink (to a 10-mile radius around Hanoi and Phuc Yen airfield, a 4-mile radius around Haiphong, and a strip 20 miles along the Chinese border); lifting the sortie ceiling on armed reconnaissance; and removing "tactical restrictions" on the execution of specific strikes. The strikes would be heavy enough to deny NVN external assistance, destroy in-country resources contributing to the war, destroy in-country resources contributing to the war, destroy all military facilities, and harass, disrupt, and impede movement into SVN. 35/

The idea of resuming the bombing with a large and dramatic bang did not appeal much to decision-makers. Apart from the old problem of triggering an unwanted Chinese reaction, the Administration was interested in giving the lie to NVN and Chinese claims that the Pause was a cynical prelude to escalation. Although it was possible that resuming merely where the bombing left off (following as it would an extended pause and a display of great eagerness for peace) might signal too much irresolution and uncertainty, there was good reason to put off any escalatory acts for a while. As Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy wrote:

> For a period of two-three weeks at least, while the world is digesting and assessing the Pause, we should do as little as possible to lend fuel to the charge -- which will doubtless be the main theme of Communist propaganda -- that the Pause was intended all along merely as a prelude to more drastic action. 36/

Bundy in fact suggested resuming at a lesser level, opening with strikes below the 20th parallel, and only after a few weeks again moving northward. McNaughton wrote:

> No consideration argues for a 'noisy' resumption.... The program at first should be at the level and against the kinds of targets involved prior to the Pause (only two weeks later should the program begin...to escalate). 37/

He also suggested that criticism would be less if the first strikes were clearly identified with the effort to stop the southward flow of men and supplies, which had been greatly increased during the Pause.

The decisions went against ending the Pause with a bang. When the bombing was resumed on 31 January (Saigon time) it was limited "until further notice" to armed reconnaissance. No new major targets were authorized. The former sanctuary restrictions and the sortie ceilings were maintained. 38/

It was also decided to postpone any serious escalation for the time being. Secretary McNamara informed the JCS that their proposals for rapid escalation were being considered, and on 24 January he sent the President a memorandum on the overall Vietnam program which sidestepped the issue. For 1966, the memorandum said, the bombing program against NVN should include 4000 attack sorties per month "at a minimum." It should consist of day and night armed reconnaissance against rail and road targets and POL storage sites. The present sanctuaries should be preserved. There should be more intense bombing of targets in Laos, along the Bassac and Mekong Rivers running into SVN from Cambodia, and better surveillance of the sea approaches. 39/

The use of interdiction rather than pressure terms in the Presidential memorandum, and the emphasis on bombing infiltration routes into SVN, rather than the flow of supplies into or within NVN, indicates that the Secretary was still interested in keeping the objectives of the bombing limited and any escalation in check. The memorandum said that the bombing had already achieved the objective of raising the cost of infiltration, and was reducing the amount of enemy supplies reaching the South. In NVN it had also diverted manpower to air defense and repair work, interfered with mobility, and forced the decentralization of many activities. It could further reduce the flow of supplies to NVA/VC forces in the South, and limit their "flexibility" to defend themselves adequately or undertake frequent offensive action, but it was doubtful that even heavier bombing would put a "tight ceiling" on the NVN effort in the South. 40/

Despite the application of the brake on ROLLING THUNDER operations, the debate over escalation wore on. Further proposals were made and further studies and reviews were requested. DIA was asked to conduct a special analysis of the NVN POL system. The study said that the exceptionally high ratio of storage capacity to consumption allowed the system to "absorb a high degree of degradation," and noted that the dispersed sites in the system were "relatively invulnerable." but concluded nonetheless that (a) the loss of storage at Haiphong would be "critical to the entire bulk distribution system" and would require either a "modification" in the handling of marine imports or a switch to importation by rail or truck through China, and (b) the loss of the other facilities would produce local POL shortages and transportation bottlenecks until substitutes and alternatives could be devised. 41/

2. The February Debate

In February a SNIE was published, estimating how NVN's physical capabilities (not its will) to support the war in the South would be affected by increasing the scope and intensity of ROLLING THUNDER. The enlarged program which the estimate considered included attacks to destroy all known POL facilities, destroy all large military facilities except airfields and SAM sites (unless they seriously interfered with our operations), interdict the land LOCs from China, (a) with or (b) without closing the ports, put and keep electric power plants out of action, and restrict the use of LOCs throughout NVN but especially south of Hanoi. 42/

The SNIE concluded that although the increased bombing might set a limit somewhere on the expansion of NVA/VC forces and their operations in SVN, it would not prevent their support at substantially higher levels than in 1965. The destruction of electric power facilities would practically "paralyze" NVN's industry, but

> ...because so little of what is sent south is produced in the DRV, an industrial shutdown would not very seriously reduce the regime's capability to support the insurgency. 43/

Destruction of POL storage facilities would force NVN to almost complete dependence on current imports, but NVN could manage. Destruction of military facilities would mean the loss of some stockpiled munitions, "although most such storage is now well dispersed and concealed." Closing the ports and interdicting the LOCs from China would reduce the level of imports--leaving the ports open would not--but NVN could continue to bring in enough supplies that were critical to the survival of the regime and essential military tasks, including the "small quantities" necessary for transshipment to SVN.

> Importation of POL would be a key problem, but would be surmountable in a comparatively short time, probably a few weeks, since quantities involved would not be large, even if increased somewhat over previous levels. Soviet POL could be unloaded from tankers at Chan-chiang in South China, moved thence by rail to the DRV border and from there to the Hanoi area by truck. It could also move from the USSR by rail directly across China, or down the coast from Chan-chiang in shallow-draft shipping. 44/

Restricting the LOCs south of the Hanoi region would create logistical problems for NVN military forces in Military Region IV south of the 20th parallel, but would not stop the relatively small amounts of material forwarded to SVN.

The cumulative effect of the proposed bombing program would make life difficult for NVN, therefore, but it would not force it to curtail the war in the South:

> The combined impact of destroying in-country stockpiles, restricting import capabilities, and attacking the southward LOCs would greatly complicate the DRV war effort. The cumulative drain on material resources and human energy would be severe. The postulated bombing and interdiction campaign would harass, disrupt, and impede the movement of men and material into South Vietnam and impose great overall difficulty on the DRV. However, we believe that, with a determined effort, the DRV could still move substantially greater amounts than in 1965. 45/

The bombing program would not prevent NVN from further expanding NVA/VC forces in the South at the projected reinforcement rate of 4500 men per month and from further providing them with heavier weapons, but it might set some limit on their size and their operations:

> ...an attempt by the Communists to increase their strength...to intensify hostilities...or...to meet expanded US/GVN offensive operations...will use up supplies at a higher rate.../This/ might raise supply requirements to a level beyond the practical ceiling imposed on their logistic capabilities by the bombing campaign....There are, however, too many uncertainties to permit estimating at just what level the limit on expansion would be. 46/

Also in February, Secretary McNamara asked the JCS to develop an optimum air interdiction program "to reduce to the maximum extent the support in men and materiel being provided by North Vietnam to the Viet Cong and PAVN forces in South Vietnam." 47/ The study, forwarded to the Secretary on 14 April, managed to frame an interdiction program which embraced virtually everything the JCS had been recommending. It pointed out that less than half of the JCS targets, "the most critical to North Vietnam's support of the insurgency, military capabilities, and industrial output," had been hit, "due to self-imposed restraints":

> These restraints have caused a piecemealing of air operations which has allowed the enemy a latitude of freedom to select and use methods that significantly increase his combat effectiveness. It has permitted him to receive war supporting materiel from external sources through routes of ingress which for the most part have been immune from attack and then to disperse and store this materiel in politically assured sanctuaries. From these sanctuaries the enemy then infiltrates this materiel to SVN/Laos....Throughout the entire movement, maximum use is made of villages and towns as sanctuaries. These and the Hanoi, Haiphong, and China border buffer areas cloak and protect his forces and materiel, provide him a military training and staging area free from attack, and permit him to mass his air defense weapons.
>
> ....The less than optimum air campaign, and the relatively unmolested receipt of supplies from Russia, China, satellite countries, and certain elements of the Free World have undoubtedly contributed to Hanoi's belief in ultimate victory. Therefore, it is essential that an intensified air campaign be promptly initiated against specific target systems critical to North Vietnam's capability for continued aggression and support of insurgency. 48/

The study went on to outline an intensified bombing campaign to cause NVN to stop supporting the insurgency in the South

> by making it difficult and costly for North Vietnam to continue effective support of the NVN/VC forces in South Vietnam and to impose progressively increasing penalties on NVN for continuing to support insurgency in Southeast Asia. 49/

Its language left no doubt that while the strikes were intended "to restrict NVN capability to support and conduct armed aggression in

SEAsia," the ultimate purpose was to apply pressure against Hanoi's will:

> The strategy of this plan requires initial application of air attacks over a widespread area against the NVN military base structure and war supporting resources. The intensity of air operations and the number of targets to be attacked gradually increase. Under such pressure of attack, NVN must further disperse or face destruction in depth of its military base and resources. The dispersal will increase the stresses on command, control, and logistic support and should cause some concern in the Military Command of the wisdom of further aggression....The combined effects of reducing and restricting external assistance to NVN, the progressive attacks against NVN military and war supporting resources, the interdiction of infiltration routes in NVN and Laos, and the destruction of NVN/VC forces and bases in SVN and Laos should cause a reappraisal in Hanoi as to NVN's military capability to continue aggression. 50/

The plan, which was merely "noted" and not red-striped by the JCS, called for the "controlled and phased intensification of air strikes" and a "modest adjustment" in the sanctuaries (to 10 miles around Hanoi, 4 around Haiphong, and 20 from the Chinese border, as previously recommended by the JCS). A first phase extended armed reconnaissance to the northeast, and struck 11 more JCS-listed bridges, the Thai Nguyen railroad yards and shops, 14 headquarters/barracks, 4 ammunition and 2 supply depots, 5 POL storage areas, 1 airfield, 2 naval bases, and 1 radar site, all outside the (reduced) sanctuaries. The second phase attacked 12 "military and war supporting installations" within the Hanoi and Haiphong sanctuaries: 2 bridges, 3 POL storage areas, 2 railroad shops and yards, 3 supply depots, 1 machine tool plant, and 1 airfield. The third phase attacked the 43 remaining JCS targets, including 6 bridges, 7 ports and naval bases, 6 industrial plants, 7 locks, 10 power plants, the NVN ministries of national and air defense, and assorted railroad, supply, radio, and transformer stations.

The plan also provided for three special attack options for execution during any of the phases "as a counter to enemy moves or when strong political and military action is desired." The options were: attack on the POL center at Haiphong; aerial mining of the channel approaches to Haiphong, Hon Gai, and Cam Pha, the three principal maritime ports; and strikes against the major jet airfields at Hanoi, Haiphong, and Phuc Yen. 51/

The JCS were apparently not in complete sympathy with the gradual phasing of stronger attacks over several months, as proposed in the study. In their formal memoranda to the SecDef they continued to restate their mid-January recommendations for the sharp blows with maximum shock effect as "the soundest program from a military standpoint" which offered "the greatest return for the air effort expended." 52/ Apparently sensing that this was more than the traffic would bear, however, they began to push for early strikes against POL as "one of the highest priority actions not yet approved." They pointed out that NVN was busily expanding and improving its LOCs, and its "offensive and defensive" air capabilities; it was expediting its import of trucks. POL was becoming increasingly significant to NVN's war effort, and its destruction would have an "immediate effect on the military movement of war supporting materials." 53/

3. The CIA Recommends Escalation

While the JCS kept up its barrage of recommendations during March, CIA broke into the debate with an apparently very influential report on the past accomplishments and future prospects of the bombing. The report virtually wrote off the bombing results to date as insignificant, in terms of either interdiction or pressure; blamed "the highly restrictive ground rules" under which the program operated; and took the bold step, for an intelligence document, of explicitly recommending a preferred bombing program of greater intensity, redirected largely against "the will of the regime as a target system." 54/

The report held that the economic and military damage sustained by NVN had been moderate and the cost had been passed along to the USSR and China. The major effect of the bombing had been to disrupt normal activity, particularly in transportation and distribution, but with considerable external help the regime had been singularly successful in overcoming any serious problems. It had been able to strengthen its defenses, keep its economy going, and increase the flow of men and supplies South. Most of the direct damage so far had been to facilities which NVN did not need to sustain the military effort, and which the regime merely did without. It had been able to maintain the overall performance of the transportation system at the levels of 1964 or better. It had increased the capacity of the LOCs to the South and made them less vulnerable to air attack by increasing the number of routes and bypasses. Despite the bombing, truck movement through Laos, with larger vehicles and heavier loads, had doubled.

The program had not been able to accomplish more because it had been handicapped by severe operational restrictions:

> Self-imposed restrictions have limited both the choice of targets and the areas to be bombed. Consequently, almost 80 percent of North Vietnam's limited modern, industrial

economy, 75 percent of the nation's population and the most lucrative military supply and LOC targets have been effectively insulated from air attack. Moreover, the authorizations for each of the ROLLING THUNDER programs often have imposed additional restrictions, such as limiting the number of strikes against approved fixed targets. The policy decision to avoid suburban casualties to the extent possible has proved to be a major constraint.

The overall effect of those area and operational restrictions has been to grant a large measure of immunity to the military, political, and economic assets used in Hanoi's support of the war in the South and to insure an ample flow of military supplies from North Vietnam's allies. Among North Vietnam's target systems, not one has been attacked either intensively or extensively enough to provide a critical reduction in national capacity. No target system can be reduced to its critical point under existing rules. 55/

Moreover, the bombing had been too light, fragmented, and slowly paced:

The ROLLING THUNDER program has spread bomb tonnage over a great variety of military and economic targets systems, but the unattacked targets of any one system have consistently left more than adequate capacity to meet all essential requirements. Furthermore, the attacks on major targets have often been phased over such long periods of time that adequate readjustment to meet the disruption could be accomplished. 56/

What was required was a basic reorientation of the program:

Fundamental changes must be made if the effectiveness of the campaign is to be raised significantly. First, the constraints upon the air attack must be reduced. Secondly, target selection must be placed on a more rational basis militarily. 57/

Putting the program on a "more rational" military basis apparently involved abandoning interdiction as a primary goal. The report held out little promise that any acceptable bombing program could physically interfere with the flow of supplies to the South. The NVN economy, it stated, was not "an indigenous economic base heavily committed to the support of military operations in the South," but rather

a "logistic funnel" through which supplies from the USSR and China flowed. As such, it was a hard target, easy to maintain in operation and quite large for the load. This was particularly the case in the lower half of the "funnel", where the bombing had been concentrated:

> ...the rudimentary nature of the logistic targets in the southern part of North Vietnam, the small volume of traffic moving over them in relation to route capacities, the relative ease and speed with which they are repaired, the extremely high frequency with which they would have to be restruck -- once every three days -- all combine to make the logistic network in this region a relatively unattractive target system, except as a supplement to a larger program. A significant lesson from the ROLLING THUNDER program to date is that the goals of sustained interdictions of the rudimentary road and trail networks in southern North Vietnam and Laos will be extremely difficult and probably impossible to obtain in 1966, given the conventional ordnance and strike capabilities likely to exist. 58/

The upper half of the "funnel" was a much more lucrative target -- not, however, because attacking it would choke the volume of supplies flowing into the South, but because it would inflict more pain on the regime in the North.

> The flow of military logistics supplies from the USSR and China cannot be cut off, but the movement could be made considerably more expensive and unreliable if authorization is granted to attack intensively the rail connections to Communist China and if the three major ports are effectively mined. About 2/3 of North Vietnam's imports are carried by sea transport and the remainder move principally over the rail connections from Communist China. Mining the entrances to the three major ports would effectively transfer all imports to rail transport, including the flow of imports needed to maintain economic activity. The rail connections to Communist China would then become a more lucrative target and the disruptive effect of interdiction would then be more immediately felt. Sustained interdiction would then force Hanoi to allocate considerable amounts of manpower and materials to maintain the line. 59/

Bombing the supplies and supply facilities at the top of the "funnel" was therefore a "preferred LOC target system." It was not advanced as an interdiction measure, however, but as a means of increasing the penalty to Hanoi (and its allies), in terms of economic,

social, and political consequences, of supporting the war in the South, and thus presumably to reduce the desire to continue it. Other targets which might be attacked in order to similarly influence the will of the regime were: 26 military barracks and/or supply facilities on the JCS list, the neutralization of which would "impede the flow of military supplies and disrupt the military training programs of NVN"; 8 major POL storage facilities, which had a "direct bearing" on the regime's ability to support the war in the South, but which had to be hit almost simultaneously in order to reduce NVN to the critical point in meeting essential requirements; the Haiphong cement plant, the loss of which would "create a major impediment to reconstruction and repair programs" until cement could be imported; 3 major and 11 minor industrial plants which, though they made "no direct or significant contribution to the war effort" and "only a limited contribution" to the economy, were "highly prized and nominally lucrative" targets; or, as an alternative method of knocking out industrial production, the main electric power facilities. 60/

As for other potential targets in NVN -- the command and control system, agriculture, and manpower --

> Attacks on these targets are not recommended at this time. In each case the effects are debatable and are likely to provoke hostile reactions in world capitals. 61/

The March CIA report, with its obvious bid to turn ROLLING THUNDER into a punitive bombing campaign and its nearly obvious promise of real payoff, strengthened JCS proposals to intensify the bombing. In particular, however, the report gave a substantial boost to the proposal to hit the POL targets. The POL system appeared to be the one target system in NVN to which, what the report called, "the principle of concentration" might be applied; that is, in which enough of the system could be brought under simultaneous attack to cut through any cushion of excess capacity, and in which a concentrated attack might be able to overwhelm the other side's ability to reconstruct, repair, or disperse its capacity. 62/

The POL targets had other qualities to commend them as the next escalatory step in ROLLING THUNDER. They really were pressure targets, but they could be plausibly sold as interdiction targets. The main ones were in the Hanoi/Haiphong sanctuaries, so that over and above any economic or military impact, strikes against them would signal that the last sanctuaries were going and the industrial and other targets there were now at risk. They fit the image of "war-supporting" facilities which strategic bombing doctrine and ample military precedent had decreed to be fair game in bringing a war machine to a standstill. They had, in fact, been struck before in other parts of NVN without any unusual political repercussions. They were situated in the arbitrarily-defined urban/industrial centers, but somewhat set apart from the densest civilian housing areas, and thus might not entail as many civilian casualties

as other targets in those areas.

Moreover, even if the impact of POL strikes would be within NVN itself -- because NVN supplied no POL at all to NVA/VC forces in the South and used next to none in transporting other goods there -- POL was at least relevant as an interdiction target. It did power trucks and boats which were involved in carrying men and supplies South. If any truck in the NVN fleet was an acceptable interdiction target, wherever it was and whatever its cargo, why not any POL?

4. McNamara Endorses POL, The President Defers It

Resumption of ROLLING THUNDER, as initiation of the pause, did not, of course, constitute a final decision on escalation. The views of CINCPAC and the JCS remained unaltered, and Secretary McNamara stood committed, unless he reversed himself, to enlarging the area and intensity of interdiction bombing and to destroying North Vietnamese POL. Neither in OSD nor the White House had anyone opposed these measures on other than prudential grounds -- the risk of alienating allies or provoking Chinese or Russian intervention or uncertainty that results would justify either the risks or the costs. Everyone seemed agreed that, were it not for these factors, intensified bombing of the North would help to accomplish American objectives. Nevertheless, the position of the decision-makers can best be characterized as hesitant.

The services naturally undertook to tip the balance toward the rapid and extensive escalation they had all along advocated. To McNamara's memorandum to the President, the JCS had attached a dissent. They felt that the Secretary underrated the "cumulative effect of our air campaign against the DRV on morale and DRV capabilities" and overestimated the "constancy of will of the Hanoi leaders to continue a struggle which they realize they cannot win in the face of progressively greater destruction of their country." 63/

When McNamara reported to the Chairman the President's ruling on ROLLING THUNDER, he apparently spoke of the difficulty of making out a convincing case that air operations against North Vietnam could seriously affect PAVN/VC operations in the South. In any event, following a conversation with the Secretary, General Wheeler ordered formation of a special study group to devise a bombing effort "redirected for optimum military effect." He explained, "the primary objective should be to reduce to the maximum extent the support in men and materiel being provided by North Viet-Nam to the Viet Cong and PAVN forces in South Viet-Nam." 64/ Headed by a Brigadier General from SAC, composed of five Air Force, three Navy, two Army, and one Marine Corps officers, and making extensive use of CINCPAC assistance, this study group went to work in early February, with an assignment to produce at least an interim report by 1 March and a final report no later than 1 August. 65/

Meanwhile, routine continued, with CINCPAC recommending programs thirteen days prior to the beginning of a month and the JCS acting on these recommendations two days later. 66/ In consequence, McNamara received from the Chiefs on 19 February the same advice that had been given during the pause. 67/ He and the President responded much as before, though now permitting armed reconnaissance within the geographical limits fixed just before the pause and authorizing a significant increase -- to above 5,000 -- in numbers of sorties. 68/

On 1 March, when this slightly enlarged campaign opened, the Chiefs filed a memorandum stressing the special importance of an early attack on North Vietnamese POL. 69/ They had singled out POL somewhat earlier, writing McNamara in November, 1965, that attack on this target "would be more damaging to the DRV capability to move war-supporting resources within country and along infiltration routes to SVN than an attack against any other single target system." While causing relatively little damage to the civilian economy, it would, they reasoned force a sharp reduction in truck and other road traffic carrying men and supplies southward. They held also that the attack should be made soon, before North Vietnam succeeded in improving air defenses and in dispersing POL storage. 70/

McNamara had rejected this recommendation, not only because of the planned pause, but also because CIA sources questioned some of the Chiefs' reasoning and stressed counterarguments which they tended to minimize. Assessing the probable results of not only taking out North Vietnamese POL, but also mining harbors and bombing military and industrial targets in the northeast quadrant, the Board of National Estimates said, "Damage from the strikes would make it considerably more difficult to support the war in the South, but these difficulties would neither be immediate nor insurmountable." 71/ With regard to the POL system alone, the Board observed "It is unlikely that this loss would cripple the Communist military operations in the South, though it would certainly embarrass them." Pointing out that the bulk of storage facilities stood near Haiphong and Hanoi, the Board went on to say that "the Communists would unquestionably regard the proposed U.S. attacks as opening a new stage in the war, and as a signal of U.S. intention to escalate the scale of conflict." 72/ This appraisal did not encourage adoption of the JCS recommendation.

The Chiefs continued nevertheless to press for a favorable decision. Before and during the pause, they presented fresh memoranda to McNamara. 73/ A more detailed CIA study, obtained just after Christmas, provided somewhat more backing for their view. It conceded that the Communists were dispersing POL facilities and that an early attack on those at Hanoi and Haiphong "would add appreciably to the DRV's difficulties in supplying the Communist forces in the South." Nevertheless, it forecast that "adequate quantities of supplies would continue to move by one means or another to the Communist forces in South Vietnam." 74/

In mid-January, the DIA prepared an estimate considerably more favorable to the scheme. 75/ But in early February appeared a SNIE estimating effects on "DRV physical capabilities to support the insurgency in the South" of the various measures, including attacks on POL, previously recommended by CINCPAC and the JCS. Its conclusion, subscribed to by all intelligence services except that of the Air Force, was that, even with a campaign extended to port facilities, power plants, and land LOC's from China, "with a determined effort, the DRV could still move substantially greater amounts than in 1965." 76/

In renewing their recommendation on 1 March, and again on 10 March, the JCS once more disputed such assessments. In an appendix to their long March 1 memorandum to the Secretary, the Chiefs outlined a concept of operations upon which they proposed to base future deployments. With respect to the air war, they urged that it be expanded to include POL and the aerial mining of ports and attacks on Hanoi and Haiphong. Their rationale was as follows:

> To cause...NVN to cease its control, direction, and support of the communist insurgency in SVN and Laos, air strikes are conducted against military and war-sustaining targets in all areas, including the Hanoi/Haiphong complex and areas to the north and northeast. Armed reconnaissance within NVN and its coastal waters is conducted to interdict LOCs, harass, destroy and disrupt military operations and the movement of men and materials from NVN into Laos and SVN. Aerial mining of ports and interdiction of inland waterways and coastal waters, harbors and water LOCs are conducted to reduce the flow of war resources. Air reconnaissance and special air operations are conducted in support of the overall effort." 77/

Ten days later the Chiefs again requested attacks on the POL together with authorization to mine the approaches to Haiphong. This time they noted that Ambassador Lodge and Admiral Sharp had each recently endorsed such measures (no documents so indicating are available to the writer). Supporting their request they cited recent intelligence reports of North Vietnamese orders for expedited delivery of additional trucks. With the arrival of more trucks, POL would become even more critical to the North Vietnamese logistical effort. Once POL reserves were initially destroyed, however, the mining of Haiphong harbor would be the next immediate priority to prevent resupply by North Vietnam's allies. 78/ The Chiefs argued that the elimination as a package of these high value targets would significantly damage the DRV's war-sustaining capability.

This time, moreover, the Chiefs possessed support in the intelligence community. A study by CIA addressed the question which had been deliberately omitted from the terms of reference for the 4 February

SNIE, i.e., what effect bombing might produce on the will of the North Vietnamese regime. Judging from a summary with some extracts, preserved in Task Force files, it made a strong case for almost unlimited bombing such as CINCPAC and the JCS had steadily advocated. It accepted previous judgments that "the goals of sustained interdictions of the rudimentary road and trail networks in southern North Vietnam and Laos will be extremely difficult and probably impossible to obtain in 1966, given the conventional ordnance and strike capabilities likely to exist." Though arguing that more payoff could result from regarding North Vietnam as a "logistic funnel" and attempting to stop what went into it rather than what came out, it conceded that the "flow of military logistics supplies from the USSR and China cannot be cut off." But the report contended that such measures as mining harbors, maintaining steady pressure on LOC's with China, and destroying militarily insignificant but "highly prized" industrial plants would not only reduce North Vietnam's capacity to support the insurgency in the South but would influence her leaders' willingness to continue doing so. "Fundamental changes must be made if the effectiveness of the campaign is to be raised significantly," said the report, "First, the constraints upon the air attack must be reduced. Secondly, target selection must be placed on a more rational basis militarily." One point stressed was the importance of taking out all remaining POL storage facilities simultaneously and at an early date. 79/

With memoranda from the JCS now reinforced by this CIA report, Secretary McNamara had to reconsider the POL issue. Conferring with Wheeler on 23 March, he put several specific questions, among them whether destruction of POL storage facilities would produce significant results if not coupled with mining of North Vietnamese ports, what exact targets were to be hit, and with how many sorties. 80/ Responding with the requested details, the Chiefs said that they attached the highest importance to the operation, even if enemy harbors remained open. They strongly recommended, in addition, attacks on adjoining industrial targets and LOC's, in order to enhance the effect of destroying POL facilities. 81/

In a memorandum for the President on bombing operations for April, McNamara endorsed most of these JCS recommendations. He proposed authorizing attacks on seven of the nine POL storage facilities in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. Of the two he omitted, one lay near the center of Hanoi. In addition, McNamara recommended attacks on the Haiphong cement plant and on roads, bridges, and railroads connecting Haiphong and Hanoi and leading from the two cities to the Chinese border, and asked that the military commanders be permitted to run up to 900 sorties into the northeast quadrant, at their discretion.

For this marked stepping-up of the air war, McNamara put on paper a much more forceful presentation than that in his January memorandum. Using as a point of departure the general estimate that bombing could neither interdict supply of the South nor halt flow from China and Russia into the North, he argued that:

....The movement can be made considerably more expansive and unreliable (a) by taking action to overload the roads and railroads (e.g., by destroying the domestic source of cement), (b) by attacking the key roads, railroads and bridge between Hanoi on the one hand and Haiphong and China on the other, and (c) by pinching the supply of POL, which is critical to ground movement and air operations.

Amplifying one of these recommendations, McNamara commented that destruction of the plant, which produced 50% of North Vietnam's cement, would make bridge and road rebuilding difficult. As for POL, he observed that the facilities targeted represented 70-80% of those in the country. Though the North Vietnamese possessed reserves and had probably already built up some in the South, their transportation system depended on a continuous supply. They were known to have recently doubled their orders for imported Soviet POL. Eventually, though not necessarily in the short run, he said, they were bound to suffer a shortage.

While McNamara conceded that he did not expect the proposed program to yield quick results in South Vietnam, he predicted that it would ultimately have some effect. Addressing some political issues that had influenced the previous hesitancy, he asserted that the South would probably do nothing more than adopt "a somewhat harsher diplomatic and propaganda line" and that the Chinese "would not react to these attacks by active entry -- by ground or air," unless the United States took further steps, the decisions on which "at each point would be largely within our own control." And offsetting such risks stood the possibility of favorable political effects. McNamara ventured no promises. He said, "We would not expect Hanoi to change its basic policy until and unless it concluded that its chances of winning the fight in the South had become so slim that they could no longer justify the damage being inflicted upon the North." Nevertheless, he commented that destruction of POL facilities "should cause concern in Hanoi about their ability to support troops in South Vietnam" and concluded his memorandum by writing:

In the longer term, the recommended bombing program.... can be expected to create a substantial added burden on North Vietnam's manpower supply for defense and logistics tasks and to engender popular alienation from the regions should shortages become widespread. While we do not predict that the regime's control would be appreciably weakened, there might eventually be an aggravation of any differences which may exist within the regime as [to] the policies to be followed.

Reading this memorandum, one might conclude that the Secretary, after passing through a season of uncertainty, had finally

made up his mind -- that he now felt the right action to be sharp escalation such as CINCPAC, the JCS, and McNaughton had advocated during the pause. But even now, despite the comparatively vigorous language of the memorandum, one cannot be sure that McNamara expected or wanted the President to approve his recommendations.

The memorandum was probably brought up at the White House Tuesday luncheon on 28 March. Just sixteen days earlier, in response to Marshal Ky's removal of General Nguyen Chanh Thi from Command of the I Corps Area, Buddhist monks had initiated anti-Ky demonstrations in DaNang and Hue. Soon, with other groups joining in, dissidents dominated the northern and central part of the country. Many not only attacked the Ky regime but denounced the American presence in Vietnam and called for negotiation with the NLF. Controlling the Hue radio and having easy access to foreign newsmen, these dissidents won wide publicity in the United States. As a result, Americans previously counted as supporters of administration policy began to ask why the United States should expend its resources on people who apparently did not want or appreciate help. Such questioning was heard from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress. Quite probably, the political situation in Vietnam and its repercussions in America stood uppermost in the President's mind. Equally probably, McNamara recognized this fact. If so, it should not have surprised him to find the President taking much the same position as that which they had both taken, and recorded in NSAM 288 in March, 1964, when the Khanh government trembled -- that it was imprudent to mount new offensives "from an extremely weak base which might at any moment collapse and leave the posture of political confrontation worsened rather than improved." 83/

In any event, the principal outcome of White House meetings at the end of March was a string of urgent cables from Rusk to Lodge, suggesting steps which might be urged on the Ky government and saying, among other things,

> ....We are deeply distressed by the seeming unwillingness or inability of the South Vietnamese to put aside their lesser quarrels in the interest of meeting the threat from the Viet Cong. Unless that succeeds, they will have no country to quarrel about....We face the fact that we ourselves cannot succeed except in support of the South Vietnamese. Unless they are able to mobilize reasonable solidarity, the prospects are very grim." 84/

As for McNamara's proposals, the President approved only giving commanders discretion to launch 900 sorties into the northeast quadrant during April and permission to strike roads, railroads, and bridges outside or just on the fringe of the prohibited circles around Hanoi and Haiphong. He did not consent to measures involving more visible escalation of the air war.

McNamara returned to the Pentagon to inform the Chiefs that, while these operations had not been vetoed, they were not yet authorized. 85/

The President had authorized the extension of armed reconnaissance into the northeast quadrant and strikes on 4 of the 5 bridges recommended by McNamara but deferred any decision on the crucial portion, the strikes against the 5th bridge, the cement plant, the radar, and above all the 7 POL targets. The JCS execution message for ROLLING THUNDER 50, which was sent out on 1 April, directed implementation of what had been approved. In addition, it ordered CINCPAC to "plan for and be prepared to execute when directed attacks during April" against the 5th bridge, the cement plant, the radar, and the 7 POL sites. 86/ A pencilled notation by Secretary McNamara with reference to these targets also mentions April: "Defer...until specifically authorized but develop specific plans to carry out in April." 87/

C. April and May -- Delay and Deliberation

1. Reasons to Wait

Although the President's reasons for postponing the POL decision are not known, and although the initial postponement seemed short, a matter of weeks, it is evident from the indirect evidence available that the proposal to strike the POL targets ran into stiffening opposition within the Administration, presumably at State but perhaps in other quarters as well. Before the question was settled it had assumed the proportions of a strategic issue, fraught with military danger and political risk, requiring thorough examination and careful appraisal, difficult to come to grips with and hotly contended. The question remained on the agenda of senior officials for close to three months, repeatedly brought up for discussion and repeatedly set aside inconclusively. Before it was resolved a crisis atmosphere was generated, requiring the continuing personal attention of all the principals.

There can be little doubt that the POL proposal instigated a major policy dispute. The explanation seems to be two-fold. One, those who saw the bombing program, whatever its merits, as seriously risking war with China or the USSR, decided to seize the occasion as perhaps the last occasion to establish a firebreak against expanding the bombing to the "flash points." Two, those who saw the bombing program as incurring severe political penalties saw this as the last position up to which those penalties were acceptable and beyond which they were not. Both points no doubt merged into a single position. Both turned the POL question into an argument over breaching the Hanoi/Haiphong sanctuaries in any major way.

McNamara's Memorandum for the President, which had treated the POL strikes as a logical extension of the previous interdiction program into an area in which it might be more remunerative, did not address these questions of sanctuaries. No other single document has been located in the available files which does. Pieced together and deduced from the fragmentary evidence, however, it appears that the view that POL strikes ran too great a risk of counter-escalation involved several propositions. One was that the strikes might trigger a tit-for-tat reprisal (presumably by the VC) against the vulnerable POL stores near Saigon. The Secretary of Defense had himself made this point as early as mid-1965 in holding off Congressional and other proponents of Hanoi/Haiphong area POL strikes, citing the endorsement of General Westmoreland. 88/ The JCS had recognized the possibility in their November 1965 paper on POL strikes, although they considered it "of relatively small potential consequence, minor in comparison to the value of destruction of the DRV POL system." 89/ General Wheeler had also gone out of his way to allude to it. 90/ Under Secretary of State Ball, in a January 1966 memorandum, saw the possibility of an enemy reprisal in SVN as only the first act of a measure-countermeasure scenario which could go spiralling out of control: a VC reprisal against POL in SVN would put unbearable pressure on the U.S. to counter-retaliate against the North in some dangerous manner, which in turn would force the other side to react to that, and so on. 91/

More important than the fear of a VC reprisal, one assumes, was the belief that the POL sites were the first of the "vital" targets, high-value per se but also generally co-located with and fronting for NVN's other high-value targets. NVN, with its "vital" targets attacked and its economic life at stake, would at a minimum defend itself strenuously (again, provoking us to attack its airfields in our defense, which in turn might set off an escalatory sequence); or, at the other extreme, NVN might throw caution to the winds and call on its allies to intervene. This might be only a limited intervention at first, e.g. use of Chinese fighters from Chinese bases to protect NVN targets, but even this could go escalating upward into a full-scale collision with China. On the other hand, the strikes at the "vital" targets might be the Southeast Asian equivalent of the march to the Yalu, convince the other side that the U.S. was embarked on a course intolerable to its own interests, such as the obliteration of the NVN regime, and cause it to intervene directly. 92/

These arguments were not new, of course; they were arguments which could be, and no doubt were, used against any bombing at all. They gained force, however, as the bombing became more intense and the more the bombing was thought to really hurt Hanoi. (It was an irony of the original concept of the air war North that the more pressure it really applied and hence the more successful it was, the more difficult it was to prosecute.)

The belief that POL strikes would overload the negative side of the scale on political grounds had to do with the possibility that, since the targets were situated in relatively populated "urban" areas (even though outside of the center cities), the strikes would be construed as no less than the beginning of an attack on civilian targets and/or population centers. This possibility, too, could widen the war if it were taken by NVN and its allies as indicating a U.S. decision to commence "all-out" bombing aimed at an "unlimited" objective. But even if it did not widen the war, it could cause a storm of protest world-wide and turn even our friends against us. The world had been told repeatedly that the U.S. sought a peaceful settlement, not a total military victory; that the U.S. objectives were limited to safeguarding SVN; that bombing NVN was confined to legitimate military targets related to the aggression against SVN; and that great care was taken to avoid civilian casualties. Any or all of this could be called into question by the POL strikes, according to the argument, and the U.S. could be portrayed as embarking on a course of ruthless brutality against a poor defenseless population.

The argument about the escalatory implications of the proposed POL strikes was difficult to deal with. Official intelligence estimates were available which said, on balance, that Chinese or Soviet intervention in the war was unlikely, but no estimate could say that such intervention was positively out of the question, and of course intelligence estimates could misjudge the threshold of intervention, it was said, as they had in Korea. 93/

The argument about the political repercussions made some headway, however. Progress became possible because of the development of military plans to execute the strikes with "surgical" precision, thus minimizing the risk of civilian casualties, and because of the development of a "scenario" for the strikes in which military, diplomatic, and public affairs factors were coordinated in an effort to contain adverse reactions. There slowly unfolded a remarkable exercise in "crisis management."

2. The April Policy Review

Though McNamara's memorandum, and the President's indication that he might later approve POL, brought the Administration somewhat nearer to a decision for escalation, there was as yet no new consensus on how the air war against the North might be tailored to serve American objectives or, indeed, on what those objectives were or ought to be. The study group in the Joint Staff, completing its work early in April, offered a straightforward answer: "The overall objective is to cause NVN to cease supporting, directing, and controlling the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos." With his understanding, they could recommend a three phase

campaign leading to destruction of between 90 and 100% of all POL storage, bridges, airfields, rail facilities, power plants, communications, port structures, and industry in North Vietnam. Whether the Chiefs reasoned similarly is not apparent from the papers available. Although they came out with comparable recommendations, they merely "noted" this study. 94/

Certainly, in spite of McNamara's memorandum recommending escalation, no clear view prevailed within OSD or among civilians elsewhere in the government occupied with Vietnam policy. Among the papers left behind by McNaughton are some fragments relating to an attempt early in April, 1966, to rethink the question of what the United States sought in Vietnam. These fragments suggest an evolution between winter, 1965-66, and spring, 1966, from hesitancy to perplexity.

The political situation in South Vietnam became increasingly explosive. On March 31, 10,000 Buddhists had demonstrated in Saigon against the government and the demonstrations had spread to other cities in the next several days. On April 5, Premier Ky flew to Danang to quell the rebellion and threatened to use troops if necessary. 95/ In this context, a meeting was convened at the White House on Friday, 9 April. Vance and McNaughton represented Defense; Ball, Bundy, and Leonard Unger the State Department; and George Carver the CIA. Walt Rostow, who had just replaced McGeorge Bundy, took part. So did Robert Komer and Bill Moyers. 96/

In preparation for this meeting, McNaughton, Ball, Unger, and Carver undertook to prepare memoranda outlining the broad alternatives open. Carver would make the case for continuing as is, Unger and McNaughton for continuing but pressing for a compromise settlement -- Unger to take an optimistic and McNaughton a pessimistic view and Ball to argue for disengagement. Then four options were labelled respectively, A, B-O, B-P, and C.

Carver, advocating Option A, wrote:

OPTION A

I. Description of the Course of Action

1. Option A involves essentially persevering in our present policies and programs, adhering to the objectives of

a. Preventing a North Vietnamese takeover of South Vietnam by insurrectionary warfare, thus

(1) Checking Communist expansion in Southeast Asia

(2) Demonstrating U.S. ability to provide support which will enable indigenous non-Communist elements to cope with "wars of national liberation" and, hence,

(3) Demonstrating the sterile futility of the militant and aggressive expansionist policy advocated by the present rulers of Communist China.

b. Aiding the development of a non-Communist political structure within South Vietnam capable of extending its writ over most of the country and acquiring sufficient internal strength and self-generated momentum to be able to survive without the support of U.S. combat forces whenever North Vietnam ceases its present campaign of intensive military pressure.

To adopt this option, Carver reasoned, required, on the political side, work with all non-Communist Vietnamese factions "to insure that the transition to civilian rule is as orderly as possible and effected with a minimum disruption of current programs." The United States would have to make plain in Saigon that continued support was "contingent upon some modicum of responsible political behavior" and would have to "initiate the Vietnamese in the techniques of developing political institutions such as constitutions and parties." An "intensive endeavor at provincial and district levels" would have to complement efforts in the capital.

On the military side, Carver judged the demands of Option A to be as follows:

a. Current U.S. force deployments in Vietnam will have to be maintained and additional deployments already authorized should be made.

b. Efforts to hamper Communist use of Laos as a corridor for infiltrating troops and supplies into South Vietnam should be continued and in some respects intensified. There should be further employment of B-52's against selected choke points vulnerable to this type of attack. Additional programs should be developed to make our interdiction attacks more effective.

c. The aerial pressure campaign on North Vietnam should be sustained for both military and psychological purposes. Attacks should not be mounted against population centers such as Hanoi or Haiphong, but major POL storage depots should be destroyed and, probably, Haiphong harbor should be mined.

d. Within South Vietnam we must recognize that the period of political transition now in train -- even if it evolves in the most favorable fashion possible -- will produce some diminution in the effectiveness of central authority and some disruption in current programs. At best, we will be in for a situation like that of late 1963. It is essential that the Communists be prevented from making major military gains during this time of transition or scoring military successes which would generate an aura of invincibility or seriously damage the morale of our South Vietnamese allies. Therefore, it is essential that during this period, Communist forces be constantly harried, kept off balance, and not permitted to press their advantage. The bulk of this task will have to be borne by U.S. and allied forces during the immediate future and these forces must be aggressively and offensively employed.

Option B-0, as developed by Unger, assumed a "policy decision that we will undertake to find a way to bring to an end by negotiation the military contest in South Viet-Nam." (This paper, dated "4/14/66," was prepared after the April 9 meeting but was filed with the other papers of that date.) It was the optimistic version of this option because Unger assumed the possibility of reaching a settlement "on terms which preserve South Vietnam intact and in a condition which offers at least a 60-40 chance of its successfully resisting Communist attempts at political takeover."

In pursuit of this option the United States would persuade the GVN to negotiate with the NLF, offering amnesty and a coalition government, though not one giving the NLF control of the military, the police, or the treasury. The United States would withdraw troops "in return for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese military forces and political cadre." Perhaps, agreements between South Vietnam and North Vietnam would provide for economic intercourse and mutual recognition.

It would not be easy to persuade the GVN, Unger conceded. Doing so might require not only words but withholding of funds or withdrawal of some American forces. And once the GVN appreciated that the United States was in earnest, there would be danger of its collapse. Even if these problems were surmounted, there would remain the difficulty of pressing the negotiations to conclusion. "There is no assurance," Unger wrote, "that a negotiated settlement can pass successfully between the upper millstone of excessively dangerous concessions to the VC/NLF and the nether millstone of terms insufficiently attractive to make the VC/NLF consider it worthwhile to negotiate."

Militarily, Unger reasoned, Option B-O would call for continuation of current efforts, perhaps with a modest increase in ground forces but with no step-up in the air war. Total refusal to talk on the part of the Communists would, however, Unger wrote,

> ...leave us with a question of what kind of stick we have to substitute for the proferred carrot and this might bring us up against the judgment of whether intensification and extension of our bombing in North Viet-Nam, coupled with whatever greater military efforts could be made in the South would bring the Communists to the table.

McNaughton's papers do not contain his original memorandum setting forth the pessimistic version of Option B. One can, however, infer its outlines from various other pieces in the McNaughton collection.

The difference between McNaughton and Unger presumably did not concern the objective -- negotiating out. It lay in McNaughton's expressing less confidence in an outcome not involving Communist control of South Vietnam. On the first Monday in April, he had talked with Michael Deutch, freshly back from Saigon. His notes read:

1. Place (VN) in unholy mess.

2. We control next to no territory.

3. Fears economic collapse.

4. People would not vote for 'our ride.'

5. Wants to carry out economic warfare in VC.

6. This is incorruptible and popular. Chieu [sic] is best successor for Ky.

7. Militarily will be same place year from now.

8. Pacification won't get off ground for a year.

If McNaughton himself accepted anything like this estimate, he would have been pessimistic indeed about prospects for the GVN's survival. Even if he did not take quite so gloomy a view, he probably felt, as he had intimated in one of his January memoranda, that the United States should prepare to accept something less than the conditions which Unger sketched. What practical consequences followed from this difference in view, one can only guess.

Option C, as stated by Ball, rested on the assumption that "the South Vietnamese people will not be able to put together a government capable of maintaining an adequate civil and military effort or -- if anything resembling actual independence is ever achieved -- running the country." On this premise, he concluded, much as in earlier memoranda, "we should concentrate our attention on cutting our losses." Specifically, he recommended official declarations that United States support depended on a representative government which desired American aid and which demonstrated its ability to create "the necessary unity of action to assure the effective prosecution of the war and the peace." Seizing upon the next political crisis in South Vietnam, the United States should, said Ball, "halt the deployment of additional forces, reduce the level of air attacks on the North, and maintain ground activity at the minimum level required to prevent the substantial improvement of the Viet Cong position."

Ball described two alternative outcomes from Option C. One was that the South Vietnamese might unify and "face reality," the other, far more likely in Ball's estimation, was that South Vietnam would fragment still further, "leading to a situation in which a settlement would be reached that contemplated our departure." He closed:

> Let us face the fact that there are no really attractive options open to us. To continue to fight the war with the present murky political base is, in my judgment, both dangerous and futile. It can lead only to increasing commitments, heavier losses, and mounting risks of dangerous escalation.

In McNaughton's files are pencil notes which may relate either to his own missing memorandum or to a conversation that took place among some of the officials concerned. Despite its cryptic nature, it is worth reproducing in its entirety, in part because it gives a clue to thoughts passing at this time through McNamara's mind:

Do we press VNese or do they move themselves[?]

What the point of probes if (w[oul]d be counterproductive otherwise)

Ball

1. No more US forces unless better govt

2. Reemph/asis/ of cond/itions/

   (a) Rep govt ask/ed/

   (b) Performance

3. Fashion govt unified and stable govt. Give time. Protect selves.

   Defend selves.

4. Effect

   (a) Nationalist

   (b) VC deal by GVN

If squeeze GVN first, and go to /Ball's position/ later, have contaminated Course C. Better to claim we want to win and they rush out to settle.

Timing critical. 10 days ago. Not today. Will have new chance when advisors decide how election set up. Unless elections rigged, Buddhists to streets.

Need Pres. statements re (a) cond/itio/ns and (b) optimism VNese moving that way.

W/oul/dn't the SVNese just comply and knuckle down and not do any better /?/ How do we move them toward compromise /?/ Maybe second time, we do throw in the towel and they make deal.

Lodge more likely to go for Ball ultimatum than B.

Anti-US govt likely to follow. How handle actual departure /?/ Do we want to precipitate anti-US /?/

Must we condition US and world public for 6 mos before 'ultimatum.'

Pres. to press, ans. qn. giving bases of our help.

BUT, why not get better deal for SVN by RSM approach? Give them choice now between (1) chaos 6 mos from now (via Ball) and VC govt. and (2) chance at compromise now with even chance of something better.

Who can deal -- Don, Thi?

If we followed RSM approach, ruin our image (pushing for deal) and cause demoralization. Tri Quang may even say we selling out.

We chilled bids earlier.

Could there be an independent Delta? Already accommodation.

As McNaughton's notes reveal, the group that met at the White House on April 9 was preoccupied with the immediate political crisis in South Vietnam. Early that morning, Walt Rostow had addressed a memo to Secretaries Rusk and McNamara suggesting a course of action for "breaking Tri Quang's momentum." 97/ His proposal -- which was the form the subsequent solution took -- called for giving substantial tactical concessions to the Buddhists on the issue of the Constituent Assembly in order to bring the regime-threatening deomonstrations to an end. At the White House meeting later that day several participants were called on to prepare papers on the crisis.

Leonard Unger of the State Department drafted a paper outlining five possible outcomes of the crisis, the last two of which were a secession of neutralist northern provinces and/or a complete collapse of Saigon political machinery with the VC moving into the vacuum. 98/ His paper was probably considered at a meeting on Monday, April 12, as suggested by McNaughton's handwritten notes. 99/ At the same meeting, a long memorandum prepared by George Carver of CIA in response to a request at the Friday meeting, and entitled "Consequences of Buddhist Political Victory in South Vietnam," was also considered. 100/ Carver argued that while a Buddhist government would have been difficult for us to deal with it would not have been impossible and, given the evident political strength of the Buddhists, might even work to our long range advantage. The three American options in such a contingency were: (1) trying to throw out the new government; (2) attempting to work with it; or (3) withdrawing from South Vietnam. Clearly, he argued, the second was the best in view of our commitments.

That same day, Maxwell Taylor sent the President a detailed memo with recommendations for dealing with the Buddhist uprising. In essence he recommended that the U.S. take a tough line in support of Ky and against the Buddhists. In his words,

> ...we must prevent Tri Quang from overthrowing the Directorate (with or without Ky who personally is expendable) and support a conservative, feasible schedule for a transition to constitutional government. In execution of such a program, the GVN (Ky, for the present) should be encouraged to use the necessary force to restore and maintain order, short of attempting to reimpose government rule by bayonets on

Danang-Hue which, for the time being, should be merely contained and isolated. 101/

These recommendations, however, had been overtaken by events. The GVN had already found a formula for restoring order and appeasing the Buddhists. In a three day "National Political Congress" in Saigon from April 12-14, the GVN adopted a program promising to move rapidly toward constitutional government which placated the main Buddhist demands. 102/ For a few weeks the demonstrations ceased and South Vietnam returned to relative political quiet. While not unusual as policy problems go, this political crisis in South Vietnam intervened temporarily to divert official attention from the broader issues of the war and indirectly contributed to the deferral of any decision to authorize attacks on the POL in North Vietnam. Other issues and problems would continue to defer the POL decision, both directly and indirectly, for another two months.

With some semblance of calm restored momentarily to South Vietnamese politics, the second-level Washington policy officials could turn their attention once again to the broader issues of U.S. policy direction. On April 14, Walt Rostow sent McNaughton a memo entitled "Headings for Decision and Action: Vietnam, April 14, 1966," (implying topics for discussion at a meeting later that day?). Item one on Rostow's agenda was a proposed high-level U.S. statement endorsing the recent evolution of events in South Vietnam and stipulating that continued U.S. assistance and support would be contingent on South Vietnamese demonstration of unity, movement toward constitutional government, effective prosecution of the war, and maintenance of order. His second topic was the bombing of the North, and subheading "b" re-opened the POL debate with the simple question, "Is this the time for oil?" 103/ Other issues which he listed for consideration included: accelerating the campaign against main force units, economic stabilization, revolutionary construction, Vietnamese politics (including constitution-making), and negotiations between the GVN and the VC (if only for political warfare purposes).

On the same day, the JCS forwarded to the Secretary the previously mentioned "ROLLING THUNDER Study Group Report: Air Operations Against NVN" with a cover memo noting that its recommendations for a stepped up bombing campaign were "in consonance with the general concept recommended in JCSM-41-66...." 104/ The voluminous study itself recommended a general expansion of the bombing with provision for three special attack options, one against the Haiphong POL center; the second for the aerial mining of the sea approaches to Haiphong, Hon Gai, and Cam Pha; and the third for strikes at the major airfields of Hanoi, Haiphong, and Phuc Yen. 105/ In offering these options, the report stated that, "Military considerations would require that two of the special attack options, POL and mining, be conducted now. However, appreciation of the sensitivity of such attacks is recognized and the precise time of execution must take into account political factors." 106/ Somewhat optimistically, the report

estimated that the POL strike would involve only 13 civilian casualties, and the mining would cause none. 107/ While there is no specific record of the Secretary's reaction to this full-blown presentation of the arguments for expanded bombing, he had sent a curt memo to the Chiefs the previous day in reply to their JCSM 189-66 of March 26, in which they had again urged attacking the POL. Tersely reflecting the President's failure to adopt their (and his) recommendation, he stated, "I have received JCSM-189-66. Your recommendations were considered in connection with the decision on ROLLING THUNDER 50." 108/

As the second-echelon policy group returned to its consideration of the four options for U.S. policy (previously known as A, B-O, B-P, and C), the weight of recent political instability shifted its focus somewhat. When the group met again on Friday, April 16, at least three papers were offered for deliberation. William Bundy's draft was titled, "Basic Choices in Viet-Nam"; George Carver of CIA contributed "How We Should Move"; and a third paper called "Politics in Vietnam: A 'Worst' Outcome" was probably written by John McNaughton.

Bundy began with a sober appraisal of the situation:

> The political crisis in South Viet-Nam has avoided outright disaster up to this point, but the temporary equilibrium appears to be uneasy and the crisis has meant at the very least a serious setback of the essential non-military programs. 109/

But the closeness with which political disaster had been averted in the South in the preceding week, "forces us to look hard at our basic position and policy in South Viet-Nam. We must now recognize that three contingencies of the utmost gravity are in some degree, more likely than our previous planning had recognized..."110/ The three contingencies Bundy had in mind were: (1) a state of total political chaos and paralysis resulting from an uprising by the Buddhists countered by the Catholics, Army, etc.; (2) the emergence of a neutralist government with wide support that would seek an end to the war on almost any basis and ask for a U.S. withdrawal; and (3) a continuation of the present GVN but in an enfeebled condition unable to effectively prosecute the war, especially the vital non-military aspects of it. Bundy's estimate was that the third contingency was the most likely at that moment, and that even the most optimistic scenario for political and constitutional evolution could not foresee a change within the succeeding three to four months. Nevertheless, he outlined the four possible U.S. lines of action much as they had been presented before:

> Option A: To continue roughly along present lines, but to hope that the setback is temporary.

Option B: To continue roughly along present lines, but to move more actively to stimulate a negotiated solution, specifically through contact between the Saigon government and elements in the Viet Cong and Liberation Front. This ~~option~~ [lined out in McNaughton] could be approached on an "optimistic" [underlined in McNaughton] or "~~lesser risk~~" [lined out in McNaughton with "harder" penciled in above and question marks in the margin] basis, or on a "pessimistic" [McNaughton underline] or "~~greater-risk~~" [lined out in McNaughton with "softer" pencilled in] basis. The opening moves might be the same in both options, but more drastic indications of the U.S. position would ["be involved" penned in by McNaughton] in the "pessimistic" approach [, which shades into option C below." penned by McNaughton].

Option C: To decide now that the chances of bringing about an independent (and non-Communist) [parenthesis added by McNaughton] South Viet-Nam have shrunk to the point where, on an over-all basis, the US effort is no longer warranted [lined out by McNaughton and replaced in pencil with "should be directed at a minimum-cost disengagement." Stet pencilled in the margin.] This would mean setting the stage rapidly [circled by McNaughton] for US disengagement and withdrawal irrespective of whether any kind of negotiation would work or not." [question marks in the margin.] 111/

Bundy did not identify in the paper his preferred option. The tone of his paper, however, suggested a worried preference for "A". In a concluding section he listed a number of "broader factors" which "cut, as they always have, in deeply contradictory directions." 112/ The first was the level of support for the Vietnam policy within the U.S. While it was adequate for the moment, continued GVN weakness and political unrest could seriously undermine it. With an eye on the 1968 Presidential elections, Bundy prophetically summed up the problem:

> As we look a year or two ahead, with a military program that would require major further budget costs--with all their implications for taxes and domestic programs--and with steady or probably rising casualties, the war could well become an albatross around the Administration's neck, at least equal to what Korea was for President Truman in 1952. 113/

Moreover, if the prevailing malaise about the war among our non-SEATO allies degenerated into open criticism, a far wider range of world issues on which their cooperation was required might be seriously affected. With respect to the Soviet Union, no movement on disarmament or other matters of detente could be expected while the war continued. But since no

significant change in Chinese or North Vietnamese attitudes had been expected in any circumstances, continuing the war under more adverse conditions in South Vietnam would hardly worsen them. Bundy ended his paper with an analysis of the impact of a U.S. failure in South Vietnam on the rest of non-communist Asia, even if the failure resulted from a political collapse in Saigon.

> 5. Vis-a-vis the threatened nations of Asia, we must ask ourselves whether failure in Viet-Nam because of clearly visible political difficulties not under our control would be any less serious than failure ~~by our own choice~~ /lined out in McNaughton/ without this factor. The question comes down, as it always has, to whether there is any tenable line of defense in Southeast Asia if Viet-Nam falls. Here we must recognize that the anti-Communist regime in Indonesia has been a tremendous "break" for us, both for in /McNaughton/ removing the possibility of a Communist pincer movement, which appeared ~~irresistible~~ almost certain /McNaughton/ a year ago, and in /McNaughton/ opening up the possibility that over a period of some years Indonesia may become a constructive force. But for the next year or two any chance of holding the rest of Southeast Asia hinges on the same factors assessed a year ago, whether Thailand and Laos in the first instance and Malaysia, Singapore, and Burma close behind, would--in the face of a US failure for any reason in Viet-Nam--have any significant remaining will to resist the Chinese Communist pressures that would probably then be applied. Taking the case of Thailand as the next key point, it must be our present conclusion that--even if sophisticated leaders understood the Vietnamese /McNaughton/ political weaknesses and our inability to control them--to the mass of the Thai people the failure would remain a US failure and a proof that Communism from the north was the decisive force in the area. Faced with this reaction, we must still conclude that Thailand simply could not be held in these circumstances, and that the rest of Southeast Asia would probably follow in due course. In other words, the strategic stakes in Southeast Asia are fundamentally unchanged by the possible political nature of the causes for failure in Viet-Nam. The same is almost certainly true of the shockwaves that would arise against other free nations--Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines--in the wider area of East Asia. Perhaps these shockwaves can be countered, but they would not /McNaughton/ be mitigated by the fact that the failure arose from internal political /sic/ causes rather than any US major error or omission." 114/

Once again, the domino theory, albeit in a refined case by case presentation, was offered by this key member of the Administration as a fundamental argument for the continuing U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Bundy rejected even the subtle argument, offered by some longtime Asian experts, that the uniqueness of the Vietnamese case, particularly its extraordinary lack of political structure, invalidated any generalization of our experience there to the rest of Asia. Thus, he argued the American commitment was both open-ended and irreversible.

George Carver of CIA argued quite a different point of view. His paper began, "The nature and basis of the U.S. commitment in Vietnam is widely misunderstood within the United States, throughout the world, and in Vietnam itself." 115/ Placing himself squarely in opposition to the kind of analysis presented by Bundy, Carver argued that we had allowed control over our policy to slip from our grasp into the "sometimes irresponsible and occasionally unidentifiable hands of South Vietnamese over whom we have no effective control. This is an intolerable position for a great power. 116/ By inferring that our commitment was irreversible and open-ended, Carver maintained we permitted the Vietnamese to exercise leverage over us rather than vice versa. To correct this mistaken view of our commitment and get our own priorities straight, Carver proposed a reformulation of objectives:

> Whatever course of policy on Vietnam we eventually decide to adopt, it is essential that we first clarify the nature of our commitment in that country and present it in a manner which gives us maximum leverage over our Vietnamese allies and maximum freedom of unilateral action. What we need to do, in effect, is return to the original 1954 Eisenhower position and make it abundantly clear that our continued presence in Vietnam in support of the South Vietnamese struggle against the aggressive incursions of their northern compatriots is contingent on the fulfillment of both of two necessary conditions:
>
> (a) A continued desire by the South Vietnamese for our assistance and physical presence.
>
> (b) Some measure of responsible political behavior on the part of the South Vietnamese themselves including, but not limited to, their establishment of a reasonably effective government with which we can work. 117/

Carver was careful to state, however, that two to three months would be required to prepare the ground for this kind of clarification so as not to have it appear we were reversing directions on Vietnam

or presenting the GVN with an ultimatum. Effectively carried out, such a clarification would broaden the range of available options for the U.S. and place us in a much better position to effect desired changes. The mechanics of his proposal called for a Presidential speech in the near future along the lines suggested earlier that week by Walt Rostow. The President should express satisfaction at the evolution of political events in South Vietnam toward constitutional government and indicate "that our capacity to assist South Vietnam is dependent on a continued desire for our assistance and on the demonstration of unity and responsibility in the widening circle of those who will now engage in politics in South Vietnam." 118/ Other speeches by the Vice President and members of Congress in the succeeding weeks might stress the contingency of our commitment, and press stories conveying the new message could be stimulated. Finally, three or four months in the future, the President would complete this process by making our position and commitment crystal clear, possibly in response to a planted press conference question. This public effort would be supplemented by private diplomatic communication of the new message to South Vietnamese leaders by the Embassy.

Carver argued that putting the U.S. in a position to condition its commitment would considerably enhance U.S. flexibility in an uncertain policy environment.

> Once the U.S. position is clear we can then see whether our word to the Vietnamese stimulates better and more responsible political behavior. If it does, we will have improved Option A's chances for success. If it does not, or if South Vietnam descends into chaos and anarchy, we will have laid the groundwork essential to the successful adoption of Option C with minimal political cost. 119/

Questions which remained to be answered included: (1) whether to continue with scheduled troop deployments; (2) whether to give the GVN a specific list of actions on which we expected action and then rate their performance, or rely on a more general evaluation; (3) whether the U.S. should continue to probe the DRV/NLF on the possibility of negotiations; (4) whether to encourage the GVN to make negotiation overtures to the VC.

The third paper, Politics in Vietnam: A "Worst" Outcome, (presumably by McNaughton) dealt with the unsavory possibility of a fall of the current government and its replacement by a "neutralist" successor that sought negotiations, a ceasefire, and a coalition with the VC. After considering a variety of possible, although equally unpromising, courses of action, the paper argued that in such a case the U.S. would have "little choice but to get out of Vietnam....Governing objectives should be: minimizing the inevitable loss of face and protecting U.S. forces, allied forces, and those South Vietnamese who appeal to us for political refuge." 120/ An intriguing tab to the same paper considered the impact on the U.S. position in the Pacific and East Asia in the event of a withdrawal from Vietnam.

Unlike the Bundy paper this analysis eschewed pure domino theorizing for a careful country by country examination. The overall evaluation was that, "Except for its psychological impact, withdrawal from Vietnam would not affect the present line of containment from its Korean anchor down the Japan-Ryukyus-Taiwan-Philippine Island chain." 121/ Four possible alternate defense lines in Southeast Asia were considered: (1) the Thai border; (2) the Isthmus of Kra on the Malay peninsula; (3) the "Water Line" from the Strait of Malacca to the North of Borneo; and (4) an "Interrupted Line" across the gap between the Philippines and Australia.

The best alternatives were either the Isthmus of Kra or the Strait of Malacca; alternative four was to be considered only as a fall back position. The paper stands as a terse and effective refutation of the full-blown domino theory, offering as it does cool-headed alternatives that should have evoked more clear thinking than they apparently did about the irrevocability of our commitment to South Vietnam.

What the exact outcome of the deliberations on these papers was is not clear from the available documents. Nor is there any clear indication of the influence the documents or the ideas contained in them might have had on the Principals or the President. Judgments on this score must be by inference. A scenario drafted by Leonard Unger and included by McNaughton with Carver's paper suggests that some consensus was reached within the group reflecting mostly the ideas contained in Carver's draft. Its second point stated:

> On U.S. scene and internationally we will develop in public statements and otherwise the dual theme that the U.S. has gone into South Viet-Nam to help on the assumption that (a) the Government is representative of the people who do want our help (b) the Government is sufficiently competent to hold the country together, to maintain the necessary programs and use our help. President will elaborate this at opportune moment in constructive tone but with monetary overtones if there is any political turmoil or if Government unwilling to do what we consider essential in such fields as countering inflation, allocating manpower to essential tasks and the like. 122/

In fact, however, while we did attempt to steer the South Vietnamese toward constitutional government on a democratic model, when the President spoke out in succeeding weeks it was to reiterate the firmness of our commitment and the quality of our patience, not to condition them. At a Medal of Honor ceremony at the White House on April 21, he said:

> There are times when Viet-Nam must seem to many a thousand contradictions, and the pursuit of freedom there an almost unrealizable dream.

But there are also times--and for me this is one of them--when the mist of confusion lifts and the basic principles emerge:

--that South Viet-Nam, however young and frail, has the right to develop as a nation, free from the interference of any other power, no matter how mighty or strong;

--that the normal processes of political action, if given time and patience and freedom to work, will someday, some way create in South Viet-Nam a society that is responsive to the people and consistent with their traditions.... 123/

The third point in the Unger scenario was to encourage the GVN to establish contacts with the VC in order to promote defections and/or to explore the possibilities of "negotiated arrangements." This emphasis on contacts between the GVN and the VC may well have reflected the flurry of highly public international activity to bring about negotiations between the U.S. and the DRV that was taking place at that time (considered in more detail below). In any event, this entire effort at option-generation came to an inconclusive end around April 20.

The last paper to circulate was a much revised redraft of Course B that reflected the aforementioned ideas about GVN/VC contacts. It was, moreover, a recapitulation of ideas circulating in the spring of 1966 at the second-level of the government. That they were considerably out of touch with reality would shortly be revealed by the renewed I Corps-Buddhist political problem in May. The paper began with a paragraph discussing the "Essential element" of the course of action -- i.e. "...our decision now to press the GVN to expand and exploit its contacts with the VC/NLF." 124/ The point of these contacts was to determine what basis, if any, might exist for bringing the insurgency to an end.

The proposed approach to the GVN was to be made with three considerations in mind. The first was the dual theme that U.S. assistance in South Vietnam depended on a representative and effective GVN and the genuine desire of the people for our help. Continued political turmoil in South Vietnam would force us to state this policy with increasing sharpness. The second consideration was the U.S. military effort. McNaughton specifically bifurcated this section in his revision to include two alternatives, as follows:

(b) Continuation of the military program including U.S. deployments and air sorties.

(1) Alternative A. Forces increased by the end of

the year to 385,000 men and to attacks on the key military targets outside heavily populated areas in all of North Vietnam except the strip near China.

(2) Alternative B. Forces increased in modest amounts by the end of the year to about 300,000 (with the possibility of halting even the deployments implicit in that figure in case of signal failure by the GVN to perform) and air attacks in the northeast quadrant of North Vietnam kept to present levels in terms of intensity and type of target. 125/

The third consideration was a continuation of U.S. support for GVN revolutionary development and inflation control.

Two alternative GVN tactics for establishing contact with the NLF were offered. The first alternative would be an overt, highly publicized GVN appeal to the VC/NLF to meet with representatives of the GVN to work out arrangements for peace. Alternative two foresaw the initiation of the first contacts through covert channels with public negotiations to follow if the covert talks revealed a basis for agreement. All of this would produce, the paper argued, one of the following outcomes:

(a) If things were going passably for our side but the VC/NLF showed no readiness to settle on terms providing reasonable assurances for the continuation of a non-Communist regime in SVN, we might agree to plod on with present programs (with or without intensified military activity) until the VC/NLF showed more give.

(b) If things were going badly for our side we might feel obliged to insist on the GVN's coming to the best terms it could get with the VC/NLF, with our continuing military and other support conditioned on the GVN moving along those lines.

(c) If things were going well for our side, the VC/NLF might accede to terms which entailed no serious risks for a continuing non-Communist orientation of the GVN in the short term. It would probably have to be assumed that this would represent no more than a tactical retreat of the VC/NLF. 126/

3. Exogeneous Factors

No precise reason can be adduced for the termination of this interdepartmental effort to refine options for American action. In a general way, as the preceding paper shows, the effort had lost some

touch with the situation; the GVN was far too fragile a structure at that point (and about to be challenged again in May by I Corps Commander General Thi and his Buddhist allies) to seriously contemplate contacts or negotiations with the VC. In Washington, the President and his key advisors Rusk and McNamara were preoccupied with a host of additional immediate concerns as well. The President had a newly appointed Special Assistant, Robert Komer, who had recently returned from a trip to Vietnam urging greater attention to the non-military, nation-building aspects of the struggle. In addition, the President was increasingly aware of the importance of the war, its costs, and its public relations to the upcoming Congressional elections. McNamara and the JCS were struggling to reach agreement on force deployment schedules and requirements; and Rusk was managing the public U.S. response to a major international effort to bring about U.S. negotiations with Hanoi. These concerns, as we shall see, served to continue the deferral of any implementation of strikes against North Vietnamese POL reserves.

On April 19, about the time the option drafting exercise was ending, Robert Komer addressed a lengthy memo to the President (plus the Principals and their assistants) reporting on his trip to Vietnam to review the non-military aspects of the war. Presidential concern with what was to be called "pacification" had been piqued during the Honolulu Conference in February. Upon his return to Washington, President Johnson named Komer to become Special Assistant within the White House to oversee the Washington coordination of the program. To emphasize the importance attached to this domain, Komer's appointment was announced in a National Security Action Memorandum on March 28. 127/ As a "new boy" to the Vietnam problem, Komer betook himself to Saigon in mid-April to have a first-hand look. His eleven page report represents more a catalogue of the well-known problems than any very startling suggestion for their resolution. 128/ Nevertheless, it did provide the President with a detailed review of the specific difficulties in the RD effort, an effort that the President repeatedly stressed in his public remarks in this period. 129/

At Defense, problems of deployment phasing for Vietnam occupied a good portion of McNamara's time during the spring of 1966. On March 1, the JCS had forwarded a recommendation for meeting planned deployments that envisaged extending tours of service for selected specialties and calling up some reserve units. 130/ Whatever McNamara's own views on calling the reserves, the President was clearly unprepared to contemplate such seemingly drastic measures at that juncture. Like attacks on North Vietnamese POL, a reserve callup would have been seen as a complete rejection of the international efforts to get negotiations started and as a decisive escalation of the war. Moreover, to consider such an action at a time when South Vietnam was in the throes of a protracted political crisis would have run counter to the views of even some of the strongest supporters of the war. So, on March 10, the Secretary asked the Chiefs to redo their proposal in order to meet the stipulated deployment schedule, stating that it was imperative that, "...all necessary

actions...be taken to meet these deployment dates without callup of reserves or extension of terms of service." 131/ The JCS replied on April 4 that it would be impossible to meet the deployment deadlines because of shortages of critical skills. They proposed a stretch-out of the deployments as the only remedy if reserve callups and extension of duty tours were ruled out. 132/ Not satisfied, the Secretary asked the Chiefs to explain in detail why they could not meet the requirements within the given time schedule. 133/ The Chiefs replied on April 28 with a listing of the personnel problems that were the source of their difficulty, but promised to take "extraordinary measures" in an effort to conform as closely as possible to the desired closure schedule. 134/ The total troop figure for Vietnam for end CY 66 on which agreement was then reached was some 276,000 men. This constituted Program 2-AR.

These modifications and adjustments to the troop deployment schedules, of course, had implications for the supporting forces as well. The Chiefs also addressed a series of memos to the Secretary on required modifications in the deployment plans for tactical aircraft to support ground forces, and for increases in air munitions requirements. 135/ These force expansions generated a requirement for additional airfields. 136/ When these matters are added to the problems created for McNamara and his staff by the French decision that spring to request the withdrawal of all NATO forces from French soil, it is not hard to understand why escalating the war was momentarily set aside.

Another possible explanation for delaying the POL strikes can be added to those already discussed. The spring of 1966 saw one of the most determined and most public efforts by the international community to bring the U.S. and North Vietnam to the negotiating table. While at no time during this peace initiative was there any evidence, public or private, of give in either sides' uncompromising position and hence real possibility of talks, the widespread publicity of the effort meant that the Administration was constrained from any military actions that might be construed as "worsening the atmosphere" or rebuking the peace efforts. Air strikes against DRV POL reserves would obviously have fallen into this category.

In February, after the resumption of the bombing, Nkrumah and Nasser unsuccessfully attempted to get negotiations started, the former touring several capitals including Moscow to further the effort. DeGaulle replied to a letter from Ho Chi Minh with an offer to play a role in settling the dispute, but no response was forthcoming. Prime Minister Wilson met with Premier Kosygin in Moscow from Feb. 22-24 and urged reconvening the Geneva Conference; the Soviets countered by saying the U.S. and DRV must arrange a conference since the conflict was theirs. Early in March, Hanoi reportedly rejected a suggestion by Indian President Radharrishnon for an Asian-Airican force to replace American troops in South Vietnam.

Later that month Canadian Ambassador Chester Ronning went to Hanoi to test for areas in which negotiations might be possible. He returned with little hope, other than a vague belief the ICC could eventually play a role.

Early in April, UN Secretary General U Thant advocated Security Council involvement in Vietnam if Communist China and North Vietnam agreed, and he reiterated his three point proposal for getting the parties together (cessation of bombing; scaling down of all military activity; and willingness of both sides to meet). No response was forthcoming from the DRV, but later that month during meetings of the "Third National Assembly" Ho and Premier Pham Van Dong reiterated the unyielding North Vietnamese position that the U.S. must accept the four points as the basis for solving the war before negotiations could start. On April 29, Canadian Prime Minister Pearson proposed a ceasefire and a gradual withdrawal of troops as steps toward peace. The ceasefire was seen as the first part of peace negotiations without prior conditions. Phased withdrawals would begin as the negotiations proceeded. The U.S. endorsed the Pearson proposal which was probably enough at that stage to insure its rejection by Hanoi. On the same day, Danish PM Krag urged the US to accept a transitional coalition government as a realistic step toward peace.

In May, Netherlands Foreign Minister Luns proposed a mutual reduction in the hostilities as a step toward a ceasefire and to prevent any further escalation. Neither side made any direct response. On May 22, Guinea and Algeria called for an end to the bombing and a strict respect for the Geneva Agreements as the basis of peace in Vietnam. In a major speech on May 25, U Thant called for a reduction of hostilities, but rejected the notion that the UN had prime responsibility for finding a settlement. Early in June press attention was focused on apparent Romanian efforts to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table. Romanian intermediaries made soundings in Hanoi and Peking but turned up no new sentiment for talks. In mid-June Canadian Ambassador Ronning made a second trip to Hanoi but found no signs of give in the DRV portion (detailed discussion below). Near the end of June a French official, Jean Sainteny, reported from Hanoi and Peking through Agence France-Presse that the DRV had left him with the impression that negotiations might be possible if the U.S. committed itself in advance to a timetable for the withdrawal of forces from South Vietnam. With pressure again mounting for additional U.S. measures against the North and the failure of the Ronning mission, the State Department closed out this international effort on June 23 (the day after the original POL execute order), stating that neither oral reports nor public statements indicated any change in the basic elements of Hanoi's position. On June 27, Secretary Rusk told the SEATO Conference in Camberra, "I see no prospect of peace at the present moment." 137/ The bombing of the POL storage areas in Hanoi and Haiphong began on June 29.

The seriousness with which these international efforts were being treated within the U.S. Government is reflected in two memos from the period of late April and early May. On April 27, Maxwell Taylor, in his capacity as military advisor to the President, sent a memo to the President entitled, "Assessment and Uses of Negotiation Blue Chips." The heart of his analysis was that bombing was a "blue chip" like cease-fire, withdrawal of forces, amnesty for VC/NVA, etc., to be given away at the negotiation table for something concrete in return, not abandoned beforehand merely to get negotiations started. The path to negotiations would be filled with pitfalls, he argued,

> Any day, Hanoi may indicate a willingness to negotiate provided we stop permanently our bombing attacks against the north. In this case, our Government would be under great pressure at home and abroad to accept this precondition whereas to do so would seriously prejudice the success of subsequent negotiations. 138/

To avoid this dilemma, Taylor urged the President to clearly indicate to our friends as well as the enemy that we were not prepared to end the bombing except in negotiated exchange for a reciprocal concession from the North Vietnamese. His analysis proceeded like this:

> To avoid such pitfalls, we need to consider what we will want from the Communist side and what they will want from us in the course of negotiating a cease-fire or a final settlement. What are our negotiating assets, what is their value, and how should they be employed? As I see them, the following are the blue chips in our pile representing what Hanoi would or could like from us and what we might consider giving under certain conditions.
>
> a. Cessation of bombing in North Viet-Nam.
>
> b. Cessation of military operations against Viet Cong units.
>
> c. Cessation of increase of U.S. forces in South Viet-Nam.
>
> d. Withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Viet-Nam.
>
> e. Amnesty and civic rights for Viet Cong.
>
> f. Economic aid to North Viet-Nam.
>
> The Viet Cong/Hanoi have a similar stack of chips representing actions we would like from them.
>
> a. Cessation of Viet Cong incidents in South Viet-Nam.
>
> b. Cessation of guerrilla military operations.

c. Cessation of further infiltration of men and supplies from North Viet-Nam to South Viet-Nam.

d. Withdrawal of infiltrated North Vietnamese Army units and cadres.

e. Dissolution or repatriation of Viet Cong. 139/

Continuing his argument, Taylor outlined his views about which "blue chips" we should trade in negotiations for concessions from the DRV.

> If these are the chips, how should we play ours to get theirs at minimum cost? Our big chips are a and d, the cessation of bombing and the withdrawal of U.S. forces; their big ones are c and e, the stopping of infiltration and dissolution of the Viet Cong. We might consider trading even, our a and d for their c and e except for the fact that all will require a certain amount of verification and inspection except our bombing which is an overt, visible fact. Even if Hanoi would accept inspection, infiltration is so elusive that I would doubt the feasibility of an effective detection system. Troop withdrawals, on the other hand, are comparatively easy to check. Hence, I would be inclined to accept as an absolute minimum a cessation of Viet Cong incidents and military operations (Hanoi a and b) which are readily verifiable in exchange for the stopping of our bombing and of offensive military operations against Viet Cong units (our a and b). If Viet Cong performance under the agreement were less than perfect, we can resume our activities on a scale related to the volume of enemy action. This is not a particularly good deal since we give up one of our big chips, bombing, and get neither of Hanoi's two big ones. However, it would achieve a cease-fire under conditions which are subject to verification and, on the whole, acceptable. We would not have surrendered the right to use our weapons in protection of the civil population outside of Viet Cong-controlled territory. 140/

Summing up, Taylor argued against an unconditional bombing halt in these words:

> Such a tabulation of negotiating blue chips and their purchasing power emphasized the folly of giving up any one in advance as a precondition for negotiations. Thus, if we gave up bombing in order to start discussions, we would not have the coins necessary to pay for all the concessions required for a satisfactory terminal settlement. My estimate of assets and values may be challenged, but I feel that it is important for us to go through some such exercise and make up our collective minds as to the value of our holdings and how

to play them. We need such an analysis to guide our own thoughts and actions and possibly for communication to some of the third parties who, from time to time, try to get negotiations started. Some day we may be embarrassed if some country like India should express the view to Hanoi that the Americans would probably stop their bombing to get discussions started and then have Hanoi pick up the proposal as a formal offer. To prepare our own people as well as to guide our friends, we need to make public explanation of some of the points discussed above. 141/

In conclusion he sounded a sharp warning about allowing ourselves to become embroiled in a repetition of our Korean negotiating experience, where casualties increased during the actual bargaining phase itself. It is hard to assess how much influence this memo had on the President's and the Administration's attitudes toward negotiations, but in hindsight it is clear that thinking of this kind prevailed within the U.S. Government until the early spring of 1968.

Taylor's memo attracted attention both at State and Defense at least down to the Assistant Secretary level. William Bundy at State sent a memo to Secretary Rusk the following week commenting on Taylor's ideas with his own assessment of the bargaining value and timing of a permanent cessation of the bombing. Since they represent views on the bombing which were to prevail for nearly two years, Bundy's memo is reproduced in substantial portions below. Recapitulating Taylor's analysis and his own position, Bundy began,

> Essentially, the issue has always been whether we would trade a cessation of bombing in the North for some degree of reduction or elimination of Viet Cong and new North Vietnamese activity in the South, or a cessation of infiltration from the North, or a combination of both. 142/

Worried that Taylor's willingness to trade a cessation of US/GVN bombing and offensive operations for a cessation of VC/NVA activity might be prejudicial to the GVN, Bundy outlined his own concept of what would be a reciprocal concession from the DRV:

> ...I have myself been more inclined to an asking price, at least, that would include both a declared cessation of infiltration and a sharp reduction in VC/NVA military operations in the South. Even though we could not truly verify the cessation of infiltration, the present volume and routes are such that we could readily ascertain whether there was any significant movement, using our own air. Moreover, DRV

action concerning infiltration would be a tremendous psychological blow to the VC and would constitute an admission which they have always declined really to make.

Whichever form of trade might be pursued if the issue even arose -- as it conceivably might through such nibbles as the present Ronning effort -- I fully agree with General Taylor that we should do all we can to avoid the pitfalls of ceasing bombing in return simply for a willingness to talk. 143/

Concerned that the current spate of international peace moves might entice the Administration in another bombing pause, Bundy reminded the Secretary that,

...during our long pause in January, we pretty much agreed among ourselves that as a practical matter, if Hanoi started to play negotiating games that even seemed to be serious, we would have great difficulty in resuming bombing for some time. This was and is a built-in weakness of the "pause" approach. It does not apply to informal talks with the DRV, directly or indirectly, on the conditions under which we would stop bombing, nor does it apply to possible third country suggestions. As to the latter, I myself believe that our past record sufficiently stresses that we could stop the bombing only if the other side did something in response. Thus, I would not at this moment favor any additional public statement by us, which might simply highlight the issue and bring about the very pressures we seek to avoid. 144/

Hence, he concluded,

As you can see, these reactions are tentative as to the form of the trade, but quite firm that there must in fact be a trade and that we should not consider another "pause" under existing circumstances. If we agree merely to these points, I think we will have made some progress. 145/

Bombing was thus seen from within the Administration as a counter to be traded during negotiations, a perception not shared by large segments of the international community where bombing was always regarded as an impediment to any such negotiations. Hanoi, however, had always clearly seen the bombing as the focal point in the test of wills with the U.S.

While Secretary Rusk was fending off this international pressure for an end to the bombing and de-escalation of the war as a means to peace, the President was having increasing trouble with war-dissenters within his own party. The US had scarcely resumed the bombing

of the North after the extended December-January pause when Senator Fulbright opened hearings by his Senate Foreign Relations Committee into the Vietnam war. Witnesses who took varying degrees of exception to U.S. policy as they testified in early February included former Ambassador George Kennan and retired General James Gavin. Secretary Rusk appeared on February 18 and defended U.S. involvement as a fulfillment of our SEATO obligations. In a stormy confrontation with Fulbright the Secretary repeatedly reminded the Senator of his support for the 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The next day, Senator Robert Kennedy stated that the NLF should be included in any postwar South Vietnamese government. Three days later, he clarified his position by saying that he had meant the NLF should not be "automatically excluded" from power in an interim government pending elections. Speaking no doubt for the President and the Administration, the Vice President pointedly rejected Kennedy's suggestion on February 21. On the other side of the political spectrum, Senator Russell, otherwise a hawk on the war, reacted in April to the continuing political turmoil in South Vietnam by suggesting a poll be taken in all large Vietnamese cities to determine whether our assistance was still desired by the Vietnamese. If the answer was no, he asserted, the U.S. should pull out of Vietnam.

The President was also regularly reminded by the press of the possible implications for the November Congressional elections of a continuing large effort in South Vietnam that did not produce results. Editorial writers were often even more pointed. On May 17, James Reston wrote:

> President Johnson has been confronted for some time with a moral question in Vietnam, but he keeps evading it. The question is this: What justifies more and more killing in Vietnam when the President's own conditions for an effective war effort -- a government that can govern and fight in Saigon -- are not met?
>
> By his own definition, this struggle cannot succeed without a regime that commands the respect of the South Vietnamese people and a Vietnamese army that can pacify the country. Yet though the fighting qualities of the South Vietnamese are now being demonstrated more and more against one another, the President's orders are sending more and more Americans into the battle to replace the Vietnamese who are fighting among themselves. 146/

Public reaction to the simmering political crisis in South Vietnam was reflected in declining popular approval of the President's performance. In March, 68% of those polled had approved the President's conduct in office, but by May, his support had declined sharply to only 54%. 147/

Some indication of the concern being generated by these adverse U.S. political effects of the governmental crisis in South Vietnam is offered by the fact that State, on May 21, sent the Embassy in Saigon the results of a Gallup Poll on whether the U.S. should continue its support for the war. These were the questions and the distribution of the responses:

> 1. Suppose South Vietnamese start fighting on big scale among themselves. Do you think we should continue help them, or should we withdraw our troops? (A) Continue to help 28 percent; (b) Withdraw 54 percent; (C) No opinion 18 percent.
>
> 2. If GVN decides stop fighting (discontinue war), what should US do -- continue war by itself, or should we withdraw? (A) Continue 16 percent; (B) Withdraw 72 percent; (C) No opinion 12 percent. Comparison August 1965 is 19, 63 and 18 percent.
>
> 3. Do you think South Vietnamese will be able to establish stable government or not? (A) Yes 32 percent; (B) No 48 percent; (C) No opinion 20 percent. Comparison January 1965 is 25, 42 and 33 percent. 148/

Lodge, struggling with fast moving political events in Hue and DaNang, replied to these poll results on May 23 in a harsh and unsympathetic tone,

> We are in Viet-Nam because it cannot ward off external aggression by itself, and is, therefore, in trouble. If it were not in trouble, we would not have to be here. The time for us to leave is when the trouble is over -- not when it is changing its character. It makes no sense for us here to help them against military violence and to leave them in the lurch to be defeated by criminal violence operating under political, economic and social guise.
>
> It is obviously true that the Vietnamese are not today ready for self-government, and that the French actively tried to unfit them for self-government. One of the implications of the phrase 'internal squabbling' is this unfitness. But if we are going to adopt the policy of turning every country that is unfit for self-government over to the communists, there won't be much of the world left. 149/

Lodge rejected the implications of these opinion polls in the strongest possible terms, reaffirming his belief in the correctness of the U.S. course,

> The idea that we are here simply because the Vietnamese want us to be here -- which is another implication of the

phrase 'internal squabbling' -; that we have no national interest in being here ourselves; and that if some of them don't want us to stay, we ought to get out is to me fallacious. In fact, I doubt whether we would have the moral right to make the commitment we have made here solely as a matter of charity towards the Vietnamese and without the existence of a strong United States interest. For one thing, the U.S. interest in avoiding World War III is very direct and strong. Some day we may have to decide how much it is worth to us to deny Viet-Nam to Hanoi and Peking -- regardless of what the Vietnamese may think. 150/

Apparently unable to get the matter off his mind, Lodge brought it up again in his weekly NODIS to the President on May 25,

I have been mulling over the state of American opinion as I observed it when I was at home. I have also been reading the recent Gallup polls. As I commented in my EMBTEL 4880, I am quite certain that the number of those who want us to leave Viet-Nam because of current 'internal squabbling' does not reflect deep conviction but a superficial impulse based on inadequate information.

In fact, I think one television fireside chat by you personally -- with all your intelligence and compassion -- could tip that figure over in one evening. I am thinking of a speech, the general tenor of which would be; 'we are involved in a vital struggle of great difficulty and complexity on which much depends. I need your help.'

I am sure you would get much help from the very people in the Gallup poll who said we ought to leave Viet-Nam -- as soon as they understood what you want them to support. 151/

Lodge's reassurances, however, while welcome bipartisan political support from a critical member of the team, could not mitigate the legitimate Presidential concerns about the domestic base for an uncertain policy. Thus, assailed on many sides, the President attempted to steer what he must have regarded as a middle course.

The President's unwillingness to proceed with the bombing of the POL storage facilities in North Vietnam continued in May in spite of the near consensus among his top advisors on its desirability. As already noted, the JCS recommendation that POL be included in Program 50 of the ROLLING THUNDER strikes for the month of May had been disapproved. 152/ An effort was made to have the strikes included in the ROLLING THUNDER

series for the month of May, which ordinarily would have been ROLLING THUNDER 51, but the decision was to extend ROLLING THUNDER 50 until further notice, holding the POL question in abeyance. 153/ On May 3, McNaughton sent Walt Rostow a belated list of questions, "to put into the 'ask-Lodge' hopper." The first set of proposed queries had to do with the bombing program and included specific questions about attacking POL. Whether Rostow did, in fact, query Lodge on the matter is not clear from the available cables, but in any case, Rostow took up the matter of the POL attacks himself in an important memorandum to Rusk and McNamara on May 6. Rostow developed his argument for striking the petroleum reserves on the basis of U.S. experience in the World War II attacks on German oil supplies and storage facilities. His reasoning was as follows:

> From the moment that serious and systematic oil attacks started, front line single engine fighter strength and tank mobility were affected. The reason was this: it proved much more difficult, in the face of general oil shortage, to allocate from less important to more important uses than the simple arithmetic of the problem would suggest. Oil moves in various logistical channels from central sources. When the central sources began to dry up the effects proved fairly prompt and widespread. What look like reserves statistically are rather inflexible commitments to logistical pipelines. 154/

The same results might be expected from heavy and sustained attacks on the North Vietnamese oil reserves,

> With an understanding that simple analogies are dangerous, I nevertheless feel it is quite possible the military effects of a systematic and sustained bombing of POL in North Vietnam may be more prompt and direct than conventional intelligence analysis would suggest.
>
> I would underline, however, the adjectives 'systematic and sustained.' If we take this step we must cut clean through the POL system--- and hold the cut -- if we are looking for decisive results. 155/

On May 9, recalling that the VC had recently attacked three South Vietnamese textile factories, Westmoreland suggested that to deter further assaults against South Vietnamese industry, the U.S. should strike a North Vietnamese industrial target with considerable military significance such as the Thai Nguyen iron and steel plant. 156/ Concurring with the basic intent of the proposal, CINCPAC recommended that the target be the North Vietnamese POL system instead. "Initiation of strikes against NVN POL system and subsequent completed destruction, would be more meaningful and further deny NVN essential war making resources. 157/

Lending further support to these military and civilian recommendations was a study completed on May 4 by the Air Staff which suggested that civilian casualties and collateral damage could be minimized in POL strikes if only the most experienced pilots, with thorough briefing were used; if the raids were executed only under favorable visual flight conditions with maximum use of sophisticated navigational aids; and if weapons and tactics were selected for their pinpoint accuracy rather than area coverage. 158/ On May 22, COMUSMACV sent CINCPAC yet another recommendation for retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnamese industrial and military targets. He called for plans that would permit the U.S. to respond to any VC terror attacks by an air strike against a similar target in the North. In particular, the Hanoi and Haiphong oil storage sites were recommended as reprisal targets for VC attacks against U.S. or South Vietnamese POL. 159/

Intervening again in mid-May, however, was yet another round of the continuing South Vietnamese political crisis. It is not clear whether or not a decision on the strikes against Hanoi/Haiphong POL was deferred by the President for this reason, but it is plausible to think that it was a factor. In brief, the Buddhists in Hue and DaNang, with the active support and later leadership of General Thi, the I Corps commander, defied the central government. Thi refused to return to Saigon when ordered and only when Ky flew to DaNang and intervened with troops and police to recapture control of the two cities was GVN authority restored to the area. The crisis temporarily put the constitutional processes off the track and diverted high level American attention from other issues. 160/ The effect of this dispute on public support for the U.S. involvement in the war has already been discussed. Concern with bringing an end to this internal strife in South Vietnam and with pushing a reluctant GVN steadily along the road to constitutional and democratic government preoccupied the highest levels of the U.S. Government throughout May. These concerns momentarily contributed to forcing the military aspects of the war into the background for harried U.S. leaders whose time is always insufficient to the range of problems to be dealt with.

D. The Decision to Strike

The POL decision was rapidly coming to a head. On May 31, a slight relaxation of the restrictions against attacking POL was made when six minor storage areas in relatively unpopulated areas were approved for attack. 161/ Apparently sometime in late May, possibly at the time of the approval of the six minor targets, the President decided that attacks on the entire North Vietnamese POL network could not be delayed much longer. In any case, sometime near the end of the month he informed British Prime Minister Wilson of his intentions. When Wilson protested, McNamara arranged a special briefing by an American officer for Wilson and Foreign Minister Michael Stewart on June 2. The following day, Wilson

cabled his appreciation to the President for his courtesy, but expressed his own feeling of obligation to urge the President not to make these new raids. Thus, he stated:

> I was most grateful to you for asking Bob McNamara to arrange the very full briefing about the two oil targets near Hanoi and Haiphong that Col. Rogers gave me yesterday....
>
> I know you will not feel that I am either unsympathetic or uncomprehending of the dilemma that this problem presents for you. In particular, I wholly understand the deep concern you must feel at the need to do anything possible to reduce the losses of young Americans in and over Vietnam; and Col. Rogers made it clear to us what care has been taken to plan this operation so as to keep civilian casualties to the minimum.
>
> However,...I am bound to say that, as seen from here, the possible military benefits that may result from this bombing do not appear to outweigh the political disadvantages that would seem the inevitable consequence. If you and the South Vietnamese Government were conducting a declared war on the conventional pattern...this operation would clearly be necessary and right. But since you have made it abundantly clear -- and you know how much we have welcomed and supported this -- that your purpose is to achieve a negotiated settlement, and that you are not striving for total military victory in the field, I remain convinced that the bombing of these targets, without producing decisive military advantage, may only increase the difficulty of reaching an eventual settlement....
>
> The last thing I wish is to add to your difficulties, but, as I warned you in my previous message, if this action is taken we shall have to dissociate ourselves from it, and in doing so I should have to say that you had given me advance warning and that I had made my position clear to you....
>
> Nevertheless I want to repeat...that our reservations about this operation will not affect our continuing support for your policy over Vietnam, as you and your people have made it clear from your [April 1965] Baltimore speech onwards. But, while this will remain the Government's position, I know that the effect on public opinion in this country -- and I believe throughout Western Europe -- is likely to be such as to reinforce the existing disquiet and criticism that we have to deal with. 162/

The failure of the special effort to obtain Wilson's support must have been disappointing, but it did not stop the onward flow of events. Available information leaves unclear exactly how firmly the President had decided to act and gives no specific indication of the intended date for the strikes. A package of staff papers prepared by McNaughton suggests that the original date was to have been June 10. A scenario contained in the package proposes a list of actions for the period 8-30 June and begins with strike-day minus 2. The suggested scenario was as follows:

> S-/Strike/ day minus 2: Inform UK, Australia, Japan
> S-day minus 1: Notify Canada, New Zealand, Thailand, Laos, Philippines (Marcos only), GRC (Chiang only), Korea
> S-hour minus 1: Inform GVN
> S-hour: Strike Hanoi, Haiphong
> S-hour plus 2: Announce simultaneously in Washington and Saigon
> S-hour plus 3-5: SecDef press backgrounder (depends on strike timing and completeness of post-strike reports) 163/

The package also included a draft JCS execute message, a draft State cable to the field on notifying third countries, a draft public announcement, a talking paper for a McNamara press conference, a list of anticipated press questions, and maps and photographs of the targets.

The circle of those privy to this tentative Presidential decision probably did not include more than a half dozen of the key Washington advisers. Certainly the military commanders in the field had not been informed. On June 5, Westmoreland urged that strikes be made against POL at the "earliest possible" moment, noting that ongoing North Vietnamese dispersal efforts would make later attacks less effective. 164/ Admiral Sharp took the occasion to reiterate to Washington that the strikes, besides underscoring the US resolve to support SVN and increase the pressure against NVN, would make it difficult for Hanoi to disperse POL, complicate off-loading from tankers, necessitate new methods of transshipment, "temporarily" halt the flow to dispersed areas, and have a "direct effect" on the movement of trucks and watercarft -- perhaps (if imports were inadequate) limiting truck use. Sharp called the POL targets the most lucrative available in terms of impairing NVN's military logistics capabilities. 165/ Two days later, in reporting the results of a review of the armed recce program, CINCPAC again urged that POL be attacked. He particularly noted the importance of,

> ...the effort being made by the NVN to disperse, camouflage and package things into ever smaller increments. This is particularly true of POL....This again emphasizes the importance of souce /sic/ targets such as ports and major POL installations.

It is hoped that June will see a modification to the RT /ROLLING THUNDER/ rules with authorization to syrike /sic/ key POL targets, selected targets in the Hon Gai and Cam Pha compleses /sic/, and relaxation of the restrictions against coastal armed recce in the NE. In addition, reduction in the size of the Hanoi/Haiphong restricted areas would be helpful.... 166/

The CIA, however, remained skeptical of these expectations for strikes against POL. On June 8, they produced a special assessment of the likely effects of such an attack, probably in response to a request from the Principals for a last minute evaluation. The report emphasized that "neutralization" of POL would not in itself stop North Vietnamese support of the war, although it would have an adverse general effect on the economy.

It is estimated that the neutralization of the bulk petroleum storage facilities in NVN will not in itself preclude Hanoi's continued support of essential war activities. The immediate impact in NVN will be felt in the need to convert to an alternative system of supply and distribution. The conversion program will be costly and create additional burdens for the regime. It is estimated, however, that the infiltration of men and supplies into SVN can be sustained. The impact on normal economic activity, however, would be more severe. New strains on an already burdened economic control structure and managerial talent would cause reductions in economic activity, compound existing distribution problems, and further strain manpower resources. The attacks on petroleum storage facilities in conjunction with continued attacks on transportation targets and armed reconnaissance against lines of communications will increase the burden and costs of supporting the war. 167/

The sequence of events in the POL scenario drawn up by McNaughton was interrupted on June 7 by yet another international diplomatic effort to get negotiations started, or at least to test Hanoi's attitudes toward such a possibility. Canadian Ambassador Chester Ronning had been planning a second visit to Hanoi for June 14-18 with State Department approval. Thus, when Rusk, who was travelling in Europe, learned on June 7 of the possibility of strikes before Ronning's trip, he urgently cabled the President to defer them.

...Regarding special operation in Vietnam we have had under consideration, I sincerely hope that timing can be postponed until my return. A major question in my mind is Ronning mission to Hanoi occurring June 14 through 18. This

is not merely political question involving a mission with which we have fully concurred. It also involves importance of our knowing whether there is any change in the thus far harsh and unyielding attitude of Hanoi. 168/

Much on his mind in making the request, as he revealed in a separate cable to McNamara the following day, was the likelihood of "...general international revulsion...." toward an act that might sabatoge Ronning's efforts.

> ...I am deeply disturbed by general international revulsion, and perhaps a great deal at home, if it becomes known that we took an action which sabotaged the Ronning mission to which we had given our agreement. I recognize the agony of this problem for all concerned. We could make arrangements to get an immediate report from Ronning. If has a negative report, as we expect, that provides a firmer base for the action we contemplate and would make a difference to people like Wilson and Pearson. If, on the other hand, he learns that there is any serious breakthrough toward peace, the President would surely want to know of that before an action which would knock such a possibility off the tracks. I strongly recommend, therefore, against ninth or tenth. I regret this because of my maximum desire to support you and your colleagues in your tough job. 169/

The President responded to the Secretary's request and suspended action until Ronning returned. When Ronning did return, William Bundy flew to Ottawa and met with him on June 21. Bundy reported that he was "markedly more sober and subdued" and had found no opening or flexibility in the North Vietnamese position. 170/

While these diplomatic efforts were underway, McNamara had informed CINCPAC of the high level consideration for the POL strikes, but stated:

> Final decision for or against will be influenced by extent they can be carried out without significant civilian casualties. What preliminary steps to minimize would you recommend and if taken what number of casualties do you believe would result? 171/

CINCPAC replied eagerly listing the conditions and safeguards for the attack that the Air Staff study had suggested in early May. He would execute only under favorable weather conditions, with good visibility and no cloud cover, in order to assure positive identification of the targets and improved strike accuracy; select the best axis of attack to

avoid populated areas; select weapons with optimum ballistic characteristics for precision; make maximum use of ECM support in order to hamper SA-2 and AAA radars and reduce "pilot distraction" during the strikes; and employ the most experienced pilots, thoroughly briefed. He added that NVN had an excellent alert system, which would provide ample time for people to take cover. In all, he expected "under 50" civilian casualties. 172/ (This was the Joint Staff estimate, too, but CIA in its 8 June report estimated that civilian casualties might run to 200-300.)

McNamara cabled his approval of the measures suggested and indicated that they would be included in the execute message. He stressed that the President's final decision would be greatly influenced by the ability to minimize civilian casualties and inquired about restrictions against flak and SAM suppression that might endanger populated areas. 173/ On June 16, CINCPAC offered further assurances that all possible measures would be taken to avoid striking civilians and that flak and SAM suppression would be under the rightest of restrictions. 174/

The stage was thus set, and when the feedback from the Ronning mission revealed no change in Hanoi's position, events moved quickly.

On 22 June the execution message was released. 175/ It authorized strikes on the 7 POL targets plus the Kep radar, beginning with attacks on the Hanoi and Haiphong sites, effective first light on 24 June Saigon time.

The execution message is a remarkable document, attesting in detail to the political sensitivity of the strikes and for some reason ending in a "never on Sunday" injunction. The gist of the message was as follows:

> Strikes to commence with initial attacks against Haiphong and Hanoi POL on same day if operationally feasible. Make maximum effort to attain operational surprise. Do not conduct initiating attacks under marginal weather conditions but reschedule when weather assures success. Follow-on attacks authorized as operational and weather factors dictate.
>
> At Haiphong, avoid damage to merchant shipping. No attacks authorized on craft unless US aircraft are first fired on and then only if clearly North Vietnamese. Piers servicing target will not be attacked if tanker is berthed off end of pier.
>
> Decision made after SecDef and CJCS were assured every feasible step would be taken to minimize civilian casualties would be small. If you do not believe you can accomplish objective while destroying targets and protecting

crews, do not initiate program. Take the following measures: maximum use of most experienced ROLLING THUNDER personnel, detailed briefing of pilots stressing need to avoid civilians, execute only when weather permits visual identification of targets and improved strike accuracy, select best axis of attack to avoid populated areas, maximum use of ECM to hamper SAM and AAA fire control, in order to limit pilot distraction and improve accuracy, maximum use of weapons of high precision delivery consistent with mission objectives, and limit SAM and AAA suppression to sites located outside populated areas.

Take special precautions to insure security. If weather or operational considerations delay initiation of strikes, do not initiate on Sunday, 26 June. 176/

The emphasis on striking Hanoi and Haiphong POL targets on the same day and trying to achieve operational surprise reflected an acute concern that these targets were in well-defended areas and U.S. losses might be high. The concern about merchant shipping, especially tankers which might be in the act of off-loading into the storage tanks, reflected anxiety over sparking an international incident, especially one with the USSR.

With the execute message out, high-level interest turned to the weather in the Hanoi/Haiphong area. The MACC began to send Secretary McNamara written forecasts every few hours. These indicated that the weather was not promising. Twice the strikes were scheduled but had to be postponed. Then, on 24 June, Philip Geyelin of the Wall Street Journal got hold of a story that the President had decided to bomb the POL at Haiphong, and the essential details appeared in a Dow Jones news wire that evening. This was an extremely serious leak, because of the high risk of U.S. losses if NVN defenses were fully prepared. The next day an order was issued cancelling the strikes. 177/

The weather watch continued, however, under special security precautions. The weather reports, plus other messages relating to the strikes, continued, handled as Top Secret Special Category (SpeCat) Exclusive for the SecDef, CJCS, and CINCPAC. (It is not known whether the diplomatic scenario which involved informing some countries about the strikes ahead of time was responsible for the press leak; in any case, the classification and handling of these messages kept them out of State Department channels.) The continued activity suggests that the cancellation of the strikes on the 25th may have been only a cover for security purposes.

On the 28th Admiral Sharp cabled General Wheeler that his forces were ready and the weather was favorable for the strikes; he requested authority to initiate them on the 29th. 178/ General Wheeler responded with a message rescinding the previous cancellation, reinstating the original execution order, and approving the recommendation to execute on the 29th. The message informed Admiral Sharp that preliminary and planning messages should continue as SpeCat Exclusive for himself and the SecDef. 179/

The strikes were launched on 29 June, reportedly with great success. The large Hanoi tank farm was apparently completely knocked out; the Haiphong facility looked about 80 percent destroyed. One U.S. aircraft was lost to ground fire. Four MIGs were encountered and one was probably shot down. The Deputy Commander of the 7th Air Force in Saigon called the operation "the most significant, the most important strike of the War."

III. McNAMARA'S DISENCHANTMENT -- JULY-DECEMBER 1966

The attack on North Vietnam's POL system was the last major escalation of the air war recommended by Secretary McNamara. Its eventual failure to produce a significant decrease in infiltration or cripple North Vietnamese logistical support of the war in the South, when added to the cumulative failure of the rest of ROLLING THUNDER, appears to have tipped the balance in his mind against any further escalation of air attacks on the DRV. As we shall see, a major factor in this reversal of position was the report and recommendation submitted at the end of the summer by an important study group of America's top scientists. Another consideration weighing in his mind must have been the growing antagonism, both domestic and international, to the bombing, which was identified as the principle impediment to the opening of negotiations. But disillusionment with the bombing alone might not have been enough to produce a recommendation for change had an alternative method of impeding infiltration not been proposed at the same time. Thus, in October when McNamara recommended a stabilization of the air war at prevailing levels, he was also able to recommend the imposition of a multi-system anti-infiltration barrier across the DMZ and the Laos panhandle. The story of this momentous policy shift is the most important element in the evolution of the air war in the summer and fall of 1966.

A. Results of the POL Attacks

1. Initial Success

Official Washington reacted with mild jubilation to the reported success of the POL strikes and took satisfaction in the relatively mild reaction of the international community to the escalation. Secretary McNamara described the execution of the raids as "a superb professional job," and sent a message of personal congratulation to the field commanders involved in the planning and execution of the attacks shortly after the results were in. 1/

In a press conference the next day, the Secretary justified the strikes "to counter a mounting reliance by NVN on the use of trucks and powered junks to facilitate the infiltration of men and equipment from North Vietnam to South Vietnam." He explained that truck movement in the first half of 1966 had doubled, and that daily supply tonnage and troop infiltration on the Ho Chi Minh trail were up 150 and 120 percent, respectively, over 1965. The enemy had built new roads and its truck inventory by the end of the year was expected to be double that of January 1965, an increase which would require 50-70 percent more POL. 2/

The Department of State issued instructions to embassies abroad to explain the strikes to foreign governments in counter-infiltration terms. The guidance was to the effect that since the Pause, the bombing of NVN had been carefully restricted to actual routes of infiltration and supply; there had been no response whatever from Hanoi suggesting any willingness to engage in discussions or move in any way toward peace; on the contrary, during the Pause and since, NVN had continued to increase the infiltration of regular NVN forces South, and to develop and enlarge supply routes; it was relying more heavily on trucking and had sharply increased the importation and use of POL. The U.S. could no longer afford to overlook this threat. Major POL storage sites in the vicinity of Hanoi and Haiphong were military targets that needed to be attacked.

The targets, the guidance continued, were located away from the centers of both cities. Strike forces had been instructed to observe every precaution to confine the strikes to military targets and there had been no change in the policy of not carrying out attacks against civilian targets or population centers. There was no intention of widening the war. The U.S. still desired to meet Hanoi for discussions without conditions or take any other steps which might lead toward peace. 3/

The strikes made spectacular headlines everywhere. Hanoi charged that U.S. planes had indiscriminately bombed and strafed residential and economic areas in the outskirts of Hanoi and Haiphong, and called this "a new and extremely serious step." The USSR called it a step toward further escalation. The UK, France, and several other European countries expressed official disapproval. India expressed "deep regret and sorrow," and Japan was understanding but warned that there was a limit to its support of the bombing of NVN. Nevertheless, according to the State Department's scoreboard, some 26 Free World nations indicated either full approval or "understanding" of the strikes, and 12 indicated disapproval. Press reaction to the attacks was short-lived, however, and within a week or so they were accepted as just another facet of the war. 4/

Meanwhile in the U.S., following a familiar pattern of the Vietnam war, in which escalations of the air war served as preludes to additional increments of combat troops, Secretary McNamara informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Service Secretaries and the Assistant Secretaries of Defense on July 2 that the latest revision of the troop deployment schedule had been approved as Program #3. 5/ The troop increases were not major as program changes have gone in the Vietnam war, an increase in authorized year-end strength from 383,500 approved in April to 391,000 and an increase of the final troop ceiling from 425,100 to 431,000. 6/ But McNamara had personally rewritten the draft memo submitted to him by Systems Analysis inserting as its title, "Program #3." His handwritten

changes also included a closing sentence which read, "Requests for changes in the Program may be submitted by the Service Secretaries or JCS whenever these appear appropriate." 7/ This language clearly reflected the following instruction that McNamara had received from the President on June 28:

> As you know, we have been moving our men to Viet Nam on a schedule determined by General Westmoreland's requirements.
>
> As I have stated orally several times this year, I should like this schedule to be accelerated as much as possible so that General Westmoreland can feel assured that he has all the men he needs as soon as possible.
>
> Would you meet with the Joint Chiefs and give me at your early convenience an indication of what acceleration is possible for the balance of this year. 8/

While the Chiefs were unable to promise any further speed-up in the deployment schedule, the Secretary assured the President on July 15 that all possible steps were being taken. 9/ But as in the air war, so also in the question of troop deployments a turning point was being reached. By the fall of 1966 when Program #4 was under consideration, the President would no longer be instructing McNamara to honor all of General Westmoreland's troop requests as fully and rapidly as possible.

2. ROLLING THUNDER 51

In the air campaign strikes continued on the other major POL storage sites, and were soon accepted as a routine part of the bombing program. On 8 July, at a Honolulu conference, Secretary McNamara was given a complete briefing on the POL program. He informed CINCPAC that the President wished that first priority in the air war be given to the complete "strangulation" of NVN's POL system, and he must not feel that there were sortie limitations for this purpose. (He also stressed the need for increased interdiction of the railroad lines to China.) 10/ As a result, ROLLING THUNDER program No. 51, which went into effect the next day, specified a "strangulation" program of armed reconnaissance against the POL system, including dispersed sites. The ceiling for attack sorties on NVN and Laos was raised from 8100 to 10,100 per month. 11/

McNamara left CINCPAC with instructions to develop a comprehensive plan to accomplish the maximum feasible POL destruction while maintaining a balanced effort against other priority targets. On July 24, CINCPAC forwarded his concept for the operation to Washington. 12/ In addition to the fixed and dispersed sites already under attack, he recommended strikes against the storage facilities at Phuc Yen and Kep airfields;

against the DRV's importation facilities (i.e., foreign ships in Haiphong harbor, destruction of harbor dredges, destruction of doc s, etc.); and the expansion of the reconnaissance effort to provide more and better information on the overall POL system. Also recommended was a step-up in attacks on rolling stock of all kinds carrying POL, and strikes on the Xom Trung Hoa lock and dam. In spite of this recommendation and a follow-up on August 8, ROLLING THUNDER 51 was only authorized to strike previously approved targets plus some new bridges and a bypass as outlined in the July 8 execute order. 13/

While CINCPAC and his subordinates were making every effort to hamstring the DRV logistical operation through the POL attacks, the Secretary of Defense was keeping tabs on results through specially commissioned reports from DIA. These continued through July and into August. By July 20, DIA reported that 59.9% of North Vietnam's original POL capacity had been destroyed. 14/ By the end of July, DIA reported that 70% of NVN's large bulk (JCS-targeted) POL storage capacity had been destroyed, together with 7% of the capacity of known dispersed sites. The residual POL storage capacity was down from some 185,000 metric tons to about 75,000 tons, about 2/3 still in relatively vulnerable large storage centers -- two of them, those at the airfields, still off limits -- and 1/3 in smaller dispersed sites. 15/ This still provided, however, a fat cushion over NVN's requirements. What became clearer and clearer as the summer wore on was that while we had destroyed a major portion of North Vietnam's storage capacity, she retained enough dispersed capacity, supplemented by continuing imports (increasingly in easily dispersable drums, not bulk), to meet her on-going requirements. The greater invulnerability of dispersed POL meant an ever mounting U.S. cost in munitions, fuel, aircraft losses, and men. By August we were reaching the point at which these costs were prohibitive. It was simply impractical and infeasible to attempt any further constriction of North Vietnam's POL storage capacity.

As the POL campaign continued, the lucrative POL targets disappeared and the effort was confined more and more to the small scattered sites. Finally, on September 4, CINCPAC (probably acting by direction although no instructions appear in the available documents) directed a shift in the primary emphasis of ROLLING THUNDER strikes. Henceforth they were to be aimed at, "...attrition of men, supplies, equipment and...POL...." 16/ Stressing the new set of priorities CINCPAC instructed, "POL will also receive emphasis on a selective basis." 17/ By mid-October, even PACAF reported that the campaign had reached the point of diminishing returns. 18/

3. POL - Strategic Failure

It was clear in retrospect that the POL strikes had been a failure. Apart from the possibility of inconveniences, interruptions, and local shortages of a temporary nature, there was no evidence that NVN had at any time been pinched for POL. NVN's dependence on the unloading facilities at Haiphong and large storage sites in the rest of the country had been greatly overestimated. Bulk imports via ocean-going tanker continued at Haiphong despite the great damage to POL docks and storage there. Tankers merely stood offshore and unloaded into barges and other shallow-draft boats, usually at night, and the POL was transported to hundreds of concealed locations along internal water-ways. More POL was also brought in already drummed, convenient for dispersed storage and handling and virtually immune from interdiction. 19/

The difficulties of switching to a much less vulnerable but perfectly workable storage and distribution system, not an unbearable strain when the volume to be handled was not really very great, had also been overestimated. Typically, also, NVN's adaptability and resourcefulness had been greatly underestimated. As early as the summer of 1965, about six months after the initiation of ROLLING THUNDER, NVN had begun to import more POL, build additional small, dispersed, underground tank storage sites, and store more POL in drums along LOCs and at consumption points. It had anticipated the strikes and taken out insurance against them; by the time the strikes came, long after the decision had been telegraphed by open speculation in the public media, NVN was in good position to ride them out. Thus, by the end of 1966, after six months of POL attacks, it was estimated that NVN still had about 26,000 metric tons storage capacity in the large sites, about 30-40,000 tons capacity in medium-sized dispersed sites, and about 28,000 tons capacity in smaller tank and drum sites. 20/

One of the unanticipated results of the POL strikes, which further offset their effectiveness, was the skillful way in which Ho Chi Minh used them in his negotiations with the Soviets and Chinese to extract larger commitments of economic, military and financial assistance from them. Thus, on July 17 he made a major appeal to the Chinese based on the American POL escalation. 21/ Since North Vietnam is essentially a logistical funnel for supplies originating in the USSR and China, this increase in their support as a direct result of the POL strikes must also be discounted against whatever effect they may have had on hampering North Vietnam's transportation.

The real and immediate failure of the POL strikes was reflected, however, in the undiminished flow of men and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh trail to the war in the South. In early July, the

intelligence community had indicated that POL could become a factor in constricting the truck traffic to the South. The statement was, however, qualified,

> The POL requirement for trucks involved in the infiltration movement has not been large enough to present significant supply problems. But local shortages have occurred from time to time and may become significant as a result of attacks on the POL distribution system. 22/

By the end of the month, however, the CIA at least was more pessimistic:

> Hanoi appears to believe that its transportation system will be able to withstand increased air attacks and still maintain an adequate flow of men and supplies to the South.
>
> ...Recent strikes against North Vietnam's POL storage facilities have destroyed over 50 percent of the nation's petroleum storage capacity. However, it is estimated that substantial stocks still survive and that the DRV can continue to import sufficient fuel to keep at least essential military and economic traffic moving. 23/

DIA continued to focus its assessments on the narrower effectiveness of the strikes in destruction of some percentage of North Vietnamese POL storage capacity without directly relating this to needs and import potential. 24/ By September, the two intelligence agencies were in general agreement as to the failure of the POL strikes. In an evaluation of the entire bombing effort they stated, "There is no evidence yet of any shortage of POL in North Vietnam and stocks on hand, with recent imports, have been adequate to sustain necessary operations." 25/ The report went even further and stated that there was no evidence of insurmountable transport difficulties from the bombing, no significant economic dislocation and no weakening of popular morale.

Powerful reinforcement about the ineffectiveness of the strikes came at the end of August when a special summer study group of top American scientists submitted a series of reports through the JASON Division of the Institute for Defense Analyses (treated comprehensively below). One of their papers dealt in considerable detail with the entire bombing program, generally concluding that bombing had failed in all its specified goals. With respect to the recent petroleum attacks to disrupt North Vietnamese transportation, the scientists offered the following summary conclusions:

> In view of the nature of the North Vietnamese POL system, the relatively small quantities of POL it requires, and the options available for overcoming the effects of U.S. air strikes thus far, it seems doubtful that any critical denial

of essential POL has resulted, apart from temporary and local shortages. It also seems doubtful that any such denial need result if China and/or the USSR are willing to pay greater costs in delivering it.

Maintaining the flow of POL to consumers within North Vietnam will be more difficult, costly, and hazardous, depending primarily on the effectiveness of the U.S. armed reconnaissance effort against the transportation system. Temporary interruptions and shortages have probably been and can no doubt continue to be inflicted, but it does not seem likely that North Vietnam will have to curtail its higher priority POL-powered activities as a result.

Since less than 5 percent of North Vietnamese POL requirements are utilized in supporting truck operations in Laos, it seems unlikely that infiltration South will have to be curtailed because of POL shortages; and since North Vietnamese and VC forces in South Vietnam do not require POL supplied from the North, their POL-powered activities need not suffer, either. 26/

Coming as they did from a highly prestigious and respected group of policy-supporting but independent-thinking scientists and scholars, and coming at the end of a long and frustrating summer in the air war, these views must have exercised a powerful influence on McNamara's thinking. His prompt adoption of the "infiltration barrier" concept they recommended as an alternative to the bombing (see below) gives evidence of the overall weight these reports carried.

McNamara, for his part, made no effort to conceal his dissatisfaction and disappointment at the failure of the POL attacks. He pointed out to the Air Force and the Navy the glaring discrepancy between the optimistic estimates of results their pre-strike POL studies had postulated and the actual failure of the raids to significantly decrease infiltration. 27/ The Secretary was already in the process of rethinking the role of the entire air campaign in the U.S. effort in Southeast Asia. He was painfully aware of its inability to pinch off the infiltration to the South and had seen no evidence of its ability to break Hanoi's will, demoralize its population, or bring it to the negotiation table. The full articulation of his disillusionment would not come until the following January, however, when he appeared before a joint session of the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees to argue against any further extension of the bombing. To illustrate the ineffectualness of bombing he cited our experience with the POL strikes:

There is no question but what petroleum in the North is an essential material for the movement, under present circumstances, of men and equipment to their borders. But neither is there any doubt that with, in effect, an unrestricted bombing campaign against petroleum, we were not able to dry up the supply.

The bombing of the POL system was carried out with as much skill, effort, and attention as we could devote to it, starting on June 29, and we haven't been able to dry up those supplies....

We in effect took out the Haiphong docks for unloading of POL and we have had very little effect on the importation level at the present time. I would think it is about as high today as it would have been if we had never struck the Haiphong docks. And I think the same thing would be true if we took out the cargo docks in Haiphong for dry cargo....

I don't believe that the bombing up to the present has significantly reduced, nor any bombing that I could contemplate in the future would significantly reduce, actual flow of men and materiel to the South. 28/

Thus disenthralled with air power's ability to turn the tide of the war in our favor, McNamara would increasingly in the months ahead recommend against any further escalation of the bombing and turn his attention to alternative methods of shutting off the infiltration and bringing the war to an end.

B. Alternatives -- The Barrier Concept

1. Genesis

The fact that bombing had failed to achieve its objectives did not mean that all those purposes were to be abandoned. For an option-oriented policy adviser like McNamara the task was to find alternative ways of accomplishing the job. The idea of constructing an anti-infiltration barrier across the DMZ and the Laotian panhandle was first proposed in January 1966 by Roger Fisher of Harvard Law School in one of his periodic memos to McNaughton. 29/ The purpose of Fisher's proposal was to provide the Administration with an alternative strategic concept for arresting infiltration, thereby permitting a cessation of the bombing (a supporting sub-thesis of his memo was the failure of the bombing to break Hanoi's will). He had in mind a primarily air-seeded line of barbed wire, mines

and chemicals since the terrain in question would make actual on-the-ground physical construction of a barrier difficult and would probably evoke fierce military opposition. In his memo, Fisher dealt at length with the pros and cons of such a proposal including a lengthy argument for its political advantages.

The memo must have struck a responsive cord in McNaughton because six weeks later he sent McNamara an only slightly revised version of the Fisher draft. 30/ McNaughton's changes added little to the Fisher ideas; they served merely to tone down some of his assertions and hedge the conclusions. The central argument for the barrier concept proceeded from a negative analysis of the effects of the bombing,

B. Present Military Situation in North Vietnam

1. Physical consequences of bombing

a. The DRV has suffered some physical hardship and pain, raising the cost to it of supporting the VC.

b. Best intelligence judgment is that:

(1) Bombing may or may not - by destruction or delay - have resulted in net reduction in the flow of men or supplies to the forces in the South;

(2) Bombing has failed to reduce the limit on the capacity of the DRV to aid the VC to a point below VC needs;

(3) Future bombing of North Vietnam cannot be expected physically to limit the military support given the VC by the DRV to a point below VC needs.

2. Influence consequences of bombing

a. There is no evidence that bombings have made it more likely the DRV will decide to back out of the war.

b. Nor is there evidence that bombings have resulted in an increased DRV resolve to continue the war to an eventual victory. /Fisher's draft had read "There is some evidence that bombings...."/

C. The Future of a Bombing Strategy

Although bombings of North Vietnam improve GVN morale and provide a counter in eventual negotiations (should they take place) there is no evidence that they meaningfully reduce

either the capacity or the will for the DRV to support the VC. The DRV knows that we cannot force them to stop by bombing and that we cannot, without an unacceptable risk of a major war with China or Russia or both, force them to stop by conquering them or "blotting them out." Knowing that if they are not influenced we cannot stop them, the DRV will remain difficult to influence. With continuing DRV support, victory in the South may remain forever beyond our reach.

Having made the case against the bombing, the memo then spelled out the case for an anti-infiltration barrier:

II. SUBSTANCE OF THE BARRIER PROPOSAL

A. That the US and GVN adopt the concept of physically cutting off DRV support to the VC by an on-the-ground barrier across the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the general vicinity of the 17th Parallel and Route 9. To the extent necessary the barrier would run from the sea across Vietnam and Laos to the Mekong, a straight-line distance of about 160 miles.

B. That in Laos an "interdiction and verification zone," perhaps 10 miles wide, be established and legitimated by such measures as leasing, international approval, compensation, etc.

C. That a major military and engineering effort be directed toward constructing a physical barrier of minefields, barbed wire, walls, ditches and military strong points flanked by a defoliated strip on each side.

D. That such bombing in Laos and North Vietnam as takes place be narrowly identified with interdiction and with the construction of the barrier by

1. Being within the 10-mile-wide interdiction zone in Laos, or

2. Being in support of the construction of the barrier, or

3. Being interdiction bombing pending the completion of the barrier.

E. That, of course, intensive interdiction continues at sea and from Cambodia.

(It might be stated that all bombings of North Vietnam will stop as soon as there is no infiltration and no opposition to the construction of the verification barrier.) 32/

Among the McNaughton additions to the Fisher draft were several suggested action memos including one to the Chiefs asking for military comment on the proposal. Available documents do not reveal whether McNamara sent the memo nor indicate what his own reaction to the proposal was. He did, however, contact the Chiefs in some way for their reaction to the proposal because on March 24 the Chiefs sent a message to CINCPAC requesting field comment on the barrier concept. 33/ After having in turn queried his subordinates, CINCPAC replied on April 7 that construction and defense of such a barrier would require 7-8 U.S. divisions and might take up to three and one half to four years to become fully operational. 34/ It would require a substantial diversion of available combat and construction resources and would place a heavy strain on the logistics support system in Southeast Asia, all in a static defense effort which would deny us the military advantages of flexibility in employment of forces. Not surprisingly, after this exaggerated catalog of problems, CINCPAC recommended against such a barrier as an inefficient use of resources with small likelihood of achieving U.S. objectives in Vietnam. These not unexpected objections notwithstanding, the Army (presumably at McNamara's direction) had begun an R&D program in March to design, develop, test and deliver within six to nine months for operational evaluation a set of anti-personnel route and trail interdiction devices. 35/

At approximately the same time an apparently unrelated offer was made by four distinguished scientific advisors to the Government to form a summer working group to study technical aspects of the war in Vietnam. It is possible that the idea for such a study really originated in the Pentagon, although the earliest documents indicate that the four scholars (Dr. George Kistiakowsky - Harvard; Dr. Karl Kaysen - Harvard; Dr. Jerome Wiesner - MIT; and Dr. Jerrold Zacharias - MIT) made the first initiative with Adam Yarmolinsky, then working for McNaughton. 36/ In any case, McNamara liked the idea and sent Zacharias a letter on April 16 formally requesting that he and the others arrange the summer study on "technical possibilities in relation to our military operations in Vietnam." 37/ On April 26 he advised John McNaughton, who was to oversee the project, that the scientists' group should examine the feasibility of "A 'fence' across the infiltration trails, warning systems, reconnaissance (especially night) methods, night vision devices, defoliation techniques, and area-denial weapons." 38/ In this way the barrier concept was officially brought to the attention of the study group.

During the remainder of the spring, while McNamara and the other Principals were preoccupied with the POL decision, the summer study group was organized and the administrative mechanics worked out for providing

its members with briefings and classified material. The contract, it was determined, would be let to the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) for the study to be done through its JASON Division (ad hoc high-level studies using primarily non-IDA scholars). The group of 47 scientists (eventually to grow to 67 with the addition of 20 IDA personnel), representing the cream of the scholarly community in technical fields, finally met in Wellesley on June 13 for ten days of briefings by high-level officials from the Pentagon, CIA, State and the White House on all facets of the war. Thereafter they broke into four sub-groups to study different aspects of the problem from a technical (not a political) point of view. Their work proceeded through July and August and coincided with McNamara's disillusionment over the results of the POL strikes.

2. The JASON Summer Study Reports

At the end of August the Jason Summer Study, as it had come to be known, submitted four reports: (1) The Effects of US Bombing in North Vietnam; (2) VC/NVA Logistics and Manpower; (3) An Air Supported Anti-Infiltration Barrier; and (4) Summary of Results, Conclusions and Recommendations. The documents were regarded as particularly sensitive and were extremely closely held with General Wheeler and Mr. Rostow receiving the only copies outside OSD. The reason is easy to understand. The Jason Summer Study reached the conclusion that the bombing of North Vietnam was ineffective and therefore recommended that the barrier concept be implemented as an alternative means of checking infiltration.

Several factors combined to give these conclusions and recommendations a powerful and perhaps decisive influence in McNamara's mind at the beginning of September 1966. First, they were recommendations from a group of America's most distinguished scientists, men who had helped the Government produce many of its most advanced technical weapons systems since the Second World War, and men who were not identified with the vocal academic criticism of the Administration's Vietnam policy. Secondly, the reports arrived at a time when McNamara, having witnessed the failure of the POL attacks to produce decisive results, was harboring doubts of his own about the effectiveness of the bombing, and at a time when alternative approaches were welcome. Third, the Study Group did not mince words or fudge its conclusions, but stated them bluntly and forcefully. For all these reasons, then, the reports are significant. Moreover, as we shall see, they apparently had a dramatic impact on the Secretary of Defense and provided much of the direction for future policy. For these reasons, then, the reports are significant. Moreover, as we shall see, they apparently had a dramatic impact on the Secretary of Defense and provided much of the direction for future policy. For these reasons important sections of them are reproduced at some length below.

The report evaluating the results of the U.S. air campaign against North Vietnam began with a forceful statement of conclusions:

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. As of July 1966 the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam (NVN) had had no measurable direct effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South at the current level.

Although the political constraints seem clearly to have reduced the effectiveness of the bombing program, its limited effect on Hanoi's ability to provide such support cannot be explained solely on that basis. The countermeasures introduced by Hanoi effectively reduced the impact of U.S. bombing. More fundamentally, however, North Vietnam has basically a subsistence agricultural economy that presents a difficult and unrewarding target system for air attack.

The economy supports operations in the South mainly by functioning as a logistic funnel and by providing a source of manpower. The industrial sector produces little of military value. Most of the essential military supplies that the VC/NVN forces in the South require from external sources are provided by the USSR and Communist China. Furthermore, the volume of such supplies is so low that only a small fraction of the capacity of North Vietnam's rather flexible transportation network is required to maintain the flow. The economy's relatively underemployed labor force also appears to provide an ample manpower reserve for internal military and economic needs including repair and reconstruction and for continued support of military operations in the South.

2. Since the initiation of the ROLLING THUNDER program the damage to facilities and equipment in North Vietnam has been more than offset by the increased flow of military and economic aid, largely from the USSR and Communist China.

The measurable costs of the damage sustained by North Vietnam are estimated by intelligence analysts to have reached approximately $86 million by 15 July 1966. In 1965 alone, the value of the military and economic aid that Hanoi received from the USSR and Communist China is estimated to have been on the order of $250-400 million, of which about $100-150 million was economic, and they have continued to provide aid, evidently at an increasing rate, during the current year. Most of it has been from the USSR, which had virtually cut off aid during the 1962-64 period. There can be little doubt, therefore, that

Hanoi's Communist backers have assumed the economic costs to a degree that has significantly cushioned the impact of U.S. bombing.

3. The aspects of the basic situation that have enabled Hanoi to continue its support of military operations in the South and to neutralize the impact of U.S. bombing by passing the economic costs to other Communist countries are not likely to be altered by reducing the present geographic constraints, mining Haiphong and the principal harbors in North Vietnam, increasing the number of armed reconnaissance sorties and otherwise expanding the U.S. air offensive along the lines now contemplated in military recommendations and planning studies.

An expansion of the bombing program along such lines would make it more difficult and costly for Hanoi to move essential military supplies through North Vietnam to the VC/NVN forces in the South. The low volume of supplies required, the demonstrated effectiveness of the countermeasures already undertaken by Hanoi, the alternative options that the NVN transportation network provides and the level of aid the USSR and China seem prepared to provide, however, make it quite unlikely that Hanoi's capability to function as a logistic funnel would be seriously impaired. Our past experience also indicates that an intensified air campaign in NVN probably would not prevent Hanoi from infiltrating men into the South at the present or a higher rate, if it chooses. Furthermore, there would appear to be no basis for assuming that the damage that could be inflicted by an intensified air offensive would impose such demands on the North Vietnamese labor force that Hanoi would be unable to continue and expand its recruitment and training of military forces for the insurgency in the South.

4. While conceptually it is reasonable to assume that some limit may be imposed on the scale of military activity that Hanoi can maintain in the South by continuing the ROLLING THUNDER program at the present, or some higher level of effort, there appears to be no basis for defining that limit in concrete terms or, for concluding that the present scale of VC/NVN activities in the field have approached that limit.

The available evidence clearly indicates that Hanoi has been infiltrating military forces and supplies into South Vietnam at an accelerated rate during the current year. Intelligence estimates have concluded that North Vietnam is capable of substantially increasing its support.

5. The indirect effects of the bombing on the will of the North Vietnamese to continue fighting and on their leaders' appraisal of the prospective gains and costs of maintaining the present policy have not shown themselves in any tangible way. Furthermore, we have not discovered any basis for concluding that the indirect punitive effects of bombing will prove decisive in these respects.

It may be argued on a speculative basis that continued or increased bombing must eventually effect Hanoi's will to continue, particularly as a component of the total U.S. military pressures being exerted throughout Southeast Asia. However, it is not a conclusion that necessarily follows from the available evidence; given the character of North Vietnam's economy and society, the present and prospective low levels of casualties and the amount of aid available to Hanoi. It would appear to be equally logical to assume that the major influences on Hanoi's will to continue are most likely to be the course of the war in the South and the degree to which the USSR and China support the policy of continuing the war and that the punitive impact of U.S. bombing may have but a marginal effect in this broader context. 39/

In the body of the report these summary formulations were elaborated in more detail. For instance, in assessing the military and economic effect of the bombing on North Vietnam's capacity to sustain the war, the report stated:

The economic and military damage sustained by Hanoi in the first year of the bombing was moderate and the cost could be (and was) passed along to Moscow and Peiping.

The major effect of the attack on North Vietnam was to force Hanoi to cope with disruption to normal activity, particularly in transportation and distribution. The bombing hurt most in its disruption of the roads and rail nets and in the very considerable repair effort which became necessary. The regime, however, was singularly successful in overcoming the effects of the U.S. interdiction effort.

Much of the damage was to installations that the North Vietnamese did not need to sustain the military effort. The regime made no attempt to restore storage facilities and little to repair damage to power stations, evidently because of the existence of adequate excess capacity and

because the facilities were not of vital importance. For somewhat similar reasons, it made no major effort to restore military facilities, but merely abandoned barracks and dispersed materiel usually stored in depots.

The major essential restoration consisted of measures to keep traffic moving, to keep the railroad yards operating, to maintain communications, and to replace transport equipment and equipment for radar and SAM sites. 40/

A little further on the report examined the political effects of the bombing on Hanoi's will to continue the war, the morale of the population, and the support of its allies.

The bombing through 1965 apparently had not had a major effect in shaping Hanoi's decision on whether or not to continue the war in Vietnam. The regime probably continued to base such decisions mainly on the course of the fighting in the South and appeared willing to suffer even stepped-up bombing so long as prospects of winning the South appeared to be reasonably good.

Evidence regarding the effect of the bombing on the morale of the North Vietnamese people suggests that the results were mixed. The bombing clearly strengthened popular support of the regime by engendering patriotic and nationalistic enthusiasm to resist the attacks. On the other hand, those more directly involved in the bombing underwent personal harships and anxieties caused by the raids. Because the air strikes were directed away from urban areas, morale was probably damaged less by the direct bombing than by its indirect effects, such as evacuation of the urban population and the splitting of families.

Hanoi's political relations with its allies were in some respects strengthened by the bombing. The attacks had the effect of encouraging greater material and political support from the Soviet Union than might otherwise have been the case. While the Soviet aid complicated Hanoi's relationship with Peking, it reduced North Vietnam's dependence on China and thereby gave Hanoi more room for maneuver on its own behalf. 41/

This report's concluding chapter was entitled "Observations" and contained some of the most lucid and penetrating analysis of air war produced to that date, or this! It began by reviewing the original objectives the bombing was initiated to achieve:

> ...reducing the ability of North Vietnam to support the Communist insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos, and...increasing progressively the pressure on NVN to the point where the regime would decide that it was too costly to continue directing and supporting the insurgency in the South. 42/

After rehearsing the now familiar military failure of the bombing to halt the infiltration, the report crisply and succinctly outlined the bombing's failure to achieve the critical second objective --the psychological one:

> ...initial plans and assessments for the ROLLING THUNDER program clearly tended to overestimate the persuasive and disruptive effects of the U.S. air strikes and, correspondingly, to underestimate the tenacity and recuperative capabilities of the North Vietnamese. This tendency, in turn, appears to reflect a general failure to appreciate the fact, well-documented in the historical and social scientific literature, that a direct, frontal attack on a society tends to strengthen the social fabric of the nation, to increase popular support of the existing government, to improve the determination of both the leadership and the populace to fight back, to induce a variety of protective measures that reduce the society's vulnerability to future attack, and to develop an increased capacity for quick repair and restoration of essential functions. The great variety of physical and social countermeasures that North Vietnam has taken in response to the bombing is now well documented in current intelligence reports, but the potential effectiveness of these countermeasures was not stressed in the early planning or intelligence studies. 43/

Perhaps the most trenchant analysis of all, however, was reserved for last as the report attacked the fundamental weakness of the air war strategy -- our inability to relate operations to objectives:

> In general, current official thought about U.S. objectives in bombing NVN implicitly assumes two sets of causal relationships:
>
> 1. That by increasing the damage and destruction of resources in NVN, the U.S. is exerting pressure to cause the DRV to stop their support of the military operations in SVN and Laos; and

2. That the combined effect of the total military effort against NVN -- including the U.S. air strikes in NVN and Laos, and the land, sea, and air operations in SVN -- will ultimately cause the DRV to perceive that its probable losses accruing from the war have become greater than its possible gains and, on the basis of this net evaluation, the regime will stop its support of the war in the South.

These two sets of interrelationships are assumed in military planning, but it is not clear that they are systematically addressed in current intelligence estimates and assessments. Instead, the tendency is to encapsulate the bombing of NVN as one set of operations and the war in the South as another set of operations, and to evaluate each separately; and to tabulate and describe data on the physical, economic, and military effects of the bombing, but not to address specifically the relationship between such effects and the data relating to the ability and will of the DRV to continue its support of the war in the South.

The fragmented nature of current analyses and the lack of an adequate methodology for assessing the net effects of a given set of military operations leaves a major gap between the quantifiable data on bomb damage effects, on the one hand, and policy judgments about the feasibility of achieving a given set of objectives, on the other. Bridging this gap still requires the exercise of broad political-military judgments that cannot be supported or rejected on the basis of systematic intelligence indicators. It must be concluded, therefore, that there is currently no adequate basis for predicting the levels of U.S. military effort that would be required to achieve the stated objectives -- indeed, there is no firm basis for determining if there is <u>any</u> feasible level of effort that would achieve these objectives. 44/

The critical impact of this study on the Secretary's thinking is revealed by the fact that many of its conclusions and much of its analysis would find its way into McNamara's October trip report to the President.

Having submitted a stinging condemnation of the bombing, the Study Group was under some obligation to offer constructive alternatives and this they did, siezing, not surprisingly, on the very idea McNamara had suggested -- the anti-infiltration barrier. The product of their summer's work was a reasonably detailed proposal for a multi-system barrier across the DMZ and the Laotian panhandle that would make extensive use of recently innovated mines and sensors. The central portion of their recommendation follows:

The barrier would have two somewhat different parts, one designed against foot traffic and one against vehicles. The preferred location for the anti-foot-traffic barrier is in the region along the southern edge of the DMZ to the Laotian border and then north of Tchepone to the vicinity of Muong Sen, extending about 100 by 20 kilometers. This area is virtually unpopulated, and the terrain is quite rugged, containing mostly V-shaped valleys in which the opportunity for alternate trails appears lower than it is elsewhere in the system. The location of choice for the anti-vehicle part of the system is the area, about 100 by 40 kilometers, now covered by Operation Cricket. In this area the road network tends to be more constricted than elsewhere, and there appears to be a smaller area available for new roads. An alternative location for the anti-personnel system is north of the DMZ to the Laotian border and then north along the crest of the mountains dividing Laos from North Vietnam. It is less desirable economically and militarily because of its greater length, greater distance from U.S. bases, and greater proximity to potential North Vietnamese counter-efforts.

The air-supported barrier would, if necessary, be supplemented by a manned "fence" connecting the eastern end of the barrier to the sea.

The construction of the air-supported barrier could be initiated using currently available or nearly available components, with some necessary modifications, and could perhaps be installed by a year or so from go-ahead. However, we anticipate that the North Vietnamese would learn to cope with a barrier built this way after some period of time which we cannot estimate, but which we fear may be short. Weapons and sensors which can make a much more effective barrier, only some of which are now under development, are not likely to be available in less than 18 months to 2 years. Even these, it must be expected, will eventually be overcome by the North Vietnamese, so that further improvements in weaponry will be necessary. Thus we envisage a dynamic "battle of the barrier," in which the barrier is repeatedly improved and strengthened by the introduction of new components, and which will hopefully permit us to keep the North Vietnamese off balance by continually posing new problems for them.

This barrier is in concept not very different from what has already been suggested elsewhere; the new aspects are: the very large scale of area denial, especially mine

fields kilometers deep rather than the conventional 100-200 meters; the very large numbers and persistent employment of weapons, sensors, and aircraft sorties in the barrier area; and the emphasis on rapid and carefully planned incorporation of more effective weapons and sensors into the system.

The system that could be available in a year or so would, in our conception, contain [sic] the following components:

-- Gravel mines (both self-sterilizing for harassment and non-sterilizing for area denial).

-- Possibly, "button bomblets" developed by Picatinny Arsenal, to augment the range of the sensors against foot traffic.*

-- SADEYE/BLU-26B clusters,** for attacks on area-type targets of uncertain locations.

-- Acoustic detectors, based on improvements of the "Acoustic Sonobuoys" currently under test by the Navy.

-- P-2V patrol aircraft, equipped for acoustic sensor monitoring, Gravel dispensing, vectoring strike aircraft, and infrared detection of campfires in bivouac areas.

-- Gravel Dispensing Aircraft (A-1's, or possibly C-123's)

-- Strike Aircraft

-- Photo-reconnaissance Aircraft

-- Photo Interpreters

--(Possibly) ground teams to plant mines and sensors, gather information, and selectively harass traffic on foot trails.

---

* These are small mines (aspirin-size) presently designed to give a loud report but not to injure when stepped on by a shod foot. They would be sown in great density along well-used trails, on the assumption that they would be much harder to sweep than Gravel. Their purpose would be to make noise indicating pedestrian traffic at a range of approximately 200 feet from the acoustic sensors.

** CBU-24 in Air Force nomenclature.

The anti-troop infiltration system (which would also function against supply porters) would operate as follows: There would be a constantly renewed mine field of non-sterilizing Gravel (and possibly button bomblets), distributed in patterns covering interconnected valleys and slopes (suitable for alternate trails) over the entire barrier region. The actual mined area would encompass the equivalent of a strip about 100 by 5 kilometers. There would also be a pattern of acoustic detectors to listen for mine explosions indicating an attempted penetration. The mine field is intended to deny opening of alternate routes for troop infiltrators and should be emplaced first. On the trails and bivouacs currently used, from which mines may--we tentatively assume--be cleared without great difficulty, a more dense pattern of sensors would be designed to locate groups of infiltrators. Air strikes using Gravel and SADEYES would then be called against these targets. The sensor patterns would be monitored 24 hours a day by patrol aircraft. The struck areas would be reseeded with new mines.

The anti-vehicle system would consist of acoustic detectors distributed every mile or so along all truckable roads in the interdicted area, monitored 24 hours a day by patrol aircraft, with vectored strike aircraft using SADEYE to respond to signals that trucks or truck convoys are moving. The patrol aircraft would distribute self-sterilizing Gravel over parts of the road net at dusk. The self-sterilization feature is needed so that road-watching and mine-planting teams could be used in this area. Photo-reconnaissance aircraft would cover the entire area each few days to look for the development of new truckable roads, to see if the transport of supplies is being switched to porters, and to identify any other change in the infiltration system. It may also be desirable to use ground teams to plant larger anti-truck mines along the roads, as an interim measure pending the development of effective air-dropped anti-vehicle mines.

The cost of such a system (both parts) has been estimated to be about $800 million per year, of which by far the major fraction is spent for Gravel and SADEYES. The key requirements would be (all numbers are approximate because of assumptions which had to be made regarding degradation of system components in field use, and regarding the magnitude of infiltration): 20 million Gravel mines per month; possibly 25 million button bomblets per month;

10,000 SADEYE-BLU-26B clusters* per month; 1600 acoustic sensors per month (assuming presently employed batteries with 2-week life), plus 68 appropriately equipped P-2V patrol aircraft; a fleet of about 50 A-1's or 20 C-123's for Gravel dispensing (1400 A-1 sorties or 600 C-123 sorties per month); 500 strike sorties per month (F-4C equivalent); and sufficient photo-reconnaissance sorties, depending on the aircraft, to cover 2500 square miles each week, with an appropriate team of photo interpreters. Even to make this system work, there would be required experimentation and further development for foliage penetration, moisture resistance, and proper dispersion of Gravel; development of a better acoustic sensor than currently exists (especially in an attempt to eliminate the need for button bomblets); aircraft modifications; possible modifications in BLU-26B fuzing; and refinement of strike-navigation tactics.

For the future, rapid development of new mines (such as tripwire, smaller and more effectively camouflaged Gravel, and various other kinds of mines), as well as still better sensor/information processing systems will be essential. 45/

Thus, not only had this distinguished array of American technologists endorsed the barrier idea McNamara had asked them to consider, they had provided the Secretary with an attractive, well-thought-out and highly detailed proposal as a real alternative to further escalation of the ineffective air war against North Vietnam. But, true to their scientific orientations, the study group members could not conclude their work without examining the kinds of counter-measures the North Vietnamese might take to circumvent the barrier. Thus, they reasoned:

Assuming that surprise is not thrown away, countermeasures will of course still be found, but they may take some time to bring into operation. The most effective countermeasures we can anticipate are mine sweeping; provision of shelter against SADEYE strikes and Gravel dispersion; spoofing of sensors to deceive the system or decoy aircraft into ambushes, and in general a considerable step-up of North Vietnamese anti-aircraft capability along the road net. Counter-countermeasures must be an integral part of the system development.

* These quantities depend on an average number of strikes consistent with the assumption of 7000 troops/month and 180 tons/day of supplies by truck on the infiltration routes. This assumption was based on likely upper limits at the time the barrier is installed. If the assumption of initial infiltration is too high, or if we assume that the barrier will be successful, the number of weapons and sorties will be reduced accordingly.

> Apart from the tactical countermeasures against the barrier itself, one has to consider strategic alternatives available to the North Vietnamese in case the barrier is successful. Among these are: a move into the Mekong Plain; infiltration from the sea either directly to SVN or through Cambodia; and movement down the Mekong from Thakhek (held by the Pathet Lao-North Vietnamese) into Cambodia.
>
> Finally, it will be difficult for us to find out how effective the barrier is in the absence of clearly visible North Vietnamese responses, such as end runs through the Mekong plain. Because of supplies already stored in the pipeline, and because of the general shakiness of our quantitative estimates of either supply or troop infiltration, it is likely to be some time before the effect of even a wholly successful barrier becomes noticeable. A greatly stepped-up intelligence effort is called for, including continued road-watch activity in the areas of the motorable roads, and patrol and reconnaissance activity south of the anti-personnel barrier. 46/

This, then, was the new option introduced into the Vietnam discussions in Washington at the beginning of September.

Their work completed, the Jason Group met with McNamara and McNaughton in Washington on August 30 and presented their conclusions and recommendations. McNamara was apparently strongly and favorably impressed with the work of the Summer Study because he and McNaughton flew to Massachusetts on September 6 to meet with members of the Study again for more detailed discussions. Even before going to Massachusetts, however, McNamara had asked General Wheeler to bring the proposal up with the Chiefs and to request field comment. 47/ After having asked CINCPAC for an evaluation, Wheeler sent McNamara the preliminary reactions of the Chiefs. 48/ They agreed with the Secretary's suggestion to establish a project manager (General Starbird) in DDR&E, but expressed concern that, "the very substantial funds required for the barrier system would be obtained from current Service resources thereby affecting adversely important current programs."

CINCPAC's evaluation of the barrier proposal on September 13 was little more than a rehash of the overdrawn arguments against such a system advanced in April. The sharpness of the language of his summary arguments, however, is extreme even for Admiral Sharp. In no uncertain terms he stated:

> The combat forces required before, during and after construction of the barrier; the initial and follow-on logistic support; the engineer construction effort and time required; and the existing logistic posture in Southeast Asia with respect to ports and land LOCs make construction of such a barrier impracticable.

....Military operations against North Vietnam and operations in South Vietnam are of transcendent importance. Operations elsewhere are complementary supporting undertakings. Priority and emphasis should be accorded in consideration of the forces and resources available to implement the strategy dictated by our objectives. 49/

To some extent, the vehemence of CINCPAC's reaction must have stemmed from the fact that he and General Westmoreland had just completed a paper exercise in which they had struggled to articulate a strategic concept for the conduct of the war to achieve U.S. objectives as they understood them. This effort had been linked to the consideration of CY 1967 force requirements for the war, the definition of which required some strategic concept to serve as a guide. With respect to the war in the North, CINCPAC's final "Military Strategy to Accomplish United States Objectives for Vietnam," stated:

In the North - Take the war to the enemy by unremitting but selective application of United States air and naval power. Military installations and those industrial facilities that generate support for the aggression will be attacked. Movement within, into and out of North Vietnam will be impeded. The enemy will be denied the great psychological and material advantage of conducting an aggression from a sanctuary. This relentless application of force is designed progressively to curtail North Vietnam's war-making capacity. It seeks to force upon him major replenishment, repair and construction efforts. North Vietnamese support and direction of the Pathet Lao and the insurgency in Thailand will be impaired. The movement of men and material through Laos and over all land and water lines of communications into South Vietnam will be disrupted. Hanoi's capability to support military operations in South Vietnam and to direct those operations will be progressively reduced. 50/

With this formulation of intent for the air war, it is not surprising that the barrier proposal should have been anathema to CINCPAC.

McNamara, however, proceeded to implement the barrier proposal in spite of CINCPAC's condemnation and the Chiefs' cool reaction. On September 15 he appointed Lt. General Alfred Starbird to head Joint Task Force 728 within DDR&E as manager for the project. 51/ The Joint Task Force was eventually given the cover name Defense Communications Planning Group to protect the sensitivity of the project. Plans for implementing the barrier were pushed ahead speedily. Early in October, just prior to the Secretary's trip, General Starbird made a visit to Vietnam to study the problem on the ground and begin to set the administrative wheels in motion. In spite of the fact that McNamara was

vigorously pushing the project forward, there is no indication that he had officially raised the matter with the President, although it is hard to imagine that some discussion of the Jason Summer Study recommendations had not taken place between them. In any case, as McNamara prepared to go to Vietnam again to assess the situation in light of new requests for troop increases, he made arrangements to have General Starbird remain for the first day of his visit and placed the anti-infiltration barrier first on the agenda of discussions. 52/

3. A Visit to Vietnam and a Memorandum for the President

McNamara's trip to Vietnam in October 1966 served a variety of purposes. It came at a time when CINCPAC was involved in a force planning exercise to determine desired (required in his view) force levels for fighting the war through 1967. This was related to DOD's fall DPM process in which the Pentagon reviews its programs and prepares its budget recommendations for the coming fiscal year. This in turn engenders a detailed look at requirements in all areas for the five years to come. As a part of this process, just three days before the Secretary's departure, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sent him an important memo reviewing force posture the world over and recommending a call-up of the reserves to meet anticipated 1967 requirements. 53/ This recommendation as a part of the overall examination of force requirements needed his personal assessment on the spot in Vietnam. Other important reasons for a trip were, no doubt, the ones to which we have referred in detail: McNamara's dissatisfaction with the results of the POL attacks; and the reports of the Jason Summer Study. Furthermore, the off-year Congressional elections were only a month away and the President had committed himself to go to Manila for a heads of state meeting later in October. For both these events the President probably felt the need of McNamara's fresh impressions and recommendations.

Whatever the combination of reasons, McNamara left Washington on October 10 and spent four days in Vietnam. Accompanying the Secretary on the trip were Under Secretary of State Katzenbach, General Wheeler, Mr. Komer, John McNaughton, John Foster, Director of DDR&E, and Henry Kissinger. In the course of the visit McNamara worked his way through a detailed seventeen item agenda of briefings, visited several sections of the country plus the Fleet, and met with the leaders of the GVN. 54/

His findings in those three days in South Vietnam must have confirmed his disquiet about the lack of progress of the war and the ineffectualness of U.S. actions to date, for when he returned to Washington he sent the President a gloomy report with recommendations for leveling off the U.S. effort and seeking a solution through diplomatic channels. 55/ McNamara recommended an increase in the total authorized final troop strength in Vietnam of only about 40,000 over Program #3, for an end strength of 470,000. This was a direct rejection of CINCPAC's request for a 12/31/67 strength of 570,000 and marked a significant turning point

in McNamara's attitude toward the force buildup. 56/ The issue would continue to be debated until the President's decision shortly after the election in November to approve the McNamara recommended total of 469,300 troops under Program #4.

With respect to the air war he stated that the bombing had neither significantly reduced infiltration nor diminished Hanoi's will to continue the fight, and he noted the concurrence of the intelligence community in these conclusions. Pulling back from his previous positions, he now recommended that the President level off the bombing at current levels and seek other means of achieving our objectives. The section of the memo on bombing follows:

> Stabilize the ROLLING THUNDER program against the North. Attack sorties in North Vietnam have risen from about 4,000 per month at the end of last year to 6,000 per month in the first quarter of this year and 12,000 per month at present. Most of our 50 percent increase of deployed attack-capable aircraft has been absorbed in the attacks on North Vietnam. In North Vietnam, almost 84,000 attack sorties have been flown (about 25 percent against fixed targets), 45 percent during the past seven months.
>
> Despite these efforts, it now appears that the North Vietnamese-Laotian road network will remain adequate to meet the requirements of the Communist forces in South Vietnam -- this is so even if its capacity could be reduced by one-third and if combat activities were to be doubled. North Vietnam's serious need for trucks, spare parts and petroleum probably can, despite air attacks, be met by imports. The petroleum requirement for trucks involved in the infiltration movement, for example, has not been enough to present significant supply problems, and the effects of the attacks on the petroleum distribution system, while they have not yet been fully assessed, are not expected to cripple the flow of essential supplies. Furthermore, it is clear that, to bomb the North sufficiently to make a radical impact upon Hanoi's political, economic and social structure, would require an effort which we could make but which would not be stomached either by our own people or by world opinion; and it would involve a serious risk of drawing us into open war with China.
>
> The North Vietnamese are paying a price. They have been forced to assign some 300,000 personnel to the lines of communication in order to maintain the critical flow of personnel and materiel to the South. Now that the lines of communication have been manned, however, it is doubtful that either a

large increase or decrease in our interdiction sorties would substantially change the cost to the enemy of maintaining the roads, railroads, and waterways or affect whether they are operational. It follows that the marginal sorties -- probably the marginal 1,000 or even 5,000 sorties -- per month against the lines of communication no longer have a significant impact on the war.

When this marginal inutility of added sorties against North Vietnam and Laos is compared with the crew and aircraft losses implicit in the activity (four men and aircraft and $20 million per 1,000 sorties), I recommend, as a minimum, against increasing the level of bombing of North Vietnam and against increasing the intensity of operations by changing the areas or kinds of targets struck.

Under these conditions, the bombing program would continue the pressure and would remain available as a bargaining counter to get talks started (or to trade off in talks). But, as in the case of a stabilized level of US ground forces, the stabilization of ROLLING THUNDER would remove the prospect of ever-escalating bombing as a factor complicating our political posture and distracting from the main job of pacification in South Vietnam.

At the proper time, as discussed on pages 6-7 below, I believe we should consider terminating bombing in all of North Vietnam, or at least in the Northeast zones, for an indefinite period in connection with covert moves toward peace. 57/

As an alternative to further escalation of the bombing, McNamara recommended the barrier across the DMZ and Laos:

Install a barrier. A portion of the 470,000 troops -- perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 -- should be devoted to the construction and maintenance of an infiltration barrier. Such a barrier would lie near the 17th parallel -- would run from the sea, across the neck of South Vietnam (choking off the new infiltration routes through the DMZ) and across the trails in Laos. This interdiction system (at an approximate cost of $1 billion) would comprise to the east a ground barrier of fences, wire, sensors, artillery, aircraft and mobile troops; and to the west -- mainly in Laos -- an interdiction zone covered by air-laid mines and bombing attacks pin-pointed by air-laid acoustic sensors.

The barrier may not be fully effective at first, but I believe that it can be made effective in time and that even the threat of its becoming effective can substantially change to our advantage the character of the war. It would hinder enemy efforts, would permit more efficient use of the limited number of friendly troops, and would be persuasive evidence both that our sole aim is to protect the South from the North and that we intend to see the job through. 58/

The purpose of these two actions would be to lay the groundwork for a stronger U.S. effort to get negotiations started. With the war seemingly stalemated, this appeared to be the only "out" to the Secretary that offered some prospect of bringing the conflict to an end in any near future. In analyzing North Vietnamese unwillingness to date to respond to peace overtures, McNamara noted their acute sensitivity to the air attacks on their homeland (recalling the arguments of the Jason Summer Study) and the hostile suspicion of U.S. motives. To improve the climate for talks, he argued, the U.S. should make some gesture to indicate our good faith. Foremost of these was a cessation or a limitation of the bombing.

As a way of projective [sic] U.S. bona fides, I believe that we should consider two possibilities with respect to our bombing program against the North, to be undertaken, if at all, at a time very carefully selected with a view to maximizing the chances of influencing the enemy and world opinion and to minimizing the chances that failure would strengthen the hand of the "hawks" at home: First, without fanfare, conditions, or avowal, whether the stand-down was permanent or temporary, stop bombing all of North Vietnam. It is generally thought that Hanoi will not agree to negotiations until they can claim that the bombing has stopped unconditionally. We should see what develops, retaining freedom to resume the bombing if nothing useful was forthcoming.

Alternatively, we could shift the weight-of-effort away from "Zones 6A and 6B" -- zones including Hanoi and Haiphong and areas north of those two cities to the Chinese border. This alternative has some attraction ir that it provides the North Vietnamese a "face saver" if only problems of "face" are holding up Hanoi peace gestures; it would narrow the bombing down directly to the objectionable infiltration (supporting the logic of a stop-infiltration/full-pause deal); and it would reduce the international heat on the US. Here, too, bombing of the Northeast could be resumed at any time, or "spot" attacks could be made there from time to time to keep North Vietnam off balance and to require

her to pay almost the full cost by maintaining her repair crews in place. The sorties diverted from Zones 6A and 6B could be concentrated on the infiltration routes in Zones 1 and 2 (the southern end of North Vietnam, including the Mu Gia Pass), in Laos and in South Vietnam.a/

a/ Any limitation on the bombing of North Vietnam will cause serious psychological problems among the men who are risking their lives to help achieve our political objectives; among their commanders up to and including the JCS; and among those of our people who cannot understand why we should withhold punishment from the enemy. General Westmoreland, as do the JCS, strongly believes in the military value of the bombing program. Further, Westmoreland reports that the morale of his Air Force personnel may already be showing signs of erosion -- an erosion resulting from current operational restrictions. 59/

The Secretary's footnote was judicious. The Chiefs did indeed oppose any curtailment of the bombing as a means to get negotiations started. They fired off a dissenting memo to the Secretary the same day as his memo and requested that it be passed to the President. With respect to the bombing program per se they stated:

> The Joint Chiefs of Staff do not concur in your recommendation that there should be no increase in level of bombing effort and no modification in areas and targets subject to air attack. They believe our air campaign against NVN to be an integral and indispensable part of our over all war effort. To be effective, the air campaign should be conducted with only those minimum constraints necessary to avoid indiscriminate killing of population. 60/

As to the Secretary's proposal for a bombing halt:

> The Joint Chiefs of Staff do not concur with your proposal that, as a carrot to induce negotiations, we should suspend or reduce our bombing campaign against NVN. Our experiences with pauses in bombing and resumption have not been happy ones. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the likelihood of the war being settled by negotiation is small, and that, far from inducing negotiations, another bombing pause will be regarded by North Vietnamese leaders, and our Allies, as renewed evidence of lack of US determination to press the war to a successful

conclusion. The bombing campaign is one of the two trump cards in the hands of the President (the other being the presence of US troops in SVN). It should not be given up without an end to the NVN aggression in SVN. 61/

The Chiefs did more than just dissent from a McNamara recommendation, however. They closed their memo with a lengthy counter-proposal with significant political overtones clearly intended for the President's eyes. In their own words this is what they said:

> The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the war has reached a stage at which decisions taken over the next sixty days can determine the outcome of the war and, consequently, can affect the over-all security interests of the United States for years to come. Therefore, they wish to provide to you and to the President their unequivocal views on two salient aspects of the war situation: the search for peace and military pressures on NVN.
>
> a. The frequent, broadly-based public offers made by the President to settle the war by peaceful means on a generous basis, which would take from NVN nothing it now has, have been admirable. Certainly, no one - American or foreigner - except those who are determined not to be convinced, can doubt the sincerity, the generosity, the altruism of US actions and objectives. In the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the time has come when further overt actions and offers on our part are not only non-productive, they are counterproductive. A logical case [sic] can be made that the American people, our Allies, and our enemies alike are increasingly uncertain as to our resolution to pursue the war to a successful conclusion. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advocate the following:
>
> (1) A statement by the President during the Manila Conference of his unswerving determination to carry on the war until NVN aggression against SVN shall cease;
>
> (2) Continued covert exploration of all avenues leading to a peaceful settlement of the war; and
>
> (3) Continued alertness to detect and react appropriately to withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from SVN and cessation of support to the VC.
>
> b. In JCSM-955-64, dated 14 November 1964, and in JCSM-962-64, dated 23 November 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided their views as to the military pressures which should be

brought to bear on NVN. In summary, they recommended a "sharp knock" on NVN military assets and war-supporting facilities rather than the campaign of slowly increasing pressure which was adopted. Whatever the political merits of the latter course, we deprived ourselves of the military effects of early weight of effort and shock, and gave to the enemy time to adjust to our slow quantitative and qualitative increase of pressure. This is not to say that it is now too late to derive military benefits from more effective and extensive use of our air and naval superiority. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend:

(1) Approval of their ROLLING THUNDER 52 program, which is a step toward meeting the requirement for improved target systems. This program would decrease the Hanoi and Haiphong sanctuary areas, authorize attacks against the steel plant, the Hanoi rail yards, the thermal power plants, selected areas within Haiphong port and other ports, selected locks and dams controlling water LOCs, SAM support facilities within the residual Hanoi and Haiphong sanctuaries, and POL at Haiphong, Ha Gia (Phuc Yen) and Can Thon (Kep).

(2) Use of naval surface forces to interdict North Vietnamese coastal waterborne traffic and appropriate land LOCs and to attack other coastal military targets such as radar and AAA sites.

5. The Joint Chiefs of Staff request that their views as set forth above be provided to the President.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff

(Sgd) EARLE G. WHEELER 62/

Such a memo from the Chiefs represents more than a dissent or an alternative recommendation; it constitutes a statement for the record to guarantee that in the historical accounts the Chiefs will appear having discharged their duty. It always comes as a form of political notification, not merely a military recommendation.

The available documents do not show what the reaction at the State Department was (apart from Mr. Katzenbach's apparent endorsement), nor do they indicate the views of the White House staff under W. W. Rostow. McNaughton's files do contain a commentary on the McNamara recommendations prepared by George Carver of CIA for the Director, Richard Helms. Carver agreed with the basic McNamara analysis of the results of the air war but did not think they constituted a conclusive statement about possible results from an escalation. Carver wrote,

> We concur in Secretary McNamra's analysis of the effects of the ROLLING THUNDER program, its potential for reducing the flow of essential supplies, and his judgment on the marginal inutility of added sorties against lines of communication. We endorse his argument on stabilizing the level of sorties. We do not agree, however, with the implied judgment that changes in the bombing program could not be effective. We continue to judge that a bombing program directed both against closing the port of Haiphong and continuously cutting the rail lines to China could have a significant impact. 63/

Carver also opposed any halt or de-escalation of the bombing to start negotiations, arguing that we could either pursue negotiations or try to build up the GVN but we could not do both. His preference was to build in the South. Hence, a bombing halt or pause was not required. As to a reduction, he argued that,

> Shifting the air effort from the northeast quadrant to the infiltration areas in Laos and southern North Vietnam would be quite unproductive. Such a course of action would not induce Hanoi to negotiate (since it would still involve bombing in the north) and would probably have little effect in changing present international attitudes. Furthermore, a concentration of sorties against the low-yield and elusive targets along the infiltration routes in the southern end of North Vietnam and in Laos would not appreciably diminish North Vietnam's ability to maintain the supply of its forces in South Vietnam. 64/

As for the anti-infiltration barrier, neither the Chiefs nor Carver had a great deal of comment. The Chiefs reiterated their reservations with respect to resource diversion but endorsed the barrier concept in principle. Carver somewhat pessimistically observed that,

> In order to achieve the objectives set for the barrier in our view it must be extended well westward into Laos. Air interdiction of the routes in Laos unsupplemented by ground action will not effectively check infiltration. 65/

To no one's surprise, therefore, McNamara proceeded with the barrier project in all haste, presumably with the President's blessing.

C. The Year End View

1. Presidential Decisions

The President apparently did not react immediately to the McNamara recommendations, although he must have approved them in general. He was at the time preparing for the Manila Conference to take place October 23-25 and major decisions before would have been badly timed. Thus, formal decisions on the McNamara recommendations, particularly the troop level question would wait until he had returned and the elections were over. At Manila, the President worked hard to get the South Vietnamese to make a greater commitment to the war and pressed them for specific reforms. He also worked hard to get a generalized formulation of allied objectives in the war and saw his efforts succeed in the agreed communique. Its most important feature was an appeal to the North Vietnamese for peace based on a commitment to withdraw forces within six months after the end of the war. It contained, however, no direct reference to the air war.

While in Manila, the President and his advisors also conferred with General Westmoreland. As McNaughton subsequently reported to McNamara (who did not attend), Westmoreland opposed any curtailment of the air war in the North, calling it "our only trump card." 66/ Unlike the Jason Study Group, Westmoreland felt the strikes had definite military value in slowing the southward movement of supplies, diverting DRV manpower and creating great costs to the North. Rather than stabilize or de-escalate, Westmoreland advocated lifting the restrictions on the program. Citing the high level of aircraft attrition on low priority targets, he warned, "you are asking for a very bad political reaction." 67/ He recommended that strikes be carried out against the MIG airfields, the missile assembly area, the truck maintenance facility, the Haiphong port facilities, the twelve thermal power plants, and the steel plant. When McNaughton pressed him on the question of whether the elimination of these targets would have much payoff in reduced logistical support for the Southern war, Westmoreland backed off stating, "I'm not responsible for the bombing program. Admiral Sharp is. So I haven't spent much time on it. But I asked a couple of my best officers to look into it, and they came up with the recommendations I gave you." In any event, he opposed any pause in the bombing, contending that the DRV would just use it to strengthen its air defenses and repair air fields. McNaughton reported that Westmoreland had repeated these views to the President in the presence of Ky and Thieu at Johnson's request; moreover, he planned to forward them to the President in a memo /not available/ at the request of Walt Rostow.

As to the barrier, McNaughton reported that, "Westy seems to be fighting the barrier less (although he obviously fears that it is designed mainly to justify stopping RT /ROLLING THUNDER/, at which

he 'shudders'...." 69/ Apart from that his concerns about the barrier were minor (although he did propose a NIKE battalion for use in a surface to surface role in support of the barrier).

On his way home from Manila, the President made the now famous dramatic visit to U.S. troops at Cam Ranh Bay. Once home, however, he deferred any major decisions on the war until after the elections. Several "peace" candidates were aggressively challenging Administration supporters in the off-year Congressional contests and the President wished to do nothing that might boost their chances. As it turned out, they were overwhelmingly defeated in the November 8 balloting.

Meanwhile, at the Pentagon the dispute over the level of effort for the air war continued. Even before Manila, the Chiefs had attempted to head off McNamara's recommendation for stabilizing the bombing with a request for a 25 percent increase in B-52 sorties per month. 70/ The Secretary, for his part, was showing considerable concern over the high attrition rates of ROLLING THUNDER aircraft. Among other things he questioned the utility of committing pilots to repeated risks when the operational return from many of the missions was so small and the expectations for achieving significant destruction so minimal. 71/

The force level arguments had continued during the President's trip too. On October 20, CINCPAC forwarded his revised Force Planning Program containing the results of the October 5-14 Honolulu Planning Conference to the JCS. 72/ In effect, it constituted a reclama to the Secretary's October 14 recommendations. CINCPAC requested U.S. ground forces totalling 493,969 by end CY 1967; 519,310 by end CY 1968; and 520,020 by end CY 1969. But the total by end CY 1969 would really be 555,262 reflecting an additional 35,721 troops whose availability was described in the planning document as "unknown." 73/

With respect to the air war, CINCPAC stated a requirement for an additional ten tactical fighter squadrons (TFS) and an additional aircraft carrier to support both an intensification of the air war in the North and the additional maneuver battalions requested for the war in the South. These new squadrons were needed to raise sortie levels in the North above 12,000/month in CY 1967. Of these ten TFS, the Air Force indicated that three were unavailable and the Secretary of Defense had previously deferred deployment of five. Nonetheless, the requirement was reiterated. 74/ They were needed to implement the strategic concept of the air mission in SEA that CINCPAC had articulated on September 5 and that was included again here as justification. 75/ Moreover, the objective of attacking the ports and water LOCs was reiterated as well. 76/

On November 4, the JCS sent the Secretary these CINCPAC force planning recommendations with their own slight upward revision of the troop figures to an eventual end strength of 558,432. 77/ In the body of the memo they endorse the CINCPAC air war recommendations in

principle but indicated that 3 TFS and the carrier would not be available. They supplemented CINCPAC's rationale with a statement of their own on the matter in appendix A. The two objectives of the air war were to "make it as difficult and costly as possible" for NVN to support the war in the South and to motivate the DRV to "cease controlling and directing the insurgency in South Vietnam." 78/ Their evaluation of the effectiveness of the bombing in achieving these objectives was that:

> Air operations in NVN have disrupted enemy efforts to support his forces and have assisted in preventing the successful mounting of any major offensives. The NVN air campaign takes the war home to NVN by complicating the daily life, causing multiple and increasing management and logistic problems, and preventing the enemy from conducting an aggression from the comfort of a sanctuary. 79/

Failures to date were attributed to the constraints imposed on the bombing by the political authorities, and the Chiefs again urged that these be lifted and the target base be widened to apply increasing pressure to the DRV.

These were the standard old arguments. But on October 6, the Secretary had addressed them a memo with an attached set of 28 "issue papers" drafted in Systems Analysis. One of these took sharp issue with any increase in the air war on purely force effectiveness grounds. The Chiefs attempted to rebut all 28 issue papers in one of the attachments to the November 4 memo. The original Systems Analysis "issue paper" on air war effectiveness had argued that additional deployments of air squadrons should not be made because: (1) the bulk of the proposed new sorties for North Vietnam were in Route Package I (see Map) and could be attacked much more economically by naval gunfire; (2) although interdiction had forced the enemy to make greater repair efforts and thereby had diverted some resources, had forced more reliance on night operations, and had inflicted substantial casualties to vehicular traffic, none of these had created or were likely to create insuperable problems for the DRV; and (3) CINCPAC's increased sortie requirements would generate 230 aircraft losses in CY 1967 and cost $1.1 billion while only doing negligible damage to the DRV. 80/ The similarity of much of this analysis to the conclusions of the Jason Summer Study is striking.

The Chiefs rejected all three of the Systems Analysis arguments. Naval gunfire, in their view, should be regarded as a necessary supplement for the bombing, not as a substitute since it lacked flexibility and responsiveness. As to the question of comparative costs in the air war, the Chiefs reasoned as follows:

> The necessity for this type of air campaign is created by constraints imposed, for other than military reasons, upon the conduct of the war in NVN. These constraints result in maximizing exposure of larger numbers of aircraft for longer periods against increasingly well defended targets of limited comparative values. [sic] The measure of the effectiveness of the interdiction effort is the infiltration and its consequence which would be taking place if the air campaign were not being conducted. The cost to the enemy is not solely to be measured in terms of loss of trucks but in terms of lost capability to pursue his military objectives in SVN. Similarly, the cost to the US must consider that damage which the enemy would be capable of inflicting by infiltrating men and supplies now inhibited by the interdiction effort; this includes increased casualties in RVN for which a dollar cost is not applicable. 81/

Sensing that the thrust of the OSD analysis was to make a case for the barrier at the expense of the bombing, the Chiefs at last came down hard against any diversion of resources to barrier construction. In no uncertain terms they stated:

> The Joint Chiefs of Staff agree that improved interdiction strategy is needed, but such improvement would not necessarily include the barrier operation. As mentioned above and as recommended previously, an effective air campaign against NVN should include closing the ports, destruction of high value military targets, attack of their air defense systems and airfields and the other fixed targets on the target list that have not been struck. These improvements have thus far been denied.
>
> Preliminary information developed by Task Force 728 indicates that the forces and cost for the barrier will be substantial. The concept and equipment for the barrier have not been subjected to a cost analysis study. Its effectiveness is open to serious question and its cost could well exceed the figure of $1.1 billion given for projected aircraft losses in this issue paper. 82/

As already indicated, these issues were all decided upon by the President immediately after the election. On November 11, McNamara sent the Chiefs a memo with the authorized levels for Program #4. CINCPAC's proposed increases in sortie levels were rejected and the McNamara recommendation of October 14 for their stabilization was adopted. 83/ As a reason for rejecting expansion of the air war, the Secretary simply stated that such would not be possible since no additional tactical fighter squadrons had been approved. The one upward adjustment of the air war

that was authorized was the increase of B-52 sorties from 600 to 800 in February 1967 as proposed by CINCPAC and the JCS. 84/

2. Stabilization of the Air War

With the President's decision not to increase squadrons or sorties for the air campaign in 1967 added to McNamara's strong recommendation on stabilizing the level of the bombing, activity for the remainder of 1966 was kept at about the current level. Among the continuing constraints that was just beginning to alleviate itself was an insufficiency of certain air munitions to sustain higher levels of air combat. 85/ The real constraints, however, as CINCPAC and the JCS correctly stated were political.

The principle supporters of halting the expansion of the air war, as we have already seen, were the Secretary of Defense and his civilian advisors. The arguments they had used during the debate over Program #4 and its associated air program were reiterated and somewhat enlarged later in November in the backup justification for the FY 1967 Southeast Asia Supplemental Appropriation. Singled out for particular criticism was the ineffective air effort to interdict infiltration. The draft Memorandum for the President began by making the best case possible, on the basis of results, for the bombing, and then proceeded to demonstrate that those accomplishments were simply far below what was required to really interdict. The section of the memo in question follows:

> A substantial air interdiction campaign is clearly necessary and worthwhile. In addition to putting a ceiling on the size of the force that can be supported, it yields three significant military effects. First, it effectively harasses and delays truck movements down through the southern panhandles of NVN and Laos, though it has no effect on troops infiltrating on foot over trails that are virtually invisible from the air. Our experience shows that daytime armed reconnaissance above some minimum sortie rate makes it prohibitively expensive to the enemy to attempt daylight movement of vehicles, and so forces him to night movement. Second, destruction of bridges and cratering of roads forces the enemy to deploy repair crews, equipment, and porters to repair or bypass the damage. Third, attacks on vehicles, parks, and rest camps destroy some vehicles with their cargoes and inflict casualties. Moreover, our bombing campaign may produce a beneficial effect on U.S. and SVN morale by making NVN pay a price for its enemy. But at the scale we are now operating, I believe our bombing is yielding very small marginal returns, not worth the cost in pilot lives and aircraft.

The first effect, that of forcing the enemy into a system of night movement, occurs at a lower frequency of armed reconnaissance sorties than the level of the past several months. The enemy was already moving at night in 1965, before the sortie rate had reached half the current level; further sorties have no further effect on the enemy's overall operating system. The second effect, that of forcing the enemy to deploy repair crews, equipment, and porters, is also largely brought about by a comparatively low interdiction effort. Our interdiction campaign in 1965 and early this year forced NVN to assign roughly 300,000 additional personnel to LOCs; there is no indication that recent sortie increases have caused further increases in the number of these personnel. Once the enemy system can repair road cuts and damaged bridges in a few hours, as it has demonstrated it can, additional sorties may work this system harder but are unlikely to cause a significant increase in its costs. Only the third effect, the destruction of vehicles and their cargoes, continues to increase in about the same proportion as the number of armed reconnaissance sorties, but without noticeable impact on VC/NVA operations. The overall capability of the NVN transport system to move supplies within NVN apparently improved in September in spite of 12,200 attack sorties. 86/

In a summary paragraph, the draft memo made the entire case against the bombing:

The increased damage to targets is not producing noticeable results. No serious shortage of POL in North Vietnam is evident, and stocks on hand, with recent imports, have been adequate to sustain necessary operations. No serious transport problem in the movement of supplies to or within North Vietnam is evident; most transportation routes appear to be open, and there has recently been a major logistical build-up in the area of the DMZ. The raids have disrupted the civil populace and caused isolated food shortages, but have not significantly weakened popular morale. Air strikes continue to depress economic growth and have been responsible for abandonment of some plans for economic development, but essential economic activities continue. The increasing amounts of physical damage sustained by North Vietnamese are in large measure compensated by aid received from other Communist countries. Thus, in spite of an interdiction campaign costing at least $250 million per month at current levels, no significant impact on the war in South Vietnam is evident. The monetary value of damage to NVN since the

start of bombing in February 1965 is estimated at about $140 million through October 10, 1966. 87/

As an alternative method of arresting the infiltration the memo proposed the now familiar barrier, preparatory work on which was proceeding rapidly. No new arguments for it were offered, and its unproven qualities were acknowledged. But it seemed to offer at that point a better possibillty of significantly curtailing infiltration than an escalation of the ineffective air war. Its costs were estimated, however, at an astounding $1 billion per year.

While these considerations were dominant at the Pentagon, the air war in the North continued. The only exceptions to the even pattern of air strikes at the end of 1966 were strikes authorized in early December within the 30-mile Hanoi sanctuary against the Yen Vien rail classification yard and the Van Dien vehicle depot. 88/ The former was attacked on December 4 and again on the 13th and 14th with extensive damage to buildings but little destruction of rolling stock. The Van Dien vehicle depot was struck six times between December 2 and 14 with some two thirds of its 184 buildings being either destroyed or damaged. 89/ Hanoi's reaction was prompt and vociferous. The DRV accused the U.S. of blatantly attacking civilian structures and of having caused substantial civilian casualties. On December 13, the Soviet Press Agency TASS picked up the theme claiming that U.S. planes had attacked residential areas in Hanoi. This brought a prompt State Department denial, but on December 15 further attacks on the two targets were suspended. Three days later there were new charges. This time the Communist Chinese claimed the U.S. had bombed their embassy in Hanoi. On December 17 the Rumanians made a similar allegation. The net result of all this public stir was another round of world opinion pressure on Washington. 90/ In this atmosphere, on December 23, attacks against all targets within 10 n.m. of Hanoi were prohibited without specific Presidential authorization.

The most important result of these attacks, however, was to undercut what appeared to be a peace feeler from Hanoi. In late November, the DRV had put out a feeler through the Poles for conversations in Warsaw. The effort was given the code name Marigold, but when the attacks were launched inadvertently against Hanoi in December, the attempt to start talks ran into difficulty. A belated U.S. attempt to mollify North Vietnam's bruised ego failed and formal talks did not materialize. Some significant exchanges between Hanoi and Washington on their respective terms apparently did take place, however. 91/

The controversy over civilian casualties from the bombing continued through the end of the year and into January 1967. Harrison Salisbury, a respected senior editor of the New York Times, went to Hanoi at Christmas and dispatched a long series of articles that attracted much world-wide attention. He corroborated DRV allegations of civilian casualties and damage to residential areas including attacks on Nam Dinh,

North Vietnam's third city, and other towns and cities throughout the country. 92/ The matter reached a level of concern such that the President felt compelled to make a statement to the press on December 31 to the effect that the bombing was directed against legitimate military targets and that every effort was being made to avoid civilian casualties. 93/

At no time in the fall of 1966 is there any evidence that a second major "pause" like that of the previous year was planned for the holiday period to pursue a diplomatic initiative on negotiations. But as the holidays drew near a brief military standdown was expected. The Chiefs went on record in November opposing any suspension of military operations, North or South, at Christmas, New Years or the Lunar New Year the coming February. 94/ The failure of the initiative through Poland in early December left the U.S. with no good diplomatic reason for lengthening the holiday suspensions into a pause, so the President ordered only 48-hour halts in the fighting for Christmas and New Year's. The Pope had made an appeal on December 8 for both sides to extend the holiday truces into an armistice and begin negotiations, but this had fallen on deaf ears in both capitals. 95/ As window-dressing, the U.S. had asked UN Secretary General U Thant to take whatever steps were necessary to get talks started. He replied in a press conference on the last day of the year that the first step toward negotiations must be an "unconditional" U.S. bombing halt. 96/ This evoked little enthusiasm and some annoyance in the Johnson Administration.

Thus, 1966 drew to a close on a sour note for the President. He had just two months before resisted pressure from the military for a major escalation of the war in the North and adopted the restrained approach of the Secretary of Defense, only to have a few inadvertent raids within the Hanoi periphery mushroom into a significant loss of world opinion support. He was in the uncomfortable position of being able to please neither his hawkish nor his dovish critics with his carefully modulated middle course.

3. 1966 Summary

ROLLING THUNDER was a much heavier bombing program in 1966 than in 1965. There were 148,000 total sorties flown in 1966 as compared with 55,000 in 1965, and 128,000 tons of bombs were dropped as compared with 33,000 in the 10 months of bombing the year before. The number of JCS fixed targets struck, which stood at 158 at the end of 1965, increased to 185, or 27 more, leaving only 57 untruck out of a list of 242. 97/ Armed reconnaissance, which was still kept out of the northeast quadrant at the end of 1965, was extended during 1966 throughout NVN except for the Hanoi/Haiphong sanctuaries and the China buffer zone, and beginning with ROLLING THUNDER 51 on 6 July was even permitted to penetrate a short way into the Hanoi circle along small selected route segments. Strikes had

even been carried out against a few "lucrative" POL targets deep within the circles.

The program had also become more expensive. 318 ROLLING THUNDER aircraft were lost during 1966, as compared with 171 in 1965 (though the loss rate dropped from .66% of attack sorties in 1965 to .39% in 1966). CIA estimated that the direct operational cost of the program (i.e., production costs of aircraft lost, plus direct sortie overhead costs -- not including air base or CVA maintenance or logistical support -- plus ordnance costs) came to $1,247 million in 1966 as compared with $460 million in 1965. 98/

Economic damage to NVN went up from $36 million in 1965 to $94 million in 1966, and military damage from $34 million to $36 million. As CIA computed it, however, it cost the U.S. $9.6 to inflict $1 worth of damage in 1966, as compared with $6.6 in 1965. 99/

Estimated civilian and military casualties in NVN also went up, from 13,000 to 23-24,000 (about 80% civilians), but the numbers remained small relative to the 18 million popula ion. 100/

The program in 1966 had accomplished little more than in 1965, however. In January 1967, an anlaysis by CIA concluded that the attacks had not eliminated any important sector of the NVN economy or the military establishment. They had not succeeded in cutting route capacities south of Hanoi to the point where the flow of supplies required in SVN was significantly impeded. The POL attacks had eliminated 76% of JCS-targeted storage capacity, but not until after NVN had implemented a system of dispersed storage, and the POL flow had been maintained at adequate levels. 32% of NVN's power-generating capacity had been put out of action, but the remaining capacity was adequate to supply most industrial consumers. Hundreds of bridges were knocked down, but virtually all of them had been quickly repaired, replaced, or bypassed, and traffic continued. Several thousand freight cars, trucks, barges, and other vehicles were also destroyed or damaged, but inventories were maintained through imports and there was no evidence of a serious transport problem due to equipment shortages. The railroad and highway networks were considerably expanded and improved during the year. 101/

The main losses to the economy, according to the CIA analysis, had been indirect -- due to a reduction in agricultural output and the fish catch, a cut in foreign exchange earnings because of a decline in exports, disruptions of production because of dispersal and other passive defense measures, and the diversion of effort to repair essential transportation facilities. On the military side, damage had disrupted normal military practices, caused the abandonment of many facilities, and forced the widespread dispersal of equipment, but overall military capabilities had continued at a high level. 102/

The summary CIA assessment was that ROLLING THUNDER had not helped either to reduce the flow of supplies South or to shake the will of the North:

> The evidence available does not suggest that ROLLING THUNDER to date has contributed materially to the achievement of the two primary objectives of air attack -- reduction of the flow of supplies to VC/NVA forces in the South or weakening the will of North Vietnam to continue the insurgency. ROLLING THUNDER no doubt has lessened the capacity of the transport routes to the South -- put a lower 'cap' on the force levels which North Vietnam can support in the South -- but the 'cap' is well above present logistic supply levels. 103/

The bombing had not succeeded in materially lowering morale among the people, despite some "war weariness." The leaders continued to repeat in private as well as public that they were willing to withstand even heavier bombing rather than accept a settlement on less than their terms. As to the future:

> There may be some degree of escalation which would force the regime to reexamine its position, but we believe that as far as pressure from air attack is concerned the regime would be prepared to continue the insurgency indefinitely in the face of the current level and type of bombing program. 104/

A key factor in sustaining the will of the regime, according to the CIA analysis, was the "massive" economic and military aid provided by the USSR, China, and Eastern Europe. Economic aid to NVN from these countries, which ran about $100 million a year on the average prior to the bombing, increased to $150 million in 1965 and $275 million in 1966. Military aid was $270 million in 1965 and $455 million in 1966. Such aid provided NVN with the "muscle" to strengthen the insurgency in the South and to maintain its air defense and other military forces; and it provided the services and goods with which to overcome NVN's economic difficulties. So long as the aid continued, CIA said, NVN would be able and willing to persevere "indefinitely" in the face of the current ROLLING THUNDER program. 105/

The military view of why ROLLING THUNDER had failed in its objectives in 1966 was most forcefully given by Admiral Sharp, USCINCPAC, in a briefing for General Wheeler at Honolulu on January 12, 1967. Admiral Sharp described three tasks of the air campaign in achieving its objective of inducing Hanoi to "cease supporting, controlling, and directing" the insurgency in the South: "(1) reduce or deny external assistance; (2) increase pressures by destroying in depth those resources that contributed most to support the aggression; and (3) harass, disrupt and impede movement of men and materials to South Vietnam." 106/ CINCPAC

had developed and presented to the Secretary of Defense an integrated plan to perform these tasks, but much of it had never been approved. Therein lay the cause of whatever failure could be attributed to the bombing in Admiral Sharp's view.

The rest of the briefing was a long complaint about the lack of authorization to attack the Haiphong harbor in order to deny external assistance, and the insignificant number of total sorties devoted to JCS numbered targets (1% of some 81,000 sorties). Nevertheless, CINCPAC was convinced the concept of operations he had proposed could bring the DRV to give up the war if "self-generated US constraints" were lifted in 1967. 107/

Thus, as 1966 drew to a close, the lines were drawn for a long fifteen month internal Administration struggle over whether to stop the bombing and start negotiations. McNamara and his civilian advisers had been disillusioned in 1966 with the results of the bombing and held no sanguine hopes for the ability of air power, massively applied, to produce anything but the same inconclusive results at far higher levels of overall hostility and with significant risk of Chinese and/or Soviet intervention. The military, particularly CINCPAC, were ever more adamant that only civilian imposed restraints on targets had prevented the bombing from bringing the DRV to its knees and its senses about its aggression in the South. The principle remained sound, they argued; a removal of limitations would produce dramatic results. And so, 1967 would be the year in which many of the previous restrictions were progressively lifted and the vaunting boosters of air power would be once again proven wrong. It would be the year in which we relearned the negative lessons of previous wars on the ineffectiveness of strategic bombing.