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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM

1960-1968

PART III



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Chapter 40

ACTION ON THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT

Notwithstanding the failure of the "peace offensive" of January-February 1966, the United States never relaxed its efforts to negotiate a settlement of the Vietnamese war. At posts throughout the world, US diplomats were constantly alert to detect the slightest sign that the other side was prepared to talk seriously about peace. They examined every lead in the expectation that increasing US military successes achieved during 1966 and corresponding dwindling enemy hopes for a straight-out military victory would eventually lead to fruitful negotiations.[1]

In mid-November 1966, one of these listening posts flashed a signal that the enemy might be shifting his position in favor of negotiations, touching off a concerted effort by the United States, lasting until the end of February 1967, to get peace talks started. During this period US diplomats were in direct contact with North Vietnamese in Moscow, and attempted to achieve another such contact in Warsaw. They also sought to enlist the support of Soviet Premier Kosygin, Prime Minister Wilson of Great Britain, and UN Secretary General U Thant. Eventually, all their efforts ended in failure. They were followed by another lull in significant diplomatic activity, which ended finally in April of 1968 when the North Vietnamese Government responded to President Johnson's curtailment of the bombing by announcing willingness to enter into preliminary talks.

Operation MARIGOLD

Action in the new diplomatic offensive began in Saigon in mid-November 1966 when the Polish Representative on the

1. (TS) Memo, W.W. Rostow to Vance, Helms and Bundy, 22 May 67, JMF 911/300 (19 May 67). (S) Rpt, Taylor to Pres, 30 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 2472/6, JMF 911/080 (30 Jan 67).

International Control Commission, Mr. Janus Lewandowski, offered to present the US position to the North Vietnamese Government--which, he claimed, was prepared to negotiate a definitive political settlement of the Vietnam war.' Lewandowski had first suggested to Lodge that Hanoi was prepared to negotiate in June, but nothing further developed during the summer. In September, Lewandowski, in consultation with Italian Ambassador d'Orlandi and with occasional conversations with Lodge, attempted to formulate a statement of the US position that might be put to the North Vietnamese Government. But this was still largely an academic exercise until Lewandowski announced in November that he was about to go to Hanoi where he would be willing to state the US position to the North Vietnamese and to see whether negotiations could be arranged.[2]

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

Other points Lewandowski was asked to make included the following: 1) the United States was serious in expressing in the Manila Conference communique a willingness to remove its troops from South Vietnam and dismantle its military bases there; 2) the United States was prepared to accept a genuinely neutral and nonaligned South Vietnam; 3) the United States was prepared to abide by the results of genuinely free elections in South Vietnam; 4) the United States would accept a reunification of Vietnam freely negotiated by the two Vietnamese states once the restoration of peace and order had

2. Unless cited otherwise, this account of MARIGOLD is based on a Dept of State Summary in (S) Msg, State 112886 to Rome, 9 Jan 67.

placed South Vietnam in a position to meet with North Vietnam on an equal footing; and finally, 5) the United States believed that the Geneva accords of 1954 and 1962 were an adequate basis for peace in Southeast Asia, but that truly effective neutral machinery for supervision and control would be required.[3]

Lewandowski, upon his return from Hanoi, informed Lodge that if the views of the United States were as he had explained them to North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong, it would be advisable to confirm them directly by conversation with the North Vietnamese Ambassador in Warsaw. Lewandowski alleged that his presentation of US views in Hanoi were identical to those in a 10-point paper he had prepared on the basis of information given him by Lodge. Lewandowski's ten points were as follows:

1. The United States was interested in a peaceful solution through negotiations.

2. Negotiations should not be interpreted as a way to negotiated surrender by those opposing the United States in Vietnam. A political negotiation would be aimed at finding an acceptable solution to all problems, having in mind that the present status quo in South Vietnam must be changed in order to take into account the interests of the parties presently opposing the policy of the United States in South Vietnam.

3. The United States was not interested in a long-term military presence in South Vietnam. The Manila statement on withdrawal should be considered in all seriousness.

4. The United States was ready, should other parties show a constructive interest in a negotiated settlement, to work out and discuss with them proposals of such a settlement covering all important problems involved from a cease-fire to a final solution and withdrawal of US troops.

5. The United States, within a general solution, would not oppose formation of a South Vietnamese government based

3. (TS) Msgs, State 83786 to Saigon, 13 Nov 66; State 84238 to Saigon, 14 Nov 66.

on the true will of the Vietnamese people, with participation by all through free democratic elections. The United States was prepared to accept necessary control machinery to assure that elections were free and democratic.

6. The United States believed unification of Vietnam must be decided by the Vietnamese themselves, for which restoration of peace and formation of proper representative organs of the people in South Vietnam was a necessary condition.

7. The United States was ready to accept and respect a true and complete neutrality of South Vietnam.

8. The United States was "prepared to stop the bombing of the territory of North Vietnam if this will facilitate such a peaceful solution. In doing so, the United States are ready to avoid any appearance that North Vietnam is forced to negotiate by bombings or that North Vietnam have negotiated in exchange for cessation of bombing. Stopping of bombing would not involve recognition or confirmation by North Vietnam that its armed forces are or were infiltrating into South Vietnam."

9. The United States, while not excluding unification of Vietnam, would not agree to unification under military pressure.

10. While the United States was seeking a peaceful solution, it would be unrealistic to expect it to accept North Vietnam's four points.

Asked by Lewandowski whether this paper correctly stated the US position, Lodge replied that on a matter of such importance he would have to refer to his government for a definitive reply, but much of the paper appeared to be in keeping with the spirit of US policy. In reporting this conversation to Rusk, Lodge expressed the view that two of the ten points required clarification. "Personally," he said to Rusk, "I would like to have a closer definition of the language of . . . paragraph 2 stating that 'the present status quo in [South] Vietnam must be changed in order to take into account the interested parties opposing the policy of the United States in South Vietnam.' . . . Another point which might need some clarification would be the first sentence in paragraph 8, which stated: 'The United States are prepared to stop the bombing of the

territory of North Vietnam if this will facilitate a peaceful solution.'"[4]

Lodge's exposition of the points requiring clarification by no means expressed the wide divergence that actually existed between the US policy on bombing that the US Government had asked Lewandowski to express to the North Vietnamese and the statement on the subject Lewandowski claimed to have made. Conspicuously missing from his eighth point was any description of the US two-phase formula he had been asked to present. To the contrary, by implication, the statement he claimed to have delivered seemed to convey the message that the United States would stop bombing merely to obtain negotiations and without compensating military deescalation--a position the US Government had consistently refused to take.

On receiving Lodge's report of Lewandowski's mission, the US Government concluded that Lewandowski's 10 points, while generally consistent with the US position, failed to spell out precisely the two-phase plan for ending the bombing. Accordingly, Lodge, on instructions, informed Lewandowski on 3 December that the US Ambassador in Warsaw would meet the North Vietnamese Ambassador on 6 December to confirm that the Lewandowski summary broadly reflected the position of the United States, but that several points were subject to important differences of interpretation. The points at issue were not specified, however, so the North Vietnamese may not have known at this date that the United States still insisted upon a military deescalation in return for stopping the bombing of North Vietnam.

On 5 December, Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki received the US Ambassador John Gronouski in Warsaw and complained that it was improper for the United States to insist upon interpretation of the 10 points. The Pole complained further of US bombing attacks in the vicinity of Hanoi on 2 and 4 December, alleging that the attacks were a deliberate escalation in contrast to the earlier deescalation the North Vietnamese had asserted they had detected and favorably noted during Lewandowski's visit to Hanoi.[5]

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4. (TS) Msg, Saigon 12247 to State, 1 Dec 66.
5. (TS) Msg, State 102960 to Saigon, 14 Dec 66.

The bombing operation in progress as of early December was ROLLING THUNDER 52, which when approved on 11 November had authorized air attacks on 12 targets within ten miles of Hanoi and Haiphong. Adverse weather conditions, however, which had prevented attacks in the Hanoi-Haiphong area since October, continued to interfere with scheduled strikes in the area until 22 November, when 17 aircraft struck a SAM support facility within 6 miles of the center of Haiphong. The next raid, on 2 December, was one of the ones to which Rapacki objected and in which the Van Dien Vehicle Depot, located 4.5 miles from the center of Hanoi, was hit by 27 aircraft. Two days later 18 aircraft attacked the Yen Vien Railroad Yard 5 miles from the center of Hanoi.[6] Thus, adverse flying conditions had in fact created the operational pattern that Rapacki claimed the North Vietnamese had noticed and attributed to political motivation.

The bombing pattern was, however, affected to some degree by political factors. While the strikes on the targets actually attacked were determined solely by operational factors, authorization for attacks on other targets on the original ROLLING THUNDER 52 had been temporarily withdrawn on 11 November so as not to "rock the boat" during British Foreign Secretary Brown's visit to Moscow. This suspension was still in effect on 5 December when Rapacki made his objection to the bombing attacks of 2 and 4 December.

Following Rapacki's objections, President Johnson continued to withhold authority to attack the withdrawn targets. On 9 December, following a discussion of the matter with Vice President Humphrey, Secretary McNamara, Deputy Secretary Vance, Under Secretary Katzenbach and General Wheeler, the President rejected CINCPAC requests of 3 and 8 December that the withheld targets be struck. His decision, according to General Wheeler, was "heavily influenced by the sensitive activities now in train." The President did not, however, curtail the bombing of North Vietnam further at this time.[7]

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6. See Ch. 36 for an account of RT 52. Air attack data is derived from (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMS 265-66, 12 Nov 66 - 283-66, 5 Dec 66.

7. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, CINCPAC to JCS, 030650Z Dec 66, JCS IN 64742, and 080940Z Dec 66, JCS IN 73338. (S) CM-1994-66 to CNO, CSA, CSAF, CMC, 10 Dec 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 66.

Bad weather, however, prevented any air attacks on North Vietnam during the period 5-12 December. During this period, Ambassador Gronouski was unable to arrange a meeting with the North Vietnamese Ambassador in Warsaw. In his meetings with Rapacki on 6, 7 and 9 December, the Polish Foreign Minister continued to haggle over the interpretation question and to contend that the US bombing attacks had raised a new issue which was not involved in the original arrangements for talks in Warsaw.[8]

This was where matters stood on 13 December when clearing weather permitted a resumption of air operations over Hanoi. Again, 20 aircraft hit Yen Vien Railroad Yard and 9 planes attacked the Van Dien Vehicle Depot. The same day, Rapacki called in Gronouski and told him that the North Vietnamese were now unwilling to hold talks in Warsaw and they would have to be postponed. In the light of this development the Department of State, on 14 December, sent new instructions to Gronouski, explaining that the United States sincerely wanted substantive talks and intended to keep the door open as long as possible, and directing him to tell the Polish Government that Washington was now willing to negotiate just on the US proposal for a two-phase deescalation either directly with North Vietnam or through the Poles.[9]

The same day US planes struck again in the Hanoi area in even greater strength than previously. A total of 84 aircraft hit the same two targets that had been struck on the 13th. On 15 December, Rapacki informed Gronouski that the North Vietnamese wished to terminate all conversations on the possibility of direct talks.

At a further meeting with Rapacki on 19 December, Gronouski reviewed the whole history of discussions to that point and stressed that, while the opening of talks must be without preconditions as to the conduct of military operations, this topic could be a first order of business, but the discussion proved fruitless. At this juncture President Johnson decided to reverse policy and offer a military concession in order to get talks started. He directed Gronouski to inform Rapacki that the United States was now prepared "to state there will be no bombing within 10 nautical miles of

8. (TS) Msg, State 102960 to Saigon, 14 Dec 66.
9. Ibid.

the center of Hanoi for an indefinite period if talks with North Vietnam can be gotten under way shortly."[10]

When Rapacki objected to this proposed linkage, President Johnson decided to halt the bombing within 10 nautical miles of Hanoi without a prior commitment to negotiate from North Vietnam. On 23 December the JCS issued appropriate instructions to CINCPAC, and the next day Gronouski informed Rapacki of the action that had been taken. However, this concession failed to produce the desired results. On 30 December Rapacki told Gronouski that the North Vietnamese had decided not to enter into talks with the US at Warsaw.[11]

Operation MARIGOLD thus ended in failure. The question remains--indeed it was raised in the press by critics of Administration policy--whether different tactics by the United States might have led to direct meetings between US and North Vietnamese representatives. The critics claimed that the bombing attacks in December, coming at a critical juncture, gave evidence of bad faith on the part of the United States, with the result that the North Vietnamese withdrew their offer to talk. Another and equally valid speculation is that Hanoi only agreed to talk in the first place on the basis of a false and misleading presentation by Lewandowski that the United States was prepared to stop the bombing without military conditions. Once the North Vietnamese leaders discovered that the United States still demanded compensating military deescalation in return for a bombing halt, they employed the early December bombings as an excuse to reject direct negotiations.

Appeal to U Thant

On 19 December, when it was becoming apparent that the Polish Government would be unable to arrange direct secret negotiations between US and North Vietnamese representatives, the US Government turned to another channel in its continuing effort to end the Vietnamese war by negotiation. Ambassador to the UN Arthur Goldberg, on that date, wrote a letter to the Secretary General of the UN, U Thant, asking him to take

10. (TS) Msg, State 106358 to Warsaw, 21 Dec 66.
11. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2135 to CINCPAC, 232114Z Dec 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13.

whatever steps he considered necessary "to bring about the necessary discussions which could lead to . . . a ceasefire." The Ambassador also reaffirmed the explicit statement in the US Government's Fourteen Points that "a cessation of hostilities could be the first order of business at a conference or could be the subject of preliminary discussions."[12]

U Thant replied on 30 December by stressing that "a powerful nation like the United States should take the initiative in the quest for peace and show an enlightened and humanitarian spirit" by accepting the Secretary General's oft-repeated three-point program. The three points, of which the first was the most essential, were to stop the bombing of North Vietnam, to scale down the fighting in South Vietnam by all sides, and to be willing to enter into negotiations with those actually fighting. As an additional manifestation of the "humanitarian spirit," U Thant proposed that the United States accompany the cessation of bombing by joining with the other parties in an extended holiday truce. The following day Goldberg replied that his Government reaffirmed its offer to "order a prior end to all bombing of North Vietnam the moment there is an assurance, private or otherwise, that there would be a reciprocal response toward peace from North Vietnam." He asked the Secretary General to "use every means at . . . [his] . . . disposal to determine what tangible response there would be from North Vietnam in the wake of such a prior step toward peace" on the part of the United States. Goldberg pointed out, however, that an end to all hostilities could not be attained by "either appeals for or the exercise of restraint by only one side . . . ." The Secretary General's proposal for an extended ceasefire was therefore welcomed by the US Government, which regretted that the other parties had so far shown no interest in it.[13]

Even before writing his letter of 30 December to Goldberg, U Thant had begun intensive secret diplomacy with Hanoi. By 3 January, he was reported by the New York Times to be hopeful of a "positive response from North Vietnam once the United States unconditionally ended the bombing."[14]

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12. The text of Goldberg's letter is in Dept of State Bulletin, LVI (9 Jan 67), pp. 63-64. See Ch. 29 for a discussion of the Fourteen Points.
13. Dept of State Bulletin, LVI (23 Jan 67), pp. 137-139.
14. NY Times, 4 Jan 67, 1.

This finding obviously did not meet the oft-repeated condition of the United States that cessation of bombing be accompanied by some reciprocal military deescalation by the North Vietnamese. In the end U Thant proved unable to extract any satisfactory answer from Hanoi. The United States, meanwhile, initiated diplomatic action through other channels.

Operation SUNFLOWER

In spite of the collapse of MARIGOLD, the US Government remained determined to enter into secret negotiations with North Vietnam. To this end, it sought to establish a direct channel of communication with Hanoi through diplomatic missions of the two countries in Moscow. This new effort began on 10 January with the passing of a message by John Guthrie, Deputy Chief of the US Mission, to Le Chang, the North Vietnamese Chargé: "The United States Government," the message read, "places the highest priority in finding a mutually agreeable, completely secure arrangement for exchanging communications with the government of the DRV about the possibilities of achieving a peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese dispute."[15]

A subsequent message, passed through the same channel on 20 January, elaborated the US view of the matters that might be discussed. These included, in addition to any subject proposed by Hanoi, the following: arrangements for reduction or cessation of hostilities; essential elements of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962, including the withdrawal from South Vietnam of forces coming from the outside; arrangements for a free determination by North and South Vietnam on the issue of reunification; recognition of the independence and territorial integrity of North and South Vietnam or of a reunified Vietnam; the international posture of South Vietnam, including its relationships with other nations; appropriate provisions relating to the internal political structure of South Vietnam, including freedom from reprisals and free political participation; and appropriate means for insuring the integrity of all the provisions agreed to.[16]

15. (TS) Msgs, State 11296 to Moscow, 5 Jan 67, and Moscow 2966 to State, 10 Jan 67.

16. (TS) Msgs, State 120335 to Moscow, 17 Jan 67, and Moscow 3126 to State, 20 Jan 67.

On 27 January Le Chang delivered Hanoi's reply to the US message of the 10th in the form of an aide memoire. After initial comments concerning the "absurd and arrogant" US conditions for peace talks and charges that United States was escalating the war and the bombing, the reply reiterated the hard Hanoi line: "unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV being materialized, the DRV could then exchange views with the United States concerning the place or date for contact between the two parties . . . ." The North Vietnamese contended that in the event such negotiations did take place, "the most current solution to the Vietnam problem" would be the four-point program of North Vietnam and the five-point programs of the National Liberation Front.[17]

The next day, the North Vietnamese Government, without referring to the diplomatic exchanges with the United States, made public its position in an interview given by Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh to the left-wing Australian jornalist Wilfred Burchett. The Hanoi regime placed particular emphasis on the text of the interview. Not only was it prominently published on the front page of all Hanoi newspapers, but it was also widely distributed to neutral governments with the request that its important character be conveyed to US diplomatic representatives.[18]

On 2 February, Guthrie handed Le Chang an interim reply to this roundabout communication from Hanoi. In its reply, the US Government agreed to discuss the four points or any other matter in secret talks. Turning to the question of attacks on North Vietnam, the US Government in its reply pointed out that bombing within 10 nautical miles of the center of Hanoi had already been stopped, and renewed the offer to deescalate further under the two-phase plan originally proposed the preceding November through the Poles. The forthcoming Tet truce, scheduled for the period 8-12 February might be a good time to begin discussions on such an approach.[19]

Before any reply to the message of 2 February had been received, action on the diplomatic front shifted to London,

17. (TS) Msg, Moscow 3218 to State, 27 Jan 67.
18. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 133736 to Paris, Wellington, Ottawa, Djakarta, Rome, Bern, 8 Feb 67. NY Times, 29 Jan 67, 6.
19. (TS) Msgs, State 128486 to Moscow, 31 Jan 67, and Moscow 3321 to State, 2 Feb 67.

where Soviet Premier Kosygin arrived on 6 February for policy talks with the British Government. In the hope that the British might be able to persuade Kosygin to bring pressure to bear on North Vietnam to negotiate, the US Government briefed the British thoroughly on the current negotiations. At two sessions on 6 February, the British presented the US two-phase deescalation plan and the list of subjects for secret discussion given to the North Vietnamese on 20 January. Kosygin made no response to this presentation but quoted the Burchett interview as evidence that the North Vietnamese were prepared to negotiate. However, when pressed by the British to urge the North Vietnamese to issue an unequivocal statement that they would negotiate if the bombing stopped, Kosygin refused. He was willing only to join Prime Minister Wilson in an endorsement of the statement given by the North Vietnamese in the Burchett interview. This Wilson refused to do.[20]

At this point, the US Government dispatched its definitive reply to the North Vietnamese statement given in the aide memoire of 27 January and the Burchett interview of the following day. This reply took the form of a letter from President Johnson to Ho Chi Minh, delivered to North Vietnamese diplomats in Moscow on 8 February so as to coincide with the Wilson-Kosygin talks still in progress in London. In his letter, Johnson offered a new deescalation package. "I am prepared", he wrote, "to order a cessation of bombing against your country and the stopping of further augmentation of United States forces in South Vietnam as soon as I am assured that infiltration into South Vietnam by land and by sea has been stopped." The day before sending this letter, Johnson had informed Wilson of its contents, stressing the point that the United States could not "accept . . . the exchange of guarantee of safe haven for North Vietnam merely for discussions which thus far have no form or content, during which they [the North Vietnamese] could continue to expand their military operations to the limit."[21]

Subsequent discussions in London did not result in any offer of positive action by Kosygin. On the evening of the 11th, with the Soviet Premier's visit drawing to a close, President Johnson sent another personal message to Prime Minister Wilson stating the willingness of the United States

20. (TS) Msgs, London 6315 and 6316 to State, 6 Feb 67.
21. (TS) Msgs, State 132481 to London, 7 Feb 67, and Moscow 3412 to State, 8 Feb 67. The text of the Johnson ltr to Ho Chi Minh is in NY Times, 22 Mar 67, 10.

"to go the last mile" in the search for peace. He asked to make an additional effort to secure Kosygin's services by giving him the following message:

> If you can get a North Vietnamese assurance--communicated either direct to the United States or through you--before 10:00 A.M. British time tomorrow that all movement of troops and supplies into South Vietnam will stop at that time, I will get an assurance from the US that they will not resume bombing North Vietnam at that time. Of course the US buildup would then stop in a matter of days.

The deadline passed with no word from Hanoi. Shortly afterward Kosygin boarded a plane for Moscow, and orders were issued to resume operations against North Vietnam.[22]

Two days later Ho Chi Minh sent his reply directly to President Johnson. In a letter dated 15 February the North Vietnamese leader harshly accused the United States of employing "the most inhuman weapons" and the "most barbarous methods of warfare" against his people, blamed the United States for the "extremely serious situation in Vietnam," and rejected any form of negotiation until the United States stopped "unconditionally its bombing raids and all other acts of war" against North Vietnam.[23]

The JCS Role

The US attempts to achieve negotiations in the MARIGOLD and SUNFLOWER efforts were obviously of concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff because of their effects not only on the immediate tactical situation but also on long-term strategic interests of the United States. During the period of these two diplomatic operations, the JCS were not asked for formal

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22. (TS) Msg, State 135748 to London, 12 Feb 67. The Tet standdown had originally been scheduled to end on 12 February, but at the request of the British, it had been extended until Kosygin departed from the United Kingdom. See Ch for an account of operations against North Vietnam at this period.

23. (TS) Msg, Moscow 3503, 15 Feb 67. The text of Ho's Letter is in NY Times, 22 Mar 67, 10.

views on any aspect of the negotiations.[24] Their position on some aspects of the question was available to Secretaries McNamara and Rusk, however, as the result of views presented in May 1965. At that time, the JCS had stated the minimum conditions for halting the bombing of North Vietnam to be: cessation of infiltration into and withdrawal from South Vietnam and Laos of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces; agreement between North and South Vietnam to settle future differences peacefully; and an immediate exchange of prisoners.[25]

Acting on their own initiative, early in 1967 the JCS presented Secretary McNamara with a new formulation of views on negotiation, along with a request that they be given the opportunity to comment on any future formulation of US policy on the subject. He, in turn, passed the views to Secretary Rusk. But this new statement of views, although initiated on 1 February, was not complete until the 27th, by which time Ho Chi Minh had slammed the door on negotiation on terms acceptable to the United States.

The JCS views, developed as answers to questions asked by General Maxwell Taylor in his report to President Johnson on a trip to South Vietnam, consisted of the following. The minimum price for cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam should be verified cessation of all North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam and Laos. Because a cessation of the bombing was one of our most important negotiating assets, additional concessions should be sought. Additional concessions to be sought now were: cessation of North Vietnamese military operations in South Vietnam including support and direction of the Viet Cong; verified beginning of withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, the demilitarized zone, and the Laotian panhandle; and significant reduction of North Vietnamese/Viet Cong acts of terrorism in South Vietnam. Further concessions, not immediately needed, but ultimately necessary to restore peace in Vietnam, included: withdrawal of all North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, the demilitarized zone, and areas in Laos not occupied by

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24. Sources available to the author do not reveal whether the JCS as a group, or the CJCS separately, ever discussed these matters with the Secretary of Defense, the President or other high-level officials.

25. See Ch. 28 for a complete discussion of these views.

communists prior to the signing of the Geneva accords of 1962; cessation of all acts of terrorism in South Vietnam; and an agreement to exchange prisoners. Verification of the measures should be by unilateral inspection and policing by the belligerents themselves rather than by the demonstrably inadequate method of international supervision and inspection. If, however, the United States should accept control by an international commission, it should be an entirely new body, free of the serious deficiencies of the present commission, and should be in place and functioning effectively before any US forces were withdrawn. To avoid a stalemate at the conference table, a fixed agenda should be established. Communist stalling or intransigence on agenda items should call for resumption of bombing of North Vietnam. Military operations elsewhere should be pressed vigorously during negotiations.[26]

Ho Chi Minh's letter of 15 February spelled failure for the MARIGOLD-SUNFLOWER diplomatic offensive. After three months of intensive diplomatic activity the Vietnam conflict was no closer to a resolution than it had been before. In spite of the various formulae advanced and the one significant bombing restriction put into effect by the United States, the North Vietnamese position on negotiation remained unchanged. The communist leaders in Hanoi were evidently still convinced they could win a military victory, in spite of the successes scored by US, South Vietnamese, and Free World military forces during 1966. Redoubled efforts on the battlefield were therefore in order, and as fighting resumed at the end of the Tet stand-down, the US military leaders hoped to win approval for intensified operations against the enemy war-making potential centered in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

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26. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-107-67 to SecDef, 27 Feb 67 (derived from JCS 2472/6-3); (S-GP 1) JCS 2472/6-4, 3 Apr 67; JMF 911/080 (30 Jan 67) sec 1.

[redacted]

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Chapter 41

ROLLING THUNDER GAINS MOMENTUM - FEBRUARY-JUNE 1967

The Bombing Resumes

Military operations against North Vietnam resumed on 13 February 1967, when the Tet standdown came to an end. During the months that followed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, supported by CINCPAC, won approval for successive ROLLING THUNDER programs that had the effect of gradually intensifying operations against targets in the vital northeast quadrant of North Vietnam.

At the time operations resumed, however, prospects for an intensified campaign against the North did not appear bright. The restrictive RT 53 was still in effect, an operation which Admiral Sharp had characterized on 2 February as an effort which fell "considerably short of what could have been an initial step in bringing more positive pressure to bear on Hanoi in 1967." He had emphasized the need for a long-range program covering all of what he considered to be key target systems.[1] This was an approach CINCPAC had long advocated and which he had gradually developed and refined. The most recent step in this evolution had been submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 18 January. This was a proposal for applying steady pressure, avoiding peaks and depressions, against six key target systems in Route Package (RP) VI as a means to destroy the "war making potential" of the enemy. The six target systems were: 1) electric power; 2) war supporting industry; 3) transportation support facilities; 4) military complexes; 5) petroleum; and 6) Haiphong and other ports. Complete destruction of these systems was not necessary, according to CINCPAC, but "general disruption" would make them ineffective. Some targets would require periodic restrike.[2]

1. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 022246Z Feb 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 67.
2. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 182210Z Jan 67, JCS IN 53524.

CINCPAC's disappointment at the continued bombing limitations had been sharpened by the weather. The northeast monsoon, a decisive factor in the effectiveness of the bombing program, had not yet ebbed. The rainy winter months with their heavy cloud cover caused many delays and cancellations of strikes. Nevertheless, the bombing programs continued.

Within a few days of the resumption of operations against the North, however, the prospect for a more effective bombing program brightened. On 17 February General Wheeler emphasized to the President the importance of striking against the electric power net, even to the point of destroying the entire system, to bring graduated pressure against Hanoi. The Chairman came away from this meeting with the feeling that there was a "new sense of urgency in the atmosphere" that could lead to new strike authorizations. These, he believed, would initially be limited to a slight broadening of the target base but would soon result in approval of actions that would bring increased pressure to bear on the enemy.[3]

RT 54

The approval of RT 54 on 23 February, just ten days after the resumption of the bombing, confirmed General Wheeler's optimism and marked the beginning of what developed into an intensified campaign against the northeast quadrant. The President authorized five new targets plus the RT 53 targets that had not been previously struck because of poor weather (six of the nine authorized under RT 53 had not been struck). At the same time the number of sorties per month was raised from 13,200 to 14,500. The new targets included four thermal power plants, Hon Gai, Thai Nguyen, Viet Tri, and Bac Giang; and the Thai Nguyen steel plant; all within or near the Hanoi/Haiphong complex. Thus, targets from two of the six target systems CINCPAC had recommended for attack - electric power and war supporting industry - were authorized, and the number of sorties increased. These were encouraging changes.[4]

3. (S) Msg, JCS 1337-67 to CINCPAC, 18 Feb 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec 15.

4. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6955 to CINCPAC, 230308Z Feb 67. (TS) Memo, J-3 to CJCS, ROLLING THUNDER with draft execute message, 21 Feb 67, same file.

In their recommendations on RT 54 the Joint Chiefs of Staff had also recommended as targets three additional thermal power plants located in Hanoi and Haiphong, a Hanoi transformer station, and the Haiphong cement plant, but these were not approved until later.

Attacks against the two target systems, both important in NVN industrial production, would not have a great effect on the total war effort, however, since the bulk of supplies and equipment was imported and could be effectively controlled only by hitting the ports and transportation systems. Nevertheless, the program brought an increase in pressure upon North Vietnam.

When the President approved RT 54 he also approved the extension of SEA DRAGON operations to 20° N latitude and authorized the selective mining of inland waterways in the same area, along with naval gunfire against military shore targets. This added over 75 miles of coastline area for operations calculated to interdict waterborne logistics craft in coordination with ROLLING THUNDER operations. The President also authorized artillery fire north of the DMZ.

CINCPAC and the commanders in the field were greatly pleased with the authority contained in RT 54. This authorization was closer to CINCPAC's own concept of striking against interrelated target systems. He thanked the Chairman for his efforts in expanding the program and promised that the effect would be "anything but salubrious for Hanoi."[5]

Unfortunately, the weather again had an adverse affect on the bombing program. The month of February produced fewer sorties than any of the previous nine months. The low total was due, of course, not only to the weather, but to the shortness of the month and the Tet standdown. The bad weather continued for most of the month of March.[6]

5. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250312Z Feb 67, OCJCS 091 File Vietnam, Feb 67.
6. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC, ROLLING THUNDER Digest, Jan-Mar 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67) sec 1A.

Political considerations continued to inhibit the ROLLING THUNDER program. Although the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, had emphasized to CINCPAC that there was no sense of urgency or political requirement that the new targets be attacked by any deadline, two of them, the Bac Giang and Hon Gai thermal power plants, were struck almost immediately and for two straight days. These attacks occasioned concern at the highest levels of the government that closely-spaced repetitive attacks against high-value targets might be construed as an escalation of the war. The Chairman urged CINCPAC to see that the strikes were made only during breaks in the weather or, that failing, only after an interval of three to five days. He feared that, if the State Department had to face domestic and foreign charges of escalation, there might be delay in securing authority for attacks against "other high-value targets such as the two thermal power plants and the cement plant in Haiphong and the Hanoi thermal power plant and transformer station." The granting of that authority, said the Chairman, appeared imminent.[7]

The Chairman counseled CINCPAC and COMUSMACV again on 6 March to take the necessary steps to avoid jeopardizing the possibility of gaining expanded authority. He felt that the situation was ripe and could only be upset by an obstacle "created by us."[8]

Although hampered by the weather, ROLLING THUNDER forces within three weeks after the authorization had struck every RT 54 target at least once. This performance, coupled with increased military resupply activity in the Haiphong area, encouraged the Chairman to continue to press for new authority. He was successful. On 22 March, with Presidential approval, the Joint Chiefs of Staff added to the RT 54 target list the two Haiphong thermal power plants, but with the admonition to minimize civilian casualties and to prevent damage to foreign shipping. Because of the weather and political considerations,

7. (TS) Msg, JCS 1422-67 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 22 Feb 67; (S) Msg, JCS 1497-67 to CINCPAC, 25 Feb 67; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec 15.

8. (S) Msg, JCS 1691-67 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 6 Mar 67, same file.

however, the two targets were not struck until 20 April. Strikes against ROLLING THUNDER targets continued through March and the first three weeks of April.[9]

RT 55 and the MIG Threat

On 22 April the President approved RT 55, a program designed to initiate an integrated campaign against the land, rail, and water lines of communication in the northeast. Such a program had been much desired and long sought by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC. The objective of the program was ultimately to isolate the Hanoi/Haiphong logistics base. The President authorized attacks on ten fixed targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong complex, representing all of the six target systems devised by CINCPAC. (By this time air defense as a primary target system had replaced ports, a system which was consolidated with the transportation targets.) Among the targets authorized were the Hanoi transformer station, the Haiphong cement plant, the Hanoi railroad/highway bridge (canal), one of the Hanoi railroad repair shops, the Haiphong ammunition depot, the Dan Phuong highway causeway, and the Xuan Mai highway bridge SW, plus a restrike of the Haiphong POL. The other two targets were Hoa Lac and Kep airfields. Attacks against the airfields were to be limited to "small and random harassment strikes designed to attrite aircraft and disrupt support facilities." Only one JCS target, the Hanoi thermal power plant, was deleted from those requested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The other general guidelines remained unchanged, although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had requested a reduction of the restrictions for armed reconnaissance.[10]

9. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 46-67 through 65-67, 25 Feb through 20 Mar 67. (TS) Telecon, NMCC to CINCPAC, 171840Z Mar 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec 15. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9614 to CINCPAC, 222314Z Mar 67. (TS) Msg, JCS 2601-67 to CINCPAC, 10 Apr 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec 15. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 66-67 through 95-67, 21 Mar through 24 Apr 67.

10. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3451 to CINCPAC, 222239Z Apr 67.

The airfields were added to the target list in order to weaken the enemy's air defense, which had been stiffened as a result of intensified attacks in the northeast quadrant in recent weeks. SAMs, antiaircraft, and MIGs were the principal weapons employed by the North Vietnamese in this effort. By far the greatest concentration of air defense weapons was in RP VI. The threat of MIG encounters had been prevalent and growing for some time. The Joint Staff had warned in January that unless additional steps were taken, the threat would probably grow, and suggested that strikes should be made on NVN airfields. At about the same time, CINCPAC had outlined six actions to counter the threat, including attacks on MIG bases. From January through March, however, the MIG harassment was ineffective. Not a single US plane was lost in 24 engagements. (There were eight US losses from SAMs during the period, and 43 from antiaircraft artillery and automatic weapons.)[11]

On 23 March CINCPAC had appealed for authority to conduct spoiling attacks on Hoa Lac and Kep airfields before MIGs from these airfields could seriously interfere with ROLLING THUNDER. Hoa Lac airfield was just nearing completion and Kep had been recently improved. Attacks against them, said CINCPAC, would counter the "growing MIG threat." These two targets were included in the proposal for RT 55 that was then being readied for presentation. But no authority came during the month of March and for most of April.[12]

In April, however, the MIG threat increased, with a large jump in the number of aerial engagements. On 13 April CINCPAC, in a cable to the Chairman, JCS, requested approval for strikes against all NVN airfields. He believed that an effective program of strikes against these airfields could drive the MIGs from North Vietnamese bases and force their relocation in China. Such a relocation of MIG aircraft might even be beneficial to the United States, since it could provide an interception point along the buffer zone that not only would impede and disrupt inbound

11. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040334Z Jan 67, JCS IN 27052. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC, ROLLING THUNDER DIGEST, Jan-Mar 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67) sec 1A.

12. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230037Z Mar 67, JCS IN 83893. (TS) Telecon, NMCC to CINCPAC, 231816Z Mar 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec 15.

MIG attacks against US strike aircraft, but also would permit US aircraft to engage the MIGs on their return leg to sanctuary in China. CINCPAC recognized that the problem of hot pursuit would be heightened, but that authority for hot pursuit into China would not be given.[13]

Upon receiving the RT 55 authority, US forces promptly launched a strike against each airfield, losing 3 of the 16 attacking aircraft. The Secretary of Defense became concerned that the field commanders were attempting to achieve more than the stipulated harassment and attrition of NVN Air Force. The Chairman reassured the Secretary that proper guidance had been given to the field commanders, but he, too, had reason for concern. He feared that such vigorous action might jeopardize efforts to gain authority to attack all NVN airfields. The Chairman suggested to CINCPAC that he exert a restraining influence on his subordinates. But CINCPAC had anticipated reaction from Washington and had already warned his field commanders to restrain their pilots.[14]

Despite the attacks on the two airfields, the number of sightings and encounters continued to grow. The United States lost seven planes to North Vietnamese MIGs during April, leading Admiral Sharp to appeal again but without success for authority to attack the remaining jet-capable airfields at Kien An and Cat Bi. Failure to obtain the desired authority, however, did not prevent effective action against other North Vietnamese airfields. On 1 May, US pilots restruck Kep and Hoa Lac airfields and destroyed 16 MIGs. Thereafter, for several months, enemy air activity was minimal.[15]

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13. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 130432Z Apr 67, same file, sec 16.

14. (S) Msg, JCS 3011-67 to CINCPAC, 24 Apr 67; (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250402Z Apr 67; same file.

15. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 95-67 through 100-67, 24 through 29 Apr 67. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC, ROLLING THUNDER DIGEST, Apr-Jun 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67) sec 1D. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 300055Z Apr 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 55, Sec 16. (TS) Msg, JCS 3223-67 to CINCPAC, 2 May 67, same file, sec 17.

Attacks on other targets on the RT 55 list continued meanwhile and, with the arrival of better weather conditions in April, strikes grew more numerous in the northeast quadrant. In an eight-day period ROLLING THUNDER strike forces flew 183 sorties with good success against nine of the ten authorized targets, plus numerous armed reconnaissance strikes throughout RP VI. The only RT 55 target not struck during the eight days was the Xuan Mai highway bridge.[16]

RT 56

Planning for a new authorization was initiated almost immediately after the approval of RT 55. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, had instructed the Joint Staff to include as fixed targets Phuc Yen and one other MIG-capable airfield--perhaps Kien An--but excluding Gia Lam, the international airport near Hanoi.[17]

Authority to execute RT 56 was dispatched to CINCPAC on 2 May and included authorization for strikes against ten targets in the northeast quadrant, four of which were restrikes against the two Haiphong thermal power plants (until they were destroyed), the Van Dien vehicle depot, and the Yen Vien railroad classification yard. The latter two targets, near Hanoi, had been struck in 1966, but in December of that year attacks against the two targets had been suspended because of political reasons. The Haiphong thermal power plants had been authorized briefly the previous November, but had not been destroyed. Since three of the new targets, Vinh Yen, Kep, and Ha Dong, were military barracks in areas of concentrated population, the execute message carried a caution to avoid civilian casualties by striking during good weather for positive identification. The Van Dien Supply/SAM Depot and the Nguyen Khe Storage facility were also approved. The last target was the Kien An Airfield, which was to be struck, along with those airfields authorized for attack under RT 55, for the purpose of maximum destruction of MIG aircraft at a minimum

16. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 96-67 through 103-67, 25 Apr through 3 May 67.
17. (TS) Memo, CJCS to Joint Staff, with pencilled notation, 25 Apr 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17.

cost in US aircraft and pilots. Strikes were authorized against all previously approved ROLLING THUNDER targets. Seven additional important targets recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not approved: the Hanoi thermal power plant, the Hanoi supply depot N, the Hanoi railroad/highway bridge on the Red River, the Haiphong railroad yards W, Haiphong port areas C and D, the Hon Gai Port, and Phuc Yen Airfield. All of the general guidelines for the new program were carried over from the previous one.[18]

The Hanoi Thermal Power Plant

The most important deletion from the Joint Staff proposal for RT 56 was that of the Hanoi thermal power plant. Destruction of this plant, in Admiral Sharp's opinion, would eliminate available power in the northeast area except for portable generators; in effect it would turn out the lights of Hanoi and Haiphong. A major problem in attacking the target, however, was the danger of civilian casualties. US officials feared that such casualties might increase public opposition to the bombing of North Vietnam. In late April the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff had suggested that WALLEYE, a sophisticated new weapon, be used against the power plant. Fired from a fighter plane, WALLEYE could lock on a target electronically and home in with precision, thereby reducing the risk of civilian casualties. But CINCPAC was not convinced that the missile was completely reliable and did not concur in its use at that time. In the meantime the Secretary of Defense advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that if the two Haiphong thermal power plants were destroyed first, it would be easier to secure approval for attack of the Hanoi plant. He recognized, however, that bad weather might prevent striking the Haiphong plants before the President could consider the prime target.[19]

18. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4255 to CINCPAC, 022248Z May 67. (TS-GP 3) Draft Execute Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, Tab 2A, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17.

19. (S) Msg, JCS 3168-67 to CINCPAC, 29 Apr 67; (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 022202Z May 67; (TS) Msg, JCS 3223-67 to CINCPAC, 2 May 67; same file.

Restrikes against the Haiphong thermal power plants were carried out on 10 May, thus setting the stage for approval of attack against the Hanoi power plant. Within a week CINCPAC received the requisite authority. Despite CINCPAC's reservations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff specified that the strike would be made by only two aircraft equipped with the WALLEYE weapon. They urged caution to minimize civilian casualties by insuring positive identification of the target. They also urged that a strike be completed before 20 May, in view of the forthcoming visit to Moscow of British Foreign Minister Brown, and of Buddha's birthday.[20]

On 19 May two US aircraft carried out the carefully planned strike against the plant; one bomb fell short and the other struck one end of the complex. A restrike the following day was more successful, and on a still later restrike the pilot actually observed and photographed the WALLEYE weapon entering through a window of the generator hall.[21]

The Bombing is Restricted

ROLLING THUNDER strike forces increased their efforts through the spring. Targets destroyed or damaged during March numbered 1,781; in April, the figure was 2,722; and during May, it was 4,325. Other statistics also illustrate this increase in activity. Of all sorties flown during March only eight percent had been against targets in RPs VI A and VI B, the areas where the pressure would be felt greatest by NVN leaders. That percentage climbed to 15 percent for the month of April. By the end of May it would be 16 percent. These increases resulted from the new

20. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 110-67, 11 May 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5404 to CINCPAC, 162108Z May 67. The United States observed a 24-hour standdown of military operations on Buddha's birthday, 23 May, but authorized naval gunfire and air operations against observed substantial military resupply activity in North Vietnam south of 20°. (TS) Fact Sheet, "Operation Hickory (U)," 16 May 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 67.

21. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 118-67 and 119-67, 20 and 22 Nov 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CTG 77.7 to CINCPACFLT, 100846Z Jun 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17.

target opportunities in the northeast quadrant opened up by RT 55 and 56. These programs had authorized 20 targets in RP VI, all of which were struck in a five week period. During that period the damage level in RP VI was greater than all previous ROLLING THUNDER strikes combined. Only 22 targets had been struck in that area during all of 1966. From 19 through 21 May, bombing close to and within the 10 nm "prohibited" area was particularly intense. These statistics indicate just how far the bombing program had developed, and they gave good reason to believe that the North Vietnamese were feeling the pressure.[22]

DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACK SORTIES
BY ROUTE PACKAGE

Month	Sorties	Route Packages						
		I	II	III	IV	V	VIA	VIB
January	6,633	43%	6%	16%	22%	4%	7%	2%
February	5,588	64%	6%	10%	12%	2%	3%	3%
March	8,493	60%	9%	11%	8%	4%	3%	5%
April	8,919	49%	11%	13%	6%	5%	7%	8%
May	11,426	39%	13%	19%	11%	3%	10%	6%
June	11,526	36%	13%	17%	11%	4%	14%	5% [23]

Then, quite suddenly, on 22 May the Secretary of Defense withdrew all authorizations for strikes against fixed targets within the 10 nm circle of Hanoi. The contrast between the intense bombing of the previous few days in the Hanoi area and the period that followed the announcement was striking. US pilots flew 254 sorties against RT 56 targets during the first 22 days of May. By 22 May, with the exception of the Giap Nhat vehicle repair facility, which had been authorized on 16 May, every authorized target had been struck at least once; many had been severely damaged or destroyed. After the 22nd of the month, only 32 sorties were flown, and until RT 57 was approved in

22. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC, ROLLING THUNDER DIGEST, Jan-Mar 67 and Apr-Jun 67; JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67) secs 1A and 1D. (TS) Briefing for SecDef and CJCS, "Air Campaign in North Vietnam," 8 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 67.

23. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC, ROLLING THUNDER DIGEST, Apr-Jun 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67) sec 1D.

mid-July the intensity of the bombing subsided around Hanoi, with the striking forces concentrating mainly on the northeast rail line.[24]

MAY SUMMARY OF STRIKES AGAINST
ROLLING THUNDER 56 TARGETS

Target	Sorties (date of strike in parenthesis)		Total for May
Yen Vien RR Classification Yard	9 (5th)	12 (13th)	21
Ha Dong Barracks	12 (5th), 8 (13th)	10 (12th), 12 (22nd)	42
Haiphong TPP E	10 (10th)		10
Haiphong TPP W	10 (10th), 10 (26th)	12 (20th)	32
Kien An Airfield	10 (10th), 12 (24th)	1 (13th)	24
Nguyen Khe Storage Area	12 (12th), 12 (22nd)	12 (13th)	36
Vinh Yen Barracks	12 (13th), 16 (25th)	16 (24th)	44
Van Dien Vehicle Depot	2 (19th)	11 (22nd)	13
Van Dien Supply/SAM Depot	20 (19th)		20
Kep Army Barracks	12 (19th)	16 (31st)	28
Hanoi TPP (authorized 16 May)	2 (19th)	4 (20th)	6
Kinh No Vehicle Repair (authorized 16 May)	10 (20th)		10
Total			286 [25]

Admiral Sharp deplored the curtailment. In a cable to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, he stated his conviction that the increased activity was beginning to hurt the enemy. "If we want to get this war over with we ought to keep the pressure on Hanoi and move in on Haiphong as JCS have recommended," he said. In his reply General

24. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 May 67, JMF 9155/55 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 103-67 through 127-67, 3 May through 1 Jun 67.

25. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 103-67 through 127-67, 3 May through 1 Jun 67.

Wheeler agreed with CINCPAC on the effectiveness of the bombing and indicated that foreign observers in Hanoi, who sent their reports to European superiors, confirmed this opinion.[26]

General Wheeler remained optimistic that authority could be obtained to strike worthwhile targets within the 10 nm Hanoi prohibited zone. On 25 May, he urged CINCPAC to submit such a list. Admiral Sharp's recommendations were received on 29 May but were not acted upon.[27]

CINCPAC nevertheless continued to press for authority to strike new targets and to restrike the more significant ones already hit. Some of the requests were for strikes against targets the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered to be not of great value. For example, on 17 June the Chairman turned down a request to strike five fertilizer plants because he believed they were not the type of non-military targets that warranted attack. Moreover, they had presumably been rendered inoperable for lack of power as the result of strikes against the power system. The Chairman also rejected certain power facilities as targets because either they did not tie into the Hanoi grid system or they were not of significant importance. Other targets recommended by CINCPAC were considered significant by General Wheeler, but these were already planned for inclusion in RT 57, then under preparation by the Joint Staff.[28]

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26. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 May 67. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 240120Z May 67. (TS) Msg, JCS 3903-67 to CINCPAC, 25 May 67; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17.

27. (TS) Msg, JCS 3903-67 to CINCPAC, 25 May 67, same file. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, CINCPAC to JCS, 290506Z May 67, JCS IN 40905 and 030424Z Jun 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 67.

28. (TS-GP 3) Telecon, JCS 4561 to CINCPAC, 171550Z Jun 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56 sec 17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8177 to CINCPAC, 162237Z Jun 67. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 280439Z Jun 67, JCS IN 17531. (TS-GP 3) Memo, J-3 to CJCS, "ROLLING THUNDER (U)," n.d. (C. 3 Jul 67), JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56 sec 17. (TS-GP 3) Telecon, NMCC to CINCPAC, 101810Z Jul 67, same file.

Strikes in the Hanoi-Haiphong area were even further restricted as the result of the accidental bombing of a Soviet ship in Haiphong harbor, on 29 June, by Navy planes attacking an automatic weapons site in the port area. President Johnson was particularly alarmed over the incident because it came at a time when US-Soviet relations were strained over the crisis in the Middle East resulting from the Arab-Israeli war.

The President did not desire any change in the pattern of air operations against North Vietnam, but did want action taken to preclude any additional incidents at that sensitive time. The next day, the Joint Chiefs of Staff created a circle of 4 nm radius around Haiphong, in which no air strikes would be permitted without new authorization. For insurance CINCPAC added a further restriction by requiring his approval on all strikes in the doughnut area between 4 nm and 10 nm from Haiphong.[29]

The restrictions on operations against North Vietnam came at a time when US military leaders believed they were beginning to obtain substantial results. Admiral Sharp reported to General Wheeler on 29 May that the stepped-up bombing operations of April and May had destroyed most of the major power resources, had brought several key war supporting industries to a virtual standstill, and had increased harassment and disruption of external assistance entering NVN through Haiphong and on the northeast rail line. The air campaign, said CINCPAC, was the one way of carrying the war home to the enemy. It would be unfortunate to "back off" just when repeated attempts to secure authority for a systematic air campaign were showing results, the pressure was increasing because of this campaign, and the weather was "optimum" over North Vietnam.[30]

29. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4027 to CINCPAC, 291323Z Apr 67, JCS 8177, 162237Z Jun 67, JCS 9143, 291737Z Jun 67. (S) Msg, JCS 4880 to CINCPAC, 291929Z Jun 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56 sec 17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9315 to CINCPAC, 302108Z Jun 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT and CINCPACAF, 010430Z Jul 67, JCS IN 24937.

30. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 290506Z May 67, JCS IN 40905. (FOUO) COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 49.

A few weeks later, CINCPAC's opinion was unchanged. He believed that the United States had achieved a position, "albeit late in the game, from which a precisely executed and incisive air campaign of depth and sustaining persistence against all the target systems" would bring significant results. He believed that the enemy was "hurting". The successful operations of the previous period should be continued with the widest latitude in planning and execution during the remaining good weather.[31]

The ROLLING THUNDER program was in even greater danger than Admiral Sharp realized. The restrictions to which he was objecting were related to current high-level talks in Washington over a far more drastic bombing curtailment--a limitation of the bombing to the area south of 20° N latitude. Some high government officials felt that the recent strikes around Hanoi had raised the temperature of the war and might elicit additional Soviet assistance to North Vietnam; also, that the US losses sustained were not commensurate with the results attained. Some desired to "let the dust settle" while watching Soviet/CHICOM reactions, or expressed doubts that air strikes in the northeast quadrant actually obstructed and reduced the flow of men and materials to the south. Others questioned the effectiveness of the bombing program and advocated that it be cut back. Various alternative programs were suggested along these general lines, but this momentous question awaited the decision of the President himself.[32]

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31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 210430Z Jun 67, JCS IN 93233. (TS) Briefing for SecDef and CJCS, "Air Campaign in North Vietnam," 8 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

32. (TS) Msg, JCS 3903-67 to CINCPAC, 25 May 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56 sec 17.

Chapter 42

LAUNCHING THE GENERAL OFFENSIVE: OPERATIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, JANUARY-MAY 1967

General Westmoreland's Concept of Operations for 1967

Late in 1966 General Westmoreland predicted that the year 1967 would usher in a new phase of combat operations in South Vietnam--allied forces would go over to the offensive. In 1966, US/FWMAF and the RVNAF had successfully engaged in a holding action which had prevented a communist conquest of South Vietnam and, indeed, had made it impossible. This success, combined with the buildup of US/FWMAF, had set the stage for a general offensive.[1]

The "Combined Campaign Plan 1967," promulgated by COMUSMACV and the Chief of the JGS on 7 November 1966, provided the basic guidance to US/FWMAF and the RVNAF. The plan was not, however, a blueprint for final victory. It envisioned neither total defeat of all enemy forces nor control by the GVN over all the territory of South Vietnam. The objective of the plan was to "extend" the area controlled by the South Vietnamese Government and to win victories over VC/NVA units.

The military operations called for by the plan were all predicated on the basic assumption that "the people are the greatest asset to the enemy and control of the people is the enemy's goal." Military operations were designed, therefore, to deny the enemy access to the people and to food-producing areas. The plan designated National Priority Areas and Areas for Priority of Military Operations, within whose boundaries were included most of the population, food-producing areas, and lines of communication. The National Priority Areas were expansions of those in the 1966 Plan. Four in number and centered on the cities of Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Saigon, and the provinces of An Giang and Vinh Long in the Delta, they were concentrations of population singled out for intensive revolutionary development efforts. The Areas for Priority of Military Operations, which included

1. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 13 Oct 66, JCS IN 63249. Unless otherwise cited, this chapter is based on (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, Vol. I, pp. 349-558.

most of the remaining populated areas, were those areas where RVNAF and US/FWMAF would "focus" their operations to "destroy or drive the enemy into sparsely populated and food-scarce areas." These operations would also "insure the protection of the population, /and/ control of resources and . . . major lines of communications, all of which will facilitate follow-on revolutionary development."

The Combined Campaign Plan called for a general separation of areas of responsibility between the US/FWMAF and the RVNAF. The former were assigned the mission of attacking the enemy main forces, base areas, and supply systems and of separating the enemy main forces from the civilian population. The latter was assigned the task of supporting the revolutionary development program, defending government centers, and protecting national resources, particularly rice and salt. However, these assignments were primary and not exclusive ones. US and FWMA forces would be available to reinforce the RVNAF; the RVNAF General Reserve and Corps Reserve units would participate in operations against the enemy main force.[2]

The Antagonists

In planning operations for 1967, the MACV staff estimated that, while the enemy was no longer able to win a military victory, he still possessed a formidable force. MACV J-2 estimated that the total enemy strength in South Vietnam at the beginning of January was about 280,575. His reinforcement rate was 8,400 men per month by infiltration from North Vietnam and 3,500 by recruitment in South Vietnam. The enemy was able to sustain in South Vietnam a combat force of about 152 maneuver battalions. An additional two divisions and one regiment were deployed just over the northern border. These forces, according to MACV J-2, gave the enemy the following attack capabilities: in the DMZ area of I CTZ, with two divisions and one separate regiment; elsewhere in I CTZ, with a force roughly the equivalent of a division; in the border areas of II CTZ, with two divisions, and in the coastal areas, with forces roughly the equivalent of another division;

2. (S) Combined Campaign Plan, 1967 (AB 142), 7 Nov 66, cited in (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1967, Vol I, pp. 317-322.

in the III CTZ, with three divisions and one separate regiment; and in IV CTZ, in regimental strength.

To achieve his objective of gaining control over the population of South Vietnam, the enemy, according to the MACV J-2, would seek to wear down the will to resist of the free world forces and their governments by means of an "offensive-defensive" strategy credited to North Vietnamese Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap. This strategy called first for developing strong, multi-division forces, in dispersed regions and with access to supplies and to secure areas. Then RVNAF and US/FWMAF would be enticed into places where dug-in communist forces could inflict heavy casualties upon them; at the same time the enemy would conduct guerrilla and harassment operations throughout the country in order to tie down friendly forces.[3]

To oppose these enemy forces, Generals Westmoreland and Cao Van Vien, the Chief of the JGS, had at their disposal forces totalling 1,171,800--735,900 South Vietnamese forces of all types, 383,300 US forces, and 52,600 forces of other nations. The cutting edge of these forces consisted of 258 maneuver battalions, of which 153 were South Vietnamese, 82 were US, and 23 were from other countries. The relative strength of the opposing forces thus favored the free world side by about 4 to 1 in numbers and 3 to 1 in equivalent maneuver battalions. The latter ratio had been calculated according to the CINCPAC formula which rated one US/FWMAF battalion as equivalent to three SVN or NVA/VC battalions.[4]

This comparison of the relative combat strength of the antagonists on the basis of maneuver battalions did not, of course, take into account the very marked superiority of the friendly forces in air power. As of 1 January 1967, their several air forces deployed some 1,150 tactical strike aircraft on bases in South Vietnam and Thailand and on aircraft carriers in the Tonkin Gulf. Although there were many demands for missions by these aircraft--such as

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3. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 2 Jan 67, JCS IN 24930.

4. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA/JCS Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Jul 68, p. A-62; (S-GP 4) CINCPAC, Evaluation of Progress in Southeast Asia, Jan 67, pp. 1-2, JCS, RAIR Br.

ROLLING THUNDER, BARREL ROLL and STEEL TIGER--free world air forces early in 1967 were flying about 10,000 attack sorties per month in South Vietnam in support of ground troops.[5]

ARC LIGHT

In addition to the tactical aircraft, there were about 50 USAF B-52 strategic bombers stationed on Guam that were available to support General Westmoreland's operations under the ARC LIGHT program. At the beginning of 1967 the B-52 sortie rate in effect was 725 per month.[6]

During the early months of 1967, several steps were taken to improve the efficiency of ARC LIGHT operations. On 1 February, the sortie rate was raised to 800 per month. On 22 February President Johnson approved a JCS recommendation of 8 December 1966 to seek approval of the Thai Government to base B-52s at U Tapao, where the B-52s would be within 400 miles of their targets as compared to the 2,600 mile distance from Guam. When the Thai Government gave its approval on 2 March, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, on the same day, approved the start of the necessary construction to base 15 B-52s at U Tapao using currently available funds.[7]

Secretary McNamara, also on 2 March, expanded the authority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to approve ARC LIGHT strikes to include Laos and the DMZ south of the demarcation line. As in the case of the original authorization, which applied only to strikes in South Vietnam, the delegated authority was subject to certain conditions: strikes against targets in the DMZ required prior concurrence from the US Embassy in Saigon and the RVN; strikes in Laos required prior concurrence from the US Embassy in Vientiane and the Laotian Government; Washington authorities had to be informed of targets 24 hours in advance of strikes to

5. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Jan 67, pp. A-24, A-39, A-47.

6. See above, Ch. 34.

7. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, Vol II, pp. 685-694. (S-GP 3) Msg, Bangkok 11165 to State, 2 Mar 68, JCS IN 41885. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7903 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 2 Mar 67, JMF 9158 (24 May 66) sec 5.

permit deferral or cancellation if necessary. On 3 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff delegated this newly acquired authority to CINCPAC and CINCSAC.[8]

CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY

Operations designed to destroy enemy base areas began in January and consisted primarily of two large-scale operations in III CTZ for the purpose of destroying two base complexes which the enemy had occupied for years and which he used to rest, resupply, and train his troops.

CEDAR FALLS, the first of these operations, was aimed at the "Iron Triangle," an area of some 60 square miles immediately northwest of Saigon. Intelligence reports indicated that elements of the 165th VC Regiment, the 9th VC Division, and the 1st NVA Division were in this area. More important, the Headquarters of VC Military Region 4, which controlled political, labor, and propaganda activities, as well as guerrilla operations in the Saigon/Cholon area, was reported to be located there. Destruction of this Headquarters became the primary objective of CEDAR FALLS.

As a preliminary to military operations, the entire civilian population was evacuated from the area of operations, which then became a specified strike zone in which field commanders were authorized to direct air strikes and artillery fires without clearance by higher authority.

The military phase of the operation began on 4 January, when B-52s began softening up the objective area preliminary to the assault of ground units. After four days of intensive bombardment, a multi-division force of 23 battalions, under operational control of the Commanding General, II FFORCEV, jumped off in the attack. Elements of the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions and the 11th Cavalry Regiment sealed off the objective area, while one reinforced battalion of the 1st Infantry Division launched an airmobile assault to seal and secure the village of Ben Suc, long considered to be a VC stronghold. There followed 17 days of methodical advance through the objective area.

8. (S-GP 3) Msgs, SecDef 7668 to JCS, 2 Mar 67; JCS 7757 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 3 Mar 67.

When CEDAR FALLS ended on 26 January, a total of 720 enemy had been reported killed, but of far greater significance was the discovery of a vast enemy underground city carved beneath the jungle floor. Behind narrow, well-camouflaged entrances, tunnels extended several hundred yards to rooms that had been used by the enemy for hospitals, mess halls, munitions factories, and living quarters. About 3,700 tons of rice--enough to feed 13,000 troops for a year--had also been destroyed.

JUNCTION CITY, an even larger assault on an enemy base area, began within a month of the conclusion of CEDAR FALLS. On 22 February a combined US/ARVN multi-division force of 36 battalions attacked War Zone C, a 150-square mile jungle-clad plateau 70 miles northwest of Saigon close to the border of Cambodia. According to intelligence reports, War Zone C sheltered not only enemy troops and base areas but also the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the North Vietnamese agency in command of operations in the south.

In the first of three planned phases of JUNCTION CITY, the US 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, the US 173d Airborne Brigade, and two South Vietnamese Marine Battalions sealed off War Zone C on all sides. Extensive airmobile operations and a battalion-size airborne operation were employed in this phase. After the area had been sealed off, three battalions attacked northwest in search and destroy operations through the center of the zone. In spite of the magnitude of the friendly forces committed, only two major actions occurred during the first phase of JUNCTION CITY: a 12-hour fire fight between a US infantry battalion and an estimated enemy battalion on 28 February, and a coordinated mortar and ground assault by an unknown number of enemy on another US infantry battalion on the night of 10 March.

In the second phase of JUNCTION CITY, which began on 18 March, search and destroy operations were executed in the eastern portion of War Zone C. Enemy reaction in this phase was more severe than in the first phase. The enemy launched three separate regimental-size attacks on US formations of battalion size, but all were repulsed with heavy losses. The second phase drew to a close on 1 April, and was followed by a third phase in which a brigade-size force continued search and destroy missions.

JUNCTION CITY ended on 14 May. During the operation friendly forces counted a total of 2,728 enemy bodies, at

a cost of 282 killed and 1,576 wounded. In the course of the operation they discovered and destroyed 164 enemy base camps, one of which was capable of supporting a division. COSVN was not discovered.

Operations in II CTZ

In the coastal regions of II CTZ, meanwhile, the US 1st Cavalry Division and the ROK forces in the early months of 1967 scored notable successes in their mission of driving enemy main force units away from population centers. Operating in Binh Dinh Province in the northern part of the II CTZ, the 1st Cavalry Division conducted Operations THAYER II and PERSHING against elements of an NVA division. After a series of defeats, the enemy withdrew the bulk of his main force units into the mountains.

ROK forces at the same time had enjoyed comparable success. In Operation OH JAC KYO, the two ROK divisions linked up their separate TAORs and took over responsibility for the entire coastal region from Than Rang to a point 40 km north of Qui Nhon. Measuring about 60 km from north to south and 25 km from east to west, this area contained about 126,000 people. Following the linkup of their two divisions, the ROKs pushed ahead with operations designed to destroy enemy forces within the area of operations, to open Highway 1, and to deny the area to the enemy as a source of manpower and supplies.

The US 4th Infantry Division, meanwhile, was carrying the fight to enemy main force units in the Central Plateau area of II CTZ near the Cambodian border. On 1 January, the division jumped off in Operation SAM HOUSTON, a search and destroy and border surveillance operation aimed at two NVA divisions with an estimated combined strength of 9,300. During January, the US division did not encounter major enemy forces, but opposition stiffened during February and March. The major engagement of the operation occurred on 22 March, when one US battalion engaged an estimated enemy battalion near the Cambodian border. SAM HOUSTON ended on 5 April. Friendly casualties totaled 172 killed and 767 wounded; 733 enemy bodies were counted. In support of friendly ground troops, USAF pilots had flown 2,184 tactical and 213 ARC LIGHT sorties.9

9. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 80-67, 6 Apr 67, p. 1.

The Enemy Counterblows

Under the pressure of General Westmoreland's general offensive, the enemy reacted by taking actions apparently designed to relieve the pressure on his units throughout South Vietnam by compelling the redeployment of US and FWMA forces. Whether by accident or design, the enemy achieved precisely this result by massing forces along the DMZ and launching attacks against positions of the III MAF. Since the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces back across the DMZ in September 1966 following the heavy defeat inflicted upon them by the Marines in Operation HASTINGS, the area had become relatively quiet. Marine troop dispositions, however, remained oriented northward, in preparation for a renewal of the attack by the North Vietnamese forces massed north of the border. No fewer than 6 of the III MAF's 19 maneuver battalions remained deployed just south of the DMZ. The Marines also manned four artillery bases in the same area -- Camp Carroll, Cam Lo, Con Thien, and Gio Linh. As a result, Marine strength elsewhere in I CTZ became spread dangerously thin, for sizable enemy forces possessed the capability to attack not only across the DMZ but by flanking actions from Laos to Khe Sanh, or through the A Shau and Ba Long Valleys, and in the southern part of I CTZ. Enemy guerrillas were also a constant threat to poorly defended South Vietnamese villages and hamlets in the zone.

During January and February, the enemy stepped up guerrilla activity in the coastal plain, while the regular North Vietnamese forces built up supply points in North Vietnam, Laos, and the DMZ and generally improved their readiness to support offensive operations in South Vietnam.

In late February, large-scale combat erupted once again along the DMZ. It was the Marines, however, who fired the first rounds. On 22 February, President Johnson, at the same meeting at which he approved RT 54, authorized employment of land artillery and naval gunfire against NVN weapons firing on friendly forces from positions north of the demarcation line when necessary to insure preservation of US lives and equipment.[10]

10. (TS) Msgs, JCS 1422-67 and JCS 6957 to CINCPAC, 22 and 23 Feb 67.

Acting under the newly granted authorization, COMUSMACV, on 25 February, authorized CG, III MAF, to fire on military targets in the north of the DMZ. The purpose was to augment air strikes during periods of reduced visibility, to disrupt enemy lines of communication in the DMZ, and to protect long-range aerial reconnaissance by attacking suspected anti-aircraft positions. Beginning on 25 February and continuing for four days, Marine artillerists fired 2,171 rounds north of the demarcation line.

The enemy reacted sharply. On nine occasions during March, he attacked Marine artillery positions with rockets and mortars. The enemy also launched a two-battalion infantry assault against these positions, but the attack was intercepted by the Marines and thrown back with heavy losses. A total of 541 enemy bodies were counted in the area around Camp Carroll, Cam Lo, Con Thien and Gio Linh.[11]

Reinforcement of I CTZ

Intelligence reports, meanwhile, began to reveal a major enemy buildup in southern North Vietnam and areas of Laos bordering on the northwest corner of South Vietnam. Marine intelligence officers estimated enemy troop strength in and around the DMZ at 20,560, an increase since June 1966 of 3,780. Of particular concern was a major buildup in the A Shau Valley leading across the border from Laos toward Hue. General Westmoreland viewed these activities as preliminary to a major enemy offensive aimed at seizing the northern provinces of South Vietnam.

By 7 April, General Westmoreland was convinced that this enemy offensive was imminent. Accordingly, he put into effect Contingency Plan NORTH CAROLINA. This plan provided for creation of a division-size provisional organization, Task Force OREGON, to take over the Chu Lai area of I CTZ, thereby relieving Marine units for deployment to the threatened areas.

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11. (S-GP 2) FMF-PAC, Operations of U.S. Marine Forces Vietnam, April 67, pp. 17-21, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67. This monograph contains a summary of Marine operations during the period of July 1966-April 1967.

In planning the reinforcement of I CTZ by Task Force OREGON, Westmoreland took pains to disturb operations elsewhere as little as possible. He recognized, however, that there would be some lessening of the tempo of combat operations in II, III and IV CTZs. The most severe impact of the deployment was felt in II CTZ, where I FFORCEV was deprived of its reserve, a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division.[12]

Within a week, COMUSMACV concluded that additional reinforcement of I CTZ was necessary. On 12 April, he informed CINCPAC that he doubted whether the redeployments already set in motion would be "enough to decisively reverse the present trend," but that further redeployments of forces under his command were not feasible. He recommended, therefore, that the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, based on Okinawa and constituting part of the PACOM reserve, reinforce III MAF as soon as possible, and that plans be made to keep it in the RVN at least until September.[13]

On 13 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after consulting CINCPAC, recommended to Secretary McNamara that he approve General Westmoreland's request. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended specifically that the two BLTs of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade be positioned off the South Vietnamese coast, to be committed when and as required by General Westmoreland. The third BLT was to remain on Okinawa in a "readiness status of 15 days for embarkation" at his request. Mr. McNamara approved the JCS request on 15 April.[14]

The enemy attempted to launch his long-awaited assault in the area of the DMZ in late April. As later reconstructed by the Marines, the immediate enemy objective appeared to be the Khe Sanh combat base located near the western end of the DMZ. The enemy plan apparently called first for isolating the battlefield by launching mortar attacks on Marine artillery bases at Dong Ha, Gio Linh, Con Thien and Camp Carroll and by using demolitions to cut Route 9. By

12. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 7 Apr 67, JCS IN 53337.
13. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 3474 to CINCPAC, 12 Apr 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 67.
14. (S-GP 4) JCSM-208-67 to SecDef, 14 Apr 67 (derived from JCS 2472/45); (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2843 to CINCPAC, 15 Apr 67; JMF 911/377 (14 Apr 67).

cutting Route 9, the enemy would deny Khe Sanh overland assistance A diversionary attack would then be launched at Lang Vei Special Forces Camp four miles west of Khe Sanh, to be followed by the main assault on Khe Sanh.

On 27 and 28 April, the enemy carried out the fire support and diversionary phases of the plan apparently on schedule. The main assault, however, had been triggered prematurely when a Marine patrol encountered enemy forces northwest of Khe Sanh on 24 April. It had soon become apparent that this was no skirmish between patrols but that large hostile forces were nearby. The Marines quickly airlifted three battalions into the area and assaulted the enemy on Hills 881, 881S, and 881N. After much hard fighting, the Marines gained the heights of the three hills by 3 May. The hills were fortified by the Marines and became key defensive positions when the enemy launched a much larger and more determined assault at Khe Sanh the following year.[15] Undeterred by the defeat at Khe Sanh, the enemy assaulted Con Thien with two battalions on 8 May but was again repulsed with heavy losses. Marine casualties in the Khe Sanh and Con Thien actions totaled 199 KIA and 535 WIA. The enemy left 1,137 bodies on the field.

The enemy, meanwhile, had been building up his artillery force in and north of the DMZ, and had intensified his fire on friendly forces. On 5 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to conduct military operations in the DMZ south of the demarcation line.[16]

With this authority, General Westmoreland directed the III MAF to invade the DMZ south of the demarcation line for the purpose of destroying enemy troops, equipment, and positions and to evacuate some 10,000 civilians living in the buffer zone. The III MAF, together with units of the ARVN, conducted these operations between 18 and 28 May, under the nicknames HICKORY, BEAU CHARGER, BELT TIGHT and LAMSON 54. Five Marine and five ARVN battalions took part. The attacking troops defeated dug-in enemy forces in a series of engagements, resulting in the temporary disruption of the enemy command organizations in the DMZ area, the destruction of many well-developed bunker complexes and

15. See Ch. 48 below.
16. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4549 to CINCPAC, 5 May 67.

artillery positions, the capture or destruction of large quantities of explosives and supplies, and the death of 787 enemy troops. Casualties suffered by friendly forces totaled 163 KIA and 1,012 WIA.[17]

General Westmoreland Requests Additional Forces

By the end of May, enemy efforts to invade the northern provinces of South Vietnam had been repulsed, at least for the time being. But the enemy, although thwarted in the north, had contributed to the disruption of offensive operations of free world forces elsewhere in South Vietnam. The redeployments made to reinforce positions on the DMZ had deprived commanders of troops urgently needed to fulfill their missions. Actually, even before this diversion of forces had taken place, the general offensive had bogged down. Forces available were simply not adequate to the task at hand. Major operations such as CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY had required the massing of from 25 to 30 battalions, which could not be spared from other tasks such as providing security for populated areas and LOCs. The result was that combat operations against enemy main forces and bases could not be sustained. The forces available were not even sufficient to maintain the neutralization of the Iron Triangle and War Zone C. Under the circumstances, the projected penetration of additional major enemy base areas such as War Zone D and the Do Xa was out of the question.[18]

To bring the capabilities of his forces into balance with their missions, General Westmoreland on 18 March submitted a request to Admiral Sharp for a reinforcement during FY 1968 of 2-1/3 divisions, two river assault squadrons, four tactical fighter squadrons, and one C-130 squadron. The minimum manpower required by such a reinforcement would be 80,576. These additional troops, General Westmoreland explained, constituted the "minimum essential force" necessary to exploit the successes of the current offensive and retain effective control of the areas being cleared of enemy main forces.

17. (S-GP 2) FMF-PAC, Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, May 1967, pp. 11-20, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67.
18. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 4 May 67, JCS IN 79155.

In making this request, COMUSMACV pointed out that he had originally estimated the US force requirements for CY 1967 at a total personnel strength of 555,741 and 124 maneuver battalions. Under Program Four, however, the personnel figure had been reduced to 470,366 and the number of maneuver battalions to 87. He had not entered a reclama for his original program, General Westmoreland explained, because of the "adverse piaster impact and the realities of Service capabilities." A subsequent reassessment, however, had "indicated clearly that the Program Four Force, although enabling us to gain the initiative, will not permit sustained operations of the scope and intensity required to avoid an unreasonably protracted war." He was now, in effect, asking for approximately the level of forces he had originally requested for CY 1967.

The "minimum essential force," said COMUSMACV, might not satisfy all future requirements. "Looking ahead, it is entirely possible that /a need for/ additional forces, over and above the immediate requirements for 2 1/3 divisions will materialize." Current planning suggested an "optimum" reinforcement of 4-2/3 divisions, 10 tactical fighter squadrons and the full mobile riverine force. Personnel requirements for the optimum reinforcement would be 199,017. Added to the 470,366 personnel authorized under Program Four, the total US force would be 678,248.[19]

19. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 180403Z Mar 67, JCS IN 75713, JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67) sec 1. The strength for the minimum essential and optimum forces stated in this message were 78,433 and 201,250. The figures given in the text were adjustments submitted in (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 28 Mar 67, JCS IN 93855. Supplemental Authorization had caused the Program 4 force level to rise to 479,231 by this date.

Chapter 43

THE DEBATE OVER ESCALATION

General Westmoreland's request for additional forces reached Washington at a time when dissatisfaction with the course of the war was growing in some quarters in the government -- dissatisfaction extending to the strategies governing operations in both North and South Vietnam. Introduced into this atmosphere, the request stirred the opponents of existing policy into positions of opposition not only to the specific manpower request but also to the current pattern of air operations against NVN. The result was a policy debate which was not resolved until July, when President Johnson finally decided both questions.

The JCS Views on Westmoreland's Request

The opening round in this policy debate was fired by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They began their consideration of COMUSMACV's request on 22 March, when General Wheeler directed the Joint Staff, with the assistance of the Services, to make a thorough analysis of it. The Joint Staff was to develop two separate cases, one assuming a Reserve call-up and the other assuming that Reserves would not be called. In an implementing directive issued three days later, the Vice Director, Joint Staff, added a new element to the study by calling for an updated "concept for the conduct of the war," if needed to validate the varied force requirements.[1]

1. (TS-GP 3) CM-2192-67 to D/JS, 22 Mar 67; (TS-GP 3) DJSM-374-67 to OpsDeps, 25 Mar 67; JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67) sec 1. In this case, the CJCS initiated JCS action on the basis of an information copy of COMUSMACV's request to CINCPAC. CINCPAC recommended to the JCS approval of COMUSMACV's request on 31 March 1967. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 310825Z Mar 67, JCS IN 10326.

The J-3 in its report submitted on 13 April recommended approval not only of General Westmoreland's immediate request for reinforcements in FY 1968, but also recommended that preparation be made to provide the optimum force. Provision of forces of this magnitude, J-3 maintained, was necessary to "hasten the successful conclusion of the war in Southeast Asia." At the present levels, there were inadequate forces to accomplish the two basic military objectives; defeat of the enemy main force units, and provision of the security necessary for successful revolutionary development -- which, in turn, would permit the GVN to extend the area under its control. To achieve these objectives, "significantly greater military pressure, which is beyond the enemy's capability to accommodate or counter, must be imposed on the enemy in NVN and SVN in as short a time as possible."

To meet both immediate and ultimate force goals, the J-3 recommended a Reserve call-up and involuntary extension of terms of service as the only practical procedure. Without these actions, the deployment of the minimum essential force could not be completed until November 1969; the buildup of the optimum force could not be completed until July 1972. With the recommended personnel actions, the minimum essential force would be in place by the end of FY 1968; the optimum force would be deployed by July 1969.

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

When the Joint Chiefs of Staff took up the J-3 report on 14 April, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, tabled a flimsy in which he objected to the report on more fundamental grounds. He challenged the basic premise that major force increases were needed.

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2. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2339/255-2, 13 Apr 67, JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67) sec 3.

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

The preferable strategy, General McConnell maintained, was to make "effective application of our superior air and sea power against North Vietnam's vulnerabilities," and thereby "cripple his capabilities to continue to support the war and . . . destroy his resolution to continue." This strategy would also "reduce the need to match . . . /the enemy/ in manpower, . . . a condition most favorable to him." In view of the deteriorating situation in I Corps, however, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, gave his approval to provision of the minimum essential force and agreed to support any Reserve call-up needed to provide it. His support for this action, General McConnell emphasized, was "conditioned on the recommendation for an immediate expanded air and naval campaign against North Vietnam . . . ."[3]

General McConnell's views were favorably received by his colleagues, and resulted on 19 April in agreement to revise JCS views generally in accord with his position. These views went forward to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 20 April. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended deployment of the minimum essential force, plus certain other air and naval units requested by CINCPAC, during FY 1968. The additional forces consisted of three USAF tactical fighter squadrons to be stationed in Thailand and an eight-inch gun cruiser and five destroyers for use in naval operations in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin. The units and approximate personnel strength recommended were as follows.

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3. (TS-GP 3) CSAFM-M-57-67 to JCS, 14 Apr 67, same file.

Unit	Approx. Strength	
Army		
1 division force	34,800	
1 armored cavalry regiment	4,100	
Support and augmentation	2,623	41,523
Marine Corps		
Augmentation III MAF	110	
1 div/wing team	43,723	43,833
Navy		
Mobile Riverine Afloat forces	2,074	
Surface forces (1 CA, 5DD)	2,564	
Support and augmentation	7,475	12,113
Air Force		
8 Tactical fighter squadrons	3,400	
1 CE squadron	600	
Support and augmentation	4,375	8,375
		105,844
Less PRACTICE NINE Force approved by SecDef 8 Apr 67		7,822
		98,022 [4]

4. The JCS recommended deployment of the Marine division/wing team in lieu of an Army division requested by CINCPAC. Deployment of the Army division rather than the Marine division/wing team would give a total force of 92,721. The JCS noted that the 7,822 spaces approved by SecDef on 9 April for PRACTICE NINE would apply against the forces recommended for FY 68. See Ch. 45 for discussion of PRACTICE NINE.

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

To complete this buildup by the end of FY 1968, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out, would be impossible under present military personnel policies and in the light of current worldwide commitments. They accordingly recommended a call-up of Reserves for a minimum of 24 months and involuntary extension of terms of service for 12 months. They also recommended that logistic support for the additional forces be provided by granting authority to reopen inactive installations in the CONUS and to draw the necessary equipment from sources in the following priority: CONUS depot assets and programmed production deliveries not committed to higher priority requirements; operational project stocks; Reserve components not scheduled for call-up; prepositioned equipment in Europe; nondeploying active units in the CONUS. An early decision on both the funding in addition to the FY 1968 budget and increases in end-year strength to support all aspects of the deployment of FY 1968 forces was also recommended. According to approximate calculations by the Services, the additional cost in FY 1968 for the Army, Navy and Marine Corps would be $2,207,000,000.[5]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also stated that, while the added forces "should provide an increased level of effort in both SVN and NVN, action must also be taken to reduce and obstruct the enemy capability to import the material support required to sustain his war effort."

5. The Air Force did not submit a cost figure. The required end FY 1968 strength increase, estimated by the Navy and Marine Corps was 133,303. The Air Force estimated it would not require a force increase; the Army did not submit a figure.

By way of further justification for the stepped-up operations and the force increases recommended, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted an updated "Military Strategy for the Conduct of the War in Southeast Asia," which they recommended that the Secretary of Defense "approve in principle." This strategy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff explained, was designed to provide for military action in pursuit of the national objective with respect to Vietnam: "to attain a stable and noncommunist government in South Vietnam." The "military contribution" to the attainment of this objective should be in the form of operations: 1) "against the VC/NVA forces in SVN while concurrently assisting the South Vietnamese government in their nation-building efforts"; 2) to "obstruct the flow of men and materials from NVN to SVN"; and 3) to "obstruct and reduce imports of war sustaining materials into North Vietnam."

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

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

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

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

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

To achieve "a," an integrated air and naval campaign should be conducted against military and war-sustaining target systems in all areas of North Vietnam and should include intensive interdiction and mining of ports and inland and coastal waters in order to disrupt military operations and obstruct the movement of men and materiel from North Vietnam into South Vietnam and Laos. To achieve "b," ground and supporting air operations should be conducted to destroy enemy main force units, base areas and safe havens, to deny him access to the population and food resources, and to block enemy invasion or infiltration

from cross-border sanctuary areas. To achieve "c," military operations should be conducted to destroy enemy guerrillas and infrastructure, to open lines of communication, to advise and train friendly military and paramilitary forces, and to protect those engaged in the Revolutionary Development Program. To achieve "d," US forces and bases in the Western Pacific and Thailand should be maintained and improved, and the capability to employ nuclear weapons should be maintained.

By including these recommendations on "strategy" and on "increased level of effort," the Joint Chiefs of Staff introduced into the debate over force levels at the outset not only the narrow question concerning operations over North Vietnam but also the broad question of the appropriate military policy and strategy to be pursued in the conduct of the war as a whole.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also explained to Mr. McNamara that both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC had indicated that there might later be a requirement for an additional 2-1/3 division equivalents and 5 more tactical fighter squadrons. An evaluation of these additions, together with an examination of the "ultimate requirement for forces needed to achieve a satisfactory conclusion of the war," would be supplied later.[6]

On 19 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to broaden the study to include all forces needed to deal successfully with foreseeable contingencies throughout the world. Approval of a Reserve call-up to provide COMUSMACV's minimum FY 1968 force would invite whatever popular displeasure a mobilization of Reserves would arouse. Having paid the political price, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reasoned, they might as well request a call-up large enough to provide all reasonable worldwide force requirements.

The following day, General Wheeler directed the Joint Staff to begin the necessary studies. In preparing them, the Chairman directed, the Joint Staff should not plan total mobilization of the World War II type, but should provide for the establishment of a training and production base which would ensure the capability to generate expeditiously the forces needed for expanded operations in Southeast Asia and at the same time to honor commitments to NATO. General Wheeler listed the following as

6. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-218-67 to SecDef, 20 Apr 67 (derived from JCS 2339/255-3, JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67) sec 4.

contingencies that might call for additional commitments of US forces: 1) provision of Soviet or other "volunteer" military units to North Vietnam; 2) an increase of tensions or even low-level military action between North and South Korea; 3) an increase in tensions in central Europe, perhaps centering around Berlin, to a degree that would force the United States to reinforce NATO; 4) overt military intervention by Communist China in the conflict in South Vietnam.[7]

From the outset disagreements among the Services and between the Services and the Joint Staff plagued the preparation of recommendations on force levels to meet worldwide contingencies. The initial effort, submitted by J-5 on 1 May, contained a calculation that the total force requirements to meet the goals established by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, would be 29 Army division force equivalents (DFE), 146 Air Force tactical fighter squadrons (TFS), 17 Navy attack carriers, and 5/4 Marine division/wing teams. Air Force planners entered a nonconcurrence to these force requirements. Repeating the arguments advanced during the debate over COMUSMACV's request for a minimum essential force, Air Force planners maintained that the tremendous costs of the proposed force increase could be avoided by removing restrictions on air and naval attacks on North Vietnam. The J-5 pointed out, however, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in their memorandum of 20 April, had recommended such intensified air and naval operations. Should such operations be carried out, the possibility of retaliatory actions around the world by Communist China and the Soviet Union would make an increase in force levels particularly necessary. On 3 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the J-5 report and the Air Force nonconcurrence and returned them to the Joint Staff and the Service planners for revision.[8]

The revised report, submitted on 11 May, adopted a different set of force goals and as a result recommended more modest force objectives than the ones contained in the initial paper. The desired military posture was now considered to be one that would provide forces with the capability to:

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7. (S-GP 3) CM-2255-67 to D/JS, 20 Apr 67, Att to JCS 2101/538-1, 22 Apr 67, JMF 372 (18 Mar 67).
8. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2101/538-3, 1 May 67; (C) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2101/538-3," 3 May 67, JMF 372 (18 Mar 67).

a. Prepare, deploy, and sustain FY 1968 forces to COMUSMACV and PACOM.

b. Restore and maintain NATO forces, NATO initial augmentation forces and pre-positioned stocks.

c. Provide a contingency/initiative force of three DFEs/10 TFSs size. This force, while available for use in any emergency, would primarily be for use in Southeast Asia.

d. Maintain a ready force of one DFE and three TFSs for minor contingencies.

Under existing tour-of-duty policies, the "contingency/initiative" force would have to be free of men who had returned from Vietnam within 25 months if the force were to be instantly available for deployment. Under this condition, attainment of the desired force posture would require 25-2/3 DFEs, 120 Air Force TFSs, and 5/4 Marine division/wing teams. To attain this force objective five Army and one Marine Reserve divisions would have to be called up.

The revised paper also called for a relaxation of restrictions on air and naval operations against North Vietnam. It did not, however, specify what specific restrictions should be removed nor what specific operations should be conducted.

These changes did not meet all the Air Force objections to the original report. Once again the Air Force entered a nonconcurrence on the same general grounds as before. It did not, however, rule out any increase in forces. At present, a buildup sufficient to achieve the capability to carry out the JSOP 69-76 strategy was justified, the Air Force maintained. If the Southeast Asia conflict became "an unduly protracted war of attrition due to continuation of constraints," then some add-ons to the JSOP levels might be required. Force levels acceptable to the Air Force were 21-2/3 DFEs, 105 TFs, 16 attack carriers, and 5/4 division/wings.

The Army also entered a nonconcurrence, objecting to the returnee-free element of the "contingency/initiative force" on the ground that it would impose unreasonable demands upon the force structure because any contingency for which it would be

required would be so grave as to justify waiving current tour policies.[9]

At a meeting on 12 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff adopted the Army view and decided not to recommend establishment of a "contingency/initiative force" free of recent returnees from Southeast Asia. As a result, the required Army force level dropped from 25-2/3 to 22-2/3 DFEs.

The Chief of Staff, Air Force, withdrew his nonconcurrence on 19 May and agreed to force levels of 22-2/3 DFEs and 120 TFSs for the Army and Air Force. General McConnell still maintained, however, that the Navy should have only 16 attack carriers rather than the 17 advocated by the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Rather than continue debate over this one ship, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to forward split views. On 20 May, they forwarded a memorandum containing these views to the Secretary of Defense. In addition to the recommended force levels, they called for a selective Reserve call-up and extension of tour of duty for 12 months, but did not specify the size of the call-up. They did, however, recommend provision of forces in the four categories proposed in the J-5 report: FY 1968 forces for PACOM and MACV; augmentation forces for NATO; a "contingency/initiative" force primarily for use in Southeast Asia; and a ready force for minor contingencies.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Mr. McNamara that the potential of the Services to equip these forces was fairly high, but, under present procedures, the required materiel posture would not be achieved by the Army until 1970 and by the Air Force until 1971. The Joint Chiefs of Staff accordingly recommended the delegation of increased authority to the Services for accelerated procurement, including authority to negotiate noncompetitive, cost-reimbursable contracts and to initiate procurement of necessary long lead-time materiel items.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also pointed out that they had "reservations concerning the ability of the United States /under present policies/ to (1) prosecute the war in Southeast Asia decisively, (2) respond to likely contingencies stemming from the war in Southeast Asia, and (3) meet other world-wide military commitments and contingencies." In Southeast Asia

9. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2101/538-4, 11 May 67; (S) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2101/538-4," 12 May 67, same file, sec 2.

"application of US power . . . incrementally and with restraint, has inhibited the effective exploitation of the superiority of US military forces and allowed the enemy to accommodate to the military measures taken." As a result, NVN was now fielding a force in South Vietnam consisting of 68 North Vietnamese and 85 Viet Cong infantry-type battalions and had massed at least three, and probably four, regular divisions near the DMZ. The North Vietnamese were becoming increasingly aggressive, and enemy supply lines, both into NVN and from North to South Vietnam remained open. The Joint Chiefs of Staff maintained that as the war in Southeast Asia dragged on and as US military capabilities increasingly became committed to it, the probability of Communist aggression elsewhere would be greater. An advance by North Vietnamese forces in Laos to the Mekong River, a flare-up in Korea, increased support by Thai Communist insurgents, pressure against Berlin, or subversion in North Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America could be expected.

With its present military posture the United States could not adequately respond to most of these contingencies. In March of FY 1968, the immediate combat-ready strategic reserve would consist of 1-2/3 Army divisions, 2 Marine division/wing teams, nonforward-deployed Navy forces, and 5 Air Force TFSs -- all with little or no sustaining capability.

Turning to the measures needed to bring the war in Southeast Asia to a successful conclusion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a relaxation of the restrictions and restraints governing operations against North Vietnam. They requested authority to strike 23 additional targets: 8 ports and port approaches, 5 airfields, 1 railroad/highway bridge, and 9 military complexes. They also recommended changes in ROLLING THUNDER operating rules to: delete the 10-nm radius Prohibited Area around Hanoi; reduce the Hanoi Restricted Area from 30 to 10 nm; reduce the Haiphong Restricted Area from 10 to 4 nm; and move the southern boundary of the Special Coastal Armed Reconnaissance Area from 20° 42' N to 20° 48' N.[10]

On the same day, in a separate memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff elaborated on the need for intensified interdiction efforts in North Vietnam. In this communication, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the

10. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-288-67 to SecDef, 20 May 67 (derived from JCS 2101/538-5), JMF 372 (18 Mar 67) sec 3.

North Vietnamese had increased imports from 800,000 metric tons in 1964 to more than 1,365,000 metric tons in 1966. There was also a real danger that the Soviet Union might introduce new weapons into the country. These weapons could include improved antiaircraft and surface-to-air missiles, guided missile patrol boats, surface-to-surface missiles, and a variety of artillery and direct fire weapons. They could be imported from the Soviet Union by rail across China, by air, or by sea. To date, the major volume of military supplies had entered by sea through the port of Haiphong, which, along with Hanoi, comprised the major logistic base area in North Vietnam.

To impede the flow of war materials into NVN, the Hanoi/Haiphong base should be neutralized, an operation which could be accomplished by direct attack or, preferably, by cutting its lines of communication, thus minimizing civilian casualties. Essential to such an interdiction would be the denial of Haiphong port to shipping. The Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed to accomplish this by "shouldering out" foreign shipping by a series of air attacks starting at the periphery of the port area and gradually moving closer to the center; these attacks would be followed by mining of the harbor and its approaches.

At the same time intensive attacks should be launched against the road, rail, air, and remaining sea routes into NVN, so that no part of the North Vietnamese LOC system would be able to function freely. Of particular importance to the success of such a campaign would be the interdiction of the northeast railroad to China, the ports of Cam Pha and Hon Gai, and the eight major operational air fields, only three of which were currently authorized for attack.

Under current authorizations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out, the pattern of attacks on Haiphong had begun with strikes on two thermal power plants, a cement plant and restrikes on petroleum and storage facilities. To continue the pattern they now proposed "sequential and continuing attacks" as follows:

a. Haiphong RR Yds W; Area C (Shipyard #1), Area D (Naval Base), Target 70, Haiphong port.

b. Haiphong RR Yd/Shops; Area A (Shipyard #1), Area F (Shipyard #2), and Area G (Shipyard North), Target 70, Haiphong port.

c. Target 70, Haiphong port (all elements) and mining of the harbor . . . .

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that Russian ships would be endangered by these operations, but they did not expect that an "active confrontation" with the Soviet Union would result. They believed Soviet reaction would be limited to diplomatic protests and possible suspension of current diplomatic negotiations such as the ones on the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the proposed freeze on antiballistic missile and intercontinental ballistic missile deployment.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to Secretary McNamara that "as a matter of urgency" the program they had outlined be authorized. Attacks should begin soon in order to take advantage of the favorable May-September weather season. They requested that Mr. McNamara bring their views to the attention of the President.[11]

Free World Countries as Sources of Additional Forces

In the course of examining the force level, the Joint Staff had considered but rejected third countries as sources of significant additional forces. General Wheeler presented this conclusion to Secretary McNamara on 24 May. The "present world political climate," he explained, made additional forces difficult to obtain, and such forces as were being made available would, in most cases, "supplement but not substitute" for US force deployments.[12]

At this time, there were only three firm offers of additional forces: the Australian offer of December 1966 of a light bomber squadron, a guided-missile destroyer, and a small reinforcement to ground forces already in South Vietnam; a New Zealand offer of a rifle company, made on 7 March; and a Thai offer of an RCT made on 30 December 1966. The New Zealand offer, like the one from Australia, resulted from the affirmation of public support for a policy of active participation in the Vietnamese war. The Thai offer stemmed from the

11. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-286-67 to SecDef, 20 May 67 (derived from JCS 2472/50-2), JMF 912/432 (23 Feb 67).
12. (TS-GP 3) CM-2377-67 to SecDef, 24 May 67, Att to JCS 2472/56-2, JMF 907/372 (26 Apr 67).

realization that Thailand had been marked as the next target of the Communists, and reflected the policy of the government to resist Communist aggression when it was still at a distance from Thailand.[13]

The Australian and New Zealand forces presented no major problems. Neither government expected a quid pro quo in return for the provision of forces. They expected only normal logistic support from US sources. The Thais, on the other hand, requested and received US support for their force in addition to the level of support already being provided the Thai armed forces by the United States under MAP. The Department of Defense authorized Service funding support for equipment and facilities used by the unit in South Vietnam, and for overseas allowances. Agreements were similar to those entered into to support the original Korean forces sent to South Vietnam. The size and composition of the Thai forces were worked out by US and Thai officers in Bangkok and given final approval by MACV at a conference in Saigon on 15 March. As finally agreed, the TO&E provided for a 2,207-man RCT consisting of four rifle companies, a field artillery battery, and supporting elements.[14]

Counterproposals by OSD - The DPM of 19 May

General Westmoreland's request for reinforcements, and persistent and widespread doubts among civilian officials as to value of operations against NVN, resulted in a DPM. The DPM, prepared by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Mr. McNaughton, included a wide-ranging analysis of policy and strategy as well as the question of reinforcements.

The first rough draft of this document was completed on 19 May, the day before the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded their views on mobilization to meet worldwide dangers and on air and naval operations against North Vietnam. The JCS views recommending approval of General Westmoreland's request for a "minimum essential force," however, had been in the hands of the Office of the Secretary of Defense for nearly a month.

13. (S) Msg, Wellington 1735 to State, 7 Mar 67. (U) Msg, Bangkok 8316 to State, 4 Jan 67, quoted in (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, p. 266.

14. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 248-250, 253-255, 266-268.

Assistant Secretary McNaughton put forward two alternate courses of action, A and B, which he proceeded to evaluate according to his view of US interests and objectives in Asia. In expounding his view, Mr. McNaughton equivocated on the fundamental question of the danger of Chinese Communist expansionism.

> There is an honest difference of opinion as to whether China as a major power . . . threatens to undercut our importance and effectiveness in the world and, . . . to organize the peoples and resources of all Asia against us. US policy is based upon a belief that China or a Chinese coalition (mainly with Japan) might do this and that the potential weight of such a coalition could throw us on the defensive and threaten our security. At the same time, we must note that most US Asian experts believe that China's history, current troubles, interests and capabilities do not make her a significant military threat outside certain fairly limited geographical areas.

Mr. McNaughton also questioned whether US intervention in South Vietnam had been intended to contain China. "To the extent that our original intervention and our existing actions were motivated by the perceived need to draw the line against Chinese expansionism, our objective has already been attained . . . ." But this was not our minimum objective, or commitment in Vietnam. "Our commitment," he said, "is only to see that the peoples of South Vietnam are permitted to determine their own future. This commitment ceases if the country ceases to help itself."

On the basis of this view of US interests and objectives, Mr. McNaughton proceeded to analyze the two military courses of action. Course A, which he claimed represented the military point of view, was to grant General Westmoreland's request for 200,000 additional troops and intensify military operations outside SVN, especially against NVN. The 200,000-man reinforcement would be furnished in two equal installments in FY 1968 and FY 1969. There would probably be requests for further force increases later to fulfill the "JCS ultimate requirement for Vietnam and associated world-wide contingencies." Accompanying the force buildup would be "greatly intensified military actions outside South Vietnam -- including Laos and Cambodia but particularly against the North."

Course B was to limit force increases to no more than 30,000 men, to avoid extending the conflict beyond the borders of SVN, and to limit bombing of North Vietnam to the area south of the 20th Parallel.

Turning to an analysis of the two courses of action, Mr. McNaughton opted for "B." Proponents of "A," he contended, all believed that large deployments were necessary to end the war quickly, but none of them believed they were necessary to avoid defeat and few believed they were required to "do the military job in due course." There were serious drawbacks to "A." The US buildup would lead to offsetting counter-buildup by the enemy, and even if there was no counter-buildup the added US forces were unlikely to "make a meaningful military difference," because the enemy could make pacification very difficult "without regard to the size of US forces." At home, the extended enlistments and Reserve call-ups would lead to divisive debate and, if the force buildup was carried out, to irresistible pressure for expanding the war to Cambodia and Laos and other areas outside SVN. Turning to the expanded bombing of North Vietnam provided by "A," Mr. McNaughton contended it would fail because the North Vietnamese would simply accept the punishment inflicted and relocate resources to maintain the flow of men and materiel to the South. Even if this estimate proved wrong and extended attacks were militarily effective, they should not be undertaken because of the risk of Soviet retaliation and the adverse public reaction at home and abroad.

Course "B," the Assistant Secretary maintained, was predicated on the existence of a military stalemate which could not be broken by large additional deployments. It called for continued military pressure combined with pacification efforts to improve the negotiating environment. These measures would be accompanied by intensified diplomatic efforts with "a view to finding a compromise involving, inter alia, a role in the South for members of the VC."[15]

15. (TS-GP 1) Draft Memorandum for the Pres, "Future Actions in Vietnam," 19 May 67, Encl to JCS 2472/72, 22 May 67, JMF 911/300 (19 May 67).

JCS and Service Views of the DPM and Related Issues

Secretary McNamara apparently discussed the DPM with President Johnson informally at some time prior to 22 May and received an unfavorable reaction. At any rate, Mr. McNamara evidently believed that the issues raised in the DPM required further study. On 20 May he asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of the Air Force and Navy, and the Director of Central Intelligence to analyze alternative programs for the bombing of North Vietnam: 1) concentrate on LOCs in the panhandle area roughly south of 20°; 2) terminate bombing of fixed targets not directly associated with LOCs in the northeast around Hanoi and Haiphong and expand armed reconnaissance by authorizing strikes on all lines of communications except within eight-mile radii of Hanoi and Haiphong.[16]

Before he received a reply to this request, on 22 May the Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their views on the draft DPM. The Joint Chiefs of Staff replied to this latter request on 1 June. They stated that their views had been misrepresented in the DPM. "The combination of force levels, deployments, and military courses of action do not accurately reflect the positions or recommendations of COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, or the Joint Chiefs of Staff." Their views were contained in their memorandums of 20 April and 20 May.

Addressing themselves to Mr. McNaughton's preferred Course B, the Joint Chiefs of Staff found its prescription for the war in the South deficient in that it recommended a force structure that would not permit an early end to the war on acceptable terms, would provide little capability for initiative action, would downgrade the Revolutionary Development program, and would result in abandoning the Delta to the Viet Cong.

With respect to the Course B strategy for the campaign against NVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that it was based on the fallacious "funnel" theory that all supplies flowing from North to South Vietnam must pass through the

16. (TS-GP 1) Interv, Kenneth W. Condit with BGEN Robert N. Ginsburgh, USAF, CSG, 24 Jan 69; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al, 20 May 67, Att to JCS 2472/71, 22 May 67, JMF 912/323 (20 May 67) sec 1. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2472/72, 22 May 67, JMF 911/300 (19 May 67).

narrow portion of North Vietnam south of 20° N. In fact, the communists supplied their forces in South Vietnam from all sides. To restrict bombing to the area south of 20° N would not permit effective interdiction. It would relieve North Vietnam of military pressure; it would be looked upon as a sign of weakness on the part of the United States; and it would strengthen the resolve of the enemy to continue the war.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also disagreed with the statement of objectives in the DPM. To limit US objectives merely to guaranteeing the right of self-determination to RVN, was not only inconsistent with current US policy and objectives, as expressed in NSAM 288 and numerous public statements, but failed "to appreciate the full implications for the Free World of failure to achieve a successful resolution of the conflict in Southeast Asia." Further, it would "undermine and no longer provide complete rationale for our presence in South Vietnam," and might render untenable the positions of the more than 35 nations supporting the Republic of Vietnam.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff accordingly recommended that:

a. The DPM NOT be sent.

b. The US national objective as expressed in NSAM 288 be maintained, and the national policy and objectives for Vietnam as publicly stated by US officials be reaffirmed.

c. The military objective, concept, and strategy for the conduct of the war as stated in JCSM-218-67 /JCS views of 20 April on COMUSMACV's 'minimum essential force'/ be approved by the Secretary of Defense.17

On 2 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued the exposition of their views on military strategy by forwarding to Mr. McNamara their reply to his 20 May request for an analysis of alternate strategies for air operations against North Vietnam. After examining the Secretary's two alternatives and a third one of their own, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the strategy they had recommended in their two memorandums of 20 May represented "the most effective war to successfully prosecute the air and naval campaign against North Vietnam."

17. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-307-67 to SecDef, 1 Jun 67, Encl to JCS 2472/72-2, 29 May 67, JMF 911/300 (19 May 67).

The Joint Chiefs of Staff judged Alternative I, which would in effect restrict bombing to the area south of 20° N, to be undesirable because it 1) would not appreciably reduce the flow of men and materiel to the south, 2) would reduce the pressure on the North Vietnamese economy and logistic system, 3) would not appreciably reduce US losses, and 4) would be judged as evidence of weakening US resolve to press on with the war.

Alternative II, if executed without attacking ports, the Joint Chiefs of Staff found also to be undesirable. Although attacks on airfields and land LOCs to China could be carried out, failure to close the ports would allow the enemy to meet his import requirements by sea. Extending Alternative II to include attacks on the ports would reduce the level of enemy imports, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded, but would still be inadequate because it did not exert military pressures simultaneously on North Vietnamese military and industrial installations.

To Mr. McNamara's two alternatives, the Joint Chiefs of Staff added Alternative III, which was also different from the proposal made in their memorandums of 20 May. The new plan called for attacks everywhere in North Vietnam except within eight nm of the center of Hanoi and two nm of the center of Haiphong. Mining of deep-water approaches to ports north of 20° N or in waters contiguous to commercial wharves would also be prohibited. This plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded, would allow the desired coordinated air campaign, but it would not accomplish the essential task of restricting imports into NVN.

Comparing the alternatives, the Joint Chiefs of Staff rated them in the following order: 1) the JCS plan of 20 May; 2) Alternative II, including ports; 3) Alternative III; 4) the status quo; 5) Alternative II, excluding ports; 6) Alternative I.[18]

The Secretary of the Air Force, Mr. Harold Brown, in his reply to Mr. McNamara's request for an evaluation of two alternatives, formed many of the same judgments as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but reached a different conclusion. He agreed with the

18. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-312-67 to SecDef, 2 Jun 67 (derived from JCS 2472/71-3), JMF 912/323 (20 May 67) sec 1. For the bombing program then in progress, see Ch. 41.

Joint Chiefs of Staff adverse evaluation of Alternative I and Alternative II without attacks on ports. He also agreed with their views on the military aspects of closing the ports, but he rejected such a move because of the political risks involved. He concluded that a continuation of the present program, modified to permit striking LOCs within eight nm of Hanoi and Haiphong and adding a few more targets such as the Red River Bridge at Hanoi, represented the optimum course.[19]

In his reply on 2 June, the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Paul Nitze, differed from Mr. Brown and the Joint Chiefs of Staff by concluding that Alternative I was preferable to both versions of Alternative II. Set up either to exclude or include bombing attacks on the ports (but not mining), the latter alternative was considered by Mr. Nitze to be prohibitively expensive in terms of the number of aircraft that he believed would be lost. The first alternative, on the other hand, would result in a substantially smaller loss of aircraft and would tend to "leave the enemy with fewer options for maintaining supply flow to SVN than does the concentration of bombing in areas farther removed from the area of supply consumption."[20]

The Revised DPM of 12 June

With all these views in hand, Assistant Secretary McNaughton on 12 June produced a new DPM. This document, which was limited to consideration of military actions against NVN, described three alternatives which had gained some support:

A. Intensified attack on the Hanoi-Haiphong logistic base, recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

B. Emphasis on infiltration routes south of 20° N, recommended by Secretaries McNamara, Vance, and Nitze.

C. Extension of the present program, recommended by Secretary Brown.

19. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecAF to SecDef, 3 Jun 67, Att to JCS 2472/71-4, 14 Jun 67, same file, same sec.
20. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecN to SecDef, "Alternative Bombing Programs in North Vietnam," 2 Jun 67, Att to JCS 2472/85, 6 Jun 67, same file, sec 2.

In defending the recommendation to pursue course B, Mr. McNaughton analyzed the three courses in terms of the objectives of operations against North Vietnam: 1) to raise morale of the South Vietnamese and the US troops in action in South Vietnam; 2) to add to the pressure on Hanoi to end the war; and 3) to reduce the amount and increase the cost of infiltration from NVN to South Vietnam. Measuring course A by these three criteria, he stated that, although the bombing of NVN had raised morale in the South, it did not follow that a significant escalation of bombing would further improve morale. With respect to increasing pressure on Hanoi, Mr. McNaughton believed that the North Vietnamese had "written off" all assets and lives that might be destroyed by US military actions short of occupation or annihilation. So far as interdiction was concerned, Mr. McNaughton claimed that enemy forces in South Vietnam required only 25 tons of supplies per day from NVN, a figure representing less than .2 percent of North Vietnamese import capability of 14,000 tons per day and .5 percent of the approximately 5,300 tons per day actually imported.

It followed, the Assistant Secretary contended, that "neither Alternative A nor any other combination of actions against the North, short of destruction of the regime or occupation of North Vietnamese territory will . . . reduce the flow of men and material below the relatively small amount needed by enemy forces to continue the war in the South." Even if all these arguments proved wrong, the danger of Soviet or Chinese counteractions and the adverse effect on US and world opinion rendered Course A unacceptable. Alternative C, he contended, possessed the same weaknesses as Alternative A.

Turning to Alternative B, Mr. McNaughton conceded that it "probably would not effectively stop, or even substantially reduce," the infiltration of materiel from the North, and it "might cause serious psychological problems among the men, officers, and commanders on our side." Alternative B would, however, be popular in the United States and around the world. It would also result in fewer aircraft and pilot losses, assuming no shift of air defenses by the enemy. Whether there would or would not be such a shift was "not clear."

The primary argument for Alternative B, said Mr. McNaughton, was that it recognized that "the outcome of the war hinges on what happens in the South, that neither military defeat nor military victory is in the cards there no matter which alternative is chosen against the North." It was therefore "designed to

improve the negotiating environment by combining continued progress in the South . . . with a restrained program against the North."[21]

Four days later, on 16 June, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, was hastily called to the White House to brief the President on the bombing of NVN. General Wheeler spoke from a talking paper recently prepared by the Joint Staff which forcefully supported the pattern of operations recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 20 May. These operations, according to the paper, were the most effective way to prosecute the air and naval campaign against North Vietnam and could possibly be decisive. The operations would bring increasing pressure to bear on the enemy by: depriving him of critical sanctuary areas for governmental, industrial, and military support operations; creating popular unrest by forcing diversion of resources from civilian to military uses; forcing allocation of manpower to reconstruction and dispersal programs; and raising the cost of support from Communist China and the Soviet Union.

The operations recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff would also create a level of interdiction which, if not decisive, could, when combined with action in South Vietnam, cause the enemy to "recalculate his profit and loss." Whether or not interdiction could reduce North Vietnamese imports to critical levels could not be determined from the insufficient and inaccurate data available, but the strenuous efforts by the North Vietnamese to resupply during Tet suggested that the NVN supply capabilities were not greatly in excess of requirements.

With regard to the criticisms made by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) in the DPM of 12 June, the Joint Staff argued that military pressure could reduce the will of NVN to continue the war: "Anyone who says that 'pain only increases the will to fight' can only speak from ignorance of the battlefield." By way of proof, the paper cited a French source to the effect that the bombing was causing a deterioration of morale in Hanoi so serious as to constitute a definite breakdown in order. It also cited an interview with a North Vietnamese interrogatee who stated that the people were beginning to doubt seriously the Hanoi regime's claims of inevitable victory.

21. (TS) Draft Memo for Pres, "Alternative Military Actions Against North Vietnam," 12 Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 67.

Citing an evaluation by the CIA, the Joint Staff maintained that there was little danger of Soviet retaliation outside Vietnam for the operations proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. If the Soviets did, in fact, apply such pressures, then Secretary Brown's proposal for a refinement of the present bombing program could be adopted. So far as the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) bombing proposal was concerned, however, it was totally lacking in military or political merit.[22]

The Presidential Decisions

The policy debate on force levels and operations against North Vietnam, which had dragged on since 18 March, moved swiftly to a conclusion following a visit by Mr. McNamara, General Wheeler, and Under Secretary of State Katzenbach to South Vietnam in early July. At a briefing in Saigon on the 11th, Mr. McNamara informed General Westmoreland there would be no Reserve call-up; however, the Administration did want to meet his requirement for additional troops but at the minimum cost in personnel spaces.

The COMUSMACV staff had worked up such an approach as an alternative to the "minimum essential force" originally requested on 18 March and now presented it. Consisting of five "packages," this plan proposed an addition of 16 maneuver battalions and various supporting units to the forces already authorized for MACV under Program 4 at a total personnel cost of 42,000 spaces. This had been achieved by a vigorous pruning of existing MACV organizations to eliminate unnecessary spaces and by counting the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade as part of the permanent MACV forces but not counting its personnel spaces against the MACV total. This unit, which was the PACOM reserve, had already been deployed to Vietnam but was still carried as part of the PACOM, rather than the MACV, force structure. When added to the forces already in Vietnam or authorized for movement under Program 4, these proposals would bring total strength of MACV to 525,000.[23]

For the benefit of the visiting dignitaries there was also a briefing on the operations against North Vietnam, given by the commanders responsible for conducting them, Admiral

22. (S) TP "Alternative Military Actions Against North Vietnam," 16 Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67.
23. (S) CM-2499-67 to JCS, 12 Jul 67, JMF 911/374 (12 Jul 67) sec 1.

Sharp, Lieutenant General William Momyer, Commanding General, Seventh Air Force, and Vice Admiral John Hyland, Commander, Seventh Fleet. All the briefers recommended strongly that air operations not only be continued but be expanded. The enemy was now beginning to feel the full effects of the air campaign and was being hurt, they contended. The United States should intensify the pressure during the next few months of good weather to bring about a change in the attitude of the enemy. General Momyer, in a briefing which subsequently assumed particular importance, pointed out in some detail how Seventh Air Force had successfully dealt with enemy air defenses and seriously disrupted traffic on the important Northeast Railroad to China.[24]

Upon returning to Washington, Secretary McNamara, General Wheeler, and Under Secretary Katzenbach were called to the White House to report on their trip. Also present were Secretary Rusk, Director of Central Intelligence Helms, General Taylor, and Mr. Rostow, Mr. Christian and Mr. Komer of the White House staff. In the discussion, it was brought out that all the field commanders favored expansion of the bombing of North Vietnam. When called upon, General Wheeler made a strong statement in favor of these operations, pointing out the damage inflicted on lines of communication. He recommended to the President that he approved a ROLLING THUNDER program which, if it did not attack the ports, at least permitted attacks everywhere else in North Vietnam except in populated areas. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, specifically wanted authority to strike targets in the 10 and 4 nm Hanoi and Haiphong prohibited zones. The meeting ended without any decision having been made. Because he had recommended an action different from the one formally recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their memoranda of 20 May, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked for and received approval from the other Chiefs for the position he had taken.

The next day, the President discussed the force buildup with his advisors, including General Westmoreland, whom he had called home for the purpose. At this meeting, the Secretary of Defense supported the MACV five-package proposal of 11 July. General Westmoreland, in reply to a question from the President,

24. (TS) Briefing, CINCPAC, CG 7th AF, and COMSEVENTHFLT for SecDef, CJCS, and USecState, "Air Campaign North Vietnam, July 1967," OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

said the proposal was acceptable to him. The President then gave his approval of the plan, except that he ordered three of five TFSs recommended be not deployed but only made ready for deployment if needed.[25]

On 14 July, Secretary McNamara requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to submit a troop list for the approved force structure, with deployment dates where possible. Subsequent discussion between Joint Staff representatives and Assistant Secretary of Defense (SA) Alain Enthoven revealed that the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade and the three TFSs to be maintained ready for deployment were to be included in the 525,000 ceiling. On the basis of this guidance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff developed a troop list which, after necessary Service adjustments, resulted in a total strength for MACV of 537,545. To remain within the ceiling of 525,000, the Joint Chiefs of Staff planned on substituting civilian contract labor for military construction personnel, using as a basis figures supplied by MACV. The troop list, expressed in terms of major units or major categories of forces was as follows:

25. (S) CM-2506-67 to D/JS, 13 Jul 67, JMF 911/374 (12 Jul 67).

SUMMARY OF US FORCE DEPLOYMENTS - VIETNAM

UNIT/ ORGANIZATION	SVC STR	ARMY	NAVY	AF	MC
Program #4 (SVN)	484,472	323,735	30,039	56,148	74,550
9th MAB to incl 2 VMA Sqdns	6,720				6,720
MACV FY 67 Additive Requirements	9,497	7,108	200	1,386	803
Americal Division 11th Lt Inf Bde	5,610	5,610			
TAC Ftr Sqdns (Two A-1 Sqdns)	963			963	
Mobile Riverine Force, GAME WARDEN and MARKET TIME Rqmts	3,604		3,604		
101st Abn Div (-)	19,103	19,103			
I CTZ Log and Const Rqmts	3,968		3,968		
US Advisory Program Expansion	2,577	2,577			
Tac Ftr Sqdns (One A-1, one F-4 Sqdn)	1,031			1,031	
Reorganization 198th Inf Bde (No added strength)					
TOTAL	537,545	358,133	37,811	59,528	82,073
Contractor/Direct Hire	-12,545				
	525,000[26]				

26. App to (S-GP 4) JCSM-416-67, 20 Jul 67, same file.

The projected closing dates for the major combat units on this troop list were as follows:

Army

198th Bde (for Americal Div)	Oct 67
11th Lt Inf Bde (for Americal Div)	Feb 68
101st Abn Div (-)	Feb 68
Reinf for 196th and 198th Bdes (3 inf bns and 9 inf bn packets)	Mar-May 68

Air Force

Tactical Fighter Squdron	Feb 68
Tactical Fighter Squadron	May 68

On 20 July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted their recommended list to Secretary McNamara. In doing so they stated they did not concur in the inclusion of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade and the two nondeployed TFSs in the personnel ceiling for Vietnam. The Marine unit, they pointed out, was still the PACOM reserve and, as such, was subject to deployment to other areas of the Pacific Command. The two Air Force units should not be included in the personnel ceiling for Vietnam until they deployed to that area.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also pointed out to Mr. McNamara that, while the forces on the troop list would "contribute significantly to the prosecution of the war," they fell short of the numbers they had recommended in their memorandum of 20 April. Their views on worldwide military requirements, submitted in their memorandum of 20 May also remained valid.[27]

On 10 August Secretary McNamara gave his tentative approval for "planning" to the JCS recommendations. The 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade and the two TFSs, he ruled, should be counted under the 525,000 ceiling. Now designated by Mr. McNamara as Program 5, the total approved force levels for South Vietnam were as follows:

27. (S-GP 4) JCSM-416-67 to SecDef, 20 Jul 67 (derived from JCS 2472/115), same file.

	Army	Navy	Air Force	Marine Corps	Total
Program 4	323,735	30,039	56,148	74,550	484,472
FY 68 Added Forces	33,297	4,234	2,242	7,523	47,296
Civilianization	-5,414	-812	-542	-	-6,768
	351,618	33,461	57,848	82,073	525,000[28]

On 15 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded a refined troop list to the Secretary of Defense. While the ceiling of 525,000 remained unchanged, force levels for the Services were adjusted as follows:[29]

	Army	Navy	Air Force	Marine Corps	Total
Program 4 and Added Forces	358,475	37,522	59,309	82,239	537,545
Civilianization	-9,595	-2,050	-600	-300	-12,525
	348,880	35,472	58,709	81,939	525,000

Secretary McNamara approved the revised troop list on 5 October.[30]

President Johnson, meanwhile, resolved the debate over operations against North Vietnam. On 20 July he approved RT 57, which was, in effect, Air Force Secretary Brown's "continuation of the present level of operations with certain targets added in the Hanoi-Haiphong area." It contained 16 new fixed targets in that area and granted authority to conduct armed reconnaissance on selected rail lines, highways, and waterways inside the 30 nm Hanoi restricted zone but not within the 10 nm prohibited zone. While not a total victory for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC points of view, the President by his action turned down the restricted operations recommended by Secretary McNamara and other high ranking

28. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "FY 68 Force Requirements for SVN (Program Number 5)," 10 Aug 67, Att to JCS 2472/115-2, 11 Aug 67, same file.
29. (TS-GP 4) JCSM 505-67 to SecDef, 15 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2472/115-5), same file, sec 2.
30. (S) Memo, SecDef to Service Secys and CJCS, 5 Oct 67, Encl to JCS 2472/115-8, 6 Oct 67, same file.

civilians in the Department of Defense. General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that the "decisive factor in persuading the President to continue bombing north of 20° and to authorize the . . . extension of operating authority was his feeling that in recent weeks the bombing had achieved significant results and with relatively little noise level." In this regard, General Wheeler continued, "the Saigon briefings (texts of which /the President/ has seen) were invaluable . . . . I am told he read Spike Momyer's briefing word for word."[31]

President Johnson had now set the limits within which the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders would conduct military operations in the months ahead. General Westmoreland now faced the task of continuing operations in RVN with forces some 15 percent larger than those he had reported to be inadequate the previous March. Admiral Sharp and his subordinate air commanders, although they had not received all they asked for, now enjoyed wider latitude in carrying the war to NVN than they had ever enjoyed before. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, having been refused the forces to reconstitute strategic reserves and contingency forces, could only hope there would be no need for additional US troops elsewhere than Southeast Asia.

31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1859 to CINCPAC, 202044Z Jul 67; (TS) Msgs, CJCS 1859 and 5741 to CINCPAC, 20 Jul 67 and 22 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

Chapter 44

ROLLING THUNDER AT ITS ZENITH: OPERATIONS AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM, JULY 1967 - MARCH 1968

The months following President Johnson's approval of ROLLING THUNDER 57 saw the campaign against the key northeast sector of North Vietnam attain its highest level, both in the number of sorties flown and in the number of targets authorized for attack. In spite of certain continuing restrictions on operations, a concentrated effort was made to cut off the flow of war materials to enemy forces entering North Vietnam from abroad--those segments of the enemy supply lines considered most vulnerable by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC.

The Original ROLLING THUNDER 57 Package

The ROLLING THUNDER 57 package approved by President Johnson on 20 July not only included 16 new targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area, but also gave authority to conduct armed reconnaissance on selected rail lines, highways, and waterways inside the 30-nm Hanoi restricted zone, though not within the 10-nm prohibited area. Of the 16 new targets, 11 were in the military support system, 4 were in the transportation system, and 1 was in the air defense system. All had been taken from a list of 129 priority targets developed by CINCPAC. This list had its origin in the realization by CINCPAC planners that many targets they considered important were not on JCS target lists. Therefore they developed and forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a comprehensive ROLLING THUNDER list, whose targets were concentrated in Route Package VI.[1]

1. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1859 to CINCPAC, 202044Z Jul 67. (TS-GP 1) Memo, Jt Staff to CJCS, "CINCPAC Priority Targets (U)," 17 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

Once again, political considerations inhibited the ROLLING THUNDER program. The new list did not include Phuc Yen Airfield--which had again been recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff--because of "tentative and tenuous indications from a couple of North Vietnamese ambassadors" that advisors from other Communist countries were there.[2]

Even the authorized strikes were to be conducted in such a way as to avoid the appearance of escalation. No more than 3 targets were to be hit in any one day, and armed reconnaissance strikes were not to be concentrated in the 30-nm Hanoi restricted zone but were to be distributed throughout RP VI in roughly the same pattern as that of the preceding few weeks. In other respects, the general guidelines in ROLLING THUNDER 57 were the same as the ones in the preceding program.[3]

During August, President Johnson added 12 targets in the Hanoi area to the RT 57 list, including the Hanoi thermal power plant, the Doumer rail/highway bridge, and the other major Hanoi rail/highway bridge. All three were struck and rendered unusable by the end of the month.[4]

These operations were an auspicious beginning to an intensified air campaign against the vital northeast sector of North Vietnam. But the stepped-up operations had hardly

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2. (TS-GP 1) Memo, COL Robert J. Dunn, USAF, /Escort Officer/ to Distribution, "Report on Significant Areas of Interest--Vietnam Investigative Tour of Messrs. Gilleas and French (Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee--Chairman Stennis)," 27 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

3. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1859 to CINCPAC, 202044Z Jul 67; (TS) Msg, CJCS 5661-67 to CINCPAC, 20 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

4. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3365 to CINCPAC, 090005Z Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4091 to CINCPAC, 171459Z Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4344 to CINCPAC, 191432Z Aug 67. (S) NMCC Memos for Record, 12 and 13 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 195- and 196-67, 21 and 22 Aug 67.

begun when they suffered a partial curtailment. On 19 August, President Johnson issued orders to suspend air strikes within the 10-nm Hanoi prohibited area beginning 24 August and running through 4 September. The only information given at the time was that the action was taken to preclude charges of escalation. Later information, however, indicates that just at this time the President was offering to Hanoi through secret channels what later became known as the San Antonio formula for peace negotiations.[5]

CINCPAC felt that the suspension came at an unfortunate time. It began right on the heels of a stretch of bad weather, and he feared the suspension would give the impression of a deescalation of pressure aginst Hanoi. CINCPAC recommended that, if it was not possible to relax the restriction, he be given authority to strike targets in the Haiphong area and Phuc Yen Airfield, to convince Hanoi that the United States was not "vacillating."[6]

Strikes in the Buffer Zone

Ten of the 16 targets authorized by President Johnson on 9 August were within the buffer zone along the Chinese border. Requests to hit these targets stemmed from difficulties encountered in attempting to cut rail traffic between Communist China and North Vietnam over the northeast line. During the months of May, June, and July, when ROLLING THUNDER forces had concentrated on this vital artery, there had been a reduction in the movement of military supplies over the line. Nevertheless, substantial amounts still reached Hanoi. The inviolability of the buffer zone shortened the distance subject to attack, and the enemy took full advantage of the situation by holding trains in the buffer zone during the day, and moving them out under cover of darkness or inclement weather.[7]

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5. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4343 to CINCPAC, 191430Z Aug 67. (TS) Memo, AsstSecState for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to SecState, 9 Apr 68, OCJCS File, Vietnam Mission, May 68.

6. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 202231Z Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

7. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3365 to CINCPAC, 090005Z Aug 67. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 290105Z Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

CINCPAC had requested on 3 June that buffer zone targets be added to the target list, and on the 29th he had appealed unsuccessfully for authority to conduct specific strikes. During the early part of July, Admiral Sharp refined his concept for attacking buffer zone targets. He briefed Secretary McNamara in Saigon on the concept, which now included 24 priority targets in the buffer zone. The Secretary requested General Wheeler to analyze these 24 targets, but before the analysis could be completed, CINCPAC recommended the execution of a new plan of operations against buffer zone targets. Submitted to General Wheeler on 29 July, this plan called for an initial strike to cut the line at a point about 19 miles south of the Chinese border, followed by strikes at installations and rolling stock north of the cut up to a point within 6 miles of the border. Great care would be taken to insure accuracy and to avoid civilian casualties.[8]

General Wheeler replied to Admiral Sharp the same day, stating he had tentatively selected 13 targets from the CINCPAC list of 24 to recommend to the Secretary of Defense. Before making these recommendations, however, the Chairman requested further views from CINCPAC on the targeting concept. Specifically, General Wheeler questioned the value of bridges as targets since they were so hard to hit. He favored destroying railroad yards to force the enemy to concentrate his supplies north of the Chinese border.[9]

Replying on 3 August, CINCPAC agreed that all the targets proposed by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, with two exceptions, appeared to be currently worth striking. He agreed, also, on the value of hitting rolling stock and supplies, but stressed the importance of subsequent attacks on bridges as a means of bottling up rolling stock, thereby making it more vulnerable to attack. Along with these views,

8. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 030424Z Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 290445Z Jun 67, JCS IN 19952. (TS) Msg, CJCS 5999-67 to CINCPAC, 29 Jul 67; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 290105Z Jul 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

9. (TS) Msg, CJCS 5999-67 to CINCPAC, 29 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67. (TS) Msg, CJCS 6106-67 to CINCPAC, 1 Aug 67, same file, Aug 67.

Admiral Sharp submitted an expanded list of targets in the buffer zone. This list was reduced to 10 by the Joint Staff and was approved by President Johnson on 9 August.[10]

The approved buffer zone targets included four railroad bridges, five railroad yards and sidings, and the Port Wallut Naval Base. In striking these targets, ROLLING THUNDER forces were authorized to attack rolling stock located to the south of the Lang Son Railroad/Highway Bridge. Pilots were instructed to destroy locomotives, rolling stock, and supplies. They were cautioned not to cross the CHICOM border or to take undue risk in the hazardous airspace contiguous to the targets. The President authorized maximum use of the WALLEYE weapon against the bridges. Strikes were to be spaced out to avoid charges of escalation. By 5 September, the President had authorized 9 additional targets in the buffer zone, including 8 bridges and 1 railroad siding.[11]

In authorizing one target on 30 August, the President cautioned against intrusions into Communist China's air space. Earlier in the month, there had been two separate violations which had prompted Admiral Sharp to remind his subordinate commanders that the authority to strike buffer zone targets had been granted in part "as a result of our assurance that we can go where we are supposed to go and hit what we are supposed to hit." CINCPAC was concerned not only because the violations increased the risk to US pilots and planes, but also that such violations might result in the cancellation of buffer zone targets and in the denial of CINCPAC's pending request to strike additional key targets. "The excellent

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10. (TS) Msgs, CINCPAC to CJCS, 031933Z Aug 67 and 030123Z Aug 67; (TS-GP 3) Memo, Jt Staff to CJCS, "CHICOM Buffer Zone Targets," 4 Aug 67; (TS) Msg, CJCS 6377-67 to CINCPAC, 8 Aug 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3365 to CINCPAC, 9 Aug 67.

11. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3365 to CINCPAC, 090005Z Aug 67. (TS) Msg, CJCS 6377-67 to CINCPAC, 8 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4091 to CINCPAC, 171459Z Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5073 to CINCPAC, 301356Z Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5480 to CINCPAC, 052113Z Sep 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5073 to CINCPAC, 301356Z Aug 67. (TS) Memo, CJCS to SecDef, "RT," 30 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

progress we have made thus far in obtaining increased strike authorizations and outstanding results attained thus far, must not be jeopardized," said CINCPAC.[12]

Operations Against the Ports

While attacks against the buffer zone targets reduced somewhat the flow of war materiel into North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were convinced that the movement of supplies through the port of Haiphong would have to be curtailed if the campaign to restrict imports was ever to be effective. A "shouldering out" concept to reduce the increased volume of war materials arriving through the Haiphong Port had been proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 20 May. This plan called for striking targets around the periphery of the city and gradually moving inward toward the center of the main dock area. But by August the target elements had not yet been approved.[13]

In the meantime, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, developed an alternative plan for isolating Haiphong. This plan would "place an in-depth concentrated interdiction ring around the Port of Haiphong to deny the enemy use of his lines of communication from the port and port area to the interior." The ring would be doughnut-shaped, including the area beyond a 1½ mile radius from the center of Haiphong outward to a radius of 8 miles. The densely populated inner circle contained only three targets that General McConnell believed significant. Most of the targets considered essential would be within the outer doughnut area and would include bridges, ferries, vulnerable road/railroad segments, waterways, and transshipment points. These targets would be struck to provide interdiction of all current major LOCs to the maximum degree possible. Moreover, the concept would eliminate danger to foreign shipping.[14]

12. (S) Msg, CJCS 7125 to CINCPAC, 30 Aug 67; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT, 260002Z Aug 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

13. See above, Ch. 43.

14. (TS-GP 3) "CSAF Concept for Isolation of the Port of Haiphong," Att to (TS) SM-519-67 to CINCPAC, 22 Jul 67, JMF 912/432 (19 Jul 67).

General Wheeler agreed that the plan would make it possible to "apply a considerable constriction to the exits from the port area." But to bring about the actual isolation of the two cities would require the removal of the 30-nm and 10-nm restricted zones around Hanoi and Haiphong, thus permitting unrestrained attacks everywhere in NVN except in the CHICOM border buffer zone and the prohibited zones around Hanoi and Haiphong. The Chairman asked CINCPAC his views on the Air Force plan.[15]

Admiral Sharp replied on 3 August that for six weeks prior to 1 August he had been conducting strikes aimed at isolating Hanoi and Haiphong from each other and from the rest of NVN generally along the lines of the Air Force plan. The concept proposed by the Chief of Staff, Air Force, was sound, CINCPAC said, and it would pile up cargo in the Haiphong area. To be fully effective, however, it should be expanded to include many more targets, including 13 in the 4-nm Haiphong prohibited area. In order to implement the plan during good weather, Admiral Sharp requested immediate authority to conduct strikes against the targets in the prohibited zone and to conduct armed reconnaissance missions in the 10-nm restricted zone. On 6 August, he submitted a further request for the removal of bombing restraints: authority to strike 19 targets in the Hanoi restricted zone and 10 in the Haiphong restricted zone; the elimination of both restricted zones; and the reduction of the prohibited areas to a 2-mile radius around Hanoi and a small rectangle around the center of Haiphong. Meanwhile, CINCPAC, on 5 August, facilitated bombing attacks in the Haiphong area by removing his own restriction concerning strikes within the 10-nm restricted zone.[16]

President Johnson did not grant these sweeping authorizations to bomb in the restricted and prohibited zones, but

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15. (TS) Msg, CJCS 6106-67 to CINCPAC, 1 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

16. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 030123Z Aug 67; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 050244Z Aug 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT and CINCPACAF, 052234Z Aug 67, JCS IN 95324. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 062347Z Aug 67, JCS IN 96713.

on 30 August and 5 September he authorized strikes on a total of 8 specific targets in the Haiphong zones.[17]

The targets around Haiphong were hit heavily through September. By the 27th of that month, 177 sorties had been flown against 6 of the 8 targets authorized in the Haiphong area under ROLLING THUNDER 57. As of 13 October all 8 of the targets had been struck at least once. An analysis of the port clearing capability of Haiphong near the end of September showed that the LOCs serving Haiphong could clear 4,300 short tons per day as compared with 9,700 the previous May. The North Vietnamese were now forced to stockpile supplies and to transport them to Hanoi mainly by inland waterways. Faster movement of supplies out of Haiphong would depend upon North Vietnamese ability to restore the Haiphong and the Kien An highway bridges.[18]

Meanwhile, the campaign against North Vietnamese seaports was expanded as the result of an authorization by President Johnson on 9 August to strike the minor ports of Cam Pha and Hon Gai. They were to be struck only when ships were at least 2,000 yards from the docks. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had been opposed to attacks on Cam Pha and Hon Gai. They felt that action against the two ports should be deferred until NVN, as a result of attacks against the Haiphong port, began using them for imports and coastal traffic. ROLLING THUNDER pilots struck Cam Pha Port with 31 sorties on 10 September, inflicting severe damage. CINCPAC, however, felt the restrictions there were too stringent, since North Vietnam could easily keep a ship alongside the docks at all times, thus preventing strikes. Such was the case from 13 September for at least two weeks, when a Soviet ship was in Cam Pha. CINCPAC wanted authority to strike, with proper caution, a coal plant and a railroad yard at Cam Pha, in spite of the presence of foreign shipping. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff were concentrating their efforts on securing more important authority, notably a relaxation of the

17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5480 to CINCPAC, 052113Z Sep 67.
18. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 204-67 through 227-67, 31 Aug through 28 Sep 67. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA to CJCS et al., Fact Sheet, "Haiphong Port Clearance," 27 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 120157Z Oct 67, JCS IN 39404.

suspension on previously approved targets around Hanoi and permission to strike Phuc Yen Airfield. As a result, action to remove restrictions at Cam Pha was relegated to a lesser priority.[19]

The Recurring MIG Threat

On 23 August, Admiral Sharp renewed his request to General Wheeler for authority to strike the MIG base at Phuc Yen airfield because recent engagements had made it "apparent that the enemy has decided to use these aircraft again to counter our strikes." As of that date, no US plane had been shot down by a MIG since May. The next day, however, two planes fell victim to enemy aircraft, prompting the Chairman to support the request and urge its approval upon the Secretary of Defense. Secretary McNamara objected, however, on the grounds that the United States would lose more planes than it destroyed in an attack on Phuc Yen, and that the continuing attacks needed to keep the field closed would result in the loss of more planes than would otherwise be lost to MIGs if operations from the field continued.[20]

CINCPAC answered the objections by noting that enemy planes could be surprised on the ground and that many might be destroyed before they were airborne. The initial attack would be followed up with other attacks but these would be merely periodic attacks of harassment. He believed that the MIGs could be forced to operate from CHICOM bases, where they would be less effective. As for the risk that charges of escalation might be raised, CINCPAC felt that this was a danger no matter which targets in North Vietnam were picked for strikes.[21]

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19. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 270028Z Sep 67, JCS IN 10882. (TS) Msg, Actg CJCS 8205-67 to CINCPAC, 30 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (TS) Fact Sheet, "ROLLING THUNDER Actions Pending," 16 Oct 67, same file, Oct 67. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5480 to CINCPAC, 052113Z Sep 67.

20. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 231941Z Aug 67; (S) Msg, CJCS to SecDef, 240829Z Aug 67; (TS) Msg, Actg CJCS to CINCPAC, 250107Z Aug 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

21. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250838Z Aug 67, same file.

Another US plane was downed by MIGs on 16 September. By that time the North Vietnamese had increased the number of MIG 21s at Phuc Yen from 6 to 11. This, coupled with the increased experience of MIG pilots, prompted CINCPAC to renew, on 20 September, his appeal to strike Phuc Yen and Bac Mai airfields. The following day, General Wheeler urged Secretary McNamara to approve Admiral Sharp's request.[22]

The occurrence of several MIG engagements on 25 September no doubt influenced the decision made the next day to authorize strikes and restrikes against Phuc Yen. Two strikes were scheduled for a 28 September attack on Phuc Yen. Before any strike was made, however, the authority was cancelled by the President because of certain visiting dignitaries in Hanoi. On 4 October, General Wheeler made another unsuccessful appeal for authority to strike the MIG base.[23]

The MIGs, meanwhile, continued to impede US air operations over North Vietnam. During September, 56 planes were forced to jettison over 107 tons of bombs owing to MIG interference; between 29 September and 10 October, 10 engagements with a total of 32 MIG sorties resulted in the loss of three US planes. But it was not until 23 October that President Johnson authorized attacks on Phuc Yen. The following day, US fliers mounted 64 sorties against the MIG field, and followed up with smaller efforts on the two succeeding days. Three MIGs were destroyed, three were damaged, and the runway was made unserviceable.[24]

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22. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 210028Z Sep 67, JCS IN 90642. (TS) CM-2660-67 to SecDef, 22 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67.

23. (S) Memo for Record, "NMCC Report on MIG Engagements Over NVN-25 September 67," 26 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7303 to CINCPAC, 262109Z Sep 67. (TS) Memo for Record, "Phuc Yen Strikes," 28 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (TS) Fact Sheet, "ROLLING THUNDER Actions Pending (U)," 16 Oct 67, same file, Oct 67. (TS-GP 3) CM-2676-67 to SecDef, 4 Oct 67, same file.

24. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 080726Z Oct 67, JCS IN 32563; (TS-GP 3) CM-2684-67 to SecDef, 1 Oct 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9674 to CINCPAC, 232212Z Oct 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 249-, 250-, 251-67, 24, 25, and 26 Oct 67.

The Suspension is Lifted

Although the MIG attacks and other elements of the North Vietnamese air defense system impeded the air campaign against North Vietnam, President Johnson's suspension of authority to strike targets within the 10-nm Hanoi prohibited zone was an even greater handicap to effective air operations. Orginally set for the period 24 August through 4 September, the suspension had been indefinitely extended on 1 September. Alarmed at the prospect of an indefinite suspension at a time when the days of good flying weather were rapidly dwindling, CINCPAC on 20 September urgently recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the suspension be lifted. The following day, the Chairman, with the support of the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, urged Secretary McNamara to approve CINCPAC's recommendation and, further, to authorize attacks on fifteen specific targets within the 10-nm Hanoi prohibited zone. In this attempt, General Wheeler was unsuccessful.[25]

General Wheeler again appealed without avail to Secretary McNamara on 4 October for a cancellation of the suspension around Hanoi and authority to strike a total of 25 targets around Hanoi and Haiphong. Two days later, the President approved 7 new targets in the Haiphong area. All 7 targets were struck at least once by 14 October; after that date most of these targets were hit several times. Another target was authorized 17 October and struck five days later.[26]

On 23 October President Johnson lifted the suspension and authorized strikes on the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant (a one-time-only strike using the WALLEYE weapon), the 2 important Hanoi bridges, plus 9 other targets in the Hanoi prohibited area, including 5 that had not previously been struck.[27]

On 25 October CINCPAC gave the Doumer Railroad/Highway Bridge the highest strike priority. This strike was to be

25. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 202352Z Sep 67, JCS IN 90536. (TS) CM-2660-67 to SecDef, 22 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67.

26. (TS-GP 3) CM-2676-67 to SecDef, 4 Oct 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8239 to CINCPAC, 061826Z Oct 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9045 to CINCPAC, 170003Z Oct 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 236-67 through 248-67, 9 through 23 Oct 67.

27. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9674 to CINCPAC, 232212Z Oct 67.

followed by the seeding of the river at that point to disrupt ferry, barge, and boat traffic. Hopefully this disruption would create lucrative targets as the supplies backed up waiting to cross the river. It took only three days for ROLLING THUNDER pilots to hit the bridges and the power plant. Most of the other targets authorized by the President on 23 October were not struck until November; some not at all during 1967.[28]

The President authorized 17 new targets in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas on 8 November. The targets included certain facilities at Bac Mai Airfield near Hanoi, 3 Hanoi and 3 Haiphong shipyards, restrikes of 4 railroad yards, and 6 other new targets--1 railroad yard, 2 industrial plants, and 3 POL installations. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, suggested that the targets be struck in a measured and deliberate manner so as to minimize the "noise level" and to curtail current talk among representatives of friendly nations concerning the recently increased intensity of air operations in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas.[29]

Also on 8 November, an important new weapon was added to the arsenal being employed in the operations to isolate Haiphong. On that date, Secretary McNamara declared the MK-36 Destructor mine to be "just another weapon" rather than a mine, and authorized its use against all authorized ROLLING THUNDER targets, including those in the prohibited zones. The MK 36 had been developed at CINCPAC's request for use in inland waterways. It had become operational in April under the authorizations then in effect, which limited mining to the area south of 20° N.[30]

Following the granting of authority to strike certain targets within the prohibited areas, ROLLING THUNDER forces unleashed a tremendous striking effort against the authorized targets and LOCs. Not since the previous July had pilots been given such freedom, and never had they had more critical

28. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF, et al., 252248Z Oct 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 249-67 through 1-68, 24 Oct 67 through 2 Jan 68.

29. (TS) Msg, CJCS 9610-67 to CINCPAC, 8 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.

30. (S-GP 4) J-3 Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "JCS 2343/751-1," 21 Dec 66, JMF 9155.3 (7 Dec 65). (S) Msg, JCS 2729 to CINCPAC, 14 Apr 67; (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2385 to CINCPAC, 082343Z Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.

targets. In terms of high-value targets struck, the last part of October and the first half of November marked the most productive period in ROLLING THUNDER history.

This intensified effort on the part of US pilots called forth a comparable countereffort by North Vietnam's air defense system. Between 23 October and 20 November, the United States lost 48 aircraft in strikes over NVN. Thirty-nine were shot down over RP VI, clear evidence that the enemy believed the targets under attack around Hanoi and Haiphong were of such value that their defense called for a maximum effort.[31]

The Bombing Slackens

Beginning in November, the pace of the bombing operations against North Vietnam gradually slackened. From that time on a combination of bad weather and Presidential restrictions led to a scaling down of attacks on targets in North Vietnam. By far, however, bad weather had the most adverse impact. The effect on the distribution of sorties in the various route packages is illustrated clearly by the chart below covering the none-month period from July 1967 through March 1968. It is readily apparent that the number of monthly sorties declined from a high rate in the summer months to a low one during the northeast monsoon of the winter months. When the weather was clear the number of sorties rose in the northern industrial area of North Vietnam, i.e., in RP VI A and VI B, where the high-value targets requiring precision and accuracy in bombing were located. When the weather was poor and cloud cover obscured the more lucrative targets, and low ceilings made SAM evasion difficult, ROLLING THUNDER pilots struck targets closer to South Vietnam in RP I through IV. Consequently, owing to bad weather in December, both the number and percentage of sorties in RP VI A and VI B were low. This unfavorable weather continued through January, February, and even March, making these months the least productive of any quarter in the previous two years; worse by far than the same quarter in 1967.

31. (S) Memo, DepDir for Ops, NMCC to SecDef, "Aircraft Losses over North Vietnam, 17-20 November 1967," 20 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.

DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACK SORTIES
BY ROUTE PACKAGE

Month	Sorties	RPI %	II %	III %	IV %	V %	VIA %	VIB %	No. Sorties VI A & B
1967									
Jul	11,337	38	8	7	10	4	14	19	3,741
Aug	11,744	48	8	10	7	2	12	13	2,936
Sep	8,540	56	8	7	8	3	9	9	1,537
Oct	8,987	41	3	6	11	3	16	20	3,235
Nov	7,268	52	5	7	11	5	7	13	1,454
Dec	5,758	57	8	7	10	4	7	7	806
1968									
Jan	6,359	47	8	11	12	6	8	8	1,017
Feb	3,280	72	3	8	2	5	8	2	328
Mar	5,037	68	8	5	6	2	5	6	554[32]

On 3 January 1968, President Johnson added to the inhibiting effects of the weather by ordering a suspension of all air strikes within 5 miles of the center of Hanoi. The prohibition was to be in effect for 72 hours, but it was extended for an additional 72 hours on 6 January, and indefinitely on 9 January.[33]

An additional restriction came on 16 January as the result of an episode involving a Soviet ship in Haiphong Harbor. On 4 January, while seeding one of the approaches to Haiphong with MK-36 weapons, a US plane through a map error inadvertently released its load too soon, in the immediate vicinity of a Soviet ship. The incident led General Wheeler to anticipate the establishment of a 5 mile prohibited circle around Haiphong similar to the one in effect around Hanoi. The Chairman, Joint

32. (TS-GP 1) CINCPAC, ROLLING THUNDER Digest Oct-Dec 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67) sec 1B. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 090435Z Feb 68, JCS IN 90743. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 072330Z Apr 68, JCS IN 30389.

33. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6402 to CINCPAC, 032158Z Jan 68. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6700 to CINCPAC, 062148Z Jan 68. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 090735Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6818 to CINCPAC, 092026Z Jan 68. (S-GP 1) Telegram, USUN to State, 232344Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

Chiefs of Staff, warned CINCPAC that such a restriction might soon be forthcoming. He requested CINCPAC to instruct his operational commanders to execute strikes in that area only when the weather permitted accurate navigation and target identification, and to employ only small forces close in to Haiphong.[34]

In reply, CINCPAC expressed his concern that an additional prohibited area would negate "our reasonably successful efforts to isolate that port." His operational commanders, said CINCPAC, had just begun to get enough MK-36 weapons to accomplish this objective, and it was not "satisfactory" to start seeding 5 miles from the city. Earlier plans had been made for seeding the Red River near Hanoi, but they had been cancelled when the 5-mile prohibited circle around that city was directed. This had left the enemy free to repair the damaged bridges and to cross the river in boats. During a time when the weather limited ROLLING THUNDER opportunities, CINCPAC felt it was even more important "that we not have added restrictions." He said,

> We seem determined to ease the pressure on the enemy at a time when our long bombing campaign is having a telling effect. The history of ROLLING THUNDER has been that we always follow a period of telling effectiveness with periods when we put restrictions on that give the enemy a chance to recuperate. This, I submit, is a costly and inefficient way to use our tremendous air power and contributes to lengthening the war.[35]

On 16 January the President, although he was aware of CINCPAC's views on the subject, directed the establishment of a 5-mile prohibited area around Haiphong. He also approved 6 more targets to be added to the authorized list, but by the end of January none of them had been struck because of bad weather.[36]

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34. (TS) Memo, NMCC to SecDef, 8 Jan 68, "Alleged Bombing of Soviet Merchant Ship of 4 January 1968"; (TS) Telecon Item, JCS 010/68 to CINCPAC, 141720Z Jan 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

35. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 150705Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

36. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7402 to CINCPAC, 162247Z Jan 68. (TS) Msg, CJCS 00489-68 to CINCPAC, Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

On 30 January, the enemy launched simultaneous assaults on the major South Vietnamese cities. As a counteraction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 3 February, recommended replacement of the Hanoi and Haiphong restricted and prohibited zones by "control areas" with radii extending 3 and 1½-nm respectively from the centers of the two cities. Control at the Washington level would be maintained over all strikes in these areas. Armed reconnaissance missions under existing procedures could then be extended to the remainder of the formerly restricted and prohibited zones. The result would be to "expose to attack critical storage areas; transhipment points; and the . . . lines of communication that support movement to and from the important logistic hubs of Hanoi and Haiphong." The President did not approve the recommendation, but on 6 February he lifted the ban on strikes within 5-nm of the centers of the two cities.37

Although other targets were added during February, and subsequently hit, and authority was given to utilize radar systems bombing techniques, little of any significance with respect to air operations in North Vietnam had occurred by the end of March. Not only were operations hampered by the weather, but operations at Khe Sanh were absorbing much of the air capability that would otherwise have been employed against NVN.38

On 30 March, President Johnson terminated military operations against North Vietnam north of 20° N thus ending the campaign to cut off or reduce North Vietnamese imports and to bring the war to the population, communications and industrial centers of NVN. Henceforth, ROLLING THUNDER and SEA DRAGON would be diverted toward the interdiction of materiel and personnel flowing from North to South Vietnam and the furnishing of fire support for friendly ground forces in the area of the DMZ.39

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37. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-78-68 to SecDef (derived from JCS 2472/222), 3 Feb 68, JMF 912/323 (31 Jan 68).

38. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1414 to CINCPAC, 172012Z Feb 68. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1742 to CINCPAC, 212233Z Feb 68. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 100345Z Mar 68, JCS IN 62353. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 072330Z Apr 68, JCS IN 30389.

39. See Ch. 50 for a discussion of the President's decision to curtail the bombing.

ROLLING THUNDER Pro and Con

At the end of March, Admiral Sharp made an assessment of the results obtained against the officially approved ROLLING THUNDER targets. According to this assessment, 331 out of the 372 authorized targets had been struck and 245 of them had been destroyed or rendered unusable. Breaking the list down into target systems, the analysis showed that of all jet-capable airfields in North Vietnam only Gia Lam remained unstruck by the end of March. An estimated 65 percent of North Vietnam's electric power capacity had been destroyed, although that figure had been higher before the rebuilding that had been accomplished during the monsoon. Of the 125 military complex targets on the list, 117 had been attacked and 106 were unusable or inactive. An estimated 65 percent of the fixed NVN POL storage capacity had been destroyed. About 50 percent of the listed transportation targets had been abandoned or rendered unserviceable, although the enemy, by employing bypass bridges and ferries, had managed to keep traffic moving on major LOCs. The two key rail lines from China into North Vietnam--the northwest line from Hanoi to Lao Cai, and the northeast line from Hanoi to Dong Dang--were considered closed or in shuttle status for the entire first 3 months of 1968. Twenty-two percent of the targeted industries were inoperable.[40]

Assuming that Admiral Sharp's damage assessments were accurate, the question remains: how effectively had the operations against North Vietnam achieved their objectives? In broad terms, these objectives were three in number: to reduce the infiltration of men and materiel from North to South Vietnam, and/or to make it more costly; to raise the morale of the South Vietnamese; and to show the North Vietnamese leaders they would pay a price for continued aggression against South Vietnam. There is a general consensus that attacks against the North raised morale in the South, but opinion on the other two points is deeply divided and is likely to remain so. This results partly from the fact that available intelligence information simply does not provide the concrete proof needed for an exact tabulation of the effects of the operations against the North. There were nevertheless a number of attempts at analysis of these operations, which led their authors to contradictory conclusions.

40. (S-GP 4) CINCPAC Rpt, "Measurement of Progress in Southeast Asia, 31 March 1968," 10 Jun 68, pp. 75-76, 78, 95, JMF 911/337 (31 Mar 68).

Among the most skeptical was the JASON study prepared by the Institute for Defense Analyses at the request of Secretary McNamara. The authors of JASON concluded that not only had the bombing had "no measurable effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South," but that "no bombing campaign can reduce the flow of military supplies to the South" nor "significantly raise the cost of maintaining the flow of men and material." In reaching these conclusions, however, the authors neglected to investigate what might result from coordinated interdiction of all import routes into NVN, which was of course the major target of ROLLING THUNDER as conceived by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC. They also claimed that the bombing had not "discernibly weakened the determination of North Vietnamese leaders to continue to direct and support the insurgency in the South," although they admitted that "deficiencies in data and methodology do not allow a thorough discussion" of the question.[41]

At the opposite extreme, an Air Force study group, with representation from the other Services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and DIA, concluded that the air campaign had destroyed or damaged a significant portion of the enemy's industrial capability and had caused the diversion of a significant portion of North Vietnamese manpower to air defense and repair of the damage resulting from air attacks. As a result, the enemy capability to expand his military force in South Vietnam was drastically curtailed. Had there been no bombing, the Air Force study group estimated, it would have been possible for North Vietnam to train and infiltrate sufficient forces to attain a total in South Vietnam of 600,000 by mid-1967.[42]

SEA CABIN, a military study group established by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and consisting of representatives of the Joint Staff, DIA, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), reached a similar conclusion. This group concluded that the air and naval campaigns against NVN had inflicted heavy damage on NVN and had "limited the DRV's capability to undertake sustained large scale military operations

41. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) IDA, "JASON, The Bombing of North Vietnam, (U)," 16 Dec 67.
42. (TS) AFCSA Briefing of Special Study for JCS, "The Air Campaign Against North Vietnam," 31 Jul 67, JMF 912/323 (31 Jul 67).

in SVN. . . . A cessation of the bombing program would make it possible for the DRV to regenerate its military and economic posture and substantially increase the flow of personnel and supplies from NVN to SVN."[43]

For their part, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took a more cautious view. "The bombing of the North coninues to impose heavy and accumulating pressure on North Vietnam that is contributing significantly to the achievement of US military objectives in South Vietnam," they informed the Secretary of Defense on 31 January 1968 after reviewing the SEA CABIN study. They did not, however, attempt to predict the results that might be expected if the bombing were halted.[44]

The various analyses by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military study groups were of ROLLING THUNDER as it had actually been conducted. From the outset, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military establishment had been opposed to the inhibited and gradual application of military power forced upon them by political authorities. No doubt the results would have been different had the military view prevailed, but the nature and degree of difference are all but impossible to measure. No study has been located that attempts to estimate the results that would have been obtained from an air campaign of the type advocated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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43. (TS-GP 1) OJCS SEA CABIN Study Group, "Study of the Political-Military Implications in Southeast Asia of the Cessation of Aerial Bombardment and the Initiation of Negotiation (S)," 22 Nov 67.

44. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-62-68 to SecDef, 31 Jan 68 (derived from JCS 2339/66-3), JMF 907/305 (29 Sep 67) sec 2.

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Chapter 45

MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH JUNE 1967 - JANUARY 1968

General Westmoreland's Summer Plans

In the months immediately following Secretary McNamara's approval of Program 5, General Westmoreland continued to press ahead with combat operations designed to attain the objectives of the Combined Campaign Plan. His primary plan for the months ahead, he reported to Admiral Sharp, was to take full advantage of the good weather in the northern provinces of SVN to wage a major offensive in I CTZ throughout the summer, while preparing to move into the central highland area of II CTZ if the enemy presented a favorable target by massing troops. In III and IV CTZs General Westmoreland planned to adjust to unfavorable summer weather and dispersed enemy positions by limiting operations to a few selected offensives on a modest scale to keep the enemy off balance. A major offensive would not be launched in these two zones until fall unless an opportunity arose to destroy major enemy forces.

The enemy, General Westmoreland reported, was also planning a "main effort" to start in June or July and had concentrated his major forces in the same area where friendly forces were to make their main effort. According to his calculations, the enemy had up to three divisions in the DMZ and the equivalent of two more divisions in the northern provinces of SVN capable of mounting a coordinated offensive. Elements of two other divisions were located in the southern part of I CTZ. In II CTZ elements of five regiments were positioned along the Cambodian border with the mission to tie down friendly forces by attacking isolated Special Forces camps. In III CTZ two divisions were deployed in a manner that constituted a similar threat to Special Forces camps in the northwest and central parts of the Zone. Friendly forces were disposed in an "optimum posture to meet the anticipated enemy threats." They were "massed against the enemy major threats" and were "employing economy of force measures" in other areas.

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1. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 041216Z Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67.

Summer Operations in III CTZ

In III CTZ COMUSMACV set as immediate objectives the disruption and defeat of enemy offensive actions, harassment and destruction of enemy main force units, maintenance of continuous pressure on VC regional and local forces, neutralization of enemy base areas, and defeat of enemy efforts to sabotage the national elections. To this end, a total of 11 operations, each resulting in killing 50 or more enemy soldiers, were conducted. Of these 11 operations, 9 were conducted by US forces and 2 by the ARVN. Two were of division size; the remainder were conducted by brigade-size forces. Of these operations, five were of more than passing interest: BARKING SANDS, DIAMOND HEAD, KOLE KOLE, FAIRFAX and ENTERPRISE.[2]

The first three were search-and-destroy operations of brigade size and were conducted by the US 25th Infantry Division. They began in May and continued until December. Conducted in three provinces west of Saigon and near the Cambodian border, they were not particularly impressive in terms of numbers of enemy killed, but were effective in increasing friendly influence over the countryside. ENTERPRISE, a similar operation with similar results, was carried out by three battalions of the US 9th Infantry Division in an area along the Cambodian border immediately to the south of that in which the 25th Division was operating. FAIRFAX, conducted by the US 199th Light Infantry Brigade, had as its objective to counter increasing VC efforts to reestablish influence over the villages and hamlets immediately surrounding Saigon. Typical operations conducted in FAIRFAX included night ambush patrols, cordon and search of hamlets and villages, small-unit search-and-destroy actions, and waterway traffic control activities.

A particularly successful measure employed in conjunction with the combat operations was the clearing of vast jungle tracts by means of Rome plows. Operating under the nickname PAUL BUNYAN, specially equipped combat engineer teams had cleared 75,000 acres of jungle by the end of

2. These are the operations singled out for special coverage by the HQUSMACV historian. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, I, pp. 382-395.

September, of which 30,000 bordered key lines of communication, and another 30,000 were in a former enemy base area. The results, COMUSMACV reported, were to reduce the effectiveness of VC ambushes and tax collections on the lines of communication and to inhibit enemy reoccupation of base areas from which he had been driven by combat forces.[3]

General Westmoreland reported substantial progress in III CTZ during the summer months. Recounting operations conducted during July, he informed Admiral Sharp that it was a "month of heartening progress both in terms of our success in attaining planned objectives and the enemy's failure to attain his planned objectives." A month later he detected an improvement in overall security. There was increasing evidence that enemy main force units were "avoiding significant contact" and were suffering a decline in morale. Reporting on operations conducted during September, he noted that the enemy had "failed to achieve a single significant victory" and was apparently continuing his policy of avoiding contact with major forces.

Summer Operations in II CTZ

The major military objectives in II CTZ continued, as in the previous period, to be to destroy or drive enemy main forces away from the populated coastal regions and to block incursions by enemy forces from sanctuary areas in Cambodia. In pursuit of the former objective, the US 1st Cavalry Division continued Operation PERSHING in the northern coastal areas of the Zone, while the ROKFV launched Operation HONG KIL DONG in the coastal regions to the south. In the latter, elements of two ROK divisions conducted search-and-destroy operations against one VC and five NVA battalions. Following an initial contact on 9 July, four ROK battalions assaulted the objective area by air to establish support bases and begin search-and-destroy operations. Airmobile assaults, supported by air and artillery, characterized the ROK offensive.

The 1st Cavalry Division, meanwhile, continued PERSHING search-and-destroy operations aimed at destruction or disruption of enemy main force units. Vigorous offensive actions led to frequent small unit contacts, but the enemy continued to avoid major engagements. The result of these

3. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 2 Oct 67, JCS IN 21700.

operations during July and August, COMUSMACV reported, was to reduce a "major threat posed by main force elements." Local force units and terrorists, however, remained active in the coastal plain.[4]

In September the enemy shifted his method of operation and pushed major forces down from the mountains toward Tuy Hoa and Phu Yen, with the apparent objective of seizing the rice harvest. Vigorous counterattacks by US, ROK, and ARVN forces thwarted these attempts, inflicting heavy casualties and driving the surviving enemy forces back into the mountains.[5]

The US 4th Infantry Division and 173rd Airborne Brigade, supported by three ARVN battalions, continued to block the Cambodian border in Operations FRANCIS MARION and GREELY. The enemy made no effort to cross the border in major force during the summer months. There were, however, numerous small-unit engagements in which friendly forces inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. Reporting on operations as of the end of September, COMUSMACV termed military progress "modest but steady."[6]

Summer Operations in IV CTZ

In IV CTZ, as in the other zones, destruction of enemy main forces and bases continued to be the primary objective of combat operations. In pursuit of these goals, friendly forces conducted a total of seven operations, each resulting in more than 50 enemy killed. One operation was of particular significance because it marked the entry of US combat units into action in the Zone. On 4 June the Mobile Riverine Force, consisting of US Navy TF 117 and a brigade of the US 9th Infantry Division and supported by various ARVN and VNMC units, launched CORONADO, a search-and-destroy operation which, under successive number designations, was to continue for the remainder of the year. There were frequent contacts with enemy units, the two largest being defeats of battalion-size forces on 19 June and 29 July. Reporting on conditions in IV CTZ as of the end of September, COMUSMACV pointed out that "the enemy situation . . . continues to deteriorate . . . . Continued GVN pressure, particularly against Viet Cong main force units and base areas, has affected . . . [the enemy's] ability to significantly deter the pacification effort and interdict lines of communication."[7]

4. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 6 Sep 67, JCS IN 63618.
5. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 10 Oct 67, JCS IN 35776.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

Summer Operations In I CTZ

In I CTZ, where General Westmoreland concentrated his major offensive efforts during the summer months, Marines and soldiers of the III MAF, Task Force OREGON, the ARVN, and ROK Marine Corps engaged in almost continuous heavy fighting. Along the DMZ, the 3rd Marine Division conducted Operations BUFFALO, HICKORY II, and KINGFISHER in succession. All were characterized by artillery exchanges and small unit engagements. A major action took place on 8 July during KINGFISHER when Marines routed an enemy force in a bunker complex within four kilometers of Con Thien. Despite the continuous combat activity, the enemy did not attempt the anticipated major assault on friendly positions during July or August. Guerrilla and terrorist attacks, however, remained at a high level.

In the southern portions of I CTZ, meanwhile, the 1st Marine Division and Task Force OREGON were also heavily engaged. Search-and-destroy operations such as COCHISE, MALHEUR, BENTON, COOK, and WHEELER were typical of these actions. In these engagements, friendly forces were universally victorious in terms of favorable casualty ratios and of driving opposing forces from the field. The enemy, nevertheless, continued to score successes in interdicting lines of communications, launching rocket and mortar attacks, and attacking isolated Vietnamese installations. On balance, however, COMUSMACV estimated that enemy combat effectiveness south of Route 9 was being continually degraded.[8]

The Enemy Offensive Along the DMZ

In spite of heavy fighting in the area of the DMZ, the major enemy offensive predicted by General Westmoreland for June or July had still not developed by the end of August. Greatly intensified bombardment of Con Thien, beginning in early September, however, marked the start of a strong effort by the enemy to win a major victory. Con Thien, situated 2 miles south of the DMZ and 14 miles from the coast, lies across a key infiltration route into the south. Its loss could open the way for a major invasion from the north by the 35,000 North Vietnamese troops massed in the area. At the very least, loss of Con Thien would block

8. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 6 Sep 67, JCS IN 63618.

construction of the anti-infiltration barrier system. More important would be the psychological impact of a major military victory by the enemy over US forces -- a goal the enemy had still been unable to achieve more than two years after the entry of US forces into combat on a large scale.

North Vietnamese bombardment of Con Thien reached its peak during the week of 19-27 September when 3,077 mortar, artillery and rocket rounds fell on the beleaguered US position. To counter the enemy bombardment General Westmoreland assembled one of the greatest massings of firepower in support of a single division in the history of warfare. These included 78 B-52 ARC LIGHT strikes, artillery fires, tactical air strikes, and naval gunfire. These fires, combined with an active defense and adverse weather conditions apparently dissuaded the enemy from mounting a major attack. By the end of September the hostile fires had substantially decreased.[9]

US casualties at Con Thien had, however, been heavy. During the period 1-24 September, enemy artillery, rocket, and mortar fire exacted a toll of 196 KIA and 1,917 WIA from US forces defending the DMZ. Concerned over the situation, President Johnson, on 21 September, asked the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., for a report. General Greene, the next day, described the situation for the President as one in which we "faced . . . increasing harassment of our fixed installations and units in the DMZ area by artillery, rocket and mortar fire" compounded by the heavy monsoon rains which severely impeded air support and overland movement.

The Marines were "not supinely enduring," General Greene reassured the President, but were actively countering by air, artillery, and infantry patrol actions, all of which were taking a toll in enemy casualties. Nevertheless, the situation was "not to our liking," Greene admitted. "It might be improved," he pointed out, "by attacking north to drive the enemy from positions on the DMZ, increasing forces on the DMZ and continuing present operations, or by withdrawing fixed defenses southward out of artillery range and conducting a mobile defense on the DMZ." All these courses of action, Greene concluded, were "under active consideration by the Theater Commander and his operational subordinates."[10]

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9. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 10 Oct 67, JCS IN 35776.
10. (TS) Memo, CMC to Pres, "Situation in the Area of the Vietnam Demilitarized Zone," 22 Sep 67, JMF 911/321 (22 Sep 67).

Although he had assured President Johnson that the Marines on the DMZ were giving a good account of themselves, General Greene was disturbed by the situation there. On 24 September he addressed a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in which he stated that he considered "the casualty level currently being experienced by the Marines in the DMZ region is too high, considering the operational benefits received." The main problem, as General Greene saw it, was that the friendly forces confronted at a disadvantage an enemy who was becoming increasingly skillful in employing artillery. The friendly forces were butted up against the DMZ and unable to get behind the enemy to cut off supplies or overrun his artillery.

As possible remedies for this situation, the Commandant of the Marine Corps listed four alternative courses of action: the three he had described for President Johnson plus a proposal to increase the air and naval gunfire effort north of the demarcation line. At the present time, he concluded, the "preferred course of action" was a combination of two of the four he had listed: namely, to reinforce forces along the DMZ and continue current operations, and to increase air and naval gunfire north of the demarcation line. To implement these courses of action would require a reinforcement of the northern I CTZ area by at least two regiments, improvement in target acquisition north of the demarcation line, employment of the entire ARC LIGHT capability, "several thousand" tactical air sorties, and maximum naval gunfire against the targets acquired, using the complete range of conventional weapons including MK-36 Destructor, Gravel and Dragon Tooth AP Mines, and Walleye.

General Greene recommended that the Joint Staff prepare for JCS consideration a memorandum to CINCPAC expressing the "concern of the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding the situation along the DMZ /and/ their views on possible courses of action," and requesting "the development of appropriate plans and recommendations to improve the situation."[11]

11. (TS-GP 4) CMCM 31-67 to JCS, 24 Sep 67, Att to JCS 2472/158, same file.

On 25 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff referred General Greene's memorandum to the Joint Staff, but rather than wait for preparation of a report, they decided to make an immediate request to Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland for information and views on the situation. A message to that effect, dispatched the same day, requested "any observations which you would care to offer regarding measures under way or planned which offer promise in relieving this situation. . . . In particular, are there any areas in which additional assistance and/or authorities beyond those now in hand would materially assist you?"[12]

Replying on 27 September, General Westmoreland confessed that he, too, was concerned over the situation on the DMZ on two counts: first, because of the high casualties and the ineffectiveness of efforts to suppress fires into friendly positions; and secondly, because he feared the DMZ situation would be viewed out of perspective. With regard to the second count, he pointed out that the casualties for September, while high, were not out of line with casualties incurred on other occasions. During July and August 1966, for instance, forces attempting to drive the enemy out of positions in Quang Tri Province suffered monthly casualties of 125 KIA and 488 WIA, and 115 KIA and 448 WIA respectively.

The fundamental difficulty on the DMZ, Westmoreland explained, was that the posture of friendly forces there was defensive, and, around Con Thien, relatively static. To shift to the offensive in operations limited to the area south of the Ben Hai River (the demarcation line) would invite repeated heavy casualties to attacking troops from enemy artillery north of the river. To make a major combined attack on these enemy positions from the sea and across the DMZ was out of the question until May or June because of the weather, even if political obstacles could be overcome. Limited offensive operations of the raid type, however, should not be ruled out, and plans for such operations were being prepared by CG, III MAF, and Commander, Seventh Air Force, for use if the situation required it.

12. (TS) Msg, JCS 7987 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 25 Apr 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (S) Note to Control Div, "CMCM-31-67 . . .," 25 Sep 67, JMF 911/321 (22 Sep 67).

In the current situation, General Westmoreland said he felt it to be unwise to increase the forces north of Route 9. He had accordingly taken several steps: stopped the installation of the anti-infiltration barrier and put resources earmarked for it into immediate hardening of combat bases and strong points north of and along Route 9; started emergency construction of an airstrip and logistical base near Quang Tri City out of range of artillery across the Ben Hai River; persuaded the South Vietnamese JGS to contribute two airborne battalions to the forces constructing and manning the strong points north of Dong Ha; directed CG, III MAF, to conduct operations north of Ai Van Pass to take pressure off friendly forces from the rear and along the critical line of communications; directed CG, III MAF, to consider thinning out his forces in forward areas near Con Thien and the Trace (the strip cleared for installation of the barrier) as soon as minimum defensive installations could be constructed behind these positions from which surveillance and patrol of the area could be conducted; and accelerated port development near Hue as a fall back position from Cua Viet.

To permit a shift of III MAF forces north should the need arise, General Westmoreland reported he had directed Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman to assign full responsibility for the three provinces comprising the southern part of I CTZ to the Americal Division (formed from Task Force OREGON on 22 September). Westmoreland reported he had also directed CG I FFORCEV to be prepared to move forces into southern I Corps should III MAF forces have to be redeployed north.

Turning to the areas in which he needed assistance from higher authorities, General Westmoreland listed the following: provide an immediate surge in B-52 sorties to the maximum sustainable rate, with a goal of 1,200 strikes per month as soon as possible; investigate the feasibility of employing 2,000 pound bombs in B-52s; make a liberal allocation of MK-36 weapons for use in the DMZ as soon as technical problems were solved; increase the number of naval gunfire ships in the DMZ area; provide flash and sound locator units as soon as possible; accelerate the deployment of units authorized under Program 5; approve increases in the RVNAF as recommended to the

Secretary of Defense in July; accelerate the issue of M-16s to ARVN units; and intensify research and development methods to locate concealed artillery pieces.[13]

Even as these messages and memoranda were being written, action was already in train that would ease the situation not only on the DMZ but also throughout SVN. On 22 September Secretary McNamara had approved Secretary of the Army Resor's request to move ahead the deployment of the headquarters group and one brigade of the 101st Airborne Division from February 1968 to December 1967.[14]

On 28 September General Westmoreland explained to Admiral Sharp the changes in USMACV plans and force deployment projections resulting from the accelerated movement of the 101st Airborne Division and the heavy enemy pressure on the DMZ. One of his major objectives for fall and winter had been to relieve the 1st Cavalry Division in Binh Dinh Province of II CTZ and commit it to successive countrywide offensive operations: PHOENIX to eliminate the enemy's Military Region 6; SANTA FE to destroy the 5th VC Division; SAN ANGELO to disrupt Military Region 10; and YORK to clean out the Do Xa. Other major objectives had been to reinforce I CTZ to the extent possible without unduly retarding operations elsewhere, to move additional elements of the 9th Infantry Division to the delta, and to reinforce III CTZ for major operations to drive the enemy away from populated areas.

These plans had been based on freeing the 1st Cavalry Division to reinforce II FFORCEV in early December, a move made impracticable by the heavy enemy pressures on the DMZ. The early arrival of the 101st Airborne Division would permit scheduled operations to proceed but with different unit assignments. The 1st Cavalry Division would not deploy to I CTZ, while the 101st Airborne Division would replace it in II CTZ.

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13. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 9056 to Actg CJCS, 2704382 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67.

14. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecA, 22 Sep 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-1, 25 Sep 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 16 Sep 67, Att to JCS 2472/153, 21 Sep 67; JMF 911/375 (16 Sep 67).

Early arrival of all the major combat units authorized under Program 5--the 11th Infantry Brigade and the remainder of the 101st Airborne Division--would facilitate the conduct of planned operations, General Westmoreland concluded.[15]

Admiral Sharp informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 October that he concurred in General Westmoreland's assessments and requests of 27 and 28 September for reinforcing actions by higher authority.[16]

Actions To Strengthen USMACV

The authorities in Washington lost no time in acting on General Westmoreland's proposals. The request for accelerated deployment of the 11th Infantry Brigade and the remainder of the 101st Airborne Division was taken under consideration by the Department of the Army, and, after a restudy of the problems involved, Secretary Resor recommended to Secretary McNamara that both units be deployed by air to SVN during December. Mr. McNamara on 21 October approved the request for early movement of the remainder of the 101st Airborne Division and on 6 November the request for early movement of the 11th Infantry Brigade.[17]

The request for an increase in ARC LIGHT to 1,200 sorties per month received equally speedy consideration. On 4 October General McConnell informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that Secretary McNamara had requested of the Air Force an assessment of its capability to attain the desired rate. General McConnell furnished the Joint Chiefs

15. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 281500Z Sep 67, JCS IN 14370.
16. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010608Z Oct 67, JCS IN 19184.
17. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 16 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-2, 17 Oct 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 20 Oct 67, and (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecA, 21 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-3, 23 Oct 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 31 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-4, 1 Nov 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecA, 6 Nov 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-5, 8 Nov 67; JMF 911/375 (16 Sep 67).

of Staff with a copy of the assessment he had supplied. It concluded that a surge in sorties could begin immediately and attain the 1,200 level by the end of December without a major relocation of major forces or an unacceptable degradation of SIOP capability. However, an increase in MK-82 and MK-117 bomb production would be required. On the basis of this assessment Secretary McNamara had recommended to President Johnson an immediate surge in ARC LIGHT sorties to 1,200 per month, a level that could be reached by January or February.[18]

General McConnell recommended that his memorandum be acted upon by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On 14 October they completed their review of the problem and forwarded a memorandum to Secretary McNamara recommending the continuation of the existing 800 sorties per month but with forces capable of a rapid increase to 1,200 sorties per month if required. This "surge" capability was to be attained by stationing an additional 9 B-52s on Guam, earmarking an additional 19 to begin movement to Guam on 72 hours' notice, constructing the necessary base facilities for them at Guam and U Tapao, and prepositioning support equipment at both bases. An increase in bomb production would also be required. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, in addition, increasing the number of B-52s permanently stationed at U Tapao from 15 to 30. This was an economy measure, calculated to save $3.5 million per month by eliminating flights from Guam and flying all ARC LIGHT sorties from U Tapao. The Secretary of Defense, on 10 November, approved the concept for providing a surge to 1,200 sorties and the proposal to base additional B-52s at U Tapao. However, he reduced the number from 30 to 25.[19]

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18. (TS-GP 3) CSAFM R-10-67 to JCS, 4 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/166, 4 Oct 67; (S) Note to Control Div, "Increase in B-52 Sorties to 1200/Month," 4 Oct 67; JMF 907/323 (4 Oct 67).

19. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-55-4-67 to SecDef, 14 Oct 67 (derived from JCS 2477/166-5); (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecAF, CJCS, ASD(ISA), 10 Nov 67, Att to JCS 2472/166-7, 14 Nov 67; same file.

On 2 October, in another move designed to provide more effective fire support to forces deployed near the DMZ, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, acting on a request from CINCPAC, recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he delegate to them, for further delegation to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, authority to approve ARC LIGHT strikes in southern NVN up to 170 degrees north latitude. The Secretary approved the recommendation on 28 November.[20]

Action on General Westmoreland's other requests was also speedily taken. Two destroyers and a cruiser of the SEA DRAGON force were diverted to augment naval gunfire operations in the DMZ, and a target acquisition battery was ordered to SVN to arrive about 15 October. In the research and development field, the minimum safe separation distance of MK-36 Destructors was determined to be 100 feet on land and 50 feet in the water. Investigations were continuing on operational problems concerning their use. In the meantime, CINCPAC was planning additional seedings of the weapons. Research in target acquisition of concealed artillery pieces had been in progress and was continuing, but no new types of equipment were expected to be operational before August 1969.[21]

Enemy Pressure on the Cambodian Border

The artillery duels around Con Thien had hardly subsided when enemy forces massing on the Cambodian border in II CTZ presented a threat of invasion from that quarter. During October, COMUSMACV reported, there were ominous signs of an enemy buildup in this area which reached critical proportions in November. On 2 November COMUSMACV estimated that four North Vietnamese regiments totaling approximately 9,000 men were massed astride the border in preparation for offensive action in Kontum Province.[22]

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20. (S-GP 3) JCSM-532-67 to SecDef, 2 Oct 67 (derived from JCS 2472/157); (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 28 Nov 67, Att to JCS 2472/157-1, 30 Nov 67; JMF 912/323 (11 Sep 67).

21. (TS-GP 3) CM 2668-67 to SecDef, 28 Sep 67, JMF 911/321 (27 Sep 67).

22. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 160113Z Dec 67, JCS IN 75000, and 120100Z Nov 67, JCS IN 12346.

To forestall an enemy attack, General Westmoreland rapidly moved five additional US battalions--two from the 1st Cavalry Division and three from the 173rd Airborne Brigade--into the area and launched preemptive attacks in the vicinity of the town of Dak To. Contact with enemy forces dug in on jungle-clad heights was quickly made, and a series of vicious firefights followed. After repeated assaults, US and ARVN forces succeeded in seizing the key heights and driving most of the enemy back across the border into Cambodia. Casualties on both sides were heavy: US, 289 KIA; ARVN, 73 KIA; enemy, 1,222 KIA.[23]

The enemy objective, as revealed by a captured document, was to annihilate a major US unit, thereby drawing US troops away from the coastal areas and exposing the pacification efforts to enemy attack. This effort was at least partially successful, for the 1st Cavalry Division's Operation PERSHING, after early successes, became essentially a holding action after the redeployment of two of its battalions to the border area.[24]

Operations in the other CTZs continued, meanwhile, at much their previous pace throughout the remainder of the year. In I CTZ the Marines continued search-and-destroy missions in the northern part of the Zone under the nicknames KENTUCKY, LANCASTER, SCOTLAND, and NEOSHO. Fighting during these operations consisted largely of small-unit engagements. In the southern part of the Zone, Army forces conducted Operations WHEELER and WALLOWA against the 2nd NVA Division, and inflicted heavy casualties upon it and prevented it from interfering with the rice harvest. In III CTZ, also, search-and-destroy operations continued. Operations SARATOGA and YELLOWSTONE succeeded KOLE KOLE, BARKING SANDS and DIAMOND HEAD. The CORONADO operations continued in IV CTZ.[25]

During 1967 friendly forces suffered casualties totaling 23,199 KIA and 93,791 WIA, Enemy losses during the year were 88,104 KIA.[26]

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23. Ibid. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, I, pp. 378-379.
24. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, I, p. 375.
25. Ibid., pp. 363-367, 393-394, and 396-398.
26. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Combat Analysis Group, J-3, "Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia," CAG Statistical Series, vol I, No. 7, 3 Feb 69.

Reinforcement of Free World Military Assistance Forces

Reinforcements for FWMAF contingents in SVN continued to arrive during the last half of 1967 and the early months of 1968. By September all the Australian, New Zealand, and Thai forces offered by the respective governments the previous winter had arrived in the country.

During July the ROKFV was swelled by about 3,000 troops--a Marine battalion, miscellaneous small Army units, and an increase to cover patients in hospitals. The provision of these forces by the ROK was the result of a visit by the ROK Minister of Defense to Korean forces in SVN in December 1966. Highly impressed by what he saw, the Minister urged his government to deploy additional forces to SVN. Because of approaching elections, however, the ROK government took no action until April 1967, at which time it proposed a package increment to provide these additional forces. Negotiations followed between US and Korean representatives, leading to an agreement on 17 June under which the US Government would fund completely the augmentation in the same manner it had funded the ROK forces provided in 1966.

Additional Free World forces were promised during October. On 16 October the New Zealand Government announced it would deploy an additional infantry company (150-170 men) to SVN. The next day the Australian Government declared its intention to reinforce its forces in SVN by 1,700 men comprising an infantry battalion and a tank squadron. Subsequently the addition of a helicopter unit and a small naval aviation contingent brought the total to 1,978. These Australian and New Zealand offers were in response to requests made on behalf of President Johnson by Mr. Clark Clifford and General Maxwell Taylor during visits to the two countries in July. The New Zealanders and the Australian infantry battalion arrived in SVN in mid-December. The remaining Australian units did not arrive until February and March 1968.[27]

At the end of 1967, FWMAF in RVN numbered 60,531--47,802 from Korea; 6,715 from Australia; 2,205 from

27. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, I, pp. 252-266. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, II, p. 567.

Thailand; 2,020 from the Philippines; 522 from New Zealand; 31 from Nationalist China; and 13 from Spain.[28]

The Barrier and Other Anti-Infiltration Programs

Without continuous fresh injections of men and materiel from NVN, the communist insurgency in SVN could not have been sustained. At the beginning of 1967 infiltration from NVN to SVN was estimated by US intelligence agencies to be running at a rate of about 3,000 men per month. Curtailment of the flow of men and supplies from NVN into SVN became, therefore, a major objective of US strategy. ROLLING THUNDER had as one of its main purposes the interdiction of men and supplies moving through NVN on their way to SVN, while the companion interdiction programs STEEL TIGER and TIGER HOUND attacked the part of this supply and reinforcement movement that passed through Laos.[29]

The STEEL TIGER program during 1967 was marked by a relaxation of previous restraints which had required aircraft to avoid populated areas and thus had inhibited the maximum use of air power in Laos. In early 1967 authorities refined the STEEL TIGER operating guidelines and created four zones within the panhandle of Laos. Zone I, adjacent to the SVN border, was designated as a "TIGER HOUND Special Operating Area," in which armed reconnaissance was permitted against all roads, tracks, paths, and rivers, and air strikes were permitted against all enemy activity. In Zone II, just to the west and north of the first zone, STEEL TIGER armed reconnaissance was permitted day or night against targets of opportunity located within 200 yards of a motorable trail or road. Other targets in this zone could be struck under certain special circumstances. In Zone III, still further west and north, all strikes had to be under positive FAC or MSQ radar control. Zone IV, including approximately the western half of the Laotian panhandle, was a STEEL TIGER controlled zone in which all strikes required approval of the US Ambassador to Laos as well as positive FAC control. The combined efforts in the

28. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, II, pp. 568-569.
29. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA/JCS, "Southeast Asia Military Fact Book," Jul 67, p. A-85.

STEEL TIGER and TIGER HOUND areas by USAF, USN, and USMC aircraft during the year averaged 3,219 attack sorties per month.30

Closely allied to the air interdiction programs was SHINING BRASS, which continued throughout 1967 sending small teams from SVN to conduct cross-border operations into Laos, including reconnaissance operations to confirm targets for air strikes, and exploitation and support operations. On 25 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff expanded the SHINING BRASS operating zone. The former line had extended from the southwest corner of the DMZ south to the Cambodian border, varying in depth from 5 kilometers in the north to 20 kilometers in the south. The new line began at a point on the NVN/Laotian border approximately 30 kilometers north of the DMZ and extended south to the Cambodian border, with a depth variation of from 20 kilometers in the north to 30 kilometers near the Cambodian border. SHINING BRASS was also renicknamed PRAIRIE FIRE effective 1 March.31

A companion reconnaissance operation to PRAIRIE FIRE was DANIEL BOONE, a program of clandestine ground reconnaissance in Cambodia approved on 22 May 1967. The decision to conduct DANIEL BOONE operations was based on the recommendations of a joint State-Defense-CIA Study Group for Cambodia, which had been established on 21 December 1966 to consider the problems generated by enemy occupation and exploitation of Cambodian territory. Among the matters presented to the Study Group was a JCS recommendation of 19 December that US forces be permitted to pursue enemy forces with whom they were engaged into Cambodia. The Study Group reported in early May, and recommended that efforts to deal with the problem of enemy forces in Cambodia be primarily political. The JCS proposal for "hot pursuit" should not be implemented, the Study Group recommended, in order to avoid provocative actions which might jeopardize political approaches or extend the war into Cambodia. To obtain intelligence of enemy activities in Cambodia, the Study Group recommended the execution of DANIEL BOONE operations. The Departments of State and

30. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, I, pp. 438-441. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, II, pp. 660-666.

31. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, II, pp. 741-745. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 7248 to CINCPAC, 251907Z Feb 67. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 6319 to CINCSAC, et al., 142123Z Feb 67.

Defense approved the Study Group recommendations on 9 and 17 May. The Joint Chiefs of Staff on 22 May directed CINCPAC to initiate DANIEL BOONE.[32]

These programs enjoyed some modest success, but the continuing high rate of infiltration stimulated a search for more effective counterinfiltration measures. During 1966, despite military opposition, the Secretary of Defense had strongly advocated the construction of an anti-infiltration barrier (PRACTICE NINE) across the northern part of Quang Tri Province in SVN, and considerable discussion and planning had taken place. On 13 January 1967 the President approved the plan and assigned to it the highest national priority. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had already requested that COMUSMACV and CINCPAC submit requirements plans based on the 22 December project definition plan of General Starbird, who was the Director of the Defense Communications Planning Group (DCPG), the body organized by Secretary McNamara to manage PRACTICE NINE. The plan for a conventional ground-supported linear barrier for eastern Quang Tri Province was due by 10 February, while that for an air-supported barrier westward and into Laos was due by 15 April.[33]

On 26 January 1967, COMUSMACV forwarded the MACV PRACTICE NINE Requirements Plan for the linear barrier to CINCPAC, who a week later passed it on to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The purpose of the plan was not only to provide subordinate MACV commands with broad planning guidance, but also to provide higher headquarters with concepts and estimated requirements to support the system. The linear strong point and obstacle system, designed to impede infiltration and to detect invasion, would extend from the South China

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32. (TS) Initial Rept, Jt State-Def-CIA Study Gp for Cambodia, n.d., JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66) sec 1A. (TS) Ltr, USecState to DepSecDef, 9 May 67; (TS) Memo, ASD (ISA) to DepSecDef, 15 May 67; (TS-GP 1) Ltr, DepSecDef to USecState, 17 May 67; Att to JCS 2343/820-6, 24 May 67. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5937 to CINCPAC, 221958Z May 67. See Ch.35, for earlier developments regarding Cambodia.

33. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2986 to CINCPAC, 061927Z Jan 67. For the beginning of the story on the anti-infiltration capability during 1966, see Ch. 35.

Sea near the DMZ westward to the vicinity of Dong Ha Mountain, some 19 miles inland.[34]

The system would consist of a series of obstacles, observation posts, strong points, and base areas. The barbed wire and minefield obstacles, equipped with sensor/detector devices, starlight scopes, and searchlights, would vary in length and width and would be placed so as to deny enemy access to known infiltration routes, provide early warning of intrusion, and compel the enemy to concentrate forces by channeling his movements. Eventually the obstacles would be extended to form a solid line westward, possibly to the Laotian border. The observation posts would simply serve to insure the surveillance of the fixed obstacles. The strong points would be heavily fortified with bunkers and trenches around the perimeters of helicopter pads. Each would be bolstered against overhead fire and would have the necessary communications capability to request and direct air, ground, and naval fire support. Each would be manned by up to a reinforced company and would be provided with automatic and direct fire weapons and mortars. The strong points would be placed in position to interdict the channelled enemy infiltrators. Adding depth to the obstacles, the observation posts, and the strong points would be the base areas, which along with the strong points would occupy key terrain features and would originate patrol and fire support. These areas would serve as bases for forces of less than battalion strength operating from the strong points, and would hold artillery units that would be within range of the strong points.[35]

All civilians would be evacuated from the area immediately in the vicinity of obstacles, strong points, and forward base areas. Extensive air and ground patrolling would detect intrusion and maintain contact with the populace in surrounding areas. Tactical air and naval gunfire would be available on short notice, and aerial reconnaissance would be performed. Helicopters would lift mobile strike forces from rear areas to block penetrations or to destroy intruders.[36]

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34. (TS-GP 3) MACV PRACTICE NINE Requirements Plan, 26 Jan 67, Encl to (TS-GP 3) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 00057, 3 Feb 67, Att to JCS 2471/3, 6 Feb 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67)..

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

COMUSMACV estimated that the linear barrier ultimately would have to be manned by a division, an armored cavalry regiment, and necessary supporting units. He assumed that maximum support would be provided by combat, combat service, and combat service support forces already in the area. An infantry brigade of 4,460 personnel plus augmentations totaling 3,231 men would be required initially, and would be the first increment of the division force.[37]

General Westmoreland pointed out that even if his command was reinforced by the necessary units, substantial MACV forces would have to be diverted to support the plan, thereby interfering with current operations. He also warned that the strong point obstacle line was but one of many anti-infiltration programs and that a proper balance should be maintained among all of them. These programs, he continued, would not stop all infiltration, but would make it more difficult and more costly for the enemy. In that light, the term "barrier" should be dropped, COMUSMACV said, since it implied an impregnable defense. In order to meet the proposed 1 November 1967 initial operational capability (IOC) date established by the Starbird plan, immediate action was necessary to provide construction funding, procurement of materials, and authority to negotiate with the RVN.[38]

Admiral Sharp, following his review of the MACV plan, recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that it not be implemented within the time frame envisioned because of the need for additional forces to construct and man the obstacle system, the diversion of forces deployed in or en route to SVN, and the need to maintain a balance in all anti-infiltration programs.[39]

When the Joint Chiefs reviewed the MACV plan they were unable to agree, and on 22 February forwarded split views to the Secretary of Defense. The four Service Chiefs recommended against implementation of the plan. They noted that it would require a total of 7,691 personnel above those currently authorized in Program 4, and diversion of some 11,500 US military and ARVN personnel from current programs. GVN agreement would have to be obtained in order

37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 060820Z Feb 67, JCS IN 87183, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67) sec 1.

to provide about 23,000 acres and to relocate 13,000 to 18,000 civilians. The plan also required immediate authority to procure and schedule shipment of construction material for strong points and bases and additional FY 1967 funding authority of $13.5 million for specified construction projects. Another objection to the plan was that the increased anti-infiltration capability would be in northeastern SVN where NVN infiltration had been minimal.[40]

The Chairman, on the other hand, recommended to Secretary McNamara that he approve the MACV plan. Although he supported the conclusion of the Service Chiefs regarding the resources required to implement it, General Wheeler believed that the eastern DMZ area represented a potential corridor for infiltration, and installation of a barrier would therefore be a prudent action. In addition, he believed it was possible that the level of activity near the DMZ might require a large diversion of forces to that area whether the barrier was constructed or not. In any event, plans could always be changed if the situation required it. He therefore recommended immediate authority and funding for improvements to Route 1 and the port at Hue, a necessary requirement to implement the plan; approval in principle for the deployment of 7,691 personnel as additive to Program 4; immediate representation to the State Department regarding negotiations with the GVN to acquire land; and authorization for procurement of materials for installation of strong points and base camps, for delivery in phase with force closure and logistic buildup plans.[41]

Secretary McNamara accepted General Wheeler's recommendations, decided that "preparations for the execution of the . . . plan . . . should go forward as quickly as possible," and directed that the necessary implementing actions be taken. This was not a decision to execute the plan, but merely to continue preparations to meet the IOC date in the event such a decision was made. The Secretary also requested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff furnish recommendations for providing the added forces required by the plan.[42]

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40. (S) Note to Control Div, 17 Feb 67; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-97-67 to SecDef, 22 Feb 67, (derived from JCS 2471/3-3); JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67) sec 2.

41. (TS-GP 1) CM-2134-67 to SecDef, 22 Feb 67, Encl A to JCS 2471/3-3, 18 Feb 67, same file.

42. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 6 Mar 67, Att to JCS 2471/3-4, 7 Mar 67, same file.

Providing these additional forces posed a problem for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Selected reserve units could not be made available for the requirement, and there was a risk of an unfavorable personnel impact upon the existing overall force structure. To minimize that risk, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the Army withdraw subordinate units totaling 8,353 personnel from the NATO M+30 reinforcing divisions, which were slated to deploy within 30 days to Europe in the event of NATO mobilization. This would enable the brigade force to close SVN in time to meet the IOC date. The Army Chief of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations "indicated" that additional strength authority and funding totaling $296 million would be required to provide the additive forces and their equipment and to restore the sustaining base. Readiness dates for these units depended upon a decision date not later than 31 March, and any decision made subsequent to that time would bring corresponding slippage.[43]

The Service Chiefs took the opportunity in the memorandum to the Secretary to reiterate their earlier position expressed on 22 February, and to recommend that no decision be made to increase anti-infiltration operations along the DMZ until the second MACV plan, due in April 1967, had been evaluated. The Chairman did not concur with the Service Chiefs, but reiterated his own earlier position. He did recommend, however, that the Secretary approve the added forces and the required funding as recommended by the Service Chiefs.[44]

On 8 April the Secretary of Defense approved for planning purposes the deployment of forces recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the linear barrier, but he excepted certain units totaling 531 personnel that either were not considered necessary or would have to be provided from present MACV resources. The approval increased US strength in SVN by 7,522, and offshore Navy strength by 300. Program 4 was revised accordingly.[45]

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43. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-162-67 to SecDef, 23 Mar 67 (derived from JCS 2471/3-5), JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67) sec 3.

44. Ibid. (C-GP 4) CM-2195-67 to SecDef, 23 Mar 67, Encl A to JCS 2471/3-5, 17 Mar 67, same file.

45. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 8 Apr 67, Att to JCS 2471/3-7, 10 Apr 67, same file.

In the meantime the MACV staff had been preparing the PRACTICE NINE Air-Supported Anti-Infiltration Plan, which was forwarded on 11 March to CINCPAC and on 3 April to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This plan was designed to complement the strong point obstacle system described in the earlier MACV plan, and to augment existing anti-infiltration programs through the selective use of specialized munitions, sensors, and related equipment then under development. A portion of the air-supported system would be established in western Quang Tri Province until the ground-supported obstacle system could be extended to the Laotian border. The air-supported plan anticipated increased infiltration activity through Laos as a result of the installation of the linear capability across northern RVN. Like its companion plan, the air-supported system would make infiltration more difficult and costly to the enemy but would not stop it.[46]

The antivehicle portion of the system was to be operational by 1 November 1967, but the antipersonnel portion on that date would simply enter an operational test phase with a limited capability. It would be upgraded later to a full operational system if tests proved successful. The antivehicle portion would be based upon anti-infiltration systems already in operation. US forces had already demonstrated their ability to interdict the flow of vehicular traffic, but this would have to be expanded and improved in the face of the anticipated increase in enemy infiltration activity in Laos. Current operations in the STEEL TIGER and TIGER HOUND areas would continue at an equal or greater intensity to destroy enemy vehicles as far from SVN as possible. Concurrently, the air-supported antivehicle plan would concentrate on new or improved techniques, equipment, and forces.[47]

Stopping the infiltration of personnel, on the other hand, was a far greater problem, if not an insurmountable one when attempted solely from the air. It would require massive quantities of sensors and ordnance. The goal, therefore, would be not to stop, but to restrict infiltration, inflict casualties, disrupt infiltration patterns,

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46. (TS-GP 3) MACV PRACTICE NINE Air-Supported Anti-Infiltration Plan, 11 Mar 67, Encl to (TS-GP 3) Ltr, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 11 Mar 67, Att to JCS 2471/3-3, 4 Apr 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67) sec 5.

47. Ibid.

force infiltration into difficult terrain, and demoralize porters and soldiers. Under the air-supported system, denial weapons would be seeded in areas of known infiltration routes and where the terrain permitted ease of access. There would be a selective use of sensors to locate activity, to detect when seeded areas had been breached, to identify additional areas requiring seeding, and to pinpoint targets for air strikes. There would be a constant shifting of interdiction points and seeded areas.[48]

Located at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, would be the Infiltration Surveillance Center (ISC), within VHF/UHF range of airborne EC-121 monitor aircraft to receive and act upon any sensor information or detonations in the minefields. That center would also pass along to the Seventh Air Force any strike request. To meet the stated operational date of 1 November 1967, COMUSMACV recommended immediate funding action so that necessary construction could be initiated.[49]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in their evaluation of the plan, agreed with COMUSMACV that any increase in efforts to inhibit and interdict infiltration should involve intensifying current programs as well as combining them with new programs of proven effectiveness. The Joint Chiefs pointed out that, in order to meet the IOC date, the air-supported plan assumed that all of the component and subsystem development then under way would proceed without delay; that the governments of South Vietnam, Laos and Thailand would approve the concept and its associated risks to friendly forces and civilians; that authorization would be given to conduct PRAIRIE FIRE operations in the PRACTICE NINE area and to base in and operate from Thailand as well as from South Vietnam; that the government of Thailand would agree to expansion of air base facilities at Nam Phong, Nakhon Phanom, and Ubon, as well as to the construction of additional Army logistic support facilities at various locations in Thailand; and that funding authorization and political clearances for construction and communications expansion could be obtained immediately. There were many other risks and problems associated with the

48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.

plan that were intensified, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by the urgent schedule demanded by the 1 November IOC date.[50]

The Joint Chiefs also noted that the required additive resources included 5,444 personnel, 47 fixed-wing aircraft and 24 helicopters, and funding totaling $22.3 million. Additional funds of approximately $2.5 million would be required in the PRAIRIE FIRE account administered by the Navy for the initial one-year period. They were becoming increasingly concerned, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, over the availability of funding to support the PRACTICE NINE requirements.[51]

In light of all these problems, the Joint Chiefs recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the execution of the plan be delayed until approximately 1 April 1968, when the capabilities of the new equipment under development would have been more fully proven and the inherent risks in the program lowered. They also recommended that immediate steps be taken to obtain approvals needed for PRACTICE NINE construction and operational concepts, and for expansion of PRAIRIE FIRE operations; that required forces be approved for planning as additive to Program 4; and that the required funds be designated and allocated immediately.[52]

The Secretary of Defense was determined to hold to the 1 November IOC date and to go forward with the preparations. On 22 April he initiated action with the State Department for negotiations with the governments of Laos and Thailand to obtain the approvals needed for PRACTICE NINE basing and for concurrences in the required expansion of area and scope for PRAIRIE FIRE operations. He also took steps to determine required additional costs, and to prepare resources needed to support the plan. About two weeks later the Secretary, after deleting 1,368 Air Force and 419 Army transportation personnel spaces, approved for planning purposes the deployment of the forces recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He did not,

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50. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-204-67 to SecDef, 17 Apr 67, (derived from JCS 2471/11-1), JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67) sec 6.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.

however, approve the opening of Nam Phong Air Base but suggested that aircraft planned for deployment there should be shifted to Korat and Nakhon Phanom or some other suitable base. Program 4 was revised to include the approved forces. A later reevaluation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff persuaded the Secretary of Defense to approve the 419 Army spaces he had previously deleted.[53]

On 8 June the Joint Chiefs again reemphasized their views of 22 February. They recommended that if the Secretary decided to execute the plan CINCPAC and COMUSMACV be given maximum flexibility in the employment of PRACTICE NINE resources. The Chairman, again dissenting from the earlier views of his colleagues, recommended simply that COMUSMACV be authorized to utilize PRACTICE NINE resources in accordance with his needs.[54]

The Secretary of Defense on 13 June finally expanded his approvals of 6 March and 8 April to include authorization to employ resources earmarked for the PRACTICE NINE strong point obstacle sector in the execution of the MACV plan of 26 January. But the decision came too late to permit material to arrive in SVN in time for construction to be completed by the IOC date. Meanwhile, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed deployment of certain forces associated with the anti-infiltration capability. In addition, the GVN had been approached, and US forces were assisting the ARVN in clearing land.[55]

That same day, 13 June, the name PRACTICE NINE was discontinued because of a partial compromise and was replaced by ILLINOIS CITY until 15 July, when it became DYE MARKER. Still later, on 7 September, following the public

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53. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 Apr 67, Att to JCS 2471/11-2, 28 Apr 67; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 8 May 67, Att to JCS 2471/11-3, 10 May 67; same file. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-400-67 to SecDef, 15 Jul 67, (derived from JCS 2471/11-5); (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 25 Jul 67, Att to JCS 2471/11-6, 27 Jul 67; same file, sec 7.

54. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-322-67 to SecDef, 8 Jun 67, Encl A to JCS 2471/3-9, 8 Jun 67, same file, sec 7.

55. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jun 67, Att to JCS 2471/3-10, 16 Jun 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67). (TS-GP 3) Memo, DCPG to SecDef, 23 May 67, Encl B to JCS 2471/3-9, 8 Jun 67, same file. (TS-GP 1) Interv, author with SEA Br, J-5, OJCS, 3 Apr 69.

release in Washington of certain information strongly implying that construction of a strong point obstacle system was under way, the classified name of DYE MARKER was changed again to the Strong Point Obstacle System (SPOS). The two air-supported subsystems in Laos and western SVN became DUMP TRUCK (antipersonnel) and MUD RIVER (antivehicle), collectively known as MUSCLE SHOALS.[56]

By 14 July, the bulldozing of a 600 meter strip for the DYE MARKER line had been completed from the coast to a point 13 kilometers inland, except for a 4 kilometer gap beginning 4 kilometers from the coast. CINCPAC on that same date requested JCS approval for additional materials required to plug the gap and to extend the line westward another 6 kilometers. However, the Secretary of Defense did not approve the extension until a month later.[57]

In the early fall, the enemy began to concentrate artillery, rocket, and mortar fires in the area of the DMZ, hampering the emplacement of the system. Press disclosures, about the same time, gave the enemy valuable knowledge of the SPOS. Furthermore, heavy monsoon rains impeded the flow of materials to the forward sites, delayed construction, and increased the period of troop exposure. These developments threatened to inflict unacceptable casualties if work on the SPOS continued. COMUSMACV, therefore, recommended to CINCPAC on 16 September a delay in the construction of the system until the weather and the enemy situation permitted work to be resumed. CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 18 September that he concurred in the recommendation of COMUSMACV and expressed the opinion that there had been too much emphasis on the 1 November IOC date. The recommendations of COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, along with certain technical and logistical difficulties, led the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conclude on 19 September that the IOC date should be postponed for 30 days. The Chief of Staff, USAF, as acting Chairman, informed the Secretary of Defense of the JCS views on 22 September. The Secretary approved them and accordingly deferred the IOC date for

56. (C) Msg, DCPG to SecDef, 132118Z Jun 67, JCS IN 76886. (S-GP 3) Msg, DCPG to SecDef et al., 7 Sep 67, JCS IN 66612, JMF 911/321 (7 Sep 67).

57. (S-GP 4) Memo, CINCPAC to JCS, 14 Jul 67, Encl to JCS 2471/27, 20 Jul 67; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 16 Aug 67, Encl to JCS 2471/27-1, 18 Aug 67; JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67) sec 7. (TS-GP 1) Interv, author with SEA Br, J-5, OCJCS, 3 Apr 69.

MUD RIVER to 1 December 1967, and for DUMP TRUCK to 1 January 1968. MUD RIVER began operations on schedule, but technical difficulties forced a postponement of the planned initiation date of DUMP TRUCK until 20 January 1968. The siege of the Khe Sanh, however, forced a further postponement until the spring of 1968.[58]

Logistics

The operational successes enjoyed by allied forces would not have been possible without a strong logistics base. Created almost from scratch following the decision of the United States to commit troops to combat in 1965, this base had been largely completed by the end of 1966. At this date, it included such installations as five deep-water ports and eight jet-capable airfields with a combined freight throughput of 870,000 short tons per month, cantonments, a modern communications system, and efficient systems for storage and distribution of supplies. Still far from satisfactory, however, was the condition of the port of Saigon and the roads comprising the ground lines of communication. Improvement of these facilities became major logistics tasks for 1967. There were also major logistics problems to be solved as the result of the increased forces provided by Program 5, the heavy combat operations along the DMZ, and the construction of the anti-infiltration barrier. In other respects the major logistic undertakings were intended to refine the system and to improve its efficiency by such means as the transfer of certain functions from AID to DOD and the expansion of the Army common supply system to replace the system operated by the Navy to support units operating in I CTZ.

By the beginning of 1967, the highway system of SVN had deteriorated badly as a result of many years of enemy interdiction, lack of maintenance, and increasingly heavy use by allied military forces. But even if it had been

58. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 30673 to CINCPAC, 161208Z Sep 67, JCS IN 82485; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 180740Z Sep 67, JCS IN 85864; JMF 911/321 (16 Sep 67). (TS-GP 3) JCSM-517-67 to SecDef, 19 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2471/41) (not sent); (TS) Memo, CSAF to Actg CJCS, 22 Sep 67, Att to (TS-GP 3) 1st N/H to JCS 2471/41, 26 Sep 67; JMF 911/321 (17 Sep 67).

in good condition, the system would not have been adequate for the large carriers and heavy-axle loads of military traffic.[59]

The 1967 military goals for road clearance, set forth in the Combined Campaign Plan for 1967, were to "secure" all roads in national priority areas and to "secure" about 500 miles and "open" about 600 additional miles of highways considered essential for military operations. The term "secure" was defined to mean "controlled by RVN/US/FWMAF during daylight hours. Isolated incidents may occur." The term "open" was defined to mean "used by RVN/US/FWMAF employing thorough security measures. Frequent incidents may occur."[60]

Allied forces scored dramatic successes during 1967 in securing and opening the essential highways. At the beginning of the year, COMUSMACV classified only 500 miles, or about 30 percent, of the military essential roads as "secure" and 76 percent as "open." By the end of the year, these figures had increased to 60 percent "secure" and 98 percent "open."[61]

Congestion in the port of Saigon was another major unsolved logistics problem at the beginning of 1967. As the year began, military operations at leased piers were proceeding with reasonable efficiency, but the commercial port was jammed with ships and barges containing some 311,400 short tons waiting to be unloaded. By late spring new construction and improved management had ended the crisis in the commercial port. The completion of facilities in the military Newport permitted release of leased berths to civilian use, and the training and guidance by USMACV and AID port organizations, had improved the GVN Port Authority to the point where it could move cargo through

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59. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, II, pp. 762-764.

60. (S-GP 3) COMUSMACV and CJGS, RVNAF, AB 142, "Combined Campaign Plan, 1967," 7 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3/3100 (7 Nov 66) sec 1A.

61. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, II, p. 765. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 296.

the port expeditiously. As a result, by the end of June there were no ships in a hold status and average ship turnaround time had dropped from 89 to 7 days.[62]

In view of this substantial improvement in port operations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that it was no longer necessary for USMACV to continue handling AID Central Purchasing Authority cargoes. These cargoes consisted of goods consigned to the GVN for use in the counter-insurgency program. COMUSMACV had agreed to handle them in 1966 in order to ease the commercial cargo backlog. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 19 August, recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he seek agreement of the Department of State and the AID to transfer responsibility for these cargoes to an appropriate US or GVN agency. Agreement was reached among these agencies, leading on 29 August to the dispatch of a joint State/Defense/AID message to the US Embassy in Saigon requesting the preparation of a plan for this purpose.[63]

On 1 December the joint USMACV/AID Saigon Port Advisory Plan providing for transfer of responsibility from USMACV to AID had been completed, but the implementation date was still under negotiation between the US Mission in SVN, OSD, and AID at the end of 1967.[64]

In the northern I CTZ, the need for port facilities increased as the result of the heavy fighting along the DMZ and the decision to install the anti-infiltration system. In the absence of deep-draft facilities in the area, landing craft sites in the Hue area were doubled during the year. During 1967 throughput of port facilities in the area increased from 540 to 5,500 short tons per day.[65]

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62. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, II, pp. 808-816.

63. (S-GP 4) JCSM-458-67 to SecDef, 19 Aug 67 (derived from JCS 2472/130); (S-GP 4) Msg, DEF 5000 to Saigon, 29 Aug 67; JMF 911/479 (7 Aug 67).

64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, II, p. 816. (U) Memo, Actg VD/JS to ASD(I&L), 18 Jul 68, Att to JCS 2472/330, 20 Jul 68, JMF 911/479 (7 Aug 67).

65. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 292.

Providing the necessary support for the additional forces authorized under Program 5 was another new logistic task that had to be faced in 1967. The facility with which the logistic system accommodated to the added burdens was proof of the soundness with which it had been planned and built. CINCPAC and COMUSMACV determined that existing port facilities would be adequate to support the movement of the additional forces, but that additional housing and related troop facilities would have to be constructed. On 7 October CINCPAC recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff construction of facilities costing $216.2 million. They reduced the figure and recommended new construction in the amount of $168.9 million to the Secretary of Defense. This latter figure represented a mere 10 percent increase in the amount already appropriated for military construction in SVN. The items recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff were included by the OSD in the FY 1969 Military Construction Program.[66]

Among the many refinements in the logistic system in SVN, one of the more important resulted from Secretary McNamara's decision of 30 November 1966 to shift responsibility for certain specific services from AID to DOD. This action imposed additional responsibilities on the logistic system in SVN. According to CINCPAC, these additional responsibilities generated a need for an additional 5,858 military personnel spaces, an added $37 million in FY 1967 construction funds, and an increase of 2 billion piasters in the amount of this currency available for military spending.[67]

There was also a need to delegate authority within the DOD for management of the newly acquired functions. On 26 February General Westmoreland recommended to CINCPAC that he be delegated directive authority for program approval and direction in SVN, but that funding and fiscal accounting be a Service responsibility. CINCPAC approved

66. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, II, pp. 897-900. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, 7 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/146-1, JMF 911/420 (5 Sep 67) sec 2. (S-GP 4) JCSM-677-67 to SecDef, 4 Dec 67 (derived from JCS 2472/146-4); (C-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 19 Jan 68, Att to JCS 2472/146-5, 22 Jan 68; same file, sec 3.

67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, II, p. 853.

the recommendation, but it was rejected at a joint AID/DOD meeting in Washington in late March. Final decision was delegated to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who, on 11 April, rejected the action taken at the joint meeting and delegated to CINCPAC "program directive and review authority." He, in turn, delegated the authority to COMUSMACV.[68]

Another effort to refine the logistic system, the establishment of a single common supply system to provide common-user items to all units in SVN, did not meet with success. The establishment of such a system to replace the dual system then in effect had been directed by Secretary McNamara on 12 December 1966. At that time, USARV and NAVFORV operated parallel systems, the former supplying all units in II, III, and IV CTZs and the latter performing the same function in I CTZ. Secretary McNamara tasked the Department of the Army with preparation of a detailed plan, and made clear that approval would be dependent upon the establishment of the necessary control mechanism in the theater. On 8 February, the Department of the Army submitted a plan to the Secretary of Defense providing for establishing this mechanism by deploying an Inventory Control Center to SVN. On 9 May, following consultation with the other Service Departments, the Department of the Army submitted a detailed plan calling for the phased implementation of a single common supply system. Secretary McNamara, on 21 July, informed the Service Secretaries that he was withholding approval of the Army plan pending presentation of more definitive requirement data, establishment of the necessary Army supply capability in SVN, and the resolution of certain interservice disagreements. By the end of 1967, the single common supply system had still not been put into effect.[69]

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68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, II, pp. 722-723. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2478 to CINCPAC, 112316Z Apr 67.

69. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Service Secys and CJCS, 12 Dec 66, Att to JCS 2315/349-23, 15 Dec 66, JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 4. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 8 Feb 67, Att to JCS 2315/349-24, 10 Feb 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 8 May 67, Att to JCS 2315/349-25, 12 May 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Service Secys, 21 Jul 67, Att to JCS 2315/349-26; same file, sec 5.

The Situation at the End of 1967

During 1967 Admiral Sharp, summing up operations in SVN for the year, reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there was a "definite shift in the military situation favorable to us." This happy result was made possible by the "significant increase in the strengths and capabilities of allied forces which facilitated expansion of combat operations to an extent which "denies the enemy the capability to conduct significant operations in the populated areas." Ground operations, closely supported by close air and ARC LIGHT strikes, had increasingly neutralized enemy base areas, located and destroyed his supplies, and driven him into sparsely populated regions where food was scarce. Most of the enemy main force units had been driven to positions near the borders, where they took advantage of sanctuaries for protection and resupply.

Steady progress had also been made in destroying communist local forces and infrastructure. As a result, the proportion of the population and area under enemy control had slowly but steadily declined.

In spite of these favorable trends, CINCPAC cautioned, the enemy had "demonstrated a willingness to accept the situation as it exists and continues to attack, harass, and terrorize in many areas. . . ." Enemy employment of artillery, rockets and mortars had also shown a marked increase in both quantity and caliber. Even more disturbing, CINCPAC reported, was evidence of "recent large unit deployments from North Vietnam which indicate that the enemy may be seeking a spectacular win in South Vietnam in the near future." However, CINCPAC continued, these enemy capabilities were not overpowering. Through "careful exploitation of the enemy's vulnerability and application of our superior fire power and mobility," he concluded, "we should expect our gains of 1967 in South Vietnam to be increased many fold in 1968."[70]

70. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010156Z Jan 68, JCS IN 12089.

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70. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, [illegible] Jan 68, JCS IN 12089.

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Chapter 46

PACIFICATION AND NATION-BUILDING--1967

During 1967, efforts in pacification and nation-building made some progress. Of particular significance was the replacement of the military regime by an elected constitutional government, a major objective long sought by the United States. Progress in other areas was also encouraging. The rate of inflation was reduced by more than half, the RVNAF was increased in size and improved in quality, and new energy was injected into the pacification program.

From Military Directorate to Constitutional Government

The inauguration of General Nguyen Van Thieu on 31 October 1967 as the first president under the new and democratic constitution was a significant milestone in the political development of SVN. The legitimacy and democratic character of the Saigon government had now been established. Its predecessor, the military regime of Air Vice Marshal Ky, had attained a certain degree of stability, but it lacked both legitimacy and a broad popular base. For these reasons, the United States had enccuraged the GVN to take the succession of steps which led finally to the establishment of constitutional democracy.

This process of political evolution had begun with the election, on 11 September 1966, of a Constituent Assembly for the purpose of drafting a constitution. However, the Leadership Council for the Nation, the military-dominated 19-member body which ruled SVN, was reluctant to confer sole responsibility for this important task on the newly elected body. In December, by means of Decree 21, it assumed the authority to amend any constitution drafted by the Constituent Assembly. Concerned by this turn of events, the Department of State urged Ambassador Lodge to seek some form of accord between the Assembly and Thieu, Ky, and the other military members who exercised the real power in the Leadership Council. In this endeavor Ambassador Lodge was at least partially successful. His efforts

led to an informal agreement by the Leadership Council to discuss any changes they felt to be necessary in the draft constitution with the Constituent Assembly.[1]

The Constituent Assembly began open debate on the first draft of the constitution on 19 January 1967. The draft provided for well-defined rights of citizens, elected local officials, substantial legislative powers, and restrictions on presidential authority. During its review of the draft, however, the Leadership Council raised objections on several points. Its greatest concern was over the proposed grants of power to the National Assembly to vote "no confidence" in the government and to declare emergencies and impose curfews. On all these points, the view of the Leadership Council prevailed and the powers in question were assigned to the President rather than to the Assembly. The Leadership Council also objected to the proposal to elect, rather than to appoint, province chiefs. On this point, too, the view of the Leadership Council prevailed.

Another point of disagreement concerned the particulars of the transition period. It was finally agreed that the Leadership Council would remain in power until the president was inaugurated. The Constituent Assembly would continue in existence and would exercise limited powers until the National Assembly convened. After the constitution was promulgated, it would assist in drafting election laws and monitoring the elections.

The Constituent Assembly approved the draft constitution on 18 March. The next day the Leadership Council accepted it, but only after heated argument between its civilian members and the supporters of General Thieu. The constitution as finally adopted called for a strong executive authority tempered by the powers of the National Assembly. The executive branch of the government consisted of a President and Vice-President elected on the same ticket, and a Prime Minister chosen by the winning Presidential candidate. It also provided for a National Assembly (NA) consisting of an upper house composed of 30 to 60 senators chosen at large,

1. (U) Msg, USIA to All Principal USIS Posts, 17 Aug 67, JCS IN 3812. (S) Msg, State 97909 to Saigon, 6 Dec 66, JCS IN 71508. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 1142-1143.

and a lower house of 100 to 200 representatives chosen from constituencies no larger than provinces. Once elected, the National Assembly would choose the Supreme Court. Local officials were to be elected in villages and hamlets, as well as in provinces, cities, and the capital.

As soon as the Leadership Council had accepted the constitution, top Vietnamese officials, including Thieu and Ky, left Saigon to attend a conference with President Johnson and other US officials in Guam. At this conference (19-21 March 67) the RVN delegation outlined the new constitution to President Johnson. On 24 March, the Constituent Assembly presented the final draft to the Leadership Council who submitted it in turn to the Armed Forces Council. Chief of State Thieu officially promulgated the constitution on 1 April 1967.

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

The presidential election campaign, meanwhile, had gotten under way. According to the qualifications drawn up by the Constituent Assembly, candidates had to be Vietnamese citizens at birth and residents of South Vietnam for at least ten years prior to election day. Suspended or dismissed military or civilian officials could not run for the two offices nor could those who had worked directly or indirectly for communism.[3]

General Thieu, the Chief of State, and Air Vice Marshal Ky, the Premier, were the chief contenders for the Presidency. Since both were military officials in the Vietnamese

2. (U) Msg, USIA to All Principal USIS Posts, 17 Aug 67, JCS IN 38212. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 1143-6.
3. (U) Msg, USIA to all Principal USIS Posts, 17 Aug 67, JCS IN 38212.

government, the military leadership split into pro-Thieu and pro-Ky factions. The US Department of State expressed deep concern about the split and instructed the US Ambassador to attempt to alleviate it. After long, heated discussions at the meeting of the Leadership Council on 28-30 June, Ky withdrew his candidacy and agreed to become Thieu's Vice Presidential running mate. According to a CIA report, Ky's version of the understanding was that he had agreed that Thieu would be the figurehead president, but that he would be the actual ruler.[4]

Tran Van Huong, who had been premier in 1964, was the leading civilian candidate. Others were Truong Dinh Dzu and Phan Khac Suu. Dzu was a wealthy Saigon lawyer and a leading opponent of the government and proponent of a peaceful settlement of the war. Suu was the chairman of the Constituent Assembly and had been Chief of State in 1964. Another leading candidate was General Duong Van ("Big") Minh, who had overthrown the Diem regime in 1963, only to be overthrown himself in 1964 and forced into exile.[5]

The United States did not openly endorse a candidate, and pledged noninterference in the elections. Yet the election of the Vietnamese President caused the United States considerable concern. Secretary of State Rusk considered it important that the civilians participate in the government, but with minimum loss of the strength the military offered. The United States, Secretary Rusk informed Ambassador Lodge on 12 January,

> must be prepared to take risk of reducing to some degree governmental effectiveness which continued military leadership might provide . . . and of supporting emergence of a regime which . . . /would have/ better prospects than current or past GVN's for attracting and exploiting the local political strength to the disadvantage of the VC.

4. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 010020Z Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67. (S) Msg, State 202550 to Saigon, 25 May 67, JCS IN 34643. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) Information Msg CIA 030922Z Jul 67, JCS IN 28054, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

5. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 1147-1154.

The ideal Vietnamese regime would combine both military and civilian elements and also provide representation for the Buddhists and "Southerners". On 8 February, the State Department informed the US Ambassador that a Huong/Ky ticket would be a satisfactory civilian-military combination. Huong, however, refused to run with Ky.[6]

The 18 slates were submitted to the Constituent Assembly by 30 June, and on 18 July that body made its final decision on their eligibility. Seven slates were disqualified, including that of "Big" Minh.[7]

The GVN took care that the election campaign proceeded "freely and fairly". It lifted press censorship, and gave all the candidates money to campaign, free transportation, and free time on government radio and television. General Vien, the Defense Minister, stated publicly that the armed forces would not support a candidate, and General Thanh, the Minister of RD, indicated that no RD workers would engage in the political campaign. Generals Ky and Thieu told the province and district leaders that they should not pressure the people to vote for any particular candidate.[8]

Since the candidates, except for Thieu and Ky, were not well known, group campaign trips were planned by the GVN. The first such trip was a complete fiasco. The plane was scheduled to land at Quang Tri but was forced to divert to Dong Ha owing to heavy crosswinds. The civilian candidates blamed the GVN for the diversion and charged that the elections were a fraud. As a result Thieu and Ky drew up a new itinerary of campaign trips.[9]

In order to insure that the elections were honestly conducted, the GVN provided poll watchers, and the Constituent Assembly monitored the electoral proceedings. The GVN, in addition, invited representatives of the UN, governments

6. (S) Msg, State 202559 to Saigon, 25 May 67, JCS IN 34643. (S) Msg, Saigon 21073 to State, 3 Apr 67, JCS IN 15705. (S) Msg, State 117709 to Saigon, 12 Jan 67, JCS IN 65555. (S) Msg, Saigon 19123 to State, 28 Feb 67, JCS IN 38291. (S) Msg, State 133730 to Saigon, 8 Feb 67, JCS IN 93315.

7. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 1148-1149.

8. (S) Msg, Saigon 2972 to State, 12 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67, pt. 1.

9. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 1149-1150.

having relations with the GVN, several parliamentary organizations, and the international press to observe the polling. To forestall intervention by the VC, COMUSMACV placed his command in a posture of maximum alert.10

The Presidential election was held on 3 September 1967. All Vietnamese men and women were eligible who were 18 years old as of 31 December 1966, who were inscribed on electors' lists, and who held electors' cards. Of those registered to vote 83 percent went to the polls. The Thieu/Ky ticket won, as expected, but with only 34.8 percent of the vote, less than anticipated. Trong Dinh Dzu, the peace candidate, came in second with 17.2 percent. Phan Khac Suu received 10.8 percent, Tran Van Huong 10 percent, and the other seven candidates the remaining 37.2 percent. Elections for the 60-seat upper house of the National Assembly were also held on 3 September and its inaugural session convened on 9 October. The campaigning for seats in the lower house, which had begun on 6 October, culminated in the election of 137 members on 22 October.11

The honesty and freedom of the elections were endorsed on 4 September by three election experts who had been members of the US group invited by the GVN to observe the voting. Speaking for the three experts, Professor Richard M. Scammon called the election "reasonably free and honest . . . . I would use exactly the same words to describe an election in the United States."12

On 30 October the Leadership Council was dissolved. The following day President Thieu and Vice President Ky were inaugurated, the lower house installed, and the Constituent Assembly dissolved. The newly inaugurated President announced

10. (S) Msg, Saigon 2972 to State, 12 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67, pt. 1. (S) Msg, JCS 6871 /CJCS/ to COMUSMACV, 222135Z Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67. (C) Msg, COMUSMACV 28421 to CJCS 260606Z Aug 67, JCS IN 44924.

11. (U) Msg, USIA to All Principal USIS Posts, 17 Aug 67, JCS IN 38212. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, p. 1143.

12. NY Times, 5 Sep 67, 1.

the appointment of Nguyen Van Loc as Premier. Premier Loc, a southern Buddhist lawyer who had been the Chairman of the Leadership Council, announced the installation of his cabinet on 9 November 1967.

The initial actions of the newly elected Thieu/Ky government showed evidence of a new seriousness of purpose and a determination to direct the full energies of the South Vietnamese people to the task of winning the war. Even before their formal inauguration, they had promulgated, on 25 October, a new and sweeping Mobilization Decree which had provided for the conscription of all men between the ages of 18 and 45 for military service, the mobilization of technicians of all types up to the age of 45, and the recall of some veterans to the colors.[13]

After its inauguration, the new administration issued a comprehensive, long-range program of economic, social, and political reform entitled "National Policy." It called specifically for action in such chronically neglected areas as land reform. Whether "performance" in these fields would live up to "promise" was, of course, a question that could only be answered after the passage of time.[14]

The GVN had been transformed from a military directorate into an elected constitutional government. Although civilians, Buddhists, and Catholics were all now represented in the government, the military still predominated and familiar officials were still in power. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese election of 1967 was an important step in accomplishing the US goal of developing democracy in RVN. For democracy to survive, however, RVN would also have to make progress toward a strong and stable economy, and at the beginning of 1967 the economy was still being eroded.

Efforts to Control Inflation

Inflation, which had threatended to reach runaway proportions in 1966, continued to be a problem in 1967.

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13. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, p. 1153.

14. Ibid. (S) Msg, Saigon 10479 to State, 6 Nov 67, JCS IN 92565.

Fortunately, however, the anti-inflation measures that had been instituted in 1966 paid substantial dividends in 1967, and by the end of the year inflation, if not halted, was at least being controlled.

To fight inflation the US Mission developed four primary measures, and secured GVN cooperation in their implementation. The four measures were: 1) massive importation of goods; 2) increase of domestic production; 3) more efficient and wider tax collection by the GVN; and 4) imposition of spending restraints on US agencies and personnel.[15]

Of these measures, the imposition of spending restraints was by far the most effective. The largest single factor contributing to inflation was the massive US participation in the war. This participation necessarily entailed vast expenditures that the small and relatively undeveloped RVN was unable to absorb. Attacking the source of the problem, the US Government had imposed a ceiling for piaster spending by US military agencies and personnel in RVN. The Secretary of Defense had established the CY 1967 ceiling at 42 billion piasters, and set the ceiling for the first two quarters of the year at 10.5 and 11.0 billion piasters respectively.

Much of the credit for the eventual success in holding down piaster expenditures belongs to COMUSMACV. He devised a program to limit piaster spending that proved highly effective. His program concentrated on three categories of expenditures: 1) maintenance and operation, 2) construction, and 3) personal spending by US troops. To curb expenditures in the first two categories, COMUSMACV imposed austere standards of design on new construction, reduced the number of leased billets in urban areas, and limited the purchase of local commodities to nine items. To reduce local personel spending, COMUSMACV increased on-post recreational facilities, expanded the R&R program, started new savings programs, and improved PX stocks. He also took steps to influence personnel to increase their pay allotments, to save their money, and to spend only MPCs.[16]

Studies undertaken during February 1967 by CINCPAC and COMUSMACV indicated that actual piaster spending was running below the established ceiling. Expenditures for the first

15. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 1035-1036.
16. Ibid., pp. 1046-1051.

quarter amounted to only 8.53 billion piasters, some one billion less than the ceiling. On the basis of these figures, CINCPAC, on 24 June, submitted projected expenditures for the third and fourth quarters of CY 1967 of 9.3 billion and 9.2 billion piasters respectively. On 5 August, the Secretary of Defense approved the figure for the fourth quarter but reduced the ceiling for the third quarter to 8.6 billion piasters.[17]

Additional expenditures resulting from the approval of Program #5 led CINCPAC, on 20 September, to request increases in the piaster ceilings for the last two quarters to 9.4 and 10.3 billion respectively. On 2 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed him that there would be no official changes in the two quarterly ceilings but that expenditures at the rate anticipated by CINCPAC would be acceptable because total spending for the year would still be within the 42 billion piaster ceiling for CY 1967. Actual expenditures for the year totaled 34.539 billion piasters.[18]

The other programs designed to combat inflation met with less success. Massive importation of consumer goods, financed jointly by the United States and the GVN, proved successful from an economic standpoint: It provided goods to meet increased consumer demands for items that could not be produced domestically because of full employment in war-related industries and the disruption of the GVN economy. There was an undesirable side effect, however: The program gave a few individuals who were making a minimal contribution to the war effort an affluent standard of living that stood in sharp contrast to the numerous improverished victims of the war.

Efforts to increase the tax collections of the GVN met with only limited success. A general reform of the tax system proved impossible for political reasons; tax revenues increased slightly but not enough to have a significant effect on the inflation. A major obstacle to increasing the tax yield was the inefficiency of collection agencies.

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17. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, pp. 578-579.

18. Ibid., pp. 580-583. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 4179 to CINCPAC, 020147Z Dec 67.

The effort to encourage domestic production, while containing some promise for the future, produced no immediately significant results.[19]

Despite their uneven pattern of success, the overall effect of the four primary measures developed by the US Mission was highly beneficial to the economy of SVN. The runaway inflation, which had threatened the country in the spring of 1966, was checked. The unemployment problem was solved, and the standard of living was rising. Most significantly, during 1967 prices in RVN rose only 30 percent--a large decrease from the 70-percent rate of inflation of the previous year.

Pacification and Revolutionary Development

It will be recalled that the President, on 15 October 1966, had given the system of divided military-civilian responsibility for the pacification program 90 days to show substantial progress. He had indicated that if it did not do so he intended to place the entire program under military control. He waited longer than 90 days but, finally on 9 May, obviously dissatisfied with the limited progress then being made, President Johnson directed that US programs for pacification and Revolutionary Development be integrated under the "single manager" system in order to provide "added thrust forward in this critical field." Because the resources committed to pacification were primarily military, the President assigned to General Westmoreland this responsibility under the overall authority of Ambassador Bunker. To carry out these responsibilities, under COMUSMACV, the President named Robert W. Komer Deputy for Pacification (Revolutionary Development) with the personal rank of Ambassador. Implementing the President's directive, COMUSMACV united the US Mission Office of Civil Operations and his own RD Support Directorate into a single agency, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS).[20]

The President's action reflected the importance attached to Revolutionary Development at the highest level of the US Government. This was a view shared by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. On 27 March he had informed the Director, Joint Staff, that Revolutionary Development was "in effect the 'pay off' item for our investment in South Vietnam, and the success of our

19. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 1035-1038.

20. (C) NSAM 362 to SecState and SecDef, 9 May 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, p. 587.

total effort will be increasingly measured by our ability to achieve progress in RD." General Wheeler was concerned that the Joint Staff was not keeping pace with the expansion of RD activities in the field. He therefore appointed SACSA as Special Assistant for Revolutionary Development on 14 April. In a further action to strengthen staff support in this field, the Revolutionary Development Division was added to SACSA on 14 April.[21]

One of Ambassador Komer's first innovations as he took up his new duties was the establishment of a new integrated civilian and military program to assure more effective control and supervision of the numerous and diverse subprograms supporting pacification. This program, designated TAKEOFF, was primarily a management tool. It did not initiate any new subprograms but was designed to bring existing ones together under a centralized management. Each of these several subprograms had its own field advisor and staff. Most important among these were the subprograms for Chieu Hoi, the RD cadre, the increasing of RVNAF support of pacification, and the eradication of the VC infrastructure.[22]

Because the elimination of the VC infrastructure in the villages and hamlets of RVN was the crux of the pacification program, Ambassador Komer gave it primary attention. As a first step he established an "Infrastructure Intelligence and Exploitation Program" (ICEX) which provided for the systematic accumulation of intelligence by US and GVN agencies aimed at identification of VC agents. The GVN National Police would arrest such agents when identified. Unfortunately, the GVN initially displayed little interest or energy in seeking and providing intelligence of this nature. As a result ICEX performance was not very successful at first. Later in the year, the GVN took a more positive approach and began providing the required intelligence. In December, the Prime Minister directed the establishment of coordinating committees at all levels of government and of District Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Centers. This broadened program was given the title PHOENIX.[23]

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21. (S) CM-2197-67 to D/JS, 27 Mar 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 67. (S) SACSA-M 341-67, 12 Apr 67, SACSA Files. (U) CM-2261-67 to SACSA, 24 Apr 67, JMF 031 (24 Apr 67).

22. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 594-596.

23. Ibid., pp. 602-604. (TS-GP 3) OJCS, "1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam," p. 5-19.

TAKEOFF attempted to give new impetus to some other subprograms as well. Under TAKEOFF, the RD cadre program nearly reached its established goal of sending 590 teams into the field in 1967, falling short by only 35 teams. The RVNAF also expanded its support of the pacification program, improving the training of its units and increasing the number of ARVN battalions assigned to support RD. During 1967, 93 percent of all ARVN battalions completed a special training course in RD. The number of battalions supporting RD increased from 38 to 53. The Chieu Hoi program, however, did not fare nearly so well. Although Chieu Hoi had been assigned a goal of 95,000 ralliers during 1967, the subprogram fell far short of this, rallying only 27,000 VC to the GVN.[24]

All subprograms under the pacification program had one common goal--to increase the population under effective control of the GVN. To measure the success in reaching this goal, the Hamlet Evaluation Program (HES) was put into operation in January 1967. According to statistics developed by HES, the GVN succeeded in making modest gains in population control during 1967. The number of people in "secure" hamlets increased from 7,033,700 to 8,455,400 during the year. The population in "contested" hamlets dropped from 2,765,900 to 2,476,300. Population in hamlets under VC control declined from 3,011,200 to 2,748,500. Summing up the results obtained during the year, Ambassador Komer reported that "In sum, much has been accomplished, but much remains to be done. Nonetheless, the greater resources, greater experience and improved organization generated during 1967 provides a solid base from which to achieve greater results in 1968."[25]

Improvement in the RVNAF

During 1967, noteworthy progress was made in enhancing the capability of the RVNAF to perform its mission of supporting the RD program. This progress was largely the result of an increase in ARVN force levels.

24. Ibid., pp. 599-613.
25. Ibid., pp. 622-625, 627.

Although RVNAF force levels for FY 1967 had been set at 633,645, the limited manpower that RVN was able to provide and the inflation generated by high force levels made it necessary to reduce this strength temporarily to 622,153 in April 1967. The reduction was carried out at the expense of the PF only.[26]

This downward turn was quickly reversed. Apparently judging that the inflation problem was no longer so dangerous, COMUSMACV, on 26 April, recommended a force level of 678,728 for FY 1968; three months later he raised the recommended strength to 685,739. His purpose was to establish "realistic force levels which will satisfy projected operational requirements . . . , particularly in support of RD," and at the same time "be attainable and maintainable within the constraints of manpower availability, leadership potential, and inflationary considerations." The new strength was attainable, COMUSMACV pointed out, on the basis of a new and higher estimate of the population of SVN, now calculated to be 16.5 million, and on the assumption that the GVN would take action to reduce the draft age and extend the tours of personnel on active duty. The US Mission and CINCPAC approved the recommendation.[27]

The proposed increase to 685,739 spaces included 15,747 for the regular forces and 47,839 for the RF/PF, a net addition of 63,586 spaces above the force levels originally projected for FY 1967. The increase would require an addition of 2,243 US advisors, but because this addition was already included in the Program #5 deployment plan, no problem was anticipated in filling advisor spaces. The higher force levels would also add piaster expenditures of 4.7 billion to 1968 costs. In US dollars the one-time cost would be $10.2 million and the recurring cost $47.5 million, all to be borne by the US Army. The provision of the equipment required would adversely affect US Army forces and cause certain other problems, but minimum equipment was available in 1967 for 53,000 of the 63,586 increases.[28]

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26. (S-GP 4) JCS 2472/151, 28 Sep 67; (S-GP 4) JCSM-530-67 to SecDef, 28 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2472/151); JMF 911/535 (26 Jul 67).

27. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 261145Z Apr 67, JCS IN 62616. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 261220Z Jul 67, JCS IN 75415.

28. Ibid.

Recapitulation of Current and Proposed

RVNAF Force Levels

Regular

Service	End FY 66 1/	MACV Approved FY 67 RVNAF 2/	Proposed Change 3/	FY 68 Total
Army	277,363	283,207	+14,966	298,173
Navy	15,833	16,076	- 112	15,964
Air Force	15,292	15,687	+ 761	16,488
Marines	7,172	7,189	+ 132	7,321
Total	315,660	322,159	+15,747	337,906

Paramilitary

RF	141,731	152,516	+32,229	184,745
PF	176,254	147,478	+15,610	163,088
Total	317,985	299,994	+47,839	347,833
Grand Total	633,645	622,153	+63,586 4/	685,739[29]

1/ CINCPAC was authorized to adjust spaces between forces within the level of 633,645, subject to approval by the Mission Council.

2/ Approved by the Mission Council.

3/ Concurred in by the Mission Council.

4/ This is a net increase of 63,586 over the FY 67 level established by COMUSMACV (622,153) or 52,094 over the SecDef authorized level (633,645).

29. (S-GP 4) App A to JCSM-630-67 to SecDef, 28 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2472/151), 20 Sep 67, JMF 911/535 (26 Jul 67).

In their review of COMUSMACV's proposal, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the FY 1968 buildup would serve the US national interest because it would increase the capability of the Vietnamese forces to accomplish mutual objectives. They believed, too, that the increase would enable the RVNAF to shoulder a greater share of the burden in RVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, therefore, that the Secretary of Defense approve the recommended FY 1968 RVNAF force level, the funds to support it, and continued authority for CINCPAC to adjust forces within the overall approved level. The Secretary did so on 7 October.[30]

In addition to this increase in strength, the RVNAF also improved its overall level of competence. This improvement had several facets. During 1967 many RVNAF units participated closely in operations with US forces, benefiting greatly from observing and practicing US military techniques in the field. Concurrently, other units were benefiting from training by US advisors in patrolling, intelligence operations, and night operations. In addition, strong efforts were made to increase the quality of military leadership in the RVNAF by improved schooling and stress on leadership principles. Finally, during the year some qualitative improvement came from modernization of the RVNAF, through provision of improved weapons on a selective basis.[31]

COMUSMACV, in early 1966, had requested 115,436 M-16 rifles for distribution to the RVNAF. Because of production limitations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the allocation of only 9,731 rifles at that time. Delivery of this allotment was completed on 31 May 1967. On 28 August, COMUSMACV entered a reclama for the remaining 105,705 weapons, plus a request for an additional 3,005, a total of 108,710. He asked that 5,000 rifles be delivered immediately from current stocks and the remainder from future production. The Secretary of Defense, on 4 October, approved immediate delivery of 5,000 M-16s from US Army depot stocks for issue to selected RVNAF units. He also directed the Joint Materiel Priorities and Allocations Board to recommend future allocations. On 12 October, the Board recommended delivery by

30. Ibid. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 7 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/151-1, 11 Oct 67, JMF 911/535 (26 Jul 67). (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8670 to CINCPAC, 112108Z Oct 67.

31. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1967, p. 920.

the end of the first quarter of FY 1969 of the remaining 103,710 rifles requested by COMUSMACV. The Secretary of Defense approved the recommendation on 24 October.[32]

As another means to improve the RVNAF, steps were taken to attain a greater flexibility and responsiveness in the procedures by which US support was furnished. In April 1966, the Secretary of Defense had transferred responsibility for furnishing support from MAP to the Military Departments. On 13 January 1967, he directed each Service to budget for the support of its South Vietnamese counterpart. The implementation of this directive was delayed, however, by an inter-service dispute over supply of items common to two or more SVN Services. On 4 May, the US Services finally agreed that for FY 1968 the US Army would fund "Operation and Maintenance common item support" provided to all the RVNAF, but that effective with FY 1969 each US Service would budget at departmental level for all support to its SVN counterpart.[33]

Year-End Assessment

Ambassador Bunker, in an address before the National Press Club on 17 November 1967, summed up progress in nation-building as "steady but not spectacular." The development of representative institutions and vigorous political life, he said, was "encouraging," as were the halt to runaway inflation, the extension of GVN control over the population,

32. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 736-738. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 281011Z Aug 67, JCS IN 65481. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 260329Z Sep 67, JCS IN 99164. (TS-GP 4) DJSM-1214-67 to J-4, 4 Oct 67, Att to JCS 1725/758, 4 Oct 67; (TS-GP 4) JCSM-472-67 to SecDef, 12 Oct 67, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 1725/758, 16 Oct 67; (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 24 Oct 67, Att to JCS 1725/758-1, 26 Oct 67; JMF 489 (4 Oct 67).

33. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3635 to CINCPAC, 13 Jan 67. (S-GP 4) Msg, CNO to CINCPAC and CMC, 251918Z Nov 66, JCS IN 53568. (S-GP 4) Msg, CSAF 90850 to CINCPAC, 092251Z Dec 66, JCS IN 84390. (S-GP 4) Msg, CMC to CINCPAC, 300239Z Nov 66, JCS IN 84391. (S-GP 4) Msg, DA 813287 to CINCUSARPAC, 042009Z May 67, JCS IN 79784.

and the increasing effectiveness of the RVNAF. These developments, in combination with the military successes achieved by allied forces, had, in Ambassador Bunker's opinion, placed victory beyond the enemy's reach. The attempt by NVN and the VC "to impose a solution by force," he said, "has run into a stone wall." This appraisal, when added to the optimistic assessments of progress in military operations by Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, put the officials in direct charge of US civil and military operations in the field on record as believing that US objectives in Vietnam would be achieved.[34]

34. Dept of State Bulletin, LVII (11 Dec 67), pp. 781-784.

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Chapter 47

THE PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC DISSENT

Public Opinion Turns Against the War

In spite of the apparent successes in the theater of operations, political opposition at home threatened to undermine the very real progress being made in the field. During 1967 a growing number of Americans, including many members of Congress and leaders of professions and the press, ceased to believe that victory was possible in South Vietnam and began to speak out in favor of some form of compromise solution to end the war. To leaders of the Administration, there seemed a real danger that the enemy strategy, as they understood it, would succeed--that the American people would eventually tire of a prolonged and seemingly inconclusive war of attrition and would force their government to withdraw or to accept terms favorable to the enemy.

As in 1966, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee served as the principal focus of the intellectual, moral, and emotional dissatisfaction with the war. On 21 January Chairman Fulbright presented his comprehensive peace plan: Washington and Saigon would propose ceasefire talks with the NLF and Hanoi; the United States should cease bombing the North, send no further reinforcements, reduce military activity to a level compatible with safety of our forces, and promise an eventual US withdrawal; following agreement upon plans for a ceasefire and self-determination in South Vietnam, convene an international conference of "all interested parties" to guarantee the same; if no settlement proved possible, consolidate US forces within fortified areas.[1]

The testimony of Committee witnesses generally supported these propositions. Edwin O. Reischauer, recently Ambassador to Japan, saw scant hope for fruitful negotiations between the NLF and the GVN; nonetheless, he advocated "prudent de-escalation" of the war's purely military

1. NY Times, 22 Jan 67.

aspects. More broadly, Reischauer sensed a misapplication of Atlantic policies to Pacific affairs; in Asia, military power inevitably floundered in the quagmire of economic and political disruption. Accordingly, he recommended that the United States minimize its Far Eastern commitments, avoid formal alliances, and encourage both nationalistic feeling and regional association.[2]

Retired Lt. General James M. Gavin held a higher hope for the possibilities of a successful settlement, on grounds that China's "Cultural Revolution" had at least partially freed Hanoi from entanglement with Red China. Consequently, the US could enter into negotiations "confident that ultimately a free, neutral and independent Vietnam" could be established, "with guarantees of stability from an international body." General Gavin likewise spoke of the possibility that "our society is going to be torn apart," and advised that solution of domestic problems be accorded the highest national priority. This theme echoed Senator Fulbright's statement that the "Great Society" had become a "sick society."[3]

Concerning the impact of ROLLING THUNDER upon the enemy, a New York Times correspondent, Harrison Salisbury, offered his opinion, based on a visit to NVN, that the military benefits were far outweighed by the sense of national unity and purpose which the bombing had inspired among the people of North Vietnam.[4] The Committee also heard historian Henry Steele Commager argue that the Puritan ethic had led the United States to an obsession with communism, and that the notion of New World purity and mission had led the nation to accept a "double standard" in America's conduct of foreign relations.[5]

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2. Hearing, "Asia, the Pacific, and the United States," S. Com on Foreign Relations, 31 Jan 67, 90th Cong, 1st Sess (1967), with Former Ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer.

3. Hearing, "Conflicts Between United States Capabilities and Foreign Commitments," S. Com on Foreign Relations, 21 Feb 67, 90th Cong, 1st Sess (1967), with LTG James M. Gavin (U.S. Army Ret.), pp. 3, 25.

4. Hearing, "Harrison E. Salisbury's Trip to North Vietnam," S. Com on Foreign Relations, 2 Feb 67, 90th Cong, 1st Sess (1967).

5. Hearing, "Changing American Attitudes Toward Foreign Policy," S. Com on Foreign Relations, 20 Feb 67, 90th Cong, 1st Sess (1967), with Henry Steele Commager, Professor, Amherst College.

Critics concentrated their efforts upon forcing a suspension of ROLLING THUNDER. In January 462 faculty members of Yale University "most respectfully" urged the President to declare an unconditional bombing halt. A few days later 50 Rhodes Scholars informed the White House that their attitude was one of "skepticism and concern" rather than "active support." If the Administration was fully committed to the goal of a negotiated settlement, they asked, why did it not take the initiative and halt air attacks? On 2 March Senator Robert F. Kennedy stated that "we are now at a critical turning point in pursuit of our stated limited objectives," and aligned himself among the advocates of a bombing suspension.[6]

But despite the rising chorus of dissension, critics still constituted a definite minority. A mid-February Harris survey showed the number who wished to maintain military pressure on North Vietnam had risen from 43 percent in December to 55 percent; specifically, 67 percent favored continuation of ROLLING THUNDER. An April Gallup poll showed that, although the supporters of the US policy toward Vietnam outnumbered those opposed by 49 percent to 38 percent, twice as many Democrats disapproved the President's Vietnam policy as twelve months before. Democrats were deeply divided, but leading Republicans strongly endorsed a program of firmness and perseverance. On 23 March, Republican Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts reversed his position and came out in support of the President, saying North Vietnam was not now prepared for meaningful negotiations. Two weeks later Michigan's Governor, George Romney, outlined a policy much like the President's, saying that "our military effort must succeed." Richard Nixon indicated that he favored a sharp increase in military effort, and asserted that defeat of the enemy was "inevitable. The only question is how soon."[7]

Dovish minority and hawkish majority each pressed toward more extreme positions. Concluding that Vietnam posed the greatest obstacle to progress in civil rights, Dr. Martin Luther King depicted the United States as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today,"

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6. NY Times, 15 and 26 Jan 67, 3 Mar 67.
7. Ibid., 22 Feb 67, 10 Apr 67, 24 Mar 67, 8 and 18 Apr 67, 18 May 67.

and called upon "all white people of good will" to declare themselves conscientious objectors. On 15 April, under the leadership of Dr. King and Dr. Benjamin Spock, 100,000 persons gathered before the UN Building to protest the war; at this rally occurred the first large-scale burning of draft cards. On the other hand, a May Harris poll revealed that the number of those favoring a military solution still exceeded those wishing withdrawal; while 45 percent of those interviewed desired a total military victory, only 41 percent wanted both sides to withdraw under UN supervision. The Gallup poll's findings were more ambiguous: the percentage believing that the US original commitment of ground troops was wrong had risen from 32 percent in January to 37 percent in May; 49 percent believed there was moral justification for the war, while 26 percent did not. Support for the war was strongest in the South and weakest in the Northeast.[8]

During the summer, however, a marked shift of sentiment took place. The familiar evidences of protest increased. On 4 June, 5,000 students and faculty members at Columbia University signed a statement protesting what they perceived to be the Administration's apparently increasing commitment to military victory; four days later, 80 percent of Harvard's Far Eastern specialists approved a similar declaration favoring negotiations for a compromise solution. An advertisement by 300 business executives urged the President to stop the bombing, de-escalate and negotiate; it stated that, on both moral and practical grounds, the war served neither national nor world interests. A mid-June Gallup poll presented evidence that Vietnam presented the greatest obstacle to President Johnson's re-election: 48 percent of those polled still had no clear notion of the national purpose and objectives being served in Vietnam; only one person in four believed that a South Vietnamese government sufficiently strong to withstand communist pressures could be created following the peace settlement.[9]

A Gallup poll released on 30 July showed that public censure of the Administration had reached its highest point. Opinion concerning Mr. Johnson's Vietnam policy

8. Ibid., 5 and 16 Apr 67, 15 and 17 May 67.
9. Ibid., 28 May 67, 5, 9 and 19 Jun 67.

had been evenly divided in June; 52 percent now disapproved the President's conduct of the war, while only one-third supported it. Two weeks later, Gallup reported that approbation for the President's overall performance of his office had fallen to 39 percent; disapproval of his actions toward Vietnam stood at 54 percent. Likewise, a Harris poll in late August showed that support for US participation in the war had declined in six weeks from 72 percent to 61 percent; dispatch of 50,000 reinforcements was disapproved by 61 percent to 29 percent. Still more significantly, Harris reported that the number willing to continue military action in order to achieve a negotiated settlement had fallen from 51 percent to 37 percent; conversely, the percentage desiring to disengage as rapidly as possible had risen from 24 percent to 34 percent. Revealingly, various Republican leaders who had previously supported the war began to reflect this softer trend. On 15 August, Governor Romney declared that US involvement was a "tragic" mistake, and warned that a massive US military buildup would threaten the peace of all Southeast Asia. Senator Thruston Morton of Kentucky also withdrew his long-standing support, saying simply "I was wrong." Asserting that the "military-industrial complex" had "brainwashed" President Johnson into believing that a military victory was possible, Morton asked for an indefinite bombing halt and an end to search-and-destroy operations.[10]

By midsummer the President and his advisors had become deeply concerned over the erosion of popular support for the Administration's Vietnam policy. On 1 August General Wheeler informed General Westmoreland: "We are becoming increasingly concerned with news media and Congressional attitudes regarding the progress of the war . . . which characterize the war as being a 'stalemate.'" Thirty days later the Chairman reported an even greater concern, when he sent a message to Westmoreland on 30 August informing him that there was "deep concern here in Washington because of the eroding support for our war effort. Much attention is being given at high governmental levels to this situation and possible measures to overcome it."[11]

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10. Ibid., 31 Jul 67, 13, 16 and 29 Aug 67, 28 Sep 67.
11. (S) Msgs, CJCS to COMUSMACV, JCS 6105, 1 Aug 67 and JCS 7126, 30 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

The results of these deliberations at high levels began to unfold as the President launched a multi-point campaign to silence his critics and restore public confidence in his policy toward Vietnam.

The San Antonio Speech

The President opened the campaign with a candid re-appraisal of the basic issues underlying US policy in Southeast Asia, a sober description of the difficulties to be overcome if these policy objectives were to be attained, and an appeal to the American people to stay the course. Speaking before the National Legislative Conference in San Antonio on 29 September, the President stressed that the "key" to all the United States had done in South Vietnam was its "own security," that the purpose of its action there was to meet an aggression that was a threat "not only to the immediate victim but to the United States of America and to the peace and security of the entire world of which we in America are a very vital part." This, said the President, was the position taken by the Congress when it resolved on 7 August 1964 by a vote of 504 to 2 "to take all steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom." It was also, he pointed out, the position taken by his two predecessors, President Eisenhower and President Kennedy, and by such Asian leaders as the Prime Ministers of Australia, Malaysia, and New Zealand, the President of South Korea, and the Foreign Minister of Thailand. He could not say with certainty, President Johnson continued, that a "Communist conquest of South Vietnam would be followed by a Communist conquest of Southeast Asia," or that a Southeast Asia dominated by Communist power would bring a third world war much closer to terrible reality . . . .But all that we have learned in this tragic century strongly suggests that it would be so." He was, therefore, "not prepared to gamble on the chance that it is not so. I am convinced that by seeing this struggle through now we are greatly reducing the chances of a much larger war--perhaps a nuclear war."

The President then attempted to answer his critics who claimed the war was stalemated. Substantial progress was being made both in political development and on the battlefield. On 1 November an elected government would

be installed. On the field of battle friendly forces had, since the US commitment of major forces in 1965, driven the enemy from many of his interior bases, had reduced the proportion of the population under communist control to well under 20 percent, and had gained secure control over 65 percent of the people.

The President then attempted to counter the enemy strategy of exploiting both the attrition inflicted on US forces and American war-weariness. In spite of the progress that had been made, he cautioned, a long hard struggle lay ahead, and the enemy was convinced that the American people would not perservere. The Premier of North Vietnam had said in 1962 that "Americans do not like a long inconclusive war . . . . Thus we are sure to win in the end." "Are the North Vietnamese right about us?" the President asked. "I think not . . . . I think it is a common failing of totalitarian regimes that they cannot really understand . . . the strength and perseverance of America."

The President then sought to answer the critics who were demanding immediate negotiations. The charge that his Administration was unwilling to negotiate was simply untrue. "I am ready to talk with Ho Chi Minh, and other chiefs of state concerned, tomorrow," he said. "Our desire to negotiate peace--through the United Nations or out--has been made very clear to Hanoi--directly and many times through third parties."

He then stated his conditions for halting the bombing of North Vietnam. Somewhat modified from his earlier pronouncements on the subject, the new formulation became known as the "San Antonio Formula." It stated:

> The United States is willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam when this will lead promptly to productive discussions. We, of course, assume that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation.[12]

The San Antonio Formula, although it still called upon Hanoi to reciprocate a suspension of bombing, gave the impression of being the least demanding US proposal to date. It set no specific conditions for a cessation of bombing. Before delivery of the San Antonio speech, the most recent offer was the one in President Johnson's letter of 8 February

12. The text is in Dept of State Bulletin, LVII (23 Oct 67), pp. 519-522.

to Ho Chi Minh. In it, the President called upon the North Vietnamese to stop infiltrating forces into South Vietnam in return for a cessation of bombing of North Vietnam and a halt to the buildup of US forces in South Vietnam.

Hanoi, however, was not sufficiently moved by the San Antonio Formula to agree to negotiation. On 3 October the North Vietnamese communist party newspaper, Nhan Dan, stated that President Johnson's offer was a "faked desire for peace," and flatly refused to reciprocate for a halt in the bombing.13

The SEA CABIN Study

In spite of North Vietnam's rejection of the San Antonio Formula, General Wheeler became seriously concerned over what might follow if the North Vietnamese accepted it. On 19 October he established an ad hoc study group (SEA CABIN) under the direction of Lieutenant General Andrew Goodpaster, consisting of representatives of the Joint Staff, DIA, and OASD(ISA). The objective of the study was to examine the major military and political-military questions which would arise from acceptance of the President's offer, and to consider the implications of the "assumption" it made that North Vietnam would not "take advantage" of a halt in the bombing. In particular, the study group was to identify the dangers to the US military position in South Vietnam resulting from a bombing halt, to determine the actions needed to overcome these dangers, and to establish, in the event such a halt occurred, the conditions that would call for a resumption of the bombing.

In its study, submitted to General Wheeler on 22 November, the SEA CABIN group concluded that US intelligence evaluations lacked evidence to assess the effectiveness of the bombing of North Vietnam. The study group was convinced, however, that cessation of bombing would make possible a higher rate of infiltration from North to South Vietnam. But the current detection techniques were so crude that such an increase could not be discovered until four to six months after the event. As a consequence, the enemy could increase infiltration during protracted talks with confidence that detection would be too slow and uncertain for the United States to justify stopping negotiations or resuming the bombing. The study group nevertheless included among the "minimum acceptable actions" by the North Vietnam the following:

13. NY Times, 4 Oct 67, 1.

Agree that for the DRV to increase over the current level the flow of personnel and material south of 19° N latitude would be to take advantage of cessation and that it will refrain from doing so.

The other "minimum acceptable actions" to which North Vietnam should adhere were to stop artillery fire from and over the DMZ into South Vietnam, accept "open skies" over NVN and withdraw from the DMZ within two weeks after cessation of bombing.[14]

On 5 December General Wheeler directed the Joint Staff to examine the study to determine whether it would be "timely and useful" to initiate an interdepartmental study of the subject, using SEA CABIN as an input. On 15 December, after considering the Joint Staff recommendations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that they had noted SEA CABIN, and recommended that an interdepartmental study group be formed to examine the "problem of NVN acceptance of the San Antonio offer, or other possible offers, and to recommend a US national position." The Joint Chiefs of Staff also asked to be represented on such a study group if it was formed and to be allowed to review the findings.[15]

Mr. McNamara accepted the JCS recommendation and made the overtures to Secretary of State Rusk that led to the establishment on 22 January 1968 of the "Contingency Study Group/VN," under the chairmanship of Assistant Secretary of State (FE) William Bundy and including representatives of the Department of State, OASD(ISA), JCS, DIA, CIA, and the White House.[16]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, meanwhile, subjected the SEA CABIN study to close scrutiny, and on 31 January forwarded to

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14. (TS) Study, "SEA CABIN," 22 Nov 67, OCJCS File, Vietnam Negotiations. (S) CM-2700-67 to LTG Goodpaster, 19 Oct 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Negotiations through Apr 68.

15. (TS-GP 1) CM-2803-67 to D/JS, 5 Dec 67, Att to JCS 2339/266; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-698-67, 16 Dec 67, (derived from JCS 2339/266-1); JMF 907/305 (29 Sep 67) sec 1.

16. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 28 Dec 68, Att to to JCS 2339/266-2, same file. (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, Dir J-5, "Bundy Planning Group," 22 Jan 68, OCJCS File, Vietnam Negotiations. The output of the "Contingency Study Group/VN" is described in Ch. 53 in connection with negotiations planning.

Mr. McNamara their views on the substantive issues raised. In their memorandum the Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized that the campaign against North Vietnam was "one of our strongest bargaining points"; therefore, the price for stopping it should be high. To illustrate what they meant by a "high" price, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided precise definitions of certain terms in the San Antonio Formula. These terms were "not take advantage," "promptly," and "productive discussions."

With regard to "not take advantage," the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with the proposed definition in the SEA CABIN report, but subtracted one condition and added another: they did not call for withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from the DMZ; they added the condition that North Vietnamese forces not attack South Vietnam across the DMZ.

With regard to "prompt" discussions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff called for the North Vietnamese to make initial contacts with the United States within 48 hours of the suspension of bombing; "serious discussion" should begin within one week and be "substantively productive" within 30 days.

The term "productive discussion," that is, "substantively productive" discussion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff defined in terms of purely military conditions--timely and "reciprocal action by North Vietnam which will de-escalate the war in South Vietnam."

Such "substantively productive" discussions would be indicated by North Vietnam taking the following actions: 1) withdraw all forces from the DMZ within 15 days from the end of the bombing; 2) cease all personnel movement into South Vietnam within 30 days of the end of the bombing; 3) agree within 30 days of a bombing halt to withdraw all forces, including fillers with VC units, to North Vietnam within 120 days of the bombing halt, or within 30 days after giving evidence that withdrawal had begun; and 4) agree within 15 days after bombing ceased to exchange prisoners of war within 60 days from the bombing halt. Failure of North Vietnam to live up to these terms or any attempt to take advantage of a bombing cessation should, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, lead to a resumption of bombing.[17]

17. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-62-68, 31 Jan 68 (derived from JCS 2339/66-3), JMF 907/305 (29 Sep 67) sec 2.

The Search for Peace Continues

Undeterred by the rejection of his San Antonio Formula, President Johnson persisted in his efforts to bring about negotiations for peace. On 11 November, in a speech delivered at sea aboard the carrier ENTERPRISE, he announced his willingness to meet the leaders of Hanoi aboard a "neutral ship on a neutral sea" if it would speed settlement. Two days later Hanoi rejected the offer out out of hand.[18]

North Vietnam countered on 14 December with a new elaboration of its position, which was circulated among members of the United Nations in the form of a 16-point political program of the National Liberation Front. The main feature of the program was its apparent acceptance of the possibility of a coalition. The program called for the establishment of a "national union democratic government" by means of a "free general election." The Department of State, however, discounted any intention by the NLF to move toward political compromise. Its objective in any coalition, said the Department's press spokesman, would be to secure control of the machinery of government at all levels.[19]

In a television interview on 19 December President Johnson expressed his own views of terms that might be useful in ending the Vietnam war. He stated that a fair solution could be worked out on the basis of five points: 1) the DMZ must be respected in accordance with the Geneva Agreement of 1954; 2) the unity of Vietnam as a whole must be a matter of peaceful adjustments and negotiations; 3) North Vietnam troops must leave Laos as required by the Geneva Agreement of 1962; 4) South Vietnam should be governed on the basis of one man, one vote; and 5) President Thieu should be encouraged to undertake the informal discussions that he had already said he was prepared to enter with the NLF.

This five-point plan proved to be no more acceptable to Hanoi than the many previous US negotiating offers and proposals. On 25 December the North Vietnamese newspaper,

18. NY Times, 12 and 14 Nov 67, 1.
19. Ibid., 16 Dec 67, 1.

Nhan Dan, condemned the five points as "nothing but worn-out tricks," and reiterated Hanoi's demand for an unconditional halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and the withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam.[20]

Operation Quick Results

A second phase of President Johnson's campaign to restore public confidence in his Vietnam policy was to demonstrate significant progress toward victory. To this end the President launched his key advisors on a search for means to attain quick and visible progress in the war effort. At a meeting of the Tuesday luncheon group on 12 September, the President raised the question of the means available to increase the pressures on North Vietnam, and called for the preparation on an urgent basis of a list of actions that would have the desired result. General Harold K. Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, who attended the meeting in place of General Wheeler, reported the President's desire to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the same day. The Joint Chiefs of Staff initiated the appropriate staff study on 22 September.[21]

On 17 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to Mr. McNamara the information requested by the President, and asked that the Secretary submit it to the Chief Executive. In their memorandum, the Joint Chiefs of Staff contended that military operations, conducted under the current policy guidelines and operational restraints, were making North Vietnam pay a heavy price for its aggression, and that NVN had lost the initiative in the RVN. However, accelerated progress toward a victory by the Free World forces would require an appropriate increase in military pressure.

The policy guidelines, designed to achieve US objectives without expanding the conflict, were: to avoid widening the war into conflict with Communist China or the Soviet Union; to refrain from invading North Vietnam or attempting to overthrow

20. Ibid., 19 and 26 Dec 67, 1.
21. (S) CM-2640-67 to GENs McConnell and Green and ADM McDonald, 12 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep 67. (TS) Briefing Sheet, "JCS 2472/167 - Increased Pressures on North Vietnam (U)," 5 Oct 67, JMF 911/320 (2 Sep 67). Evidence available to the author does not reveal what action, if any, was taken on the President's request by agencies other than the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

the North Vietnamese Government; and to be guided by the principles set forth in the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962.

The objectives of the United States in Southeast Asia could be achieved within the framework of these policies, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. But to bring about an end to North Vietnam's military effort in the near future would require the relaxation of certain existing operational limitations. The expansion of operations that would result from the removal of these restraints would entail some additional risk, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the danger of overt intervention by the Soviet Union or Communist China to be remote.

The specific measures recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to speed the war to a successful conclusion were actions they had advocated unsuccessfully on frequent occasions in the past: the removal of restrictions on the air campaign against all militarily significant targets in North Vietnam; the mining of North Vietnamese deep water ports; the mining of inland waterways and estuaries in North Vietnam to within 5 nm of the Chinese borders; the extension of SEA DRAGON operations to within 10 nm of the Chinese border; the use of ship-based TALOS missiles against enemy aircraft over North Vietnam; an increase of air interdiction in Laos and along the borders of North Vietnam; authority for B-52s to overfly Laos and attack targets there both day and night; and the expansion of covert operations in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam.[22]

Although he was not willing to authorize the military actions listed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Johnson directed a continuing search for measures promising quick and dramatic results. On 8 November the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed General Westmoreland that the items under consideration included: coordinated attack on the VC infrastructure; increased integration of ARVN into operations with US forces; operations aimed at destroying VC provincial battalions; reinforcement of RD teams with local personnel; the assignment of additional US advisors for RF and PF; the opening and securing of lines of communication; various economic programs, such as land reform, universal elementary education, and an increase in agricultural productivity; an

22. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-555-67, 17 Oct 67 (derived from JCS 2472/167), JMF 911/320 (2 Sep 67).

attack on corruption; and encouragement of local government to assume more responsibility.[23]

General Westmoreland replied on the following day that he agreed with assigning priority to these measures "because these are precisely the items to which we have already been devoting urgent efforts." An additional area promising good results, said COMUSMACV, was improvement of the RVNAF.[24]

After analyzing General Westmoreland's reply and conducting a study of the various programs under consideration, the Director of the Joint Staff advised General Wheeler that "progress in South Vietnam can be enhanced substantially by forward movement in all . . . [these] programs." For discernible progress within six months on the program calling for an attack on the VC infrastructure, action was required at the Washington level. Washington authorities could expedite the construction of detention centers and the assignment of advisors to the ICEX program. In the longer run, the most promising program was improvement of the RVNAF. If the necessary decisions were made to overcome equipment shortages, the Director said, "good momentum could be imparted to the program within twelve months."[25]

Operation Reassurance

The President also sought to regain public support for his Vietnam policy through optimistic reports of progress from the responsible commanders and officials in charge of operations in RVN. To this end, he asked Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland, whom he had ordered home to discuss the progress of the war effort, to set the record straight in public speeches. Bunker, in his address delivered on 18 November before the National Press Club, stressed that "steady but not spectacular progress" was being made militarily and in nation-building. The development of representative

23. (TS) Msg, JCS 9566 to COMUSMACV, 8 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.
24. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 091610Z Nov 67, same file.
25. (TS-GP 1) DJSM-1381-67 to CJCS, 13 Nov 67, same file.

institutions and vigorous political life was encouraging, and the enemy's attempt to impose a solution by force had "run into a stone wall." Ultimate victory seemed assured, but, said the Ambassador, "I can't answer the big question that I know is on your minds: How long will it take?"[26]

General Westmoreland, speaking before the same organization three days later, also displayed confidence that a military victory was attainable. He described progress in the war effort in terms of four phases. In Phase I, which had ended successfully in mid-1966, the United States had built up an elaborate logistic infrastructure in South Vietnam, deployed some 400,000 men and several thousand aircraft, expanded, equipped, and revitalized the South Vietnamese Army, and prevented an enemy military victory. In Phase II, which would be concluded by the end of 1967, the United States had continued the activities of Phase I, driven the enemy divisions back to sanctuary or into hiding, entered enemy base areas and destroyed his supplies, and raised enemy losses beyond his capability to replace them. With 1968, a third phase would begin. This would be an "important point when the end begins to come into view."

During Phase III, the main emphasis would be on strengthening the South Vietnamese government and its armed forces to the point where they would be able to take over the burden of self-defense. When this objective was reached, Phase IV would begin. This phase would see the gradual withdrawal of US forces and a final mopping up of the Viet Cong by South Vietnamese forces. General Westmoreland set no specific date for the beginning of Phase IV, but he claimed that enough progress had been made so that the goal "lies within our grasp--the enemy's hopes are bankrupt."[27]

The President's initial efforts at rallying public support for his policies had little effect. In fact, it appeared that public support of the Administration's Vietnam policy was still slipping. According to a Harris survey published on 2 October, approval for the President's Vietnam policy stood at 31 percent; 58 percent supported the war, a decline of 3 percent from August. While continuation of ROLLING THUNDER had been favored by 59 vs. 25 percent in June, the ratio now had fallen to 48 vs. 37 percent. Significantly,

26. "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S. Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, pp. 249-254.
27. Ibid., pp. 254-259.

only 37 percent still wished to fight in order to achieve negotiations and 37 percent preferred to withdraw as rapidly as possible. A New York Times poll of 243 governors, senators, and representatives yielded the following results: 69 saw no weakening of support for the Administration; 64 detected broad general opposition; 80 discerned strong sentiment for either negotiation or withdrawal; and 30 reported a feeling that military action was too limited to achieve victory. The trend was plain. Many Congressmen believed the President's request for a tax increase had crystalized sentiment against the war.[28]

The intensity and varieties of dissent grew still more dramatic. On 21 October, a crowd of 50,000 gathered in Washington to "confront the warmakers"; Dr. Spock informed the rally that the "real enemy" was not Ho Chi Minh but Lyndon Johnson. College campuses and draft boards served as the sites for spectacular protests well covered by the press. Between September and December, recruiters for Dow Chemical--sole manufacturers of napalm--encountered either verbal or physical opposition from students on 46 occasions. On 5 December, 264 persons were arrested after they had barred the entrance of a New York City induction center; two weeks later, 207 were seized in a similar episode at Oakland. And on 18 December, Senator Eugene McCarthy announced that he would enter the primaries in the hope of forcing President Johnson to alter his Vietnam policy.[29]

The growing dissent was reflected in a further decline of popular support for the war. A mid-November Harris survey indicated that 46 percent disapproved the President's Vietnam policy, and only 23 percent supported it. The number that favored continuation of the fight until a negotiated settlement could be reached fell from 51 percent in July to 26 percent in November; in the same time span, the percentage of those wishing to withdraw as quickly as possible rose from 24 percent to 44 percent.

It was at this juncture that Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland had returned to the United States and assured the nation that the war was progressing well and denied emphatically that a stalemate existed. Immediately thereafter, popular support for Administration policy suddenly

28. NY Times, 3 Oct 67, 8 Oct 67.
29. Ibid., 21 Oct, 6 Dec, 19 Dec 67.

and sharply increased: the Harris poll showed a rise from 23 to 34 percent in approval of Presidential conduct of the war. According to Gallup, approval of Mr. Johnson's overall performance advanced from 38 to 41 percent.[30]

At year's end, therefore, the Administration had lost, and then regained, a narrow plurality of support. President Johnson seemed personally secure within his own party; a Harris poll showed 63 percent of Democrats favored his re-nomination, as compared to 20 percent for Senator McCarthy. Among the public at large, however, the margin of support specifically for Vietnam policy was far smaller. For example, a December poll by Good Housekeeping indicated that women favored continuation of the war effort by only 46 to 41 percent. Similarly, a survey of the University of Michigan faculty showed members were almost evenly divided; only among natural scientists did a majority favor continuation of bombing of the North.[31]

A group of well known Far Eastern scholars (including Professors Scalapino, Barnett, and Reischauer) concluded that the ability to develop and defend policies attuned to limited objectives constituted the "vital test" confronting the United States. Indeed, a Gallup report indicated 65 percent of the sample polled foresaw a compromise peace, while only 19 percent envisioned all-out military victory. However, James Reston wrote that the major question was whether the Chief Executive could bridge the "credibility gap" and so regain that popular trust which is the first condition of effective leadership. Mr. Johnson evidently decided that the war had fatally sapped his influence and prestige. According to later accounts by his aides, the President decided in December that he would not seek re-election.[32]

Whether President Johnson would be able to regain popular trust obviously depended in large measure on fulfillment of his predictions of a favorable outcome of the war within a reasonable time. Unfortunately for the President, the enemy was about to embark upon actions that would deeply erode public confidence in both the President himself and the hope that his goals in Vietnam could be achieved at a reasonable cost and in a reasonable time.

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30. Ibid., 14 Nov, 26 Nov, 5 Dec 67.
31. Ibid., 6 Nov, 6 Dec, 19 Dec 67.
32. Ibid., 19 Nov, 11 Dec, 20 Dec 67, 2 Apr 68.

Chapter 48

THE TET OFFENSIVE

The Holiday Ceasefires

In the closing weeks of 1967, suggestions were again heard for ceasefires to mark the three approaching holidays: Christmas, New Year, and Tet. As in previous years, US military commanders objected to these proposals, which, they feared, would place US fighting forces at a disadvantage. But the Administration, considering the question from a different viewpoint, and sensitive to the growth of criticism at home and abroad, decided it could not afford to reject suggestions for holiday truces.

The subject was first raised on 13 October 1967 by Ambassador Bunker, who urged that Christmas and New Year ceasefires, if they were decided upon, should not exceed 24 hours each. For Tet, he suggested 48 hours, with 72 as a maximum "fallback" position. At the same time he pointed out that last year's rules had been inadequate to regulating enemy resupply activities, and recommended a total freeze on logistics and force repositioning by both sides during the ceasefires.[1]

General Westmoreland regarded these suggested time limits as acceptable if ceasefires were considered necessary. However, he opposed any logistic freeze so long as there existed a possibility that it might become a precedent in future ceasefire negotiations. On his part, Admiral Sharp recorded his opposition to any holiday ceasefires.[2]

Echoing CINCPAC's views, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary of Defense on 23 October 1967 that, in their opinion, the United States should urge the RVN and its allies to announce, as soon as possible, that there

1. (TS) Msg, Saigon 8432 to State, 130934Z Oct 67, JCS IN 42411.
2. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 34790 to CINCPAC, 221152Z Oct 67, JCS IN 59001. (TS-NOFORN-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 200132Z Oct 67, JCS IN 54974.

would be no standdown of military operations during any of the holidays. Even a 24-hour truce, they argued, was disadvantageous to US forces, because of the respite it would afford the enemy. They expressed particular opposition to the suggested freeze on logistic activities. The enemy, they declared, could carry out his activities clandestinely, but it would be impossible to conceal the steady flow of logistic support and personnel required by US forces.[3]

While the question remained unresolved, the Viet Cong Liberation Radio announced that its forces would observe ceasefires of 72 hours at Christmas and New Year, extending from 24 to 27 December 1967 and from 30 December 1967 to 2 January 1968, respectively, and a seven-day period for Tet (27 January-3 February). In each case the ceasefire would begin at 0100, Saigon time.[4]

With this announcement, it became urgent for the Allies to determine and announce their own policy. When the subject was discussed by the Administration in Washington, General Wheeler reaffirmed the opposition of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to any ceasefires and urged that, if they were necessary, they should not exceed the periods suggested originally by Ambassador Bunker. Accepting this latter view, the Department of State instructed the Ambassador to uphold the 24-24-48 hour formula in discussing the matter with GVN.[5]

Ambassador Bunker accordingly presented this proposal to President Thieu, who at first countered with a 36-36-72 hour formula, but dropped it and accepted the US recommendation. It was agreed that GVN would submit this plan to the other troop-contributing countries.[6] Their assent was

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3. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-567-67 to SecDef, 23 Oct 67 (derived from JCS 2472/177-1), JMF 911/305 (6 Oct 67).

4. (C) Msg, Saigon 11408 to State, 180920Z Nov 67, JCS IN 23776.

5. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 72761 to Saigon, 212139Z Nov 67, JCS IN 30502; (S) CM-2773-67 to ASD(ISA), 20 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67. (S-GP 2) Msg, State 74877 to Saigon, 260205Z Nov 67, JCS IN 38981.

6. (S) Msg, Saigon 12799 to State, 061040Z Dec 67, JCS IN 56195; (S-GP 3) Msg, State 80713 to Saigon, 070130Z Dec 67, JCS IN 58244.

forthcoming and the beginning of the 24-hour Christmas truce was set for 1800, Saigon time, on 24 December (240500, EST).[7]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff drafted rules of engagement for the ceasefire periods, modifying those of the preceding year in order to lessen enemy opportunities to take advantage of them. The JCS draft was submitted to the Defense and State Departments, where it was amended to make it slightly more restrictive for US forces. As finally promulgated on 15 December, the rules provided that US forces, during the Christmas, New Year, and Tet standdowns, would initiate no military offensive operations except in response to (1) enemy initiatives that endangered the safety of US/RVN/FWMA forces, (2) "abnormally great" resupply activities or infiltration into the southern part of the DMZ or the area immediately south thereof, (3) other "abnormally great" resupply activities.[8] Authority to react to such enemy actions was vested in CINCPAC. US forces would assume full alert posture and continue all security precautions, including patrol activity. Forces in contact with the enemy were not to break contact unless enemy effort to withdraw was "clearly evident," or until the operation was concluded. MARKET TIME, GAME WARDEN, and search and rescue operations would continue, and aerial reconnaissance would be intensified. Air and naval operations were authorized in support of any of the above operations, and ARC LIGHT support might be requested through normal channels.

Operations in or over North Vietnam were to be suspended unless authorized by CINCPAC. He was empowered to approve SEA DRAGON operations, air strikes, and artillery fire south of 20 degrees against "abnormally great" resupply activities or other actions that posed a "direct and immediate threat" to friendly forces. North of 20 degrees, CINCPAC might authorize air strikes against targets presenting an "immediate and direct threat" (for example, movement of SAMs indicating prospective extension of SAM defenses south of the 20-degree line). Normal operations in Laos and Cambodia were to continue.

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7. This was the hour at which the Christmas truce actually began, as shown by later records. No record has been found of the agreement of the other troop-contributing countries or of the formal announcement of the decision.

8. The phrase "abnormally great" had been inserted by the State and Defense Departments, where the Joint Chiefs of Staff had wished to speak of "major" activities.

Notwithstanding these restrictions, US commanders were given "full authority" to act "for the safety of their forces," and might resume military actions if necessary for that purpose. Moreover, they were warned to be ready to resume normal operations at once should enemy violations make it necessary to terminate the ceasefire.[9]

Christmas came and went, with US and allied forces observing a truce from 1800 on 24 December to the same hour on 25 December. During this period, according to US estimates, VC/NVA forces committed 118 truce violations, of which 40 were considered "major."[10] Enemy efforts to make maximum use of the ceasefire were indicated by visual and photographic evidence collected over North Vietnam, showing at least 750 trucks moving southward between Than Hoa and Dong Hoi.[11] CINCPAC did not, however, exercise his discretionary authority to order offensive operations.

The New Year ceasefire, under the agreement reached by the US and its allies, was scheduled to begin at 1800H on 31 December. Before it took effect, Pope Paul VI made a personal appeal to President Johnson for an extension of the agreed 24-hour period. The Department of State accordingly informed Ambassador Bunker on 28 December 1967 that the Administration was considering a 12-hour extension, that is, until 0600 on 2 January. This period would extend beyond the announced termination of the Viet Cong's ceasefire (0100 hours), but it seemed preferable to the alternative of an earlier beginning for the truce, which would have increased the number of daylight hours available to the enemy.[12]

Ambassador Bunker at once consulted the Deputy COMUSMACV, General Abrams (COMUSMACV was then absent in Manila), and obtained his concurrence to the Department's proposal.[13]

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9. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-687-67 to SecDef, 9 Dec 67 (derived from JCS 2472/197); (TS) Memo, DepASD(ISA) to LTG Brown, 15 Dec 67; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5343 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 160120Z Dec 67; JMF 911/305 (6 Oct 67).
10. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 300-67, 26 Dec 67.
11. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 251-67, 28 Dec 67.
12. (S-GP 1) Msg, State 90178 to Saigon, 28 Dec 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 67.
13. (S) Msg, Saigon 14540 to State, 280945Z Dec 67, same file.

General Abrams had concurred with some reluctance, since he was aware of the position of COMUSMACV and of the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding holiday ceasefires. He merely told the Ambassador that, in his judgment, the projected 12-hour increase would make little difference in enemy capabilities in view of the current weather in North Vietnam.[14]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed any extension of the agreed 24-hour period.[15] General Westmoreland, when consulted at Manila, also expressed opposition to the extension but accepted it as politically inevitable. Indicating a viewpoint directly opposite to that of the Department of State, he urged chronological limits that would include a maximum of daylight hours, since darkness could be turned to the enemy's advantage. Accordingly, he recommended a period running from 1200H on 31 December to 2400H on 1 January, which would meet the objective expressed by the Pope to make New Years Day a "day of peace."[16] The Department of State, however, considered that discussion of the original extension plan had progressed too far to be modified in this manner.[17]

Following agreement among the allies, the GVN publicly announced that a ceasefire would be observed from 311800H December to 020600H January.[18] Before it took effect, CINCPAC reviewed the volume of logistic activity observed in North Vietnam during the recent Christmas truce and instructed his commanders that any repetition of this volume would be considered as "abnormally great" resupply operations, as defined

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14. (TS) Msg, DEPCOMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 282216Z Dec 67, OCJCS, same file.

15. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Actg CJCS to Actg SecDef, "New Year's Ceasefire (U)," 28 Dec 67 same file. (Bears no CM number, but handwritten note states: "This memo was signed by Gen. McConnell and taken by him to Mr. Nitze on 28 Dec 67.")

16. (S) Msg, AFSSO 13AF to SSO CINCPAC, 291155Z Dec 67 (readdressed by CINCPAC, info Actg CJCS, 291912Z Dec 67); (S) Msg, Saigon 14610 to State, 290721Z Dec 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 67.

17. (S) Msg, State 90905 to Saigon, 29 Dec 67, JCS IN 90905, same file.

18. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 44204 to JCS, 301028Z Dec 67, same file.

in the rules of engagement.[19] This interpretation was concurred in by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the exception of General McConnell, the Acting Chairman.[20] No use was made of this authority, although US forces reported 63 major and 107 minor enemy violations during the 36-hour period.[21]

Probably influenced by this record of violations, General Westmoreland sought to avoid any ceasefire on the occasion of the approaching Tet holiday, for which the US and South Vietnamese governments had tentatively agreed upon a 48-hour period. On 8 January 1968 General Westmoreland indicated to General Vien, Chief of the JGS, his opposition to any Tet truce. While General Vien was inclined to agree with this view, he considered that some cessation of operations for this important holiday was essential for the morale of his troops. He was willing, however, to support a recommendation that it be limited to 24 hours. Admiral Sharp approved his proposal. President Thieu, when it was presented to him, demurred, since he had publicly committed himself to the 48-hour plan. He finally accepted a 36-hour period, to begin at 1800H on 29 January. This compromise was endorsed by Ambassador Bunker.[22]

In Washington, President Johnson questioned the reasons for thus reducing the agreed 48-hour period.[23] Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after consulting COMUSMACV and CINCPAC,[24] furnished a detailed justification. The substance of their argument was that in 12 additional hours the enemy could quadruple the volume of supplies moving southward. In a 36-hour ceasefire, the enemy, according to their estimate, could move 3,300 tons; in 48 hours, the figure would rise to 14,400 tons. Coastal shipments would account for this enormous

19. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to Actg CJCS, 300255Z Dec 67, same file.
20. (TS) CM-2877-67 to SecDef, 30 Dec 67, same file.
21. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 1-68, 2 Jan 68.
22. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00338 to CINCPAC, 090331Z Jan 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 092115Z Jan 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 01665 to CINCPAC, 160415Z Jan 68, JCS IN 38608. (S) Msg, Saigon 16071 to State, 160400Z Jan 68, JCS IN 39064.
23. (TS) Msg, JCS 00554 to COMUSMACV, 182104Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.
24. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 200323Z Jan 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00943 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 200843Z Jan 68; same file.

difference; the longer period would enable waterborne logistic craft to move southward from as far north as Thanh Hoa, near the 20th parallel, to Dong Hoi, just above the DMZ, and, after unloading, to return or disperse. This contention was supported by the volume of WBLC activity observed during previous ceasefires of varying periods.[25]

The JCS reasoning prevailed. The United States and the allied governments agreed that the Tet ceasefire would be limited to 36 hours.[26] Before it took effect, however, General Westmoreland concluded that the situation in I CTZ, where enemy forces were known to be concentrating, was so threatening that this region should be excluded from the ceasefire. There should be no interruption in the bombing of North Vietnam, at least as far north as Vinh, just below the 19th parallel. Ambassador Bunker and Admiral Sharp agreed with these views.[27]

The Administration approved General Westmoreland's views, with the stipulation that bombing would be restricted to the region south of Vinh. President Thieu also gave his concurrence. On 26 January 1968 the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC and CINCSAC of these exceptions to the 36-hour Tet truce, which would begin at 1800H on 29 January. They were publicly announced by the GVN on 29 January, shortly before the truce took effect.[28]

The Attack and Its Repulse

With the announcement of the Tet ceasefire, the stage was set for what was to prove the most widespread enemy offensive of the entire war thus far. The attackers achieved both

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25. (TS) CM-2927-68 to SecDef, 20 Jan 68, JMF 911/305 (6 Oct 67).

26. Again the decision is not documented in available records, but is apparent from later developments.

27. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 01165 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 241239Z Jan 68; Saigon 16815 to State, 241230Z Jan 68, JCS IN 55711; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250216Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

28. (TS-GP 3) Msg, State 104215 to Saigon, 25 Jan 68, JCS IN 57706. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01219 to CJCS, 251416Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8282 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 261714Z Jan 68. NY Times, 30 Jan 68, p. 1.

strategic and tactical surprise, despite the fact that the US command was fully aware that the enemy was capable of attacking at any time and that he probably intended to do so in the near future. On 20 December 1967 COMUSMACV, in an appraisal of communist intentions that proved to be highly accurate, had forecast that the enemy, seeing that the trend of events was running against him, would "undertake an intensified country-wide effort, perhaps a maximum effort, over a relatively short period." If successful, he would probably seek to negotiate from his dominant position; if not, he would probably "continue the war at a reduced intensity," rather than negotiate from weakness.[29]

In a similar vein, CINCPAC, in summing up the course of the war during 1967 and outlining plans for the coming year, noted on 1 January 1968 that the tempo of enemy bombardments was rising and that enemy forces were showing increased willingness to engage in sustained combat. "Recent large unit deployments from North Vietnam," he warned the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "indicate that the enemy may be seeking a spectacular win in South Vietnam in the near future."[30]

Intelligence obtained during January 1968 bore out these appraisals by pointing to the probability of a major attack. Specific objectives were mentioned: Saigon, Kontum, Pleiku, Hue, Quang Tri, Da Nang, and other localities. It was indicated that the attack might come in late January or early February. But the veil of security maintained by VC and NVA forces succeeded in concealing the precise timing of the attack, as well as its unprecedented scale. General Westmoreland's principal object of concern as of the end of January

29. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 12397 to CJCS, 200609Z Dec 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 67.

30. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010156Z Jan 68, JCS IN 21089. After the Tet offensive, a NY Times reporter obtained access to this message, or parts of it. A story published in the Times on 21 Mar 68 quoted verbatim certain passages in which CINCPAC gave a generally optimistic summary of the course of the war in 1967 and forecast further allied gains in 1968. The obvious intent of the story was to discredit COMUSMACV (to whom the message was erroneously ascribed) by implying that he considered the enemy incapable of large scale attacks. It is impossible to state whether this biased selection of excerpts is to be attributed to the reporter or to some official who made the message available.

was the situation in the western end of I CTZ, where he feared a major attack at Khe Sanh, perhaps coinciding with diversionary offensives elsewhere in South Vietnam. He had reinforced Khe Sanh in order to bar the enemy's route toward the important coastal cities in I CTZ. At the same time, forces in III CTZ were redeployed to provide better coverage of Saigon and its approaches.

The atmosphere of the Tet holiday helped to confer upon the enemy the advantage of surprise. Violations of the cease-fire were of course expected, but the profound significance of Tet in Vietnamese life made it difficult to conceive that the enemy would deliberately choose this occasion to launch a concerted, country-wide attack. Large numbers of RVNAF officers and men had been granted leave for the occasion.[31]

The enemy's preparations for the attack were thorough. Munitions and supplies in ample quantities had been stockpiled along the Cambodian border and then moved up to secret cache sites within South Vietnam. Large numbers of enemy troops, in civilian guise, had been infiltrated into major cities, with their weapons and ammunition.[32]

Enemy strength on the eve of the Tet offensive, according to estimates accepted by USARPAC, totalled 114,866, of which 55,349 were North Vietnamese regulars and 59,517 were members of VC main and local force units. The geographic distribution of this manpower was as follows:

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31. The extent to which the Tet offensive was forecast by intelligence was later summarized in information compiled by the Joint Staff and DIA in answer to inquiries submitted by Congressmen shortly after the attack. This information appears as a (TS) Encl to SACSA M-109-68 to D/JS, 12 Feb 68, OCJCS File, 091 Vietnam Feb 68 (Bulky). Answers were supplied to eighteen questions, with comment on four criticisms of US and SVN forces and their performance. Questions 1 and 3 dealt with the degree of advance warning. For examples of intelligence available before the attack, see (S-NOFORN) DIA IBs 14-68, 19 Jan; 16-68, 23 Jan; 17-68, 24 Jan; 20-68, 29 Jan. For US troop movements in the days preceding Tet, see (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, June 1968, pp. 222, 226, 229 (hereafter cited as CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report). The situation at Khe Sanh is described later in this chapter.

32. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, pp. 229-230.

	NVA	Main and Local
I CTZ	26,715	11,190
II CTZ	17,614	10,870
III CTZ	11,020	19,262
IV CTZ	--	18,195
Total	55,349	59,517

VC irregulars added another estimated 71,700 to the enemy total. These figures did not include forces across the border in Laos or Cambodia.[33]

The massive assault burst forth on the night of 29-30 January 1968. Following mortar and rocket barrages, enemy troops struck the major cities in II CTZ: Kontum, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Pleiku, and others. US military installations at Da Nang, in I CTZ, were similarly assailed. With the coming of daylight, enemy troops did not withdraw but dug in and attempted to maintain their positions in the cities. Shortly before 1000H on the morning of 30 January, the Saigon government cancelled the Tet truce. US forces were directed to resume full operations.[34]

On the following day the wave of attacks engulfed cities in other parts of South Vietnam. The most spectacular manifestation was an assault on Saigon by a large force of infiltrators. The Presidential palace and the headquarters of the JGS were assailed, and a portion of the outer compound of the US Embassy was seized and held for a time. President Thieu declared martial law, denouncing the communists for their "act of perfidy" in violating their own self-imposed truce.[35]

The brunt of the assault fell upon the ARVN, since most US forces were at that time engaged in search and destroy

33. Figures as of the end of January 1968, from (S-GP 3) Hq USARPAC, Highlights of United States Army, Pacific, Activities, Jan 68.

34. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 25-68, 30 Jan, and 26-68, 31 Jan 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01438 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 301255Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. NY Times, 31 Jan 68, p. 1.

35. (TS) NMCC OPSUM 27-68, 1 Feb 68; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 310707Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01449 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 310918Z Jan 68, same file. NY Times, 31 Jan 68, p. 1, 1 Feb 68, p. 1.

operations at some distance from the principal cities. Thus tested, the often-criticized ARVN forces met the challenge. Disappointing enemy hopes, they did not break, flee, or defect, but turned at once to the task of repelling the invaders. In Saigon, Hue, and some other places, the scale and duration of the attacks required the diversion of US forces to assist in driving out the enemy. In the judgment of General Wheeler, expressed later after a visit to Saigon, the timely intervention of US reaction forces made the difference between victory and defeat in those particular localities. "In short, it was a very near thing," remarked General Wheeler.[36]

Official Washington was startled by the news of the attack. President Johnson was immediately and intensely concerned, and sought a first-hand assessment of the situation from General Westmoreland. General Wheeler transmitted this request to COMUSMACV via secure telephone at 0545H on 1 February. By that time, General Westmoreland was able to report that the attack had passed its peak and that the enemy was losing the initiative. The attackers had had only local successes, he continued, and they had not succeeded in capturing a single city in entirety, although they still held parts of Saigon and six other cities. He viewed the Tet offensive as the second stage of a three-phase campaign. The first phase had been a preparatory buildup combined with sporadic attacks; the third would consist of a "massive" attack in Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces.[37]

In succeeding days the offensive continued to ebb. The enemy committed no additional major forces, and those that had entrenched themselves in the cities and towns were rooted out by Allied forces, which had orders to block the enemy's

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36. (TS) Encl to SACSA M-109-68 to D/JS, 12 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68 (Bulky) (answers to Question 1); (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01539 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 021337Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) Rpt of CJCS on Situation in Vietnam and MACV Force Requirements, 27 Feb 68 (hereafter cited as "Rpt of CJCS on Situation in Vietnam . . . , 27 Feb 68"), (JCS 2472/237, 28 Feb, amended by corrig, 29 Feb); JMF 911 (27 Feb 68).

37. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01464 to CJCS, CINCPAC, and Saigon, 010013Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

escape, to pursue the fleeing enemy as closely as possible, and to reopen lines of communication.[38] By the middle of February the offensive could be regarded as essentially over,[39] although an outburst of mortar and rocket attacks on various cities and airfields took place on the night of 18-19 February, and was described by Ambassador Bunker as the "second wave" of the Tet offensive.[40] Enemy ground forces held out longest in Hue, where they were not dislodged until the morning of 25 February.[41]

The Aftermath

At its height, the Tet offensive had involved an estimated 67,305 enemy troops, of which 44,990, or almost exactly two-thirds, were Viet Cong forces. Evidently the enemy's strategy had been to launch the attack with VC forces and to hold back the major NVA units to exploit any later attacks that might be gained.[42]

Out of these totals, the enemy lost an extraordinarily high proportion of men. An initial estimate showed 15,595 killed in action as of 041200H February. Three days later the figure had risen to 24,199, compared with 670 US dead, 1,294 ARVN and 44 FWMAF (a total of 2,008). Still later, after the offensive had subsided, COMUSMACV estimated 33,875

38. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 01539 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 021337Z Feb 68; MAC 01588, 031253Z Feb 68; COMUSMACV MAC 01592 to CINCPAC, 031512Z Feb 68; COMUSMACV MAC 01614 to CJCS, 040959Z Feb 68; same file.

39. DIA later adopted the date of 13 Feb 68 as marking the end of the Tet offensive for statistical reporting purposes. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement.

40. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 42-68, 19 Feb 68; 43-68, 20 Feb 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 20175 to State, 221200Z Feb 68.

41. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 47-68, 26 Feb 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 02667 to Actg CJCS, 250929Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

42. This was the estimate given by CJCS following his visit to SVN, 23-25 Feb 68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) Rpt of CJCS on Situation in Vietnam, 27 Feb 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01592 to CINCPAC, 031512Z Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

enemy killed in action between 291800H January and 151200H February.[43]

The magnitude of these figures inspired some skepticism on the ground that they were inflated or that they included large numbers of hastily conscripted civilians along with actual troops. General Westmoreland assured General Wheeler that the size of the figures had "caused a good deal of consternation out here too," but he was convinced that they were reasonably accurate and that most of the casualties represented combat troops. The nature of the offensive, he explained, had been responsible for an extraordinarily high rate of slaughter. The enemy had committed units without regard to their combat effectiveness, and had given them "do-or-die" orders that forbade withdrawal.[44]

What had been the enemy's purpose in thus flinging so many of his chips on to the table for a single throw of the dice? The Hanoi radio had proclaimed that the Tet attacks were "part of a general offensive aimed at overthrowing of the Saigon Government."[45] At the most, the enemy perhaps hoped that the Saigon regime and its armed forces would disintegrate under the shock. There was abundant evidence that the Communists had counted upon a large measure of popular support and a significant number of defections from the RVNAF. At the least, Hanoi and the Viet Cong probably expected to deal a severe blow to the government of SVN and to the morale of the United States, while at the same time seizing and maintaining control of several major cities where a communist administrative apparatus could be created. The "Alliance of Peaceful and Democratic Forces," the formation of which was announced by the VC radio early in the offensive, was apparently intended to serve as a convenient "front" to attract opponents of the Thieu government. With this group to make a claim to political legitimacy, and with the principal

43. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 25-68, 5 Feb 68. (C) Memo, DepDir for Opns, NMCC to CJCS, "Casualties, Weapons Seized and Aircraft Losses in South Vietnam," 7 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 34-68, 16 Feb 68.

44. (S) Msg, JCS 01439 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 062218Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01754 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 072350Z Feb 68, same file.

45. NY Times, 2 Feb 68, p. 1.

cities under actual or apparent occupation, the communists would enjoy a powerful negotiating position, just as they had in 1954 after the fall of Dien Bien Phu.[46]

If this reading of the enemy's intentions was correct, it could be seen that his offensive was largely a failure; he had achieved none of his major political or military objectives. The government in Saigon and its administrative structure throughout the country were shaken but intact, although the blow to its prestige could not be denied. No cities had passed under enemy control. There had been no evidence of large-scale rallying to the NLF or its new "Alliance." RVNAF forces did not defect or desert in large numbers; US advisers rated their performance as up to or beyond expectations, even in those units that were seriously understrength because of leaves granted for the Tet holiday.

Nevertheless it could not be denied that the enemy had achieved certain successes, which could hardly be dismissed as negligible. Probably his most important accomplishment was to force the concentration of US and ARVN forces around the cities, thus leaving large portions of the countryside wide open to exploitation by the Viet Cong. The vital Revolutionary Development program had suffered a serious setback. The extent of its disruption, which could only be judged with the passage of time, would be the surest measure of the degree to which the Tet offensive had affected the course of the war. The ARVN had been driven into a defensive posture; it remained to be seen how well it would bear up if enemy forces were able to maintain pressure. Finally, despite the size of his losses, the enemy remained capable of mounting another wave of attacks. "In essence, the side who

46. (S) Memo, no sig, "Information from Prisoners and Documents Which Indicate Possible VC/NVA Intentions During the Tet Period," 3 Feb 68, Att to Memo, G.A. Carver, CIA to SecDef, same date; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01592 to CINCPAC, 031512Z Feb 68; (TS) Msg, COFS MACV MAC 01926 to MG DePuy, 110538Z Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 19428 to State, 151100Z Feb 68. (C) Msg, Saigon 21322 to State, 061210Z Mar 68, JCS IN 55651.

can rebuild fastest and take the offensive around the cities and towns will win the next round," said General Westmoreland on 26 February.[47]

General Westmoreland felt that the psychological effect had been considerable, especially in Saigon, where the population had hitherto enjoyed reasonable security. The communists had shown themselves able to bring the war into the heart of the capital, in the face of the overwhelming military strength of the RVN and its allies. On the other hand, the enemy's action in launching the assault during the Tet holiday--a sacred occasion for the poeple of Vietnam--had inspired a large measure of anger against the communists.[48]

The physical damage left in the wake of the fighting was enormous. On 15 February Ambassador Bunker estimated that 485,000 new refugees or evacuees had been created, 48,000 houses destroyed, 3,800 civilians killed, and 21,000 wounded. Moreover, industry and commerce had been disrupted and lines ofcommunications severed.[49] A revised estimate made at the end of March listed a maximum of 650,000 evacuees (which had by then declined to 400,000), 95,000 homes destroyed, 7,500 civilian deaths, and 15,500 wounded.[50]

Looking toward the future, Ambassador Bunker believed that the Tet attack had created a rare opportunity for the Saigon government to turn the situation to its advantage. The shock to the nation had been severe, but it had served as a stimulus to national unity; people were rallying to the support of the government. Moreover, for the first time there was a feeling of pride toward the RVNAF. Working closely with President Thieu and Vice-President Ky, the Ambassador urged them to exploit these favorable developments and to move swiftly and vigorously to repair the damage, to demonstrate

47. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) Rpt of CJCS on Situation in Vietnam . . . , 27 Feb 68. (S) Msgs, DCG USARV ARV 344 to CSA, 121200Z Feb 68; COMUSMACV MAC 02701 to CINCPAC, 260731Z Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

48. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01614 to CJCS, 040959Z Feb 68, same file. (S) Msg, Saigon 19428 to State, 151100Z Feb 68.

49. (S) Msg, Saigon 19428 to State, 151100Z Feb 68.

50. (C) Msg, Saigon 23150 to State, 270430Z Mar 68, JCS IN 97060.

genuine concern for the population, to get the pacification program back on schedule, to attack the VC infrastructure where it had surfaced, and to press the fight against corruption. Six weeks after the end of the attack, he could report encouraging evidence that his efforts were producing results. Thieu and Ky seemed to be submerging their differences and working together effectively. A high-level committee had been set up to coordinate relief efforts; it had begun operations under the direction of the Vice President, but had completed the first phase of its work and had been turned over to the Prime Minister. Thieu was emerging as a real leader who was making his presence felt in Saigon and in the countryside. Removal of corrupt and inefficient officials had begun, together with a weeding out of incompetent military commanders.[51]

But even while it was becoming clear that the new political structure in South Vietnam had survived the shock of Tet, events were revealing that the most severe effects of the enemy offensive had been felt in the United States, where public and official opinion was brought to a turning point. Military men had been perfectly aware that the enemy possessed the capability of attacking on a large scale if he were willing to pay the price. But this fact had not been appreciated in the United States. In many quarters, the enemy's ability to attack throughout South Vietnam was misinterpreted as proof that previous optimistic progress appraisals had been wholly erroneous, that the enemy was growing stronger rather than weaker, that he was a hydra-headed monster invulnerable to military defeat. These sentiments contributed to bring about the drastic change in US policy announced by President Johnson on 31 March 1968, as described in the next chapter. Whether the enemy had counted on influencing US opinion as part of his objectives for the Tet attack was not clear. But there could be no doubt whatever that, in this realm, he had attained unqualified success, to a degree perhaps exceeding his fondest hopes.

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51. (S) Msgs, Saigon to State: 17920, 041100Z Feb 68; 18582, 081115Z Feb 68; 19428, 151100Z Feb 68; 20175, 221200Z Feb 68; 20798, 290940Z Feb 68; 21321, 061200Z Mar 68; 22088, 141030Z Mar 68; 22579, 201130Z Mar 68; 23308, 281200Z Mar 68. These are Ambassador Bunker's 37th-45th regular weekly messages for the Pres. (S) Msgs, Saigon 18699 to State, 090930Z Feb 68, and 20928, 011130Z Mar 68.

The Siege of Khe Sanh and Its Anticlimax

Throughout the Tet offensive, the northern part of I CTZ, adjacent to the DMZ, constituted in effect a separate theater where events took a different course. Even before the attack, an ominous situation had developed in this region, notably in the western part, around Khe Sanh. Here a USMC force of two battalions had been conducting a search-and-destroy operation (SCOTLAND) since early November 1967.[52] Beginning in January 1968, the enemy moved to invest Khe Sanh in strength. Three NVA divisions were assembled in the vicinity and a large supply base was set up in nearby Laos. The relatively small Marine force was thus in a precarious position, the more so since the highway on which ground resupply depended had been rendered impassable, by weather and by enemy action, as early as September 1967.[53] This highway, Route 9, ran eastward from Laos through Khe Sanh to the coast of Vietnam, where it linked up with the main north-south highway connecting the coastal cities.

Largely owing to its location along Route 9, Khe Sanh could be described as a "strategic crossroads." In US hands, it could bar a major enemy advance into Quang Tri province. At the same time, it overlooked the routes into southern Laos. Lying some 30 miles from the ocean, it was separated by approximately 23 miles from the Marines' logistic base at Dong Ha. Fire support bases were located at Camp Carroll and at Than Son Lam, approximately ten and seven miles east of Khe Sanh, respectively. The base area at Khe Sanh was about three kilometers long and one kilometer wide. It was dominated on the north, west, and south by mountains rising about 800 meters above the valley.[54]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had laid heavy stress on the situation at Khe Sanh when they argued in favor of a Tet ceasefire of 36 as opposed to 48 hours. At that time, according to the JCS estimate, there were 15,500 NVA troops within 20 miles of Khe Sanh. "This massing of enemy troops indicates

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52. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 256-67, 1 Nov 67, 304-67, 30 Dec 67. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, p. 362.

53. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, p. 221.

54. (S-GP 4) "Fact Sheet" on Khe Sanh, 17 Apr 68, Encl to DJSM-448-68 to CJCS, same date; JCS 2472/277, 26 Apr 68; JMF 911/175 (28 Mar 68). (Cited hereafter as "Khe Sanh Fact Sheet").

an attack of major proportions on Khe Sanh is imminent," argued the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Khe Sanh may be an intermediate objective with the final objective of Quang Tri City or possibly Hue."[55]

COMUSMACV, working closely with General Cushman (commanding the III MAF), had laid plans to deploy reinforcements to Khe Sanh on short notice. Four USMC battalions could be sent in within 12 hours. Preparations were being made to shift forces northward to bring additional Marine elements within reach of Khe Sanh, as well as two Army brigades. The JGS had agreed to deploy two additional airborne ARVN battalions to I CTZ, making a total of four in that zone. General Westmoreland had also approved plans for a coordinated air support campaign, consisting of B-52 and tactical air strikes on enemy forces massing around Khe Sanh.[56]

To make certain that air assets were properly exploited in the battle that seemed to be approaching, General Westmoreland planned to assign temporary operational control of the 1st Marine Air Wing to his Deputy for Air, General Momyer, Commanding General of the 7th Air Force.[57] Admiral Sharp, on learning of this proposal, expressed misgivings and asked COMUSMACV to submit the final plan for his approval before putting it into effect. "Any plan which might divest CG, III MAF of operational control of his own assets will require full consideration of all aspects of the problem," he warned.[58]

General Westmoreland replied that he had no intention of denying the Marines their necessary close air support or of interfering with the system by which it was provided. His draft directive on the subject charged General Momyer with developing a plan to "concentrate all available air resources

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55. (TS) Att to CM-2927-68 to SecDef, 20 Jan 68, JMF 911/305 (6 Oct 67).
56. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00547 to CJCS, 121422Z Jan 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00276 to CINCPAC, 071230Z Jan 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.
57. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00797 to CINCPAC, 180009Z Jan 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CG III MAF and CG 7th AF, 171206Z Jan 68, retransmitted to CINCPAC as MAC 00994, 210951Z Jan 68, same file.
58. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 182231Z Jan 68, same file.

in the battle area" and with "overall responsibility for air operations for the execution of this plan." General Momyer would "coordinate and direct" the employment of all air strikes, but would coordinate the details of his plan with the 1st Marine Air Wing and III MAF. The Commanding General, III MAF, was instructed to make available for this purpose those tactical bomber sorties "not required for direct air support of Marine units." Moreover, it was stipulated that "the direct support of Marine units by the 1st Marine Air Wing is not affected by this plan." Admiral Sharp was satisfied with this directive, and it was promulgated by COMUSMACV on 22 January.[59]

It was inevitable that the position of the Marines at Khe Sanh--in an exposed forward position, surrounded by swelling numbers of seasoned communist jungle fighters, and wholly dependent for their survival upon aerial resupply--should invite comparison with a somewhat similar situation that had ended in a smashing communist victory: the French forces at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The comparison was being made by Administration policy-makers early in January. On 11 January General Wheeler informed COMUSMACV that two courses of action, based on the analogy with Dien Bien Phu, were being discussed in "high non-military quarters." One was to launch a lightning stroke into Laos in order to hit the enemy from the rear, followed by assault on his bases in that part of Laos. The other was to withdraw from Khe Sanh while it was still possible to do so with relatively little public notice. Those supporting the latter suggestion argued that the road to Khe Sanh had already been cut; that the enemy controlled the surrounding hills and would soon be able to interdict the airfield with artillery; and that there was an "awkward relationship" between COMUSMACV and CG III MAF, which made the latter reluctant to withdraw and the former reluctant to order him to do so. General Wheeler referred these suggestions to COMUSMACV, making it clear that he himself rejected both.[60]

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59. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 00992 to CINCPAC, 210945Z Jan 68 (as corrected by SSO MACV to SSO CINCPAC, 211223Z Jan 68); CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 211917Z Jan 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 02378 to CDR 7 AF and CG III MAF, 220448Z Jan 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

60. (TS) Msg, JCS 00343 to COMUSMACV, 111546Z Jan 68 same file.

General Westmoreland pronounced both courses of action infeasible. The first would depend upon airlift capabilities, and would strain them to the utmost at a time when the beginning of the northeast monsoon season was making air resupply precarious; moreover, enemy forces were probably too strong for success in a short campaign. As for withdrawal, that was unthinkable. Khe Sanh was militarily important, as the western anchor of defenses along the DMZ, but it was even more important psychologically. "To relinquish this area would be a major propaganda victory for the enemy," declared COMUSMACV. Concerning the arguments used to support this suggestion, General Westmoreland observed that:

(1) Route 9 could be opened if necessary, but it was not decisive, since Khe Sanh could be reinforced and resupplied by air.

(2) All tactically essential hills around Khe Sanh were in US hands and would remain so.

(3) The enemy would have great difficulty in trying to move in heavy artillery through the terrain of western Quang Tri province, although large quantities of mortar and rocket fire should be expected.

(4) The allegation of a difficult relationship between himself and General Cushman was "absurd."[61]

General Wheeler forwarded COMUSMACV's comments to the Secretary of Defense on 13 January 1968, indicating his concurrence.[62] CINCPAC also emphatically rejected both of the suggested courses of action. "In the event a major attack against Khe Sanh materializes," he declared, "it will be fought on our terms, on our ground, and within supporting range of our weapons."[63]

Operation NIAGARA, the air campaign intended to disrupt the enemy's preparations in the Khe Sanh area and keep him off balance, was launched early on 20 January 1968 (Saigon time). B-52 aircraft bombed enemy forces believed to be

61. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00547 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 121422Z Jan 68, same file.
62. (TS-GP-3) CM-2908-68 to SecDef, 13 Jan 68, same file.
63. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 142146Z Jan 68, same file.

staging for attacks, as well as suspected troop concentrations, storage areas, and transshipment points.[64] By 29 January approximately 40 B-52 and 500 tactical air sorties were being flown each day as part of this campaign. The large number of secondary explosions suggested that these air strikes, together with artillery fire, were disrupting the enemy's logistic buildup and troop concentrations.[65]

It appeared that, in launching this campaign, General Westmoreland had beaten the enemy to the punch. On the night of 20-21 January, the enemy began a seven-hour barrage of rocket and mortar fire against Khe Sanh airfield, followed by a ground attack that overran the village of Khe Sanh. Most of the Marine defenders (who had been strengthened a few days earlier by a third battalion) withdrew into the perimeter, abandoning all outposts except a few of the most commanding hill positions. "The anticipated enemy attack on Khe Sanh was initiated last evening," announced COMUSMACV on 21 January. He reported that planned northward movement of Army forces was already underway.[66] On the following day, air evacuation of civilian refugees who had fled into the perimeter was begun.[67] On 23 January a fourth Marine battalion was brought in to reinforce Khe Sanh, followed several days later by an ARVN Ranger Battalion.[68]

The initial enemy attacks were repulsed and tapered off, and the situation again became quiescent. On 23 January COMUSMACV appraised these assaults as "reconnaissance in force designed to knock off the outposts. It remains to be seen," he concluded, "whether our initiatives thus far have off-set his time-table."[69] But there was no doubt in his mind that a

64. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 17-68, 20 Jan 68.
65. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-63-68 to Pres, 29 Jan 68, JMF 911/301 (29 Jan 68).
66. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 18-68, 22 Jan 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00992 to CINCPAC, 210945Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68; (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, p. 226.
67. (C) Memo for Record, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, "Khe Sanh Situation Report," 23 Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.
68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, p. 226.
69. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01108 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 231329Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

major battle impended. In an appraisal of prospects, he predicted to CINCPAC that the nature of the operations around Khe Sanh would be misunderstood at home and that it would be possible for "skeptics and dissenters to construct erroneous and misleading assessments of our battle field posture . . . . As the Quang Tri battle develops there will be those quick to advocate abandonment of 'indefensible and unimportant positions'. I unreservedly maintain that Khe Sanh is of significance; strategic, tactical, and most importantly, psychological."[70]

In the days that followed, General Westmoreland, taking advantage of the lull, established a provisional Field Army headquarters in the Hue/Phu Bai area, to assume operational control of all US ground forces in I CTZ. It was designated MACV Forward and placed under the command of Deputy COMUSMACV, General Abrams.[71] Subsequently, on 10 March, MACV Forward became a corps headquarters, designated Provisional Corps, Vietnam (PROVCORPV); it was placed under the command of LTG William B. Rosson, USA, with operational control assigned to III MAF. General Abrams then returned to his duties in Saigon.[72]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff kept in close touch with the developing situation at Khe Sanh. On 29 January General Wheeler discussed it via telephone with General Westmoreland, who affirmed his conviction that "we can hold Khe Sanh and we should hold Khe Sanh." He reported that morale was high and that there appeared an opportunity to inflict a "severe defeat" upon the foe. He believed that everything possible had been done, both in South Vietnam and in Washington, to insure success.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately forwarded this information to President Johnson. They indicated their agreement with COMUSMACV's assessment of the situation and

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70. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01060 to CINCPAC, 230138Z Jan 68, same file.

71. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 01215 to CINCPAC, 251237Z Jan 68 and MAC 01233, 260445Z Jan 68; same file. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-63-68 to Pres, 29 Jan 68, JMF 911/301 (29 Jan 68).

72. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, p. 242.

recommended that the US position at Khe Sanh be maintained.[73] The President now had the assurance of his highest military advisors, given in writing, that Khe Sanh was defensible.

By the end of January it was known that two NVA divisions had been positioned for a direct assault at Khe Sanh, two more for attacks on US positions between there and the coast (Camp Carroll, Con Thien, and Gio Linh), and another two, plus three additional regiments, for assaults on the major cities of I CTZ, farther south: Quang Tri, Hue, Da Nang, and Hoi An. The enemy dispositions, were described in a CIA briefing on 31 January 1968 that was attended by SACSA, General DePuy. The CIA spokesmen presented evidence that the enemy around Khe Sanh was organizing a "massive" personnel replacement system like that used at Dien Bien Phu, which had provided for 100 percent replacement capacity before the attack began. Further evidence suggested that the North Vietnamese Home Army was to be thrown into the assault--proof that the enemy regarded the campaign as decisive. Analogy with previous battles suggested that General Vo Nguyen Giap himself--the architect of victory at Dien Bien Phu, now NVA Minister of Defense--was in command of the forces around Khe Sanh, though there was no hard evidence of this. In short, the conclusion of the CIA representatives, as summed up by General DePuy, was that "although they don't know with certainty whether Vince Lombardi is on the coaching bench, there is no mistaking the fact that the Green Bay Packers are on the field."[74]

To a layman the disparity in numbers at Khe Sanh might seem dangerous: 20-25,000 NVA troops against 5,700 US Marines and 500 Vietnamese Rangers. But in the theater as a whole, the balance was not unfavorable. There were 3,800 additional Marines and 500 Army troops within ten miles of Khe Sanh, and 37,000 more friendly troops within a 40-mile radius. Moreover, fire support bases at Camp Carroll and Than Son Lam, equipped with 175mm guns and 155mm howitzers, were near enough to affect the outcome of the battle.[75]

When the communists struck throughout South Vietnam in their Tet offensive, their forces around Khe Sanh remained relatively inactive. But COMUSMACV did not allow his

73. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-63-68 to Pres, 29 Jan 68, JMF 911/301 (29 Jan 68).
74. (TS-GP 1) SACSA M 79-68-F for CJCS, 31 Jan 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.
75. (S-GP 4) Khe Sanh Fact Sheet.

attention to be diverted. He remained convinced that a Khe Sanh attack would follow the Tet assault, as part of an overall strategic plan. He outlined in more detail his conception of the enemy plan in a message to General Wheeler on 9 February. An objective of the Tet offensive, he believed, was to seize control of Pleiku and Darlac Provinces, giving the enemy control of the western part of the country from the A Shau Valley, in Thua Thien province, all the way to northern Tay Ninh. A massive attack against Khe Sanh and across the DMZ, if successful, would add the two northernmost provinces, Quang Tri and Thua Thien, to his holdings. Thus, in effect, the communists would have partitioned the country, as in Laos, and would be in an excellent position to dictate a favorable political settlement.[76]

President Johnson also kept one eye fixed on Khe Sanh while the Tet offensive was in progress. On 31 January he asked General Wheeler how the Khe Sanh garrison could be reinforced in case bad weather descended and the enemy interdicted the airfield with artillery, as at Dien Bien Phu. General Wheeler pointed out in reply that COMUSMACV could resupply with helicopters, which required no runways, and could if necessary reopen Route 9, though at considerable cost. He pointed out also that the US forces, unlike the French in 1954, had artillery and tank units nearby.[77] Commenting on this exchange of views, General Westmoreland noted further that he now had three Army brigades north of the Hai Van Pass; that radar techniques made it possible to direct air strikes at night or in conditions of zero visibility; and that if the enemy massed for attack, he would become correspondingly more vulnerable to superior US artillery and air striking power.[78]

Pursuing the subject further, General Wheeler asked if it would be desirable to employ additional mortars and artillery in the Khe Sanh perimeter. General Westmoreland replied that any increase of forces within the perimeter would increase the risk of loss by fire and add to the difficulties of logistic support. Any additional fire support should be retained outside the perimeter, for use with counterattacking

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76. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01858 to CJCS, 091633Z Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68) sec 1.

77. (TS) Msg, JCS 01147 to COMUSMACV, 010351Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

78. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01586 to CJCS, 031226Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

and exploitation forces when the time came. "All available resources required by General Cushman," he affirmed, "are being provided within the practical limitations of the overall situation in RVN."[79]

The possibility of using nuclear weapons at Khe Sanh, to retrieve the situation if it should become desperate, had already been considered. On 1 February 1968 General Wheeler asked the advice of COMUSMACV and CINCPAC about the advisability of doing so, though he considered it unlikely that the necessity would arise.[80] Two days later he informed General Westmoreland that the President had made it clear that he did not wish to be placed in a position in which he would have to decide whether to use nuclear weapons.[81]

General Westmoreland thought it unlikely that such weapons would be needed, but that if the situation in the DMZ area should change "dramatically," the United States should be prepared to introduce "weapons of greater effectiveness against massed forces"--either tactical nuclear weapons or chemical agents.[82] Admiral Sharp reported that contingency plans for using nuclear devices were being prepared at Okinawa, though he did not expect them to be required.[83] General Wheeler directed that these plans not be forwarded to Washington until the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked for them or until a critical situation should make it necessary (in CINCPAC's opinion) that they be considered by the Joint Chiefs.[84]

When the President heard that these plans were in preparation, he ordered them discontinued. Already there had been speculation on the subject in the news media, and he wished to make certain that allegations by the opposition would have no foundation.[85] Accordingly, by direction of CINCPAC,

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79. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 01305 to COMUSMACV, 032310Z Jan 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01635 to CJCS, 050125Z Feb 68; same file.
80. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 01154 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 011526Z Feb 68, same file.
81. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 01272 to COMUSMACV, 030332Z Feb 68, same file.
82. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01586 to CJCS, 031226Z Feb 68, same file.
83. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 020208Z Feb 68, same file.
84. (TS) Msg, JCS 01678 to CINCPAC, 101848Z Feb 68, same file.
85. (S) Msg, JCS 01690 to CINCPAC, 111913Z Feb 68, same file.

this planning program (FRACTURE JAW) was at once terminated.[86]

The siege of Khe Sanh was a principal topic of conversation at a White House luncheon on 3 February attended by General Wheeler, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, and other officials. The civilian officials expressed considerable apprehension, but there was no disposition to abandon the position. Several courses of action were discussed, such as a diversionary amphibious operation against North Vietnam or a ground attack northward through the DMZ. General Wheeler passed along the substance of the conversation to General Westmoreland, with assurances that official Washington, from the President on down, reposed complete confidence in his judgment.[87]

On the night of 4-5 February, a new rocket barrage assailed the defenders of Khe Sanh, followed by enemy ground attacks against outposts.[88] One of these attacks was by a regimental-size force (2,000-3,000 men), but was broken up by an air and artillery barrage before it could reach the hill position that apparently constituted its objective.[89] Again the conclusion was drawn that the decisive hour had struck. "Now that the attack has been launched," said General Wheeler in a message to COMUSMACV, "the President is interested in all details." He asked COMUSMACV to furnish a daily summary of the situation at Khe Sanh and in the DMZ, with a forecast of planned US actions.[90] He also instructed the Joint Staff and DIA to provide daily briefings on the Khe Sanh/DMZ situation to the Armed Services Committees of both Houses of Congress.[91]

Again the enemy chose not to, or could not, press home his attack; enemy forces broke contact and resumed their

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86. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV et al., 120242Z Feb 68, same file.
87. (S) Msg, JCS 01216 to COMUSMACV, 041642Z Feb 68, same file.
88. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 30-68, 5 Feb 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01666 to CJCS, 051131Z Feb 68, same file.
89. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, pp. 241-242.
90. (S-GP 1) Msg, JCS 01320 to COMUSMACV, 042330Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.
91. (C-GP 4) CM-2981-68 to DJS and Dir DIA, 5 Feb 68, same file.

campaign of artillery harassment.[92] But on the night of 6-7 February, the enemy attacked and overran the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei, four miles southwest of Khe Sanh, making use of tanks for the first time.[93]

There followed another lull of about two weeks' duration. But the enemy's continuing interest in Khe Sanh was confirmed by a Viet Cong radio broadcast on 18 February 1968 (made available to newsmen in Saigon on 26 February), which asserted for the first time that General Giap was commanding the offensive in South Vietnam. While it did not specifically assert that he was in direct command at Khe Sanh, it declared that he "dares guarantee" that Khe Sanh would indeed become "another Dienbienphu."[94] Perhaps in reaction to this boast, the New York Times printed a lengthy article comparing these two situations. The reporter did not overlook the differences, but it was evident that he believed that the Khe Sanh position shared many of the weaknesses of Dien Bien Phu and that he had doubts about its defensibility.[95]

The author of this news story could perhaps be classified among the "skeptics and dissenters" who, as General Westmoreland had predicted, would misunderstand the reasons for holding Khe Sanh and urge its abandonment. Such a point of view was not without its advocates even within the Department of Defense. A study prepared in the office of the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs early in March 1968 argued that US forces were playing into enemy hands by holding on to the Khe Sanh position, that the enemy could take it if he wished, and that a US withdrawal might free enough troops to make it unnecessary to send COMUSMACV the reinforcements for which he was asking.[96] These conclusions, however, were not accepted

92. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 31-68, 6 Feb 68.
93. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 32-68, 7 Feb 68, 33-68, 8 Feb 68. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 01741 to CJCS, 071026Z Feb 68; MAC 01798, 081022Z Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (S-GP 3) Hq USARPAC, Highlights of United States Army, Pacific, Activities (U), Feb 68.
94. NY Times, 27 Feb 68, p. 3.
95. NY Times, 8 Mar 68, p. 1.
96. (TS) Memo, ASD(ISA) to Dep SecDef, 9 Mar 68, w/encl, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68.

by Administration policy-makers, civilian or military.

Toward the end of February there was another sharp increase in the rate of artillery and mortar fire on Khe Sanh. The peak was reached on 23-24 February, when 1,300 rounds landed in or near the combat base within 24 hours.[97] But there was no ground attack, and the rate of fire soon slacked off to normal.

As the weeks slipped by, the anticipated massive attacks that would tighten the noose about the defenders failed to materialize. To use the metaphor employed earlier by CIA, the whistle never blew for the kickoff; the "Green Bay Packers" picked up their football and went off to play elsewhere, presumably against less formidable opposition. A reasonable assumption was that the severe toll taken by US aircraft and artillery had led to the repeated postponement and finally the abandonment of the operation. The effectiveness of US firepower was indicated by an estimate that 3,543 enemy troops had been killed in the DMZ during the first quarter of 1968, as compared with 6,884 during the entire preceding year.[98]

The initiative now passed to friendly forces. In March COMUSMACV laid plans to reopen Route 9 as part of a general offensive against enemy forces in the Khe Sanh area.[99] These plans went into effect on 1 April 1968 (Saigon time) with the launching of PEGASUS, a combined linkup-search and destroy operation. Elements of the First Cavalry Division (Airmobile), assisted by an airborne ARVN task force, seized positions along Route 9 and south of Khe Sanh Combat Base, while two Marine regiments moved westward from Camp Carroll along Route 9. At the same time, Operation NIAGARA, the coordinated

97. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 02501 to CJCS, 221035Z Feb 68; MAC 02-71 (number garbled), 231142Z Feb 68; MAC 02625, 241203Z Feb 68; MAC 02667, 250929Z Feb 68, same file; (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 47-68, 24 Feb 68, 47-68, 26 Feb 68.

98. (TS) Hq USMC, Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, 25 Mar 68.

99. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 03572 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 150422Z Mar 68; (TS) CM-3147-68 to SecDef, 22 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68.

program of air strikes, was called off. By that time the number of enemy troops around Khe Sanh, according to US estimates, had declined to 11,900.[100]

The distance to be covered was short and the operation proceeded against relatively light opposition, which naturally stiffened as the advancing forces drew closer to Khe Sanh.[101] The siege of Khe Sanh was officially declared ended on 5 April 1968.[102] There was no dramatic "relief" of the once-beleaguered Marines, but the press attempted to dramatize the situation. A reporter described how, on 6 April 1968, a 20,000-man US relief column reached the base at Khe Sanh and then, instead of entering the base, "fanned out on three sides in search of the vanishing enemy soldiers."[103] The erstwhile besiegers had now become the quarry.

The first element of the relief force to enter the Khe Sanh Combat Base was an ARVN company, which was air-landed on 6 April. Two days later elements of the First Air Cavalry Division entered the base.[104] By that time, US forces clearly held the initiative and were conducting clearing operations on all sides of Khe Sanh.[105] On the same date, the emergency airborne resupply effort, which had begun on 21 January, was discontinued.[106] On 10 April COMUSMACV reported that the airfield was open to all aircraft and that, during the period 090900 to 100900, Khe Sanh had received no incoming enemy

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100. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 77-68, 1 Apr 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 08886 to CINCPAC et al., 291240Z Mar 68. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 04395 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 011102Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8592 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 280225Z Jun 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, p. 244.

101. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 04443 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 021028Z Apr 68; MAC 4494, 031117Z Apr 68; MAC 4538, 041217Z Apr 68; MAC 04567, 051108Z Apr 68; MAC 04613, 061107Z Apr 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.

102. NY Times, 6 Apr 68, p. 1.

103. Ibid.

104. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8592 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 280225Z Jun 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68.

105. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 70-68, 9 Apr 68. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 04768 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 091143Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.

106. (TS) Hq USMC, Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, 8 Apr 68.

fire, for the first time since 20 January. He estimated that Route 9 would be open for logistic traffic on 12 April.[107] In another significant development on 10 April, US troops re-occupied the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp against little opposition.[108] On 12 April 1968 General Westmoreland asked permission to discontinue the special daily report on Khe Sanh. General Wheeler agreed that these reports had served their purpose and instructed him to submit in their stead a series of daily reports on the overall situation in the DMZ.[109]

The last enemy-held outpost near Khe Sanh--Hill 881 North, four miles northwest of the combat base--was seized by the Third Battalion, 26th Marines, on 14 April 1968.[110] Operation PEGASUS was declared ended on that day and the related ARVN operation (LAMSON 207) three days later.[111] As of 0800H on 15 April, responsibility for the PEGASUS area of operations was transferred to the Third Marine Division.[112]

The battle of Khe Sanh was over, and unquestionably it ended as an impressive tactical victory for the allies. From a strategic viewpoint, however, it was not entirely clear which side deserved the palm of victory. The enemy's concentration of forces around Khe Sanh, and along the DMZ generally, had disrupted US troop dispositions and forced COMUSMACV to spread his forces dangerously thin at a time of great crisis in SVN. The siege of Khe Sanh, hard on the heels of the Tet offensive, had led General Westmoreland to ask for massive reinforcements. His request, and the events that had motivated it, subjected the Administration to the severe internal stress that led ultimately to the President's decision to curtail the bombing of North Vietnam and to seek negotiations.[113] Thus Khe Sanh could be regarded as part of a

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107. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 04795 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 101130Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.

108. (S-GP 4) Hq USARPAC, Highlights of United States Army, Pacific, Activities (U), Apr 68.

109. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 4897 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 121148Z Apr 68; (C) Msg, JCS 04014 to COMUSMACV, 122246Z Apr 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.

110. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 05009 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 151106Z Apr 68, same file.

111. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 93-68, 19 Apr 68.

112. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 05009 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 151106Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.

113. See Ch. 49.

strategy that had produced favorable consequences for the foe. On the other hand, the small Khe Sanh garrison of 6,200 US Marines and ARVN Rangers had blocked the principal route of advance through Quang Tri province to the coastal cities, and had tied up approximately four times their number of troops in the immediate vicinity of Khe Sanh during the perilous days of Tet.

If the enemy had actually hoped to produce "another Dien Bien Phu" by overwhelming the garrison, his defeat was plain to see. Intelligence accumulated during and after the siege suggested that the enemy had indeed planned a massive ground attack, supported by artillery and armor. The date had been successively moved back; it had first been set to coincide with the Tet offensive, then was rescheduled for the latter part of February, for 13/14 March, and finally for 22/23 March. Presumably these postponements reflected the spoiling effects of US airpower and artillery on the enemy's preparations.[114]

The analogy with Dien Bien Phu was supported by a study of enemy tactics at Khe Sanh. The hardening of weapons sites, the closing in of the enemy infantry, the probing attacks, and the attempt to interdict the airfield--all of these followed the 1954 model.[115] The radically different outcome in 1968 could be ascribed to US firepower, which General Westmoreland had predicted would prove decisive.

The effects of this firepower showed up in an enormous disparity in casualty figures. Estimates prepared by MACV's operational analysis group, MACEVAL, early in April 1968 were that the enemy had suffered casualties ranging from 14,600 to 28,900 men, of whom from 3,288 to 6,515 had been killed. The casualty rate amounted to between 49 and 65 percent of the personnel committed to the operation (including replacements).[116] A later estimate gave total enemy casualties of approximately 15,000, as compared with 197 US/ARVN killed and 822 wounded evacuees.[117]

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114. (S) Memo, Dir MACEVAL to COMUSMACV, "An Analysis of the Khe Sanh Battle," 5 Apr 68, Encl to Memo, Actg CS, MACV to CJCS, same subj, 10 Apr 68 (hereafter cited as "Memo, Dir MACEVAL to COMUSMACV, 5 Apr 68"), OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.
115. (S-GP 4) Khe Sanh Fact Sheet.
116. (S) Memo, Dir MACEVAL to COMUSMACV, 5 Apr 68.
117. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, p. 242.

Most of the enemy casualties could be ascribed to Operation NIAGARA, the air counteroffensive. Between 15 January and 31 March 1968, 96,000 tons of air ordnance had been delivered against enemy positions, as compared with 3,600 tons of ground ordnance.[118] Nevertheless the artillery effort had been formidable; 102,857 rounds were fired between 20 January and 1 April 1968. During this same period, the enemy had fired 11,114 rounds of artillery, mortar, and rocket ammunition against the Khe Sanh compound--a daily average of 150 rounds, approximately equal to the 1967 figure for the entire I CTZ.[119]

Air power also contributed to the US success by maintaining a constant flow of supplies and replacements and by making it possible to evacuate the wounded. The air line of communication, which was never severed, delivered a daily average of 194 short tons of supplies and 70 troops during the siege, making it possible not only to meet the requirements of the garrison but to build up a reserve of about 20 days' supplies at combat rates.[120] The Marines in the Khe Sanh perimeter had endured much, but at no time had they been forced into the desperate plight of the hapless French defenders of Dien Bien Phu fourteen years earlier.

118. (S) Memo, Dir MACEVAL to COMUSMACV, 5 Apr 68.
119. (S-GP 4) Khe Sanh Fact Sheet.
120. (S-GP 4) Khe Sanh Fact Sheet.

Chapter 49

A NEW DEPARTURE IN POLICY

Emergency Reinforcement of COMUSMACV

When the news of the Tet attack reached the Joint Chiefs of Staff, they at once considered ways of strengthening General Westmoreland's position without delay. The most prompt method of doing so would be through the application of increased airpower. On 31 January General McConnell declared that "this vicious turn in the nature and conduct of the war must be met in kind with greater force than is permitted by our present policy of limited objectives with limited force." Consequently, he recommended removal of all geographic restrictions on military operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered this suggestion but decided to send a less sweeping recommendation to the Secretary of Defense. On 3 February they urged that the prohibited and restricted areas around Hanoi and Haiphong be eliminated. They recommended instead the establishment of "control" areas around the centers of these two cities, consisting of circles with radii of 3 nm for Hanoi and of 1 1/2 nm for Haiphong. Strikes on targets within these areas would remain under close Washington control. The President did not act on this request, but on 6 February he removed the special ban on strikes within 5 nm of the centers of these two cities that he had imposed a few weeks earlier.[1]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also firmly resisted suggestions that ROLLING THUNDER be curtailed. On 7 February 1968 the Joint Staff forwarded to General Wheeler a critical analysis of a study by the Institute for Defense Analyses that downgraded the effectiveness of the bombing campaign. The Joint Staff concluded that the authors of the study had produced misleading results by compartmentalizing the campaign and had ignored the cumulative effectiveness of an interdiction program unhampered by "vacillating restraints that permit and aid recuperation." On 19 February 1968 the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that the Chairman would present their views on ROLLING THUNDER to higher authority "as the opportunity presented itself." They advocated conduct of armed

1. (TS) CSAF-A-34-68, 31 Jan 68; (TS) Note to Control Div., "ROLLING THUNDER," 31 Jan 68, (TS) JCS 2472/222, 1 Feb 68 (revised Dec On, 2 Feb 68); (TS) JCSM-78-68, 3 Feb 68. JMF 912/323 (31 Jan 68).

reconnaissance within eight miles of the Chinese border and reaffirmed their view that the Hanoi-Haiphong control areas should be reduced.[2]

At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the possibility that it might become necessary to send troop reinforcements to COMUSMACV. This contingency presented grave implications because of the depleted state of the US strategic reserves. A list of forces available for dispatch to Southeast Asia, submitted by J-5 on 5 February 1968, presented a bleak picture. The only available Army unit in CONUS strategic reserve (apart from three heavy divisions committed to NATO, each of which required twelve weeks for mobilization) was the 82nd Airborne Division. The Marine Corps had available approximately one and one-third divisions/wings: the 5th Division/3d Wing (6/9 of a division), in the Pacific Command, and the 2d Division/Wing (7/9 division), in the Atlantic Command. The Navy could supply five aircraft carriers and an equal number of cruisers, but only by drawing on forces required to support NATO. Available Air Force units in CONUS strategic reserve were 12 TFS, eight of which were Air National Guard units recently called to active duty. Presenting this meager list, J-5 pointed out that the deployment of any of these forces would require compensating mobilization of Reserve units to replenish the strategic reserve.[3]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff studied this paper and decided to call for more information before reaching a decision. On 7 February 1968 they considered a somewhat more comprehensive study prepared by J-5. Again they reached no decision except to agree that any dispatch of reinforcements to COMUSMACV would require mobilization of some reserve units and some change in rotation policies and other existing ground rules.[4]

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2. (TS) Memo, D/JS to CJCS, "Comments on IDA JASON Study on 'The Bombing of North Vietnam'" 7 Feb 68; (TS) DJSM-148-68, 7 Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 68. (TS) Secy, JCS, Dec On "ROLLING THUNDER Targets," 19 Feb 68, JMF 912/323 (31 Jan 68).

3. (TS) J-5 T 9-68, "Forces Available for Emergency Deployment to Southeast Asia," 5 Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

4. (S) Note to Control Div, "Forces Available for Emergency Deployment to Southeast Asia," 5 Feb 68; (TS) J-5 T 12-68, same subj, 7 Feb 68; (C) Note to Control Div, same subj and date, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

On the following day, at the request of General Wheeler, J-5 prepared a study of the deployability status of the 82d Airborne Division and of the 6/9 Marine division (5th Division/3d Wing) available in PACOM. J-5 concluded that the former could close South Vietnam within nine to 29 days after a decision was made and the latter within five to 17 days, depending on various possible "mixes" of airlift capacity.5

As yet there had been no request from General Westmoreland for reinforcements. On 7 February (Washington time), General Wheeler consulted COMUSMACV by telecon and learned that he contemplated a move of the 101st Airborne Division north to meet the threat in I CTZ. In a message to COMUSMACV later that day, General Wheeler suggested that the enemy buildup around Khe Sanh was intended to serve just such a purpose--to siphon off forces from the south, exposing the ARVN to attack. To counter such an enemy strategy, the Chairman suggested that reinforcements could be sent in the form of the 82d Airborne and of approximately one-half of a Marine division. Both steps would require changes in the length of tours in Vietnam and the time between tours. Although such changes would not be popular, the US Government, according to General Wheeler, "is not prepared to accept a defeat in South Vietnam. In summary," he concluded, "if you need more troops, ask for them."6

Agreeing that General Wheeler's view of enemy strategy was logical, General Westmoreland replied that it would be well to plan for the worst possible contingency--the loss of Khe Sanh, which would then have to be retaken. He therefore "strongly urged" that plans be made to provide the 82d Airborne and the one-half Marine division of which General Wheeler had spoken. In the event of a setback in northern I CTZ, these reinforcements could make an amphibious landing somewhere in the area to eject the enemy. Surf conditions for such an effort would be favorable in April.7

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5. (TS) J-5 Briefing Sheet for CJCS on JCS 2472/226, 5 Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

6. (TS) Msg, JCS 01529 to COMUSMACV, 080448Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

7. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01810 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 081440Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

General Wheeler still desired a more forceful recommendation from the field commander. Reinforcements might be desirable earlier than April, he suggested, to assist in defense or pursuit. "I am not trying to sell you on the deployment of additional forces which in any event I cannot guarantee," he said. But, sensing that "the critical phase of the war is upon us," he did not believe that COMUSMACV should "refrain from asking for what you believe is required under the circumstances."[8]

On 9 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed with the President the possible deployment of the 82d Airborne and 6/9 Marine division, to be accompanied by mobilization of 120,000 reservists and by legislative action to extend terms of service and to permit recall of individual reservists. No decision was reached, but later that day Secretary McNamara asked General Wheeler to submit a tentative deployment plan, plus two others of lesser scope, one for dispatching only the 82d Airborne, another for sending only those Marine battalions available in CONUS. Neither of these smaller plans would require reserve mobilization or legislative action. Mr. McNamara stressed the difficulty of getting Congressional action, which would probably be preceded by "prolonged and divisive debate." He pointed out, moreover, that it was necessary to plan for the possibility of "substantial and perhaps widespread civil disorders" in the United States during the coming summer.[9]

The three plans, drawn up by J-5, were sent to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 February. J-5 concluded that the most comprehensive plan, embracing both the 82d Airborne and 6/9 of a Marine division, would be the most advantageous, but that it would require immediate callup of reserve component units at least comparable in size. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the J-5 paper and sent it back for a revision that would indicate more clearly the support forces required for the proposed deployments and would stress the impact on the US world-wide force posture.[10]

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8. (TS) Msg, JCS 01590 to COMUSMACV, 090021Z Feb 68.
9. (S) Memo for Record, CJCS, "Actions in Southeast Asia," 9 Feb 68. JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).
10. (TS) JCS 2472/226-1, 10 Feb 68; (S) Note to Control Div, "Emergency Reinforcement of COMUSMACV," 10 Feb 68; JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

Meanwhile COMUSMACV had become more emphatic in his demand for reinforcements. On 9 February 1968, in a long assessment of the enemy's strategy and his own situation, he declared that he "would welcome reinforcements at any time they can be made available." Even a "six-month loan" of reinforcements might "turn the tide to the point where the enemy might see the light or be so weakened that we could return them."[11] Two days later he declared that "additional forces from CONUS would be most helpful in permitting us to rapidly stabilize the current situation."[12]

Such language was not strong enough to sway the Administration. COMUSMACV's message of 9 February was discussed at a meeting at the White House on 11 February, attended by General Wheeler, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Secretary-designate Clifford, and other officials. The interpretation placed on the message by the conferees, as General Wheeler informed COMUSMACV, was that "you could use additional U.S. troop units, but you are not expressing a firm demand for them; in sum, you do not fear defeat if you are not reinforced."[13]

Before General Westmoreland could reply to this message, J-5 completed the revised deployment paper called for by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. J-5 recommended that measures be taken at once to prepare the 82d Airborne and 6/9 Marine division for possible deployment, but that the decision on sending these units be deferred temporarily. Meanwhile, according to J-5, reserve units suitable for replacement should be called up and legislation should be sought to authorize recall of individual reservists and to extend terms of service for active duty personnel. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved this paper on 11 February and sent their conclusions to Secretary McNamara the following day.[14]

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11. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01858 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 091633Z Feb 68. JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).
12. (TS-NOFORN) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01924 to CJCS, 110308Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.
13. (S) Msg, JCS 1695 to COMUSMACV, 120108Z Feb 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.
14. (TS) JCS 2472/226-2, 11 Feb 68; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-91-68 to SecDef, 12 Feb 68; JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68) sec 2.

Early on 12 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff finally received from General Westmoreland an unequivocal statement that he "desperately" needed reinforcements to enable him to hold the northern I CTZ without endangering other areas. He pointed out that he was 25,000 short of the ceiling of 525,000 men that had been authorized for South Vietnam. "I need these 525,000 troops now," he declared. He urged immediate deployment of a Marine regiment package and a brigade package of the 82d Airborne, with the remaining elements of these units to be sent later. "Time is of the essence," he declared. He asked that the Secretary of Defense and the President be informed of his views, in which Ambassador Bunker had concurred.[15] In a further communication, General Westmoreland addressed himself to General Wheeler's account of the 11 February White House meeting:

> I am expressing a firm request for additional troops, not because I fear defeat if I am not reinforced, but because I do not feel that I can fully grasp the initiative from the recently reinforced enemy without them.[16]

Meeting at 0930 on 12 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the new and urgent appeal from General Westmoreland. They agreed to reconvene that afternoon, at which time the Army and Marine Corps would provide information on the impact of deployments to South Vietnam and on the minimum levels of reserve mobilization required.

Before this subsequent meeting could be held, however, General Wheeler was unexpectedly summoned to the White House. There the President announced that he had decided to approve COMUSMACV's request, that is, to deploy at once a brigade of the 82d Airborne and a Marine RLT. At 1600 that afternoon General Wheeler informed his colleagues of this decision, at the same time directing the Joint Staff to prepare a study of the necessary reserve mobilization and legislative actions.[17]

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15. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and CJCS, 120612Z Feb 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

16. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 02018 to CJCS, 121823Z Feb 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

17. (S) Note to Control Div, "Deployments to SVN," 12 Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

The resulting report from J-5, submitted on 13 February and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff the same day, indicated that the emergency reinforcement of MACV would require mobilization of the following reserve units: two Army infantry brigades; one Marine regiment; one composite Marine group; and two Navy mobile construction battalions. A total of 46,300 reservists would have to be called immediately to active duty, and 137,000 more should be placed in readiness for probable mobilization.[18]

Concurrently, Secretary McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to study four possible courses of action consequent upon the emergency deployments to South Vietnam. These were as follows:

a. To defer any additional actions pending receipt of further information from CONUSMACV.

b. To mobilize 40,000 reservists (which could be done without legislative action).

c. To call up either 40,000 or 130,000 reservists, and at the same time to ask Congress to authorize additional personnel actions to strengthen the Armed Forces.

d. In addition to Course c, to submit supplemental appropriation requests for legislative approval.

On 15 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that further reinforcements to South Vietnam should be deferred until General Westmoreland asked for them, but they did not consent to delay in the mobilization of reserve units. They again recommended immediate call-up of 46,300 men and an immediate request for authority to call individual reservists and to extend terms of service. They also urged prompt action to obtain financial authorization to support these recommendations.[19]

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18. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2472/231, 13 Feb 68; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-96-68 to SecDef, same date; JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

19. (TS) JCS 2472/234, 14 Feb 68; (TS) JCSM-99-68 to SecDef, 15 Feb 68; JMF 911/384 (13 Feb 68).

The President, however, tended to favor one of Mr. McNamara's more moderate alternatives. On 16 February Mr. Walt Rostow informed General Wheeler that, while no decision had been made, Mr. Johnson was considering a call-up of 40,000 reservists in units plus a request to Congress for the necessary appropriations, but with no further action for the moment. Reporting this development to his colleagues, General Wheeler directed the Joint Staff to study further actions to improve the US posture in Southeast Asia, indicating the rationale for the recommendation for authority to extend terms of service and to call up individual reservists.[20]

Three days earlier, on 13 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed the deployment to South Vietnam by air of one airborne brigade task force of the 82d Airborne Division (at a strength of approximately 4,000) and one Marine regiment (reinforced) from the Fifth Marine Division, about 5,200 men. Both were to be deployed on a temporary basis.[21] These orders were carried out swiftly. The 27th Marine Regimental Landing Team arrived at Da Nang on 17 February 1968. Four days later the Third Brigade, 82d Airborne, reached Chu Lai.[22]

Strategy Debated

Apart from COMUSMACV's need for immediate reinforcements, a case could be made for a larger overall force in SVN to carry out the US long-range strategy there. On 8 February 1968 General Westmoreland had informed General Wheeler that his staff was restudying requirements, on the assumption that the 525,000 ceiling in Program 5 would be lifted. A preliminary estimate of additional requirements included an additional US infantry division and the ROK Light Infantry Division already under discussion, plus additional helicopter and

20. (TS) CM-2976-68 to CSA et al., 16 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

21. (S) Msgs, JCS 9926 to CSA et al., 130218Z Feb 68, and JCS 9929 to CMC et al., 130341Z Feb 68; JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68) sec 2.

22. (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 242.

airlift units and more ships for the Mobile Riverine Force.[23] General Wheeler, in reply, asked COMUSMACV to withhold his estimate of his requirements at least until the next month. He feared that the effort to meet emergency needs might be jeopardized by introducing the subject of long-range requirements at that time.[24]

It could be foreseen that any effort to stretch the 525,000 ceiling on MACV forces would spawn a host of political difficulties for the Administration. Even before the Tet offensive, there was some evidence that public support for the Vietnam war was wavering. Ostensibly, President Johnson's political position seemed reasonably secure. A trial heat of Presidential aspirants conducted in mid-January by the New York Times showed that Mr. Johnson led all potential opponents. Furthermore, a Gallup poll published on 28 January indicated the President had widened his lead over Senator McCarthy from 3-1 to 4-1; 57 percent of Democrats listed themselves as "hawks," only 27 percent as "doves." Among the public at large, approval for the President's overall performance had risen in three months from 38 percent to 48 percent. The vital ingredient in this improvement was optimism concerning Vietnam; 50 percent of those polled believed the United States was making good progress in the war.[25]

But further evidence demonstrated that Mr. Johnson actually stood atop a shaky pyramid. Thus although the AFL/CIO convention in December 1967 gave overwhelming endorsement to the President's war policy, a Gallup poll taken during that same month showed that union families approved Mr. Johnson's handling of the war by only 47 percent to 43 percent. More significantly, the same poll indicated that nearly half of all voters--49 percent--actually disapproved, as against 39 percent who approved.[26]

This dangerous cleavage in public opinion was broadened by the news of the Tet offensive. True, the initial public response appeared to be one of unity and resolution. A

23. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01812 to CJCS, 081557Z Feb 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.
24. (TS) Msg, JCS 01589 to COMUSMACV, 090020Z Feb 68. OCJCS F81e 091 Vietnam Feb 68.
25. N.Y. Times, 21 Jan 68; 29 Jan 68.
26. N.Y. Times, 12 Dec 67, p. 12; 3 Jan 68, p. 3.

Harris poll taken shortly after Tet recorded a rise in war support to 74 percent, as compared with 61 percent in December. Similarly, the Gallup survey reported that "hawks" now outnumbered "doves" by 61-23 percent. But at the same time, Gallup found that support for the President's conduct of the war had fallen to 35 percent and approval of his overall performance to 41 percent.

Even clearer was the shock of the Tet offensive in the minds of minds of many of those who might be considered leaders or molders of public opinion. Thus the New York Times declared that "the facts of life about the war have finally been made unmistakeably clear to everyone in the United States, from President Johnson on down." Similarly, Senator Robert F. Kennedy proclaimed that events had "finally shattered the mask of official illusion," revealing the impossibility of a military solution.[27]

Against this backdrop, General Wheeler undertook his visit to South Vietnam on 23-25 February, as described in the last chapter. On his return, he brought with him COMUSMACV's new list of requirements. This list called for no less than three additional divisions and 15 tactical fighter squadrons--a total of 206,756 spaces over and above the current ceiling of 525,000 men. General Westmoreland wished the first increment to be deployed by 1 May; it should consist of one mechanized brigade, one armored cavalry regiment, the remaining two regiments of the Fifth Marine Division, and eight tactical fighter squadrons.[28]

For the Administration, this request, which would require large-scale mobilization and additional appropriations, was potential political dynamite. Inevitably, the response was a reexamination of current strategy in Vietnam to see if US objectives could be achieved with a smaller investment of resources. "My report on the situation in South Vietnam and your force requirements touched off an intense discussion of where we stand and where we are going in the war," reported General Wheeler to COMUSMACV on 29 February. The President had turned over COMUSMACV's request to a newly appointed committee headed by the newly designated Secretary of Defense, Mr. Clark Clifford. This committee, which included General

27. NY Times, 4 Feb 68; 9 Feb 68; 13 Feb 68; 14 Feb 68; 18 Feb 68.

28. (TS) JCS 2472/237, 28 Feb 68, JMF 911 (27 Feb 68).

Wheeler among its members, was instructed to render by 4 March 1968 a preliminary report on the military implications of the following five possible courses of action:

1. To honor COMUSMACV's proposal as submitted.

1 A. To do so, but with accompanying stipulations that US forces in SVN would not be employed in Cambodia, Laos (except as already authorized) or North Vietnam, that no further increase in US forces would be contemplated, that the bombing campaign would not be expanded, and that the Port of Haiphong would not be mined or bombed.

2. To maintain forces at the present level of Program 5 (525,000 spaces plus the units deployed during February).

3. To increase the present level by 50,000.

4. To increase it by 100,000.

General Wheeler asked COMUSMACV to consider the feasibility of changes in US political and military objectives and of alternative military strategies that could be implemented with smaller forces than those he had requested.[29]

General Westmoreland replied that, in his opinion, existing objectives in Vietnam were sound. The additional forces that he was seeking were needed to restore flexibility to allied forces, which had been stretched thin by the Tet attacks and the concentration of enemy troops in the northern part of I CTZ. If suitably enlarged, these forces could expand and intensify offensive operations against enemy forces, base areas, and infiltration routes, and could maintain pressure on the enemy in all CTZs in order to hinder his recovery from the effects of his recent defeat. Without reinforcements, it would be necessary to continue to accept a calculated risk in II and III CTZs, which had become "economy of force" areas, and it would be impossible to maintain constantly a division-size force in IV CTZ (as had been done before the Khe Sanh

29. (TS) Msg, JCS 02430 to COMUSMACV, 292339Z Feb 68; (TS) CM-3067-68 to CSA et al., 28 Feb 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68. Other members of the new committee were GEN Maxwell Taylor, Nitze, Warnke, Goulding, Rusk, Katzenbach, Habib, Fowler, and William Bundy.

situation necessitated a northward shift of forces).30

Admiral Sharp endorsed COMUSMACV's troop request, but pointed out that it could not at once affect the situation. He therefore urged a major step-up in the air campaign, to be followed by "a combined amphibious and air mobile campaign against North Vietnam as early as the weather and the current situation permits." On 9 March 1968 Admiral Sharp reported that, in accordance with his instructions, COMUSMACV had submitted plans for an amphibious/airmobile/airborne assault on North Vietnam, to be followed by a swing southward through the DMZ to destroy enemy forces and materiel. CINCPAC requested authority to conduct this operation--DURANGO CITY--on or about 1 June.31

This judgment in favor of an enlarged sphere of military operations was supported by staff studies undertaken within the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In two examinations made at the Chairman's direction, J-5 emphatically endorsed the first of the five options under study by the Clifford Committee. J-5's Southeast Asia Branch concluded that the initiation of a strategic ground offensive in North Vietnam, coupled with the expansion of existing strategic air and naval campaigns, "would hasten the accomplishment of U.S. objectives in South Vietnam and successfully conclude the war." Similarly, the Short Range Branch of J-5 judged that implementation of Option One "will greatly reduce risks to Free World forces in South Vietnam and will accomplish U.S. objectives more rapidly than the forces of the other options." Reviewing this latter paper, the Army Chief of Staff wrote General Wheeler that, while he supported the force levels recommended in Option One, he did not approve the implication that expanded ground operations into Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam would be allowed. "The guidance for consideration of the option did not include a change in basic national objective nor alter political guidance in any way," he pointed out. General Johnson believed that, consequently, the strategy pursued by CINCPAC and COMUSMACV must continue to

30. (TS-NOFORN) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 02951 to CJCS, 020947Z Mar 68; MAC 02956, 021109Z Mar 68; MAC 02962, 021223Z Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010823Z Mar 68, JCS IN 44082. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 032253Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 092348Z Mar 68, JCS IN 62030.

fall within the limits of current political guidance until such time as this directive was altered.[32]

But influential voices within the Administration were raised in opposition to General Westmoreland's request by those who believed the time had come for a major revision in US policy. Thus one study prepared for submission to the President concluded that a 205,000-man augmentation in US troops could be neutralized by a mere 25,000 additional men from North Vietnam and that it was utterly impossible to accomplish current objectives with any level of US forces whatever. The study urged that COMUSMACV be assigned the limited mission of maintaining the security of populated areas while the United States exerted its efforts to build up the GVN and its armed forces to enable them to assume the burden of the war.[33]

Four days later Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge, an architect of US policy in Vietnam who had generally been considered a "hawk," presented somewhat similar conclusions to Secretary Rusk. American public opinion, he pointed out, would tolerate either a short war with high casualties or a long war with few casualties, but not a combination of a lengthy war and a high casualty rate. He believed that military victory through ground action was impossible. Reinforcements should be sent only in numbers sufficient "to enable us to keep faith with our troops in exposed positions." Military operations should aim at splitting up the enemy and keeping him off balance, and emphasis should be placed on "the creation of durable local political institutions under which police-type programs—for 'territorial security'--can operate."[34]

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32. (TS) Rpt by SEA Br, J-5, "Comparison of Two Courses of Action in Vietnam," 29 Feb 68, OCJCS File, VN, SecDef Mtgs, STRATEGIES, Msc. (TS) Rpt by Short Range Br, J-5, "Analysis of COMUSMACV Force Requirements and Alternatives," 1 Mar 68, OCJCS File, Black Book. (TS) Memo, CSA to CJCS, same title, 2 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

33. (TS) Memo for the Pres, "Alternative Strategies in SVN," 1 Mar 68 (labelled "3d draft"; no signature or other identification), OCJCS File, Black Book No. 1. (Filed with other papers relating to the Clifford Committee, and probably prepared somewhere in OSD by, or at the request of, one or more of the civilian members of that Committee).

34. (TS) Memo, Lodge to Rusk, 5 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 68.

On 5 March, Secretary Rusk reviewed a possibility that had been discussed and discarded in mid-1967. In a memorandum to Secretary Clifford, he suggested the President might announce that bombing attacks would henceforth "be limited to those areas which are integrally related to the battlefield." ROLLING THUNDER would continue "presumably as far North as Vinh"; full bombing could resume in the event of either a major attack on Khe Sanh or a second wave of assaults against the cities. The advantage of this course of action was that it "would shift away from the logical debates about words and put the problem on the de facto level of action. If Hanoi took no corresponding military action, the bombing would be resumed."[35]

Public opinion had been shaken even far more severely than these proposed reappraisals might indicate. Speaking to General Wheeler on 7 March, Secretary Clifford warned the Chairman that "the American public cannot stand another shock such as that administered by the Tet offensive." MACV now must be "conservative in assessments of the situation and enemy capabilities," thus placing the Administration in "a strong public information position." Unless this were done, Clifford believed, Westmoreland's request for major reinforcements "will be made much harder--perhaps impossible--to sell . . . ." In a message to Westmoreland, General Wheeler observed, "I must admit that Secretary Clifford's assessment is shared by me . . . ." In a further communication to COMUSMACV on 8 March, the Chairman stated that "I feel I must tell you frankly that there is strong resistance from all quarters to putting more ground force units in South Vietnam." A call-up of reserves and concomitant actions, he declared, "will raise unshirted hell in many quarters . . . ."[36]

By mid-March, a Senatorial revolt against further escalation seemed imminent. In the course of an 8 March floor debate Robert Kennedy declared that it had become "immoral and intolerable to continue the way we are." William Fulbright demanded that the President consult Congress before making any further decisions, and announced that the Tonkin Gulf resolution was a "contract based on misrepresentation"

35. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 5 Mar 68, same file.
36. (S) Msg, CJCS to COMUSMACV, JCS 2721, 7 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68. (TS) Msg, CJCS to COMUSMACV, JCS 2767, 8 Mar 68, JMF 911/374 (9 Mar 68).

and therefore "null and void." Senators Lausche (D., Ohio) and Tower (R., Texas) were among the few who spoke on behalf of the Administration. When General Westmoreland's request for 206,000 additional troops became known, the New York Times shrilly denounced such "suicidal escalation": "The time has come to abandon this bankrupt policy. The American people have been pushed beyond the limits of gullibility." A correspondent noted the bitter temper of the times: President Johnson now followed a secret itinerary, appearing mostly at military bases; a poet accepting a literary award casually referred to the Vice President as a man "famous for his lies"; Secretary Rusk said of reporters who questioned official reports of progress in Vietnam, "Whose side are they on?"[37]

Program 6 for COMUSMACV

The cleavage in opinion was reflected in the report submitted to the President by the Clifford Committee on 4 March 1968. The committee recommended the following actions:

1. Immediate deployment of 3 TFS (two Air Force and one Marine) deferred from Program 5.

2. Immediate deployment of an additional 22,000 men, consisting of the 4th Marine Expeditionary Force Minus (18,100 men, consisting of three BLTs, four TFS, and command and support elements), six additional TFS, and one Naval Mobile Construction Battalion. All of these could be deployed by mid-June.

3. A call-up of reserves and other actions necessary to improve the strategic reserve, so that it would be possible later to grant COMUSMACV's full request if the President decided to do so. A total of 262,000 reservists would be required for this purpose, plus increased draft calls and extension of terms of service; taken together, these measures would increase the FY 1969 end strength of the Army Forces by 511,000 men.

37. NY Times, 8 Mar 68; 11 Mar 68.

In other words, General Westmoreland would receive some reinforcements immediately but the decision on his requested addition of 205,000 men would be deferred for the time being. These measures should be accompanied, according to the committee, by an effort to galvanize the ARVN to improve its performance.

The committee noted that even COMUSMACV's full reinforcement plan would provide no truly satisfactory answer to the Vietnam problem. It would "Americanize" the war and might frustrate South Vietnam's political development. The members therefore suggested a "study in depth, to be initiated immediately, of possible new political and strategic guidance for the conduct of US operations in South Vietnam." Such an analysis might conclude that COMUSMACV should not be expected either to destroy or to expel the enemy.

On the question of ROLLING THUNDER, the committee divided. Some members, notably General Wheeler, sought a substantial expansion of targets and authority in and near Hanoi and Haiphong, including the mining of Haiphong harbor, and the extension of SEA DRAGON operations up to a Chinese buffer zone. Other members favored nothing more than a "seasonal step-up" in air operations through the spring.

With regard to negotiating options, however, the committee agreed in doubting that Hanoi would be prepared for a "serious move toward peace" in the near future, except on its own terms. They therefore recommended that the San Antonio formula should remain as the "rock bottom" US negotiating position; any change in terms appeared to be "extremely unwise" at present.[38]

The President did not at once render a formal decision, but it soon became clear that the committee's recommendations regarding deployments would be generally followed. Indeed, there was at first a disposition to allow somewhat larger forces than those proposed by the committee. In a meeting on 8 March 1968, the President agreed to cancel the tentative decision to "civilianize" 12,545 spaces in MACV and thus at

38. (TS) Msg, JCS 02590 to COMUSMACV, 051658Z Mar 68. (TS) "Draft Memorandum Prepared by Special Committee," 4 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

once to raise the approved Program 5 ceiling to 537,545. Moreover, it was agreed that COMUSMACV should receive an additional 30,000 men by 15 June 1968, over and above those in Program 5 and the temporary emergency redeployments sent in February. Reporting these developments to General Westmoreland, General Wheeler submitted a list of available Marine, Air Force, and Navy units that could be deployed by 15 June 1968, asking him to select from them a package of 30,000 men.[39]

The larger force ceiling thus tentatively approved became known as Program 6.[40] It was agreed also that the Army would call up enough reserves to make it possible to provide by 28 July 1968 an Army component for Program 6, including a mechanized infantry brigade and an armored cavalry regiment.[41] Already General Westmoreland had submitted two alternative 30,000-man force packages made up of varying proportions of Army and Marine Corps forces.[42]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to Secretary Clifford on 15 March 1968 that Program 6 as then drafted did not meet the problem of sustaining the forces to be supported to South Vietnam, nor did it provide support forces for the emergency units deployed in February. Moreover, they again took the opportunity to request authority to call up reserve units and individuals, to extend terms of service, and to enlarge the end strengths of the Services. These steps were needed in order to restore existing active forces to full combat readiness.[43]

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39. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2766 to COMUSMACV, 090045Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

40. (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to JCS, "Southeast Asia Deployments," 14 Mar 68, Encl B to JCS 2339/271, 15 Mar 68, JMF 911/374 (9 Mar 68).

41. (S) Memo, SecA to CSA, no subj, 13 Mar 68, JMF 911/374 (9 Mar 68). (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 02777 to CS MACV, 092243Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

42. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 3385 to CJCS, 111150Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

43. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-159-68 to SecDef, 15 Mar 68, JMF 911/374 (9 Mar 68).

Following further discussion, Program 6 was sharply reduced. General Westmoreland, accepting the impracticability of large-scale reinforcements, reviewed his requirements in the light of the improved situation after the defeat of the Tet offensive and the recovery of the RVNAF. He then cut back his estimated requirements for the immediate future to the following: permanent retention of the two units shipped in February (or their equivalents), the three TFS still due under Program 5, two more TFS, one armored cavalry squadron, and additions to the Navy Mobile Riverine Force. COMUSMACV believed that these reinforcements, with forces already available, would "provide us the means necessary to contain further enemy initiated actions while continuing forward progress in most areas." They would be adequate for any eventuality other than "heavy enemy reinforcements from the north." General Wheeler, in a hurried meeting with General Westmoreland at Clark AFB on 24 March 1968, indicated that these additional forces represented the limit of what the President would grant.[44]

As finally approved in early April, Program 6 established a new troop ceiling of 549,500--an increase of 24,500 over Program 5. Approximately 11,250 of this increase would consist of combat troops; this figure included the reinforcements already sent (the 3d Brigade, 82nd Airborne, to be converted to a separate light infantry brigade, and the 27th Marine RLT, which was to be replaced by an Army mechanized brigade), plus an armored cavalry squadron and two TFS. The remainder consisted of engineer, artillery, and other support units, and constituted COMUSMACV's principal net gain under Program 6.

The new ceiling assumed that the "civilianization" program would go forward as originally planned, starting in September 1968. Other elements of Program 6 included the following: deployment of three TFS authorized under Program 5 but not yet sent; an increase in the B-52 sortie rate from

44. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 4192 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 271333Z Mar 68; (S) Msg, JCS 3449 to COMUSMACV, 280152Z Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 16 Mar - .

1,200 to 1,800 per month for the period March-June 1968 and 1,400 per month thereafter; increases in planned air ordnance consumption and fixed-wing aircraft losses as a result of the higher sortie rates; and increases in projected helicopter losses, based on more recent loss experience as well as the added Program 6 deployments.[45]

The revised Service ceilings under Program 6 were as follows:

Service	Program 5	Program 6 Add-On	Total Program 6
Army	348,896	19,692	368,588
Navy	35,447	1,775	37,222
Air Force	58,977	2,540	61,517
Marine Corps	81,680	493	82,173
Total	525,000	24,500	549,500[46]

The Policy Decision

Announcement of the reserve call-ups requisite for Program 6 could be expected to fuel the flames of controversy raging in Congress and in the press concerning the Vietnam war. Prudence dictated that the announcement should be coupled with a statement indicating how the projected mobilization fitted the Administration's strategy and objectives in Vietnam.

The debate on strategy went on within the Administration. On 12 March 1968 former Secretary of State Dean Acheson conferred with representatives of the White House, CIA, and the Departments of State and Defense. Mr. Acheson likened the situation in Vietnam to that which existed in Korea after July 1951, when the Eighth Army limited its task to strategic

45. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #6," 4 Apr 68, JMF 907/374 (14 Mar 68). (TS) MACV Troop List, OSD Program 6 Add-on, 28 Mar 68, prepared by Pacific Division, J-3; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 16 Mar - . (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5766 to CINCPAC et al., 061701Z Apr 68.

46. (S) Troop List, Program 6 Add-On Forces, SVN, Encl A to (S-GP 3) MJCS 197-68, 10 May 68, JMF 907/374 (14 Mar 68).

defense. The implication was that US forces in South Vietnam should go on the defensive. Major General DePuy rejected this suggestion, arguing that it was "illusory to suggest that there was some brand new, more clever way to fight in Vietnam." He believed that he succeeded in dissuading Mr. Acheson to some extent. An extremely pessimistic view was expressed by Mr. Richard C. Steadman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) for East Asia and Pacific Affairs; he judged the situation "utterly hopeless," and believed that the only solution was "to cut our losses, go on the defensive and seek the earliest possible way out." Mr. Acheson was "unprepared to accept this point of view," pointing out that "if we do make a decision in Washington that the situation is hopeless, it then automatically becomes a fact."[47]

At this juncture, a sudden financial crisis was added to the Administration's troubles. On 13 March the London gold market suspended trading amid intense speculation. The international monetary system seemingly stood on the brink of collapse, a victim of the Vietnam war and of Congress' refusal to approve a tax increase. The President had presented a $186,000,000,000 budget, in which expenditures for Vietnam totaled $25,700,000,000. Of the $2,900,000,000 increase in a $79,800,000,000 defense budget, $1,300,000,000 was directly attributable to the war. Accordingly, Tom Wicker in the New York Times ascribed the monetary crisis to "Guns, Butter and Folly"; in his opinion, fulfillment of Westmoreland's request had become "an economic impossibility."[48] Indeed, General Wheeler wrote COMUSMACV on 16 March that the fiscal crisis and the troop deployment issue together had "placed the Government in as difficult a situation as I have seen in the past five

47. (TS-GP 1) SACSA M-185-68 to CJCS, 13 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68. The strategic debate within the Administration after the Tet offensive is imperfectly documented in available records, but has since been described in various press accounts. Two noteworthy examples are in the Washington Post, 9 Feb 69, p. 1, and the NY Times, 6-7 Mar 69, p. 1. The Times story is longer and more detailed, but both generally accord with such documentary evidence as is available. It is apparent that both were based on extensive interviews with cognizant officials (most of them doubtless civilians, inasmuch as some animus toward the military viewpoint appears). Both emphasize that a major role in leading the President toward his final decision was played by Secretary Clifford, whose own position changed from "hawk" to "dove" as a result of the Tet offensive and COMUSMACV's request for reinforcements.

48. NY Times, 17 Jan 68; 17 Mar 68.

years"; he further cautioned Westmoreland not to reveal to anyone that the situation "is as serious as I think it is."[49]

Following an emergency conference in Washington, the US and six nations of Western Europe agreed to uphold the gold price of $35 per ounce among central banks while permitting private markets to fluctuate freely. The immediate problem thus was resolved; the larger causes from which it sprang--taxes, budgets and deficits--had still to be settled.

Simultaneously came the New Hampshire Presidential primary, held on 12 March, in which Senator McCarthy won an astonishing 42 percent of the Democratic vote, against 49 percent for President Johnson. Observers had believed that a McCarthy vote of only 25 percent would severely damage the President's standing. What, then, did the results signify? One pre-election survey showed that more than half the Democrats polled were ignorant of Senator McCarthy's Vietnam position; indeed, the more voters became aware of his opposition to the war, the less likely they were to support him. Whatever the reasons, a large section of the party obviously had lost confidence in Mr. Johnson. On 16 March, Senator Kennedy decided also to seek the Presidency, saying that the "disastrous divisive policies" pursued in Vietnam could be altered "only by changing the men who are now making them."

By the end of March, the Harris poll found that basic war support had declined in six weeks from 74 to 54 percent; dispatch of a further 100,000 troops was disapproved 52 percent to 31 percent. Likewise, the Gallup poll showed that approval for the President's overall performance fell in March from 41 to 36 percent; his positive Vietnam rating lessened from 32 to 26 percent. According to Gallup's findings, Vietnam discontent had become the majority sentiment among all parties, classes and regions. Republicans disapproved the Johnson policy, 74 percent against, 18 percent for; Democrats by 51 versus 37 percent. Although continuation of the bombing campaign was favored 51 to 40 percent, a clear majority stood ready to approve cessation if the government so decided. [50]

At mid-month, the outcome of the debate within the Administration seemed highly uncertain. On 16 March General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that, although there was little hope for approval of the mining of the Haiphong port approaches, the long-standing JCS request to reduce the Hanoi and Haiphong control

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49. (S) Msg, JCS 03024 to COMUSMACV, 162045Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 16 Mar- .

50. NY Times, 15 Mar 68; 17 Mar 68; 29 Mar 68; 31 Mar 68; 3 Apr 68.

areas to 3 and 1.5 nm respectively "appears to stand a good chance of approval."[51] Simultaneously the Department of State asked Ambassador Bunker's opinion of proposals that the United States discontinue or sharply limit the bombing campaign. The Ambassador replied that these proposals were most unwise; they would raise doubts about US intentions, feed the latent anti-Americanism that the Viet Cong were exploiting, and endanger the "new mood of unity and anti-Communism" in the country.[52]

A key development in the progress toward a decision within the Administration was a meeting of the President's Senior Informal Advisory Group on 25-26 March. Members of the group included Dean Acheson, George Ball, Arthur Dean, McGeorge Bundy, Cyrus Vance, and Douglas Dillon and Generals Ridgway, Taylor, and Bradley. On 25 March the group met at the State Department for a series of briefings. The meeting was also attended by a number of high government officials. General DePuy (SACSA) described the military situation in SVN and Mr. George Carver, of CIA, the state of internal security in that country. Mr. Phil Habib, of the Department of State, discussed South Vietnam's political situation, while Mr. William Bundy, of the same Department, appraised the prospects for negotiations.[53]

On the following day the members met with the President, in a meeting attended by General Wheeler. Reportedly they advised Mr. Johnson to reject any idea of military escalation and urged him instead to intensify efforts to reach a political solution. Since this verdict represented a reversal of opinion for most of the members of the group, its impact upon the President must have been striking.[54]

This advice presumably played a role in the President's decision to restrict sharply the number of reinforcements granted COMUSMACV under Program 6. Events soon showed that the President had decided also to adopt the other part of

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51. (TS) Msg, JCS 03023 to CINCPAC, 161657Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68.

52. (TS) Msgs, State 131732 to Saigon, 16 Mar 68; Saigon 22548 to State, 20 Mar 68.

53. (UNK) "Schedule and Participants in Special Meetings," undated, OCJCS File, 091 Vietnam Troop Build-up and Call-up, 16 Mar - (filed under date 25 Mar 68); (TS) Interv, Robert J. Watson with BGEN Robert N. Ginsburgh, Chairman's Staff Group, 24 Jan 69.

54. Washington Post, 9 Feb 69, p. A 16; NY Times, 7 Mar 69, p. 14 (The Post story erroneously dates the two-day meeting a week early, i.e., 18-19 March.)

the group's recommendation: a new initiative for peace, which would involve a sharp cutback in US air operations. He revealed this decision to Congressional leaders before announcing it to his military advisors. Not until 29 March 1968, in a meeting with Secretary Clifford, did the Joint Chiefs of Staff learn that the curtailment of bombing was under consideration. On the following day, at a White House meeting, they learned of the decision.[55]

As the President described his plan, he would make a public announcement that additional men would be sent to Vietnam, but would couple it with a new effort to break the diplomatic deadlock and to move Hanoi toward negotiations. A sharp restriction on the bombing campaign would be an essential part of the President's peace move. As General Wheeler later explained to Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, the President based his decision on the following considerations:

1. Public support for the war had decreased alarmingly since the Tet offensive.

2. Weather over North Vietnam would be unfavorable for air operations during the next 30 days.

3. Announcement of a US peace initiative might reverse the growth of domestic dissent and opposition, and would aid in countering foreign criticism.

4. President Thieu of South Vietnam had been consulted and agreed to the limitation of bombing.[56]

The President's Speech of 31 March 1968

Addressing the nation on 31 March 1968, President Johnson proclaimed to all the world his willingness "to move immediately toward peace through negotiations." As a step

55. Senators Mansfield and Russel were privy to the decision at least by 27 Mar 68. (U) Congressional Record, vol 114, 2 Apr 68, pp. 3776-3777. (S) Msg, JCS 3583 to CINCPAC, 011951Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.

56. (S) Msg, JCS 3583 to CINCPAC, 011951Z Apr 68. (TS) Msg, JCS 3561 to CINCPAC et al., 310232Z Mar 68; (S) Msg, JCS 3564 to COMUSMACV, 310304Z Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68.

in that direction, he announced that he was "taking the first step to deescalate the conflict," by unilaterally reducing the level of hostilities:

> Tonight I have ordered our aircraft and our naval vessels to make no attacks on North Vietnam, except in the area north of the demilitarized zone where the continuing enemy buildup directly threatens Allied forward positions and where the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to that threat.

Mr. Johnson did not delimit the precise area in which attacks would continue. He pointed out, however, that "the area in which we are stopping our attacks includes almost 90 percent of North Vietnam's population and most of its territory." At the same time, he promised that "even this very limited bombing of the North could come to an early end if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi."

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

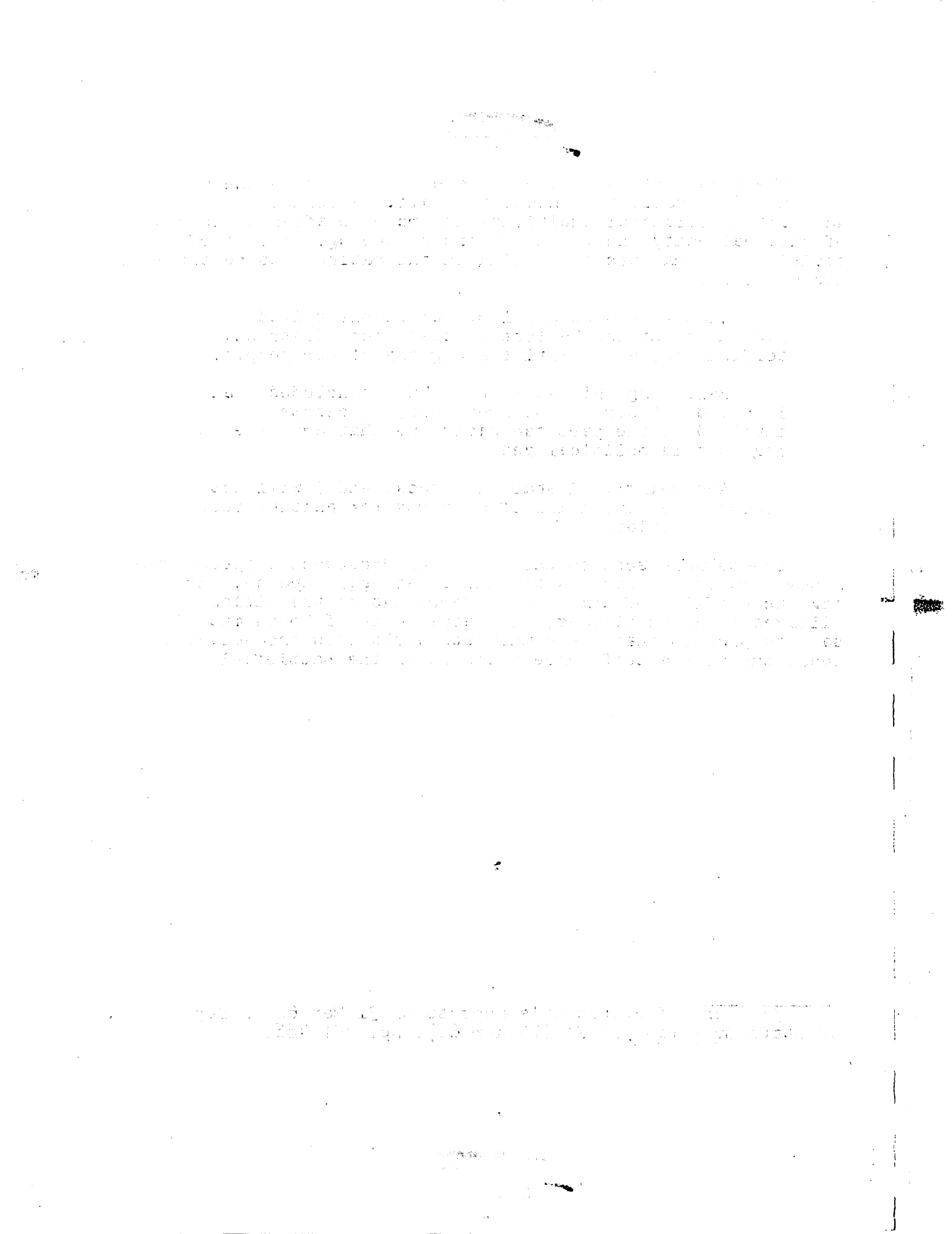
The President told his hearers that approximately 11,000 men had been sent to South Vietnam on an emergency basis a few weeks earlier. Now, he continued, support forces totalling 13,500 men would be added over the next five months, in accord with JCS recommendations. Some of these men would be drawn from Reserve units that were to be called up for service. He did not indicate the number of reservists to be mobilized. He estimated that actions taken since the beginning of the year to strengthen US forces in South Vietnam (and also those in Korea), and to build up the RVNAF, would require an additional $2.5 billion in expenditures in the current fiscal year and $2.6 billion in the following year.

The President saved for the end of his speech the most moving and dramatic announcement of all: a renunciation of any further political ambitions, in order to advance the cause of national unity and to put an end to the ugly spirit of divisiveness that was developing in the nation. As he expressed his decision:

> What we won when all of our people united just must not now be lost in suspicion, distrust, selfishness, and politics among any of our people.
>
> Believing this as I do, I have concluded that I should not permit the Presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year. . . .
>
> Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.57

Events were soon to show that the President's speech gave a new turn to the war. A diplomatic struggle opened, paralleling the conflict of armies and guerrillas in the cities and villages of South Vietnam. The experience of Korea made it safe to predict that the communists would show themselves as tenacious at the conference table as on the battlefield.

57. Text of President's address of 31 Mar 68 in Dept of State Bulletin, LVIII (15 Apr 68), pp. 481-486.



Chapter 50

DE-ESCALATION AND THE QUEST FOR TALKS

Implementation of the Bombing Restrictions

Upon receiving the President's order on the evening of 30 March to limit the bombing of NVN to the area south of the 20th parallel, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff went immediately to his office to dispatch the brief "execute" order to CINCPAC.[1] General Wheeler directed Admiral Sharp to discontinue all air strikes against NVN north of the 20th parallel beginning at 0800, 1 April, Saigon time, or 1900, 31 March, Washington time (two hours before the beginning of the President's nation-wide address). Photo and visual reconnaissance was still permitted beyond the 20th parallel, but it could no longer be given an armed escort.[2] This restriction against escorted reconnaissance flights did not apply to the Gulf of Tonkin beyond the twelve nautical mile territorial limit claimed by NVN.[3]

In a subsequent message to Admiral Sharp, General Wheeler defined the reduced objective of the curtailed ROLLING THUNDER program as "the maximum destruction and disruption of NVN support of their combat forces." To this end, air strikes in the area below the 20th parallel were to be conducted against military targets related to the movement of troops and supplies, as well as against any enemy activity that posed a threat to friendly forces. The long-standing prohibition against attacks on targets located in populated areas, however, remained in effect.[4]

Reflecting upon the military consequences of the President's unilateral deescalatory measure, the Chairman concluded that these were negligible, at least for the next thirty days. The weather over the northern portion of NVN would continue to be unsuitable for air operations throughout the month of April, so this was not a bad time for such a cessation.[5]

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1. (TS) Msg, JCS 3583 to CINCPAC, 1 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).
2. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5145 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 68.
3. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5183 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 1 Apr 68.
4. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5291 to CINCPAC, 2 Apr 68.
5. (TS) Msg, JCS 3561 to CINCPAC et al., 31 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).

Within minutes after transmitting his orders to CINCPAC limiting operations in NVN, General Wheeler sent another message to COMUSMACV conveying the President's instructions for operations in SVN. Here, there was to be no change. General Westmoreland's efforts to regain the initiative after the Tet offensive were to continue unabated, including his planned Operation PEGASUS which was designed to eliminate the remaining threat to Khe Sanh, and which was scheduled to begin on 31 March, the same day the bombing restrictions were to take effect.[6] These instructions were in keeping with the President's intention to assume a strong fight-and-talk posture for any negotiations that might materialize with NVN.

Replying to General Wheeler's order to restrict air operations, Admiral Sharp revealed some chagrin at the short notice he had been given:

> Again I have been caught completely unaware of an impending major change of policy on the air war . . . . Frankly I simply cannot understand why I am not forewarned of the possibility of such important decisions . . . . In summation, I have not been kept informed . . . . If this results from decision by higher authority then I suggest revision of this policy be urgently requested.[7]

Admiral Sharp was also concerned because the President's decision contravened his repeated recommendations that ROLLING THUNDER be expanded as the weather over NVN improved. Had these recommendations been given any consideration? Another question in his mind was whether or not the thirty-day figure mentioned by General Wheeler, in his assessment of the consequences of the restriction, was intended to indicate the actual duration of the bombing curb.[8]

General Wheeler replied that he had informed Admiral Sharp of the President's decision as soon as he had received it himself. He went on to assure him that he and the Service

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6. (S) Msg, JCS 3564 to COMUSMACV, 31 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (14-31 Mar 68). For a description of Operation PEGASUS see Ch. .

7. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 010315Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).

8. Ibid.

Chiefs had not only given serious attention to his ROLLING THUNDER recommendations but had approved them and intended to seek approval of higher authority as soon as events would permit. With regard to the duration of the restrictions, the Chairman could not be certain when they would be lifted, if at all. Hanoi's response to the President's peace overture, if and when it came, would have a major influence on this matter.[9]

At the conclusion of this message, General Wheeler touched on the fact that the President, in his speech, had not specified the exact line of demarcation for the bombing limitation. He had said, instead, that all attacks would be ended "except in the area north of the demilitarized zone where the continuing enemy buildup directly threatens allied forward positions and where the movement of their troops and supplies are clearly related to that threat." According to General Wheeler, the President had in mind as the line of demarcation the 20th parallel that was mentioned in the "execute" order, but had left it out of his speech in order to keep valuable information from the enemy.[10]

There is some evidence, however, that on 31 March the President revealed the exact dimensions of the bombing curb to several governments, including that of the Soviet Union. Ambassador Harriman, whom the President appointed to handle any talks that might materialize with the North Vietnamese, referred to the President's disclosure in a discussion with the Swiss Ambassador on 4 April. Still later, in a conversation in Paris on 27 May with Ambassador Zorin, he said that President Johnson had "explained to Dobrynin on March 31st that the 20th parallel would be the limit of the bombing . . . ."[11]

Assuming that Ambassador Harriman was accurately informed, it may be that the President was not as concerned with keeping the demarcation line a secret from Hanoi as he was with not committing the United States to it publicly. This tactic would allow the President a certain degree of flexibility in the bombing of NVN. Should the North Vietnamese attempt to use the area beyond the 20th parallel as a sanctuary, the President would be in a position to thwart their actions without arousing great public criticism.

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9. (TS) Msg, JCS 3583 to CINCPAC, 1 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).

10. Ibid.

11. (S) Dept of State, Memo of Conversation, "Swiss Offer Geneva as a Site for Peace Talks," 4 Apr 68, OCJCS File CROCODILE Outgoing, 1-30 Apr 68. (S) Msg, Paris 14827, DELTO 176 to SecState, 27 May 68, OCJCS File Viet/Paris Mission, May 68.

Unfortunately the President's public vagueness on the exact limitations of the bombing curb misled many of his critics into thinking that it was much closer to the DMZ than the 20th parallel and thus a greater concession than was actually the case. Senator Fulbright, who had not been taken into the President's confidence prior to the delivery of the speech, was among these. He had called the President immediately after the speech to congratulate him on the move and the next day enthusiastically joined his like-minded colleagues on the Senate floor to praise the President for his major unilateral concession in behalf of peace.[12]

The President's critics, however, did not labor very long in their exaggerated conception of the magnitude of the bombing curb. At the very moment the Senate was praising the President for his actions on 1 April, a UPI news release from Saigon had reported a US air strike against the city of Thanh Hoa which was located more than two hundred miles north of the DMZ. In disbelief Senator Fulbright sought verification of the strike and on the following day, 2 April, ruefully observed in the Senate that he had been mistaken about the magnitude of the President's gesture and of its significance as a move towards peace. "I thought," said Fulbright, "he would in a significant way stop the bombing in an effort to stop the war." Instead, it was a "very limited step" and one "not calculated to bring a response from North Vietnam." Senator Mansfield, who had been busy at his desk plotting the position of Thanh Hoa on a map, rose to the defense of the President. Here, for the first time, Senator Mansfield publicly revealed the 20th parallel as being the demarcation line for the bombing that President Johnson had in mind when he announced the bombing curb, and pointed out that Thanh Hoa was within the prescribed area. The President's language could have been clearer, Mansfield admitted, but its vagueness stemmed from his wish to avoid giving the enemy a clear sanctuary and not from a desire to deceive his critics. Mansfield went on to say that while he had personally preferred a greater restriction on the bombing than the President had ordered it was nevertheless a substantial concession and a serious bid for a negotiated peace.[13]

12. NY Times, 3 Apr 68, pp. 1 and 14.
13. Ibid.

The long Senate debate over the extent and significance of the President's bombing limitation touched off such a furor that the Administration felt constrained to offer an immediate clarification. Thus, while Senator Mansfield was trying to enlighten his Congressional colleagues, the President closeted himself with his advisors at the White House in order to work out an official statement for the general public. At 1650 EST, just as the Senate debate was drawing to a close, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs released the statement. Quoting the President's speech at some length, Mr. Goulding announced that while attacks had been halted in an area of NVN containing almost 90 percent of its population and three fourths of its land, "attacks are continuing in the remaining southern quarter of NVN--from the twentieth parallel just north of Thanh Hoa, south to the DMZ, the area in which, in the President's words, 'the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to the threat against allied foward positions.'" Pursuant to the President's purpose, bombing since 31 March had been directed "primarily against targets in the southernmost areas of the panhandle. Ninety percent of the sorties have been within 60 miles of the DMZ while only 2.3 percent were against targets in the Thanh Hoa area."[14]

About the same time Mr. Goulding was making this statement, General Wheeler had sent a message to CINCPAC directing a forty-eight hour postponement of a strike against the Thanh Hoa bridge--which had been scheduled for the following day, 3 April. In addition, he suggested that responsible commanders "maintain a close control over strike sorties over the next week or so to the end that our weight of effort favors the southern portions of the authorized strike area in North Vietnam." This was not to be construed, however, as preventing strikes against lucrative targets throughout the zone involving supplies and men moving toward the DMZ or into Laos.[15]

If it was difficult for the President to convince his critics that his curb on the bombing of NVN was a genuine deescalatory gesture, how could he answer the charge that the expanding operations in conjunction with Operation PEGASUS in SVN were designed to offset it? The President spoke with General Wheeler about his problem on the eve of his 31 March speech. The President wanted to avoid this customary charge and yet did not wish to interfere with General Westmoreland's

14. (U) Msg, DEF 5321 to CINCPAC et al., 2 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).
15. (S) Msg, JCS 3652 to CINCPAC, 2 Apr 68, same file.

actions in any way. Recognizing the impossibility of concealing the extent of these actions in the presence of more than six hundred reporters in SVN alone, General Wheeler could suggest only that General Westmoreland be instructed not to modify his plans, but to try to "play them in low key." Every effort, in other words, should be made by COMUSMACV to describe Operation PEGASUS and related actions as the usual run of offensive operations against the enemy in order to provoke as little adverse criticism as possible.[16]

Hanoi's Positive Response: Further Restrictions on Military Operations

Throughout 1 and 2 April the Administration essentially was preoccupied with its critics. There was no word from Hanoi until the morning of 3 April, when Radio Hanoi relayed the North Vietnamese Government's first response to the President's speech. The text of the Hanoi statement followed its usual harsh line, but with one important exception: it was no longer insisting on a complete cessation of the bombing before contacts between the US and NVN were made. Now, as the statement read, "the DRV Government declares its readiness to send its representatives to decide with the U.S. side the unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts by the United States against the DRV so that talks could begin."[17]

The President seized upon this brief but seemingly promising passage. In a broadcast of his own later that same day, he reiterated his willingness to send representatives "to any forum at any time" to discuss ways in which the war could be brought to an end. "Accordingly," the President went on, "we will establish contact with the representatives of North Viet-Nam."[18]

Previously, when diplomatic feelers had been put out for talks with the North Vietnamese, there had been some instances where coordination between these efforts and military actions in the field was inadequate. (See Ch 40.) This time the

16. (S) Msg, JCS 3564 to COMUSMACV, 31 Mar 68, OCJCS 091 Vietnam (14-31 Mar 68).
17. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," Encl to Memo, ExecSecy, Dept of State to SecDef et al., 6 Apr 68, p. 2 (hereafter cited as "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE"), OCJCS File, CROCODILE, Outgoing (1-30 Apr 68).
18. Ibid.

President was intent upon avoiding any incident, even accidental, that might jeopardize this exchange. To this end, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, ordered, for the time being and until further notice, the discontinuance of all operations north of the 20th parallel over NVN and the Tonkin Gulf.[19] As an added precaution the President directed his military commanders to cease all air strikes and SEA DRAGON operations in NVN above the 19th parallel. In so doing, he stressed the importance of not revealing this new restriction, which if known might weaken the US negotiating position. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, accordingly instructed CINCPAC to hold this directive as closely as possible and to execute it in a manner that would conceal the fact that the discontinuance of operations between the 19th and 20th parallels came from a decision by higher authority. Revealing his displeasure over "leaks" in the past, General Wheeler further suggested that field commanders should adopt the same "no comment" rule for press inquiries regarding operations in NVN that was being followed in Washington.[20]

Something akin to what the President had feared actually occurred on the very day these precautionary measures were ordered. Hanoi Radio on Thursday, 4 April, charged that three waves of US aircraft had bombed populated areas of the Province of Lai Chau, which lay in the northwestern section of NVN along the Laos border many miles north of the 20th parallel. In response to these allegations, the Secretary of Defense ordered the review of all strikes in NVN and Laos to determine if any US or allied aircraft could have been involved. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, after a thorough check of the flights scheduled and/or flown in NVN and Laos, found no evidence to suggest that US aircraft were responsible. The American Embassy in Vientiane had reported that no Laotian planes had attacked NVN, and bad weather in the area inclined the JCS to believe it; still, they were not willing to rule out the possibility that Lao T-28s might have been involved in the Lai Chau attack.[21]

For his part, Prince Souvanna Phouma of Laos denied that his aircraft were responsible for the alleged attack on Lai

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19. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 5380 and 5420 to CINCPAC, 3 Apr 68. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 5381 and 5491 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 3 and 4 Apr 68.

20. (TS) Msg, JCS 3668 to CINCPAC, 3 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).

21. (S) CM-3189-68 to SecDef, 8 Apr 68, same file.

Chau. It was his guess that Red China had carried out the attack with the aim of ending the US-NVN contacts that they had opposed from the beginning.[22] Choosing to forego any public speculation on the matter, Secretary Clifford merely declared US innocence in the incident in a press conference on 8 April.[23]

The Lai Chau incident, however, did prompt the US to place restrictions on its military operations in Laos. In a message sent out on the day of the Hanoi broadcast, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to discontinue, until further notice, BARREL ROLL air strikes in the ALPHA, BRAVO, and COCO areas of Laos that bordered northwest NVN.[24] BARREL ROLL operations in other areas along the Laos-NVN border above the 19th parallel were still authorized, but had to be conducted under positive forward air control (FAC).[25] These restrictions were in sharp contrast to the level of operations the US had actually intended to carry out in Laos. In fact, Ambassador Sullivan in Vientiane, on the eve of the President's speech, had been instructed to assure Prince Souvanna that air strikes in Laos would be augmented rather than curtailed.[26]

The Administration's fear of any action in NVN that might subject it to a charge of deliberately trying to sabotage the prospective talks soon affected the actions of its allies as well. General Westmoreland had been approached by the Vietnamese Air Force on 12 April about the introduction of its recently acquired F-5 squadron in the air interdiction program north of the DMZ. General Westmoreland, in a cable to General Wheeler, expressed his fear that, while such a step would mean an increase of only six sorties per day, the fact that it would mark the first use of jet aircraft by RVN might give it an escalatory connotation.[27] General Wheeler, after conferring with Secretary Clifford, agreed with General Westmoreland and asked that he take steps to get the VNAF to withdraw its request. "As you

22. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC HWA 1213 to CJCS, 13 Apr 68, same file.
23. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 6
24. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5540 to CINCPAC et al., 4 Apr 68.
25. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 5617 to CINCPAC et al., 5 Apr 68; JCS 5686, 6 Apr 68.
26. (TS) Msg, VIENTIANE 5814 to CINCPAC, 12 Apr 68, JCS IN 39897, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).
27. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 4893 to JCS, 12 Apr 68, same file.

no doubt know," he told COMUSMACV, "we are in a real hassle as to the locale of the prospective talks, and one more propaganda advantage placed in the hands of the North Vietnamese could well bring the whole effort to naught . . . a breakdown in talks attributable to us would be a disaster here in the United States."[28]

Some of the precautionary steps ordered by the President after the 3 April exchange with Hanoi had to be reversed or modified shortly thereafter. This was particularly true in the case of reconnaissance, which had been prohibited in NVN above the 20th parallel. The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were especially concerned with the military risks that such a prohibition entailed. They wanted it resumed as early as politically possible and continued throughout the course of any future negotiations. On 6 April, Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler raised the issue at a White House meeting with the President. Their arguments apparently persuaded the Chief Executive, because he ordered the resumption of a slightly reduced reconnaissance program above the 20th parallel on 11 April.[29]

The Search for an Acceptable Talk Site

The "hassle" over the locale for talks that General Wheeler referred to in his 12 April message to General Westmoreland had been going on since the first US-NVN exchange was announced by the President on April 3.

At that time, President Johnson had promised to establish direct contact with NVN representatives regarding specific arrangements for talks. This was done formally through the US Embassy in Vietiane, Laos, where NVN was also represented and where there had been previous diplomatic contacts between the two countries.

In the note that Ambassador Sullivan delivered to his NVN counterpart, the President proposed a meeting at the ambassadorial level in Geneva, beginning 8 April.[30] Geneva, a traditional location for international meetings, could easily

28. (S) Msg, JCS 4013 to COMUSMACV, 12 Apr 68, same file.
29. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 6226 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 11 Apr 68, same file.
30. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 2.

accommodate a large number of diplomats and the world press. It was also in a neutral country. This made it the favorite choice for the US Government.[31] Still, Switzerland was a European nation, and North Vietnam did not have a mission there, which made its acceptance by NVN unlikely. For this reason, the President stated his readiness to consider "any reasonable alternative suggestions" by the DRV.[32]

For the next five days there was no official reply from Hanoi. On April 8, the day the President had proposed for the beginning of talks in Geneva, the NVN Representative in Vientiane delivered Hanoi's brief, formal reply. Hanoi pointedly ignored President Johnson's Geneva proposal, but agreed to meetings at the ambassadorial level, and suggested Phnom Penh, Cambodia, as an appropriate place. If the US was not agreeable to Phnom Penh, then it was open to "another place to be mutually agreed upon." President Johnson publicly acknowledged this message, but made no reference to its content.[33]

In his official reply on 9 April, the President ruled out Phnom Penh on the grounds that the United States did not have there a diplomatic mission, which was necessary to insure secure communications. The President repeated his preference for Geneva, but also proposed four Asian sites as possible alternatives, with the first meeting to take place on 15 April: Vientiane, Rangoon, Djakarta, or New Delhi.[34]

The NVN reply, dated 11 April, countered with a suggestion of Warsaw, with a date of 18 April for the beginning of the talks.[35] This suggestion came as a surprise, since it had been expected that NVN would insist on an Asian site. Warsaw was clearly unacceptable to the US because Poland's assistance to NVN did not qualify it as a neutral in the Vietnam war. But rather than address itself to this second suggestion in private, the United States Government decided to prod Hanoi publicly. Accordingly, the White House issued a comparatively lengthy public statement that went beyond the mere acknowledgement of Hanoi's latest response. "On serious matters of this kind," the statement read, "it is important to conduct talks in a neutral atmosphere, fair to both sides. The selection of an appropriate site in neutral territory, with adequate communications facilities, should be achieved promptly through

31. (TS) Project B, OCJCS File, Viet-Nam Negotiating Book.
32. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 2.
33. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
34. (TS-GP 3) Msg, State 143729 to Vientiane, 9 Apr 68, JCS IN 33785, OCJCS File, CROCODILE Outgoing, (1-30 Apr 68).
35. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 11.

mutual agreement. Those acting in good faith will not seek to make this a matter of propaganda.[36]

Radio Hanoi, in a broadcast on 13 April, bitterly attacked this statement, interpreting it as being irreconcilable with the oft-repeated US pledge to meet anywhere at anytime. Instead of answering Hanoi's suggestion of Warsaw, the United States was announcing conditions for a talk site and suggesting at the same time sites that were "not adequate to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." This, Hanoi concluded, was indicative of the US efforts to deliberately sabotage the talks.[37]

While the North Vietnamese offered no reasons for the inadequacy of the five US proposed sites, US officials speculated that they had rejected most of them out of deference to Communist China. Polish authorities, who had been monitoring the diplomatic and propaganda exchange, concurred in this interpretation. The Poles, on the other hand, sensing US dissatisfaction with Warsaw and reflecting growing pressure on Poland from France, began to mention Paris rather than Warsaw as a possible site.[38]

Paris by this time was also being mentioned unoffically by several other interested governments. On 18 April, a French Foreign Ministry official informed an American diplomat that in the past twenty-four hours there had been indications that the "choice of a site for US-DRV contacts is moving in the direction of Paris." The United States, however, was decidedly cool to Paris as a site for the talks. In view of France's Vietnam policy, it seemed doubtful that France would be impartial. Moreover, given France's general uncooperative attitude toward US policy in Western Europe, the US did not wish to risk giving France any credit for resolving the Vietnam war. Consequently, the United States sought to induce the North Vietnamese to agree on another site. To this end the United States delivered another note to the NVN representative in Vientiane on 18 April, the same day the French approached the US about Paris. It repeated the five previously mentioned sites and added six others in Asia and four in Europe: Colombo, Tokyo, Kabul, Katmandu, Rawalpindi, Kuala Lumpur, Rome, Brussels, Helsinki, and Vienna.[39]

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36. Ibid., p. 12.
37. NY Times, 14 Apr 68, p. 1.
38. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE." p. 26.
39. Ibid., pp. 30-32.

The United States had now offered a list of fifteen possible locations. NVN, however, was quick to charge that none satisfied the two conditions that the US itself had insisted upon. Many of the countries on the list were not neutral, and most had no diplomatic relations with North Vietnam. It thus rejected all of the sites recommended by the US. North Vietnam repeated its preference for Warsaw, and charged the United States with "full responsibility for delaying the talks between the two sides." The United States replied that Warsaw was not acceptable as a site because Poland was a direct contributor to the Vietnamese war.[40]

In subsequent public statements, Secretary Rusk expressed his impatience with NVN's intransigence. Almost three weeks had passed since the President had ordered a restriction on the bombardment of NVN. In this time, the United States had suggested fifteen sites while NVN had offered only two. This record, Rusk felt, showed none of the flexibility indicated in Hanoi's 3 April message. "While the US was businesslike in proposing sites, NVN engage[d] in polemics. . . . meanwhile NVN infiltration continues and is growing in face of US unilateral act of deescalation."[41]

Increasing Enemy Threat and the Question of Expanding ROLLING THUNDER

Secretary Rusk's doubts about NVN's sincerity with regard to the talks had increased with recent reports from the field. Before mid-April enemy-initiated actions had declined sharply. Some observers were inclined to view this as evidence of deescalation on the part of NVN. Others, including the allied military field commanders, believed that the decline resulted from the continuing general allied offensive, which forced the enemy to withdraw to comparatively safe sanctuaries in the border areas of Cambodia and Laos where he could regroup his forces and prepare for another offensive of his own.[42]

Evidence that the enemy was indeed preparing for a new offensive began to mount by mid-April. On 18 April a COMUSMACV intelligence survey of enemy LOCs in the DMZ area revealed a massive enemy effort underway to move large quantities of

40. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
41. Ibid., p. 39.
42. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS et al., 130212Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).

equipment, supplies and personnel into SVN. Truck traffic on the major LOCs in southern Laos and in the area of Route Package I was approaching an all-time high. The repair and improvement of railroads and roads had been accelerated appreciably, and new roads were being built by the enemy in SVN.[43] A broader CINCPAC intelligence survey of the entire panhandle area corroborated COMUSMACV's evaluation. Air reconnaissance had revealed an increased use of both coastal and inland waterways. Water traffic observed in the vicinity of Vinh was heavier than it had been since 1965, and convoys of more than 100 trucks each--ten times the normal average--had been sighted frequently in the panhandle by mid-April.[44]

Air reconnaissance of NVN above the 20th parallel, which had resumed after 11 April, also revealed increased efforts to support a major infiltration of SVN. Photographs taken of Hanoi and Haiphong on 14 and 15 April showed the completed repair and construction of key rail bridges in that vicinity. This included the vital Doumer bypass rail bridge on the Hanoi-Vinh rail line. With the repair of these key rail bridges, traffic between Hanoi and Haiphong and between these cities and the south once again was resumed.[45]

Repair and improvement of NVN port facilities were also underway. On 18 April, reconnaissance of Haiphong harbor revealed the presence of the large Soviet-made suction dredge Zemleses, after a two-year absence. With this vessel, NVN had the capability of clearing Haiphong channel of the accumulated silt that had impeded shipping for the past year.[46]

The repair and construction of military installations, particularly those related to air defense such as MIG bases and SAM sites, were also going on at an alarming pace. Photographs taken on 22 April, for example, detected a large SAM site about five miles southeast of Hanoi in the last stages of construction. This was the second such site discovered in this area in the past two weeks.[47]

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43. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 180508Z Apr 68, JCS IN 50236, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16-30 Apr 68).
44. (S-GP 2) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 272158Z Apr 68, JCS IN 71044, same file. (S) DIA IB, 29 Apr 68, pp. S-1, 2.
45. (S) DIA IB, 24 Apr 68, p. A-3.
46. (S) DIA IB, 25 Apr 68, p. A-6.
47. (S) DIA IB, 29 Apr 68, p. A-5.

The apparent deadlock over a talk site, coupled with this massive NVN logistical buildup indicating a pending NVA/VC offensive in SVN, prompted General Wheeler on 23 April to direct CINCPAC to make contingency plans for resuming the bombing of NVN beyond the 20th parallel. The plans were to cover three target options, each for a minimum of two days of strikes, and capable of being executed on short notice and with maximum surprise.[48]

By this time, President Johnson was also showing increased concern over the high infiltration rate. The decline in NVA/VC initiated attacks since his 31 March speech was gratifying, but the ever-increasing infiltration of men and supplies into SVN was viewed by the Administration as a clear violation of the "no advantage" conditions of the President's 1967 San Antonio formula. As Secretary of Defense Clifford interpreted the formula, infiltration was not expected to exceed "normal levels." A normal level for personnel had been estimated at around 6,000 men per month. Estimates of the infiltration rate for April, while admittedly "rougher" than usual, ran as high as 20,000--a peak rate for the entire war.[49]

By the Administration's estimate, North Vietnam was taking an intolerable military advantage of the bombing restrictions. Nevertheless, the President did not feel that he could resume the bombing above the 20th parallel, at least not as a first step. The unannounced restriction of the bombings between the 19th and 20th parallels was another matter.

On 28 April, the President indicated to General Wheeler that he was considering the possibility of resuming the bombing between these two parallels, and would probably make a decision on April 30. If he did decide to resume air strikes in this area, he wanted to make certain they would come as a surprise in order to insure maximum destruction. Accordingly, General Wheeler instructed CINCPAC to be prepared to resume strikes in this region in line with the President's suggestions.[50]

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48. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7218 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16-30 Apr 68). See Ch. 52 for a detailed account of the pending NVN/VC offensive.

49. NY Times, 2 May 68, p. 1.

50. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4569 to CINCPAC, 28 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16-30 Apr 68).

Before reaching a decision, however, the President wanted General Westmoreland's personal assessment of the effects of the bombing restriction on the situation in SVN. Specifically, he wanted to know how the further reduction of the bombing area from the 20th to the 19th parallel had affected infiltration and whether or not, in COMUSMACV's opinion, the line should be returned to the 20th parallel.[51]

General Westmoreland, in his 30 April reply to the President, observed that the bombing restriction enabled the enemy to shift the center of gravity of his logistics from Hanoi southward. The resulting increase in the infiltration of men and supplies into SVN might already have adversely affected the allied combat position. General Westmoreland strongly recommended the resumption of the bombing between the 19th and 20th parallels, immediately and in force: it should be directed particularly at the area of Thanh Hoa, the critical link in the NVA's logistic system.[52]

Despite the apprehensiveness of his field commander over the enemy logistic buildup, the President was apparently still clinging to the hope of reaching an agreement with NVN on a site for talks and did not wish to take any action that might jeopardize this possibility. Thus, the date of 30 April came and passed without a Presidential decision on the bombing. General Wheeler told CINCPAC on 2 May that the question was still being considered.[53]

Agreement on Paris as a Site for Talks

After weeks of fruitless exchanges with the North Vietnamese and third parties, Secretary Rusk had become increasingly pessimistic about the prospect for talks. On the morning of 2 May, he was informed by the US Embassy in Vientiane that Hanoi had rejected the latest US proposal for a meeting in the Gulf of Tonkin on an Indonesian ship, and had indicated that there would be no further communication for "quite some time."[54] Later that day, in an appearance before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Secretary revealed some of his discouragement when he cited NVN infiltration as an

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51. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4568 to COMUSMACV, 28 Apr 68, same file.

52. Interv. J. F. Schnabel with Mr. Paul Kearney, Admin. Asst. to the CJCS, 9 Jan 68.

53. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 7996 to CINCPAC, 2 May 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16-30 Apr 68).

54. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 68

indication of Hanoi's lack of good faith. He warned that a NVA/VC offensive would measurably set back the possibility of talks.[55]

Only a few hours later, however, the NVN representative in Vientiane unexpectedly delivered another note to Ambassador Sullivan proposing Paris as the site for talks commencing on or about 10 May.[56] The Administration at once decided to accept Hanoi's proposal and so informed its allies. Admittedly, Paris was less than ideal, but it was acceptable for initial talks. If the French Government created difficulties, a change in the site could be arranged for the substantive negotiations to follow.[57]

After obtaining agreement from the allies, President Johnson announced on 3 May that the United States Government accepted Hanoi's proposal to meet in Paris on 10 May. The President spoke of his belief that in Paris the parties would receive fair and impartial treatment. He also expressed hope that this agreement on initial contacts would lead to peace in Southeast Asia, but added a cautionary note for those who might expect too much from the talks: "This is only the first step. There are many, many hazards and difficulties ahead."[58]

55. NY Times, 3 May 68, p. 1
56. "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 70.
57. Ibid., p. 71.
58. "The President's News Conference of May 3, 1968," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, GPO: Washington, D.C., pp. 741-742.

Chapter 51

STRENGTHENING THE RVNAF

RVNAF Force Levels Before Tet

The US military intervention in Vietnam had begun as an attempt to build up South Vietnam's own forces to enable them to cope with the insurgency. This objective remained high on the list of US goals even after US forces took over the principal burden of the fighting. The attempt to maximize the full military potential of RVN was hindered by a variety of factors: inflationary trends in the economy, shortage of facilities and equipment, lack of competent leaders and instructors, and poor motivation of personnel (reflected in low morale and a high desertion rate). But by the end of 1967, General Westmoreland was able to report that the long US military assistance program for RVN was yielding unmistakable results. The improved quality of the RVNAF was being reflected in better combat performance, both offensively and defensively.[1]

The Combined Campaign Plan for 1968, adopted in November 1967, provided a general division of responsibilities between US and RVN forces. The RVNAF were given primary responsibility for the pacification and security of "National Priority" areas, or those containing a large majority of the population, food producing regions, and vital LOCs. US and FWMA forces assumed primary responsibility for destroying the main VC/NVN armed forces, base areas, and resources. But it was understood that combat conditions would often require overlapping or shifts in responsibilities.[2]

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1. (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, pp. 267, 272, 274; (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1967, pp. 184, 197-199.

2. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1967, pp. 317-20. (TS) Memo, J-5 to CJCS, "Comparison of Objectives," 1 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68. (S) RVNAFSCS and USMACV, "Combined Campaign Plan 1968," 11 Nov 67, JMF 911/350 (11 Nov 67).

The RVNAF continued to show improvement throughout 1967. In October of that year the United States agreed to support a rise in force levels to 685,739 for FY 1968. The new RVNAF force structure would include:

ARVN	301,468
VNN	16,003
VNMC	7,321
VNAF	16,448
RF	183,546
PF	160,953
Total	685,739

GVN officials planned to support the rise in force levels by lowering the draft age to 19, extending tours of service by one year, and recalling some reservists. During FY 1969, the GVN would expand the draft to include 18-year-olds and would extend tours of service by an additional six months.[3]

In November 1967, General Westmoreland announced that his headquarters was taking further actions to improve the effectiveness of the RVNAF. Efforts were being made to improve their equipment, organization, leadership, training, morale, and management. Additional attention was also to be given to the US advisory effort.[4]

In line with these objectives, he requested delivery of ten items of equipment during 1968 to accelerate the modernization of RVNAF firepower, mobility, and communications. These items included M16 rifles, M79 grenade launchers, M60 machine guns, 81mm mortars, howitzers, trucks, radios, and additional ammunition allocations. Most of these items, including the M16s, were approved for delivery during 1968, but some were held up pending decision on the FY 1969 RVNAF force structure.[5]

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3. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1967, pp. 187-90.
4. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 10726 to CJCS, 9 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.
5. (S) Tab C to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

As of 31 December, the total strength of the RVNAF was 643,100, of which 342,900 were allocated to the regular forces and 300,200 to the territorial forces (RF/PF).6

The Tet Offensive and Its Effects

The attack launched by VC/NVA forces on the night of 29-30 January 1968, during the Tet holiday, has been described in Chapter 48. The enemy was largely successful in catching RVNAF forces off guard. Unit commanders had granted leave liberally to their personnel for the holiday occasion. As a result, most units were down to about 40-50 percent of their strength when the enemy struck. Some unit commanders had been careful to keep their on-hand personnel at full combat readiness. In other units, however, officers and men were caught unprepared, doubtless influenced by a subconscious expectation that the enemy would respect the holiday--the most solemnly regarded one in the entire Vietnamese calendar.

Others of the enemy's hopes were destined to disappointment. Intelligence obtained after the attack indicated clearly that the enemy high command had fully expected that ARVN units and personnel would defect in large numbers, or, at the least, would offer only half-hearted resistence. With this expectation in mind, the communists directed the brunt of their attack against the ARVN. But the troops of South Vietnam rose to the occasion. US advisors later reported that, of the 149 ARVN maneuver battalions, 42 had performed exceptionally well during the attack, while only eight were rated poor in performance. Not a single ARVN unit defected to the enemy. In some cases, RVNAF units carried out effective counterattacks even though outnumbered.

For this creditable record, the RVNAF paid a high price in casualties. Approximately 535 ARVN soldiers were killed in action and an additional 1,698 wounded. COMUSMACV reported on 29 February 1968 that the effectiveness of the ARVN had been degraded in all four CTZs. But already the losses were being replaced and ARVN units were approaching their pre-Tet operational status.

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6. (S) Interv, Robert J. Watson and Arthur A. Chapa with CDR Paul F. Abel, USN, Revolutionary Development South Vietnam Branch, Office of SACSA, 3 Feb 69.

The level of hostilities in the urban areas had forced the GVN to supplement ARVN forces with RF/PF units redeployed from the countryside. As a result, some 96 RF companies and 388 PF platoons in II, III, and IV Corps had changed their mission or their location as of 29 February. US advisors reported that RF/PF capabilities had been degraded in 20 of the 44 provinces but felt that the units had performed better than expected. In most cases these units held their positions and fought the enemy forces.

MACV also reported that the performance of the Air Force and the Marine Brigade had been highly effective while that of the Navy had been excellent.

The Tet attacks amplified some problems in the RVNAF that the United States had been attempting to rectify prior to the offensive. Key among these were short-comings in weaponry and transportation. RVNAF forces had been equipped with less sophisticated weapons than those of the enemy, whose modern Russian AK-47 assault rifles, light and heavy machine guns, and antitank and artillery rockets had given him fire superiority. The shortage of transportation facilities had in many cases prevented RVNAF personnel on leave from rejoining their units during the offensive.[7]

On 3 February, General Westmoreland requested that the United States accelerate delivery of the M16 rifles, M60 machine guns and M29 mortars he had requested for the RVNAF prior to the Tet hostilities. He also asked that the RVNAF be provided with additional armored personnel carriers and helicopters.[8]

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7. (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 282. (S-GP 4) MACV, Report-Reassessment of RVNAF Status, as of 29 February 1968, 21 Mar 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68). (S) Msg DCG USARV to CSA, 121200Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (TS) CM-2973-68 to Spec Asst to Pres for National Security Affairs, 13 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 12-29 Feb 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 20928 to State, 1 Mar 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225.

8. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01586 to CJCS, 3 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. Tab C to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

Within 24 hours, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed General Westmoreland that his request had been approved. Immediate arrangements were made to accelerate delivery of the requested items.[9]

Immediately following the Tet offensive, the GVN accelerated implementation of its previously planned mobilization efforts. As President Thieu later announced to his countrymen, such action was necessary because, "we must make greater effort and accept more sacrifices . . . the existence of the nation is at stake and this is mainly a Vietnamese responsibility."[10] The government at once began drafting 19-year-olds and announced that 18-year-olds would be drafted in May 1968. Veterans under the age of 33 with less than five years service were informed that they would be recalled to duty, and the length of service of all members of the RVNAF was extended indefinitely. Prior to Tet, the RVNAF had expanded to approximately 631,000 personnel, but mobilization efforts drove RVNAF force levels to a new high of 647,000 by 13 March 1968, just 38,739 short of the 685,739 the United States had agreed to support in FY 1968.[11]

In March, General Westmoreland spoke of building a "self-sustaining RVNAF capable of expanding or contracting its main effort to conform to shifts in the direction of the war."[12] He estimated that the accelerated recruiting drive would swell the RVNAF force structure to 707,000 by September 1968 and to 751,739 by December 1968. If the recruiting momentum continued at the immediate post-Tet level, the RVNAF could be expanded to 779,154 by the end of FY 1969 and to a maximum sustainable strength of 801,215 by the end of FY 1970. He recommended that the United States approve these figures as planning objectives for the years indicated.[13]

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9. (TS) Memo for Record, ASD(I&L) "Actions in Response to MACV Msg on 'Additional Help Required,'" 3 Feb 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CJCS 1303 to COMUSMACV, 3 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1-12 Feb 68. (S) Tab C to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

10. NY Times, 1 Apr 68, 26.

11. (S) Tab B to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

12. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 06882 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 68, JCS IN 61553, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 16-30 Apr 68.

13. Ibid. (S) Tab B to CM-3116-68, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

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

On 19 March, General Wheeler informed the Secretary of Defense that it was important that the United States authorize expansion of the RVNAF force structure beyond the authorized FY 1968 level of 685,739 in order to permit the GVN to fill unit shortages, to sustain the momentum of RVNAF procurement and training programs, and to show US support of the GVN mobilization efforts. He recommended that this be done immediately by authorizing the addition of 31,475 personnel spaces previously authorized for expansion of the RVNAF during FY 1969.[15]

US Presidential Decision to Shift Major Portion of War Effort to GVN

President Johnson's decision to send only a limited number of US reinforcements to South Vietnam after the Tet offensive -- approximately 24,500 instead of the 206,000 requested by General Westmoreland -- has been described in an earlier chapter. In reaching this decision, the President determined to prepare the RVNAF to assume a greater share of the war effort. In his speech to the nation on 31 March 1968, Mr. Johnson applauded the GVN's recent mobilization efforts and stated:

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14. (TS) Msg, Saigon 21733 to State, 11 Mar 68, JCS IN 64635.

15. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) CM-3128-68 to SecDef, 19 Mar 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68). (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 07327 to CINCPAC, 15 Mar 68, JCS IN 72264.

. . . . Our first priority will be to support their effort.

We shall accelerate the re-equipment of South Vietnam's armed forces in order to meet the enemy's increased firepower. And this will enable them progressively to undertake a large share of combat operations against the Communist invaders.[16]

Four days later, General Westmoreland recommended revision of the current practice of distributing M16 rifles to US and RVNAF troops on a 50-50 basis. He asked that the RVNAF be given 75 percent of the available M16s, to capitalize on the high morale and aggressiveness that RVNAF personnel were exhibiting during the post-Tet period. He also recommended that this weapon be provided to the RF/PF forces for the first time. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the request and stipulated that the RVNAF would continue receiving 75 percent of the monthly allocation until they had received all they required.[17]

That same day, the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the 19 March request by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for 31,475 additional personnel spaces for the RVNAF for FY 1968, raising the authorized ceiling to 717,214. Mr. Nitze further requested that the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, submit to his office certain additional information concerning RVNAF force structure, combat effectiveness, and equipment shortages, together with studies that would justify the 779,154 RVNAF force level that General Westmoreland had recommended for FY 1969.[18]

Long-Range Objectives: Initial JCS Plans

Before the Joint Chiefs of Staff could provide Mr. Nitze with the information he had requested on 4 April, the United States and NVN agreed to the opening of negotiations in Paris. This development had important implications

16. NY Times, 1 Apr 68, 26.
17. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 945 to CSA, 4 Apr 68, JCS IN 23458, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68. (FOUO) COMUSMACV Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 278.
18. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "Increase in FY 1968 RVNAF Force Level (U)," 4 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

for the RVNAF program. Negotiations might well lead to a "freeze" on force levels and armaments in RVN or to restrictions on postwar US military aid to the GVN. It was therefore important to bring the RVNAF to maximum strength as rapidly as possible.

Realization of these facts shaped the JCS reply to Mr. Nitze. On 15 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told him that the goal should be

> ...to bring the RVNAF to a self-sufficient posture prior to any freeze, and thus create the largest sustainable RVNAF in-being prior to a negotiated settlement.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were thinking in terms of building an RVNAF force structure capable of coping with a "residual internal insurgency threat," but not of defeating a renewed invasion from North Vietnam.

They felt confident that the 801,215 force level could be reached even before the end of FY 1970, the date originally proposed by COMUSMACV. Recognizing that the armor, artillery, transport, construction, engineer, and other special equipment could not arrive in RVN in time to arm new recruits, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested that the new personnel could be armed with available M2 carbines and assigned to existing units as light infantrymen until the equipment could be deployed. The carbines might be provided as an interim weapon until M16s became available. They also recommended that all RVNAF, including RF/PF, be provided with M16s.[19]

This JCS memorandum apparently "crossed" one from the Deputy Secretary of Defense that showed that Mr. Nitze was thinking along the same lines. As he wrote:

> We have embarked upon a course of gradually shifting the burden of the war to GVN forces. We now must support as quickly as possible and to the maximum extent feasible efforts of the GVN to enlarge, improve, and modernize their armed forces.

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19. (S-GP 4) JCSM-233-68 to SecDef, "Accelerated Expansion of the RVNAF (U)," 15 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

Mr. Nitze recognized that in the course of negotiations the United States and the Government of NVN might agree to a mutual restriction of military operations. Given this possibility, he requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a comprehensive and feasible plan to reorient the GVN forces to make them self-sufficient in the areas of logistics, airlift, and air/artillery support.[20]

On 17 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Admiral Sharp to develop a plan according to Mr. Nitze's specifications. He was also told that he might "coordinate" his efforts with the RVN JGS on the basis of "strengthening" the RVNAF rather than making it "self-sufficient" so as not to cause undue alarm.[21]

While Admiral Sharp prepared the plan, both he and COMUSMACV expressed their opinions regarding the prospects of a larger role for the RVNAF. They agreed that the RVNAF was not capable of self-sufficiency at the present time and that US units would be needed to provide substantial combat and logistical support, for a time at least.[22]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that the modernization of the RVNAF would not in itself guarantee that the RVNAF could operate effectively in a combat role. They saw value in testing the ARVN's capabilities in an expanded combat role, but recognized that such tests would not be valid if elite units of the ARVN were used. They felt that the tests should be carried out by COMUSMACV and the JGS without undue political pressure to get the RVNAF to assume greater responsibility too quickly. They also believed that the task of turning over a larger part of the war in RVN to the RVNAF should proceed at a rate to be determined by COMUSMACV, with no "attempt to rush the process or to attempt at this point to draw up firm schedules." In sum,

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20. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (U)," 16 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 1.

21. (S-NOFORN) Msg, JCS 6703 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

22. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 5388 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 68; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS 030314Z May 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 68.

the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw grave risks in a policy that would turn over the main combat role to the RVNAF too rapidly.[23]

On 23 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted the plan requested by Mr. Nitze on 16 April. It was designed to shift the burden of the war gradually to the GVN, completing the process by the end of FY 1973. It assumed that the RVNAF, when enlarged and improved, could successfully cope with the Viet Cong in the absence of large-scale infiltration, but that some US support would continue, especially for the GVN Navy and Air Force.

Under the JCS plan, the RVNAF would be expanded in three increments, or phases. The first phase would go into effect immediately and would run through FY 1968. During this period, the RVNAF would increase to the newly authorized FY 1968 strength of 717,214 and would be provided with modern equipment. The second increment would be implemented during FY 69, when the RVNAF would be further enlarged to 801,215 men, with additional modernization. The final phase would run from the close of FY 1969 through FY 1973. No detailed plans for this period were scheduled, since, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out, it was impossible at that time to determine the rate at which the RVNAF could absorb modern equipment. However, they did provide contingency measures for the third phase that allowed the RVNAF to take over equipment in the hands of selected US units if US and NVN forces withdrew from South Vietnam.

As to the ultimate effects of the plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that:

> the RVNAF, even though expanded and modernized may continue to suffer from important deficiencies, such as training, leadership, and morale, which may limit RVNAF capability to achieve the objectives established for it.

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23. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Discussion Topic for SecDef-JCS meeting, Monday, 29 Apr 68," 26 Apr 68; (TS) J-3 TP 42-68, 29 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

They added that the plan would require the diversion of equipment from US active and inactive units, with consequent adverse effects on US force readiness.[24]

On 24 May, Mr. Nitze approved the recommendations that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted on 15 April to increase RVNAF strength to 801,215 and to issue M2 carbines and M16 rifles to the RVNAF (including RF/PF). The additional personnel were to be allocated to the RVNAF service and paramilitary forces as follows:

Service	FY 68 Force Levels As of 4 Apr 68	Proposed FY 69 Add-on	FY 69 Total
1. Regular Forces			
Army	321,056	34,079	355,135
Navy	17,178	728	17,906
Air Force	17,198	4,374	21,572
Marine Corps	8,271	629	8,900
Total Regular	363,703	39,810	403,513
2. Paramilitary Forces			
Regional Forces	185,871	32,816	218,687
Popular Forces	167,640	11,375	179,015
Total Paramilitary	353,511	44,191	397,702
Grand Total	717,214	84,001	801,215

But Mr. Nitze withheld approval of funds to support the personnel expansion until he could study the long-range plan submitted the previous day.[25]

The Modernization and Expansion of the RVNAF in Two Phases

After reviewing the JCS long-range plan, Mr. Nitze issued his decision on 25 June 1968. He approved the proposal to expand and modernize the RVNAF during FY 1968 (except for certain portions dealing with the VNN). He

24. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) JCSM-324-68 to SecDef, 23 May 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec IA.

25. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "Accelerated Expansion of RVNAF (U)" (derived from JCS 2472/264-1), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

also approved the proposed FY 1969 force structure for ARVN combat units, for ARVN and VNMC artillery battalions, and for the RF/PF, as well as the planned activation of two VNAF helicopter squadrons. While he did not approve the rest of the plan, he instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review the RVNAF program in two phases. The Phase I plan would concentrate on maximizing the ground combat power of the ARVN, rather than on building a balanced RVNAF. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were to indicate the actions that the United States should take to reach this goal, assuming that the United States would continue participating in the war at presently approved levels. The Phase II plan should delineate a program to build a RVNAF force structure capable of coping with an internal insurgency if both NVA and US forces withdrew. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were to assume that the GVN would receive any necessary equipment as early as possible and that it would eventually acquire most of the facilities currently being used by US forces. Mr. Nitze asked that a preliminary report on Phase I be submitted to him by 15 August 1968.[26]

While these plans were being prepared, Mr. Nitze and the Joint Chiefs of Staff took steps to carry out the RVNAF expansion and modernization already approved for FY 1968. Owing to Mr. Nitze's decision temporarily to withhold funds, General Westmoreland approved a somewhat lower strength objective than had been authorized in Washington--751,513 instead of 801,215. But the process of mobilization set in motion by the GVN soon outstripped this goal. By the end of June 1968 the RVNAF had reached a strength of 765,050.[27]

The GVN's mobilization efforts were thus outpacing US support. The Joint Chiefs of Staff therefore recommended that, as an interim measure, the Secretary of Defense authorize the Military Departments to program certain equipment for ARVN combat and combat support units due to

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26. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (U)," 25 Jun 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-2), JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 2.

27. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3920 to CINCPAC, 2 Jul 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 4080 to CINCPAC, 5 Jul 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 2. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 19762 to CINCPAC, 9 Jul 68, JCS IN 29587, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 3.

be activated in FY 1969. Additionally, they requested the immediate activation of a number of combat service support elements.[28]

On 30 July, Mr. Nitze approved these requests. He also instructed the Service Secretaries to make every effort to provide support to match the GVN's mobilization efforts and to expedite delivery of the equipment.[29]

In August, for reasons of speed and efficiency, the Secretary of Defense appointed Mr. Richard Steadman, of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, to oversee those actions needed to improve the capabilities and performance of GVN forces. General Wheeler appointed Rear Admiral W. D. Houser, USN, to perform the same task within the OJCS. Mr. Steadman was given the additional responsibility of managing all OSD matters dealing with US support of the RVNAF.[30]

Development of Phase I Plans

The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a preliminary report on Phase I RVNAF improvement and modernization on 29 August and a second and final report on 2 October. Under the plan, the RVNAF strength of 801,215, already approved as a final goal, would be reached in FY 1969. Subsequently, these forces would be modernized by the end of FY 1973, at an approximate cost of $8,028,912,000, 66 percent of which would be for ammunition. The program was designed to "maximize, for the indefinite future, ground combat capabilities within the RVNAF." It was assumed that a balanced RVNAF force structure would not be needed because US forces would continue operating at present levels and would provide such logistic support as port terminal service, airlift, engineer construction, property disposal, and out-of-country maintenance.

28. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 19762 to CINCPAC, 9 Jul 68, JCS IN 29587, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 3. (S-GP 4) JCSM 455-68 to SecDef, 19 Jul 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-4), JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 2.

29. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (U)," 30 Jul 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 3.

30. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6931 to CINCPAC, 12 Aug 68. Adm Houser was replaced in Nov 68 by BG A.J. Bowley. See CM-3753-68 to SecDef, 5 Nov 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1 Nov 68.

Since the plan emphasized ground combat strength, only limited expansion was envisioned for ARVN logistic units and for the VNN and VNAF. Combat elements of the ARVN, including the RF/PF, would be allocated more than 64,000 of the planned increase of 84,001 men, with the rest distributed to the VNN and VNAF. It was anticipated that later, during Phase II, the ARVN would be reduced to allow expansion of the other services.

The JCS schedule called for the Phase I ARVN forces to be trained and ready for activation by the end of the third quarter of FY 1970 and the VNN and the VNAF by the end of the second quarter of FY 1971. The limited expansion envisioned for the VNN would take place during 1969. The entire RVNAF force structure could be modernized by the end of FY 1973, but achievement of Phase I objectives would depend on the ability of the Services to provide equipment on schedule and on the capacity of the RVNAF to absorb and utilize US materiel.[31]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that COMUSMACV believed the RVNAF capable of assuming an increased share of combat operations during FY 1969-70 if the Phase I Plan was implemented. But they reiterated their earlier warning that even after expansion and modernization the RVNAF might not be able to meet their objectives, because of deficiencies in training, morale, and leadership. They warned also that if US forces were withdrawn without adequate guarantees (such as those envisioned in the Manila Communique of 1966), the RVNAF would continue to require support by residual US forces. They stressed that the Phase I plan could not be implemented at the expense of other SEA or non-SEA programs without a further deterioration of an already unsatisfactory US world-wide military posture.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval of the Phase I plan along with the necessary additional funding and procurement authority. They also asked that COMUSMACV be given authority to make minor adjustments or revisions

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31. (S-GP 4) JCSM-524-68 to SecDef, 29 Aug 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-7), JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 3. (S-GP 3) JCSM-577-68 to SecDef, 2 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-9), same file, sec 4A.

in RVNAF force structure as circumstances might require, within Service ceilings and in in-country materiel assets approved for Phase I.

On 23 October, Mr. Nitze approved the Phase I plan with minor alterations in the ammunition levels requested and in the types of small arms to be distributed to RVNAF logistic support units. However, he indicated that the Secretary of Defense would have to request additional funds to acquire Phase I equipment requirements beyond those already programmed for FY 1969, and prepare a study of Phase I costs for FY 1970 to be included in the FY 1970 budget request. Therefore, Mr. Nitze instructed the Service Secretaries to review the net equipment requirements for the FY 1969-70 Phase I program, and to submit their findings to him by 9 November as an addendum budget. Mr. Nitze then authorized General Abrams to make adjustment in the RVNAF force structure within Service ceilings and in in-country, materiel assets approved for Phase I.[32]

The Phase I plan underwent three modifications in 1968. The first dealt with force levels and was necessitated by the progress of the GVN mobilization program, which surpassed US expectations. On 20 June, President Thieu signed a second General Mobilization Law, which extended the age limit for induction into the RVNAF to 43 from 35 years of age. Men between the ages of 44-50 were made liable for part-time service in civilian defense units.[33]

By 1 September, RVNAF force levels had risen beyond 811,000. It was expected that they would reach 850,000 by 30 October. On 25 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and Ambassador Bunker had recommended that the authorized strength of the RVNAF be raised to 850,000. They stated that under plans proposed by the GVN, approximately 39,000 of the new personnel would be used to expand the Regional Force structure. This increase would permit the RF to

32. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., "Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces: Improvement and Modernization (U)," 23 Oct 68, Att to JCS 2472/272-15, 25 Oct 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 8. (S-GP 3) JCSM-577-68 to SecDef, 2 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-9), same file, sec 4A.

33. NY Times, 20 June 68, 4.

extend their coverage of territory and to assume responsibility for RD programs currently undertaken by ARVN forces, which would thus be released for regular ground operations. The rest of the proposed increase (9,785 men) would be assigned to long lead-time training programs, such as those for mechanics, communications-electronics technicians, and airplane pilots, as a first step in preparing the RVNAF for eventual transition to Phase II.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed an uncertainty that the RVNAF would be able to sustain a force level of 850,000 in the long run. However, they felt that even a short-term increase in forces would have its advantages. Not only would it permit expansion of the RF, but it would reduce the supply of manpower available to the enemy.[34]

Mr. Nitze approved the increase in RVNAF force levels to 850,000 on 1 November.[35]

The second and third modifications were minor and dealt with changes in RVNAF equipment requirements. Mr. Nitze approved them on 14 November and 6 December respectively.[36]

Planning for Phase II

The JCS plan for the second phase of RVNAF modernization, submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 15 November 1968, was intended to provide a force capable of coping with a "residual" insurgency threat after US, FW, and NVA forces had been withdrawn. Such a threat was defined as one involving up to 130 VC maneuver battalions (possibly including some NVA fillers), capable of regimental-size combat operations on a scale approximating that of 1964-1965. To meet this contingency, the plan

34. (S-GP 3) Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (Force Structure Increase) (U)," 23 Oct 68, on JCS 2472-14; (S-GP 4) JCSM-633-68 to SecDef, 25 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-15), JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 8.

35. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., "Increase in RVNAF Force Structure (U)," 1 Nov 68, Att to JCS 2472/272-16, same file, same sec.

36. (C-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5528 to CINCPAC and CSA, 14 Nov 68. (C-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7087 to CNO and CINCPAC, 6 Dec 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 9.

envisioned a balanced, self-sufficient RVNAF, to be achieved by adding air, naval, and logistic units to the strong ground forces that would be established in Phase I. The ultimate force structure, while not "optimum," was "considered reasonably attainable by the Government of Vietnam."

The plan would go into execution at the start of FY 1970 and would be completed by the close of FY 1974. Priority would be given the ARVN, which would be completed by the end of FY 1971. The VNN would be scheduled for completion (with minor exceptions) by the end of FY 1973 and the VNAF during the following year. The estimated cost of the plan was $3.1 billion, of which about 82 percent would be for ammunition. The transition from Phase I would be assisted by the long-term training programs undertaken under the recently approved modification of Phase I.

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

The Joint Chiefs of Staff took the opportunity to warn against premature withdrawal of US and FWMA forces, pointing out that their Phase II plan would not enable the RVNAF to cope with large NVA forces. They noted also that, even after the conditions of the Manila Communique were met, it would be necessary for US military personnel to remain in SVN, first to provide various types of support, then to dispose of US property, and finally to serve an advisory function.

They foresaw that the negotiators at Paris might agree to a settlement that would prohibit or restrict further military assistance to RVN. In view of this possibility,

they urged that COMUSMACV be authorized to continue progress toward Phase II goals.[37]

The United States ceased all bombing of NVN on 31 October, as described in a later chapter. This action caused General Abrams some concern because he saw that it strengthened the possibility of substantive negotiations leading to the mutual withdrawal of US/NVN forces in the near future. On 9 November, he recommended that the United States begin implementation of the Phase II RVNAF improvement and modernization program as rapidly as possible. He proposed an accelerated version of the Phase II plan that would permit completion by FY 1972. It called for two actions as follows. First, some equipment in the hands of US forces would have to be turned over to the RVNAF. Second, the RVNAF Phase II force structure would be expanded to 877,090. The additional 27,090 personnel would be assigned to long lead-time and on-the-job training programs to prepare the RVNAF for transition to Phase II without having to draw the needed personnel from the ARVN or the RF as previously planned. This action would permit retention of the strong ground force structure currently being built under Phase I. Once the new personnel were trained and the RVNAF was able to absorb the additional equipment, new units would be formed and provided with equipment taken from selected US units. Most of these additional RVNAF personnel would be assigned to the VNN and the VNAF.[38]

The Secretary of Defense considered the Phase II plan and General Abrams' accelerated version of that plan until mid-December. During that period, officials within the Department of Defense reviewed the costs involved in building a RVNAF force structure of the size envisioned in Phase II.

Army officials pointed out that the Phase II equipment requirements would have an adverse effect on the readiness

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37. (S-GP 4) JCSM-678-68 to SecDef, 13 Nov 68, same file, sec 8. (S-GP 3) Tab B to J-5 BP 65-68, 20 Nov 68, JMF /not bound/.

38. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 34325 to CINCPAC, 9 Nov 68, JCS IN 93364. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Nov 68, JCS IN 20488. (S-GP 4) MACV Report, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization - Phase II," 25 Dec 68, JCS 2472/406, JMF /not bound/.

of US forces, especially if the plan was accelerated as suggested by General Abrams. They cited the fact that while supplemental funds had been requested to continue the Phase I program during FY 1969 and additional funds were being sought in the FY 1970 budget, there was no guarantee that Congress would react favorably. Thus funds might be unavailable to replace equipment turned over to the RVNAF. Therefore, they recommended that the RVNAF Phase II force structure be established on a temporary basis only. A "baseline" structure should be established for the RVNAF, smaller than that envisioned in the Phase II plan. Equipment needed to sustain the full Phase II force structure should then be "loaned" to the RVNAF, to be returned to the United States when the RVNAF receded to its "baseline" level.39

The Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the Phase II plan and the question of force levels with the Secretary of Defense and his Deputy on several occasions. The OSD officials were of the opinion that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had overestimated the enemy threat in preparing their Phase II plans. They declared that the United States would never agree to a settlement that would allow an enemy force of the estimated size to remain in South Vietnam. Both expressed doubts that Congress would appropriate the additional funds for a RVNAF force structure of the size called for in either of the plans, Phase I or Phase II. Moreover, they did not believe the GVN had the manpower and economic facilities to sustain a force of that size in the long run. Adopting the suggestion offered by Army planners, they proposed a much smaller "baseline" RVNAF structure--perhaps 250,000 men for the regular ARVN forces, with additional VNN, VNAF, and RF/PF as needed. Such a force should not be created in the image of US forces and therefore would hardly need the sophisticated equipment and mobility of US forces.40

For their part, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not believe it was possible to determine the proper size of the RVNAF force structure until US civilian and military officials agreed on the conditions that should be assumed

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39. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) Msg, D/JS 14353 to MACV, 21 Dec 68.

40. Ibid. (S-GP 3) Tab A to J-5 BP 65-68, 20 Dec 68 JMF /not bound/.

to exist on T-Day, such as the size and location of enemy forces and the prospect of continuing infiltration.[41] These questions would, of course, be shaped by the terms of any peace agreement. On 12 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a list of "essential conditions for a cessation of hostilities" in RVN. They recommended that US government officials review and agree on the conditions and that they then be forwarded to the US representative in Paris. The US negotiators should be instructed to make all efforts to convince their North Vietnamese counterparts to agree to all the conditions. Their level of success would determine the security situation in RVN once hostilities in RVN had ceased.

If the North Vietnamese agreed to all the conditions, an "optimum" security situation would result. If only partial agreement were achieved, then an "intermediate" situation would remain. But, if most of the conditions were rejected, the "worst" security situation could be expected.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that the Phase II force structure plan had been designed to cope with the "worst" security situation. COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, they stated, had been instructed to develop plans to deal with the "optimum" and "intermediate" situations. But they advised the Secretary of Defense that it seemed wise to continue with present plans to establish a force structure capable of coping with the "worst" situation. As a minimum, they recommended approval of the FY 1970-71 Phase II goals and General Abrams' accelerated plan.[42]

On 18 December, Mr. Nitze approved the Phase II force structure (except for portions dealing with the VNN and with ammunition requirements). He also approved acceleration of the Phase II plan as proposed by General Abrams. Since he had not approved the proposed VNN force structure, the newly

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41. (S) Note to Control Div, "T-Day Planning and Improvement and Modernization of the RVNAF," 2 Dec 68, JMF 907/305 (9 Dec 68).

42. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) JCSM-732-68 to SecDef, 12 Dec 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7580 to CINCPAC, 12 Dec 68; JMF 907/305 (9 Dec 68).

authorized RVNAF force level was 866,434, rather than the recommended 877,090. He then requested a detailed activation schedule, equipment list, and turnover schedule, together with a plan to withdraw US units freed by transfer of their equipment, for the accelerated Phase II plan.

The Deputy Secretary of Defense directed MACV and the Service Secretaries to do everything possible to accelerate the training of the RVNAF with a view toward self-sufficiency. "The time available to implement Phase II may be short," he warned, "and the residual post-hostilities MAAG may be small."

At the same time, Mr. Nitze wished preparations made to cover a postwar situation in RVN short of the "worst" contingency envisioned by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He therefore requested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepare a Phase III plan, designed only "to meet an internal insurgency threat from indigenous VC forces." This plan would be the same as that requested by the JCS for an "optimum" security situation.[43]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded a plan for accelerated Phase II to the Secretary of Defense on 4 January 1969. It listed the schedules for the activation of additional RVNAF units and set forth plans for the redeployment of US units and set forth plans for the redeployment of US units and for the turnover of their equipment to the RVNAF. All ARVN forces would be activated by the second quarter of FY 1970, while the air and naval forces would be fully activated by the close of FY 1972. The costs involved were slightly larger than those in the original Phase II plan, to provide for a minor expansion of ARVN logistic units and some additional naval craft.[44]

RVNAF Effectiveness in 1968

By the end of CY 1968, MACV reported that the RVNAF had risen to an estimated total strength of 826,500, distributed as follows:

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43. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., Att to JCS 2472/272-27, 19 Dec 68, JMF /not bound/.

44. (S-GP 3) JCSM-6-69 to SecDef, 4 Jan 69, (derived from JCS 2472/272-28), JMF /not bound/.

Regular Forces	
ARVN	387,250
VNN	18,500
VNMC	9,000
VNAF	18,750
Total Reg. forces	433,500
Territorial Forces	
RF	219,000
PF	174,000
Total Terr. forces	393,000
Total RVNAF	826,500

This total was approximately 220,000 greater than a year earlier. Of this increase, 160,000 had been volunteers and the rest draftees.

The GVN had also expanded its paramilitary forces to 127,000 (45,000 in the CIDG and 82,000 in the National Police). In addition, a People's Self-Defense Forces (PSDF) had been organized, with a strength of over 1,000,000 men and women. More than half of these had received some training, and over 100,000 were armed.[45]

This expansion in size was accompanied by an improvement in quality. In the judgment of both CINCPAC and Ambassador Bunker, the RVNAF had improved in aggressiveness, self-confidence, and quality of leadership in 1968.[46] Their assessment was borne out by an increase in the number of battalion-size operations conducted by the RVNAF in the

45. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) OCJCS Study Group, 1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam (U), pp. 5-14, 15 Jan 69. (S) Interv, Robert J. Watson and Arthur A. Chapa with CDR Paul F. Abel, USN, Revolutionary Development South Vietnam Branch, Office of SACSA, 3 Feb 69. (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225.

46. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012225Z Jan 69, JCS IN 10811. (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225.

last quarter of the year, in the face of a decline in the general level of hostilities.

The RVNAF increased their ratio of weapons captured to weapons lost during 1968, as well as their "kill ratio." Whereas the RVNAF had maintained a kill ratio of 2.9 to 1 during the period April through November in 1967, they expanded that ratio to 4.0 to 1 during the same months of 1968.[47]

Despite the improvements, however, many of the problems that had hampered the effectiveness of the RVNAF in 1967 remained unsolved at the close of 1968. Most serious was the high desertion rate, which had actually increased during the year, beginning after the Tet offensive. By the end of November 1968, the "gross" rate (which made no allowance for returnees) had reached 15.5%, only 2.3% lower than the 1965 figure when enemy pressure had been at a high point. Even more alarming was the fact that most deserters were from ground combat units, which had a desertion rate of 40% for the entire year. The increase was in large part a result of the rapid post-Tet mobilization; 80% of deserters were men who had had less than six months of service.

Reasons assigned for desertion included fear and confusion on the part of servicemen, concern for the welfare of dependents, excessive periods of exposure to combat, inadequate pay, expectation of an imminent peace settlement, and laxity of enforcement of punitive measures. Remedial actions had been undertaken by the JGS as of the end of the year. These included tighter application of the law, larger rewards to those who "informed" on deserters, establishment of maximum "desertion quotas" for each command (with a promise of removal of commanders whose rates exceeded their specified figures), intensive troop indoctrination programs, and improved facilities for soldiers.

US officials anticipated that these actions, together with the completion of the general mobilization effort, would produce a substantial drop in the desertion rate by

47. (S) DIA IBs 219-68 and 6-69, 7 Nov 68, and 9 Jan 69, supplements, "Statistical Summary on South Vietnam." (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225. (TS-GP 3) OCJCS Study Group, 1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam (U), pp. 1-6.

the end of March 1969. But Ambassador Bunker believed that United States officials should not be disappointed if the desertion rate did not subside with time. He explained that intelligence sources had indicated that the VC/NVA forces were having similar problems and that both sides might continue to suffer from desertion because of underlying social factors, such as localism and ethnic and religious antagonisms.[48]

The problems of inadequate leadership also troubled the RVNAF throughout 1968. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had repeatedly warned the Secretary of Defense that leadership shortcomings might prevent the RVNAF from accomplishing any mission expected of them regardless of how much equipment they were given. With the approval of an 850,000-man force structure, the problem of acquiring additional and competent leaders became magnified.

COMUSMACV convinced the Joint Chiefs of Staff that additional officers and NCOs should be provided for the RVNAF.[49] The JGS developed a three-year program to increase the number of officers and NCOs to satisfy the requirements of an 850,000-man force. Ninety percent of that leadership was to be made available by the close of CY 1968. Plans were also made to improve the RVNAF promotion regulations.[50]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided the Secretary of Defense with monthly RVNAF officer/NCO strengths, promotion projects, and evaluation of the promotion program; but OSD officials became skeptical that the JGS was not doing all that should be done to improve the inadequate leadership situation. They considered that the JGS programs would

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48. (C) Tab D to J-5 BP 65-68, 20 Dec 68, JMF /not bound/. (C) Msg, Saigon to State, 14 Sep 68, JCS IN 66904. (C) Msg, COMUSMACV 41264 to JCS, 11 Dec 68, JCS IN 62883; (C) Msg, COMUSMACV 17134 to CJCS, 15 Dec 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68.

49. (C) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization," 1 Nov 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 68.

50. (C-GP 4) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "RVNAF Officer/NCO Strengths and Promotions," 18 Nov 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 68.

not provide the needed leadership for the increased RVNAF force structure and that they would not attack the corruption, prejudice, and ineptitude of the RVNAF leadership.[51]

But General Wheeler informed the Secretary of Defense that he agreed with General Abrams' view that the JGS promotion program would supply the RVNAF with the needed leadership at the proper rate. Higher rates, he warned, could have adverse effects on the quality of the RVNAF leadership and could not be supported by the RVNAF because of an inadequate grade base.[52]

In December, General Wheeler reported that projected estimates indicated that RVNAF officer/NCO quotas for CY 1968 would actually be exceeded.[53]

General Abrams assured the Joint Chiefs of Staff that efforts were being made to promote outstanding officers and NCOs through battlefield promotions and that everything possible was being done to improve the quality of the leadership. The RVNAF was reviewing selection criteria, improving the quality of training schools and senior service schools, and revising policies governing the assignment of war college graduates. Educational requirements for officers were being maintained despite the rapid mobilization effort.[54]

On balance, as 1968 drew to a close, there was reason to believe that the attempt to upgrade the RVNAF had been successful. The process had kept pace with the nation-building effort that is described in the next chapter. Both the military and the civilian institutions of RVN had been subjected to a severe test early in the year, and both had survived to emerge stronger than before. After the Tet offensive, Ambassador Bunker had reported that the

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51. Ibid. (C) J-5 BP 65-68 Tab C: "RVNAF Officer/NCO Structure," 20 Dec 68.

52. (C-GP 4) CM-3770-68 to SecDef, 19 Nov 68; (C-GP 4) CM-3803-68 to SecDef, 3 Dec 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68.

53. (C-GP 4) CM-3840-68 to SecDef, 30 Dec 68, Att to JCS 2472/358-4, 2 Jan 69, JMF 911/535 (30 Jul 68).

54. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 17134 to CJCS, 15 Dec 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68.

people of South Vietnam were for the first time experiencing a sense of pride in the performance of their army, just as they were rallying to support the government in its hour of crisis. If the RVNAF continued to improve their combat record, there was room to hope that they might constitute a major symbol of national unity around which the democratic elements in SVN might rally. If so, the armed forces of RVN might contribute to the successful resolution of the political conflict even as they prepared themselves for their primary task of assuming responsibility for the nation's security after the United States withdrew its forces.

Chapter 52

THE COURSE OF THE WAR AFTER TET

Changes in Command: Washington, Saigon, Honolulu

The early months of 1968 saw extensive changes in the ranks of those who had directed the US war effort in SVN for the past several years. Perhaps the most important development was the resignation of Robert S. McNamara, who had held the position of Secretary of Defense longer than any other incumbent. His successor, Clark M. Clifford, was sworn in on 1 March 1968.[1]

The impending retirement of several high ranking military officers led to further personnel changes. The Chief of Staff, US Army, General Harold K. Johnson, was scheduled to lay down his duties at the end of the fiscal year. On 23 March President Johnson announced his intention to appoint General Westmoreland to this position. He added that he had asked General Wheeler, who would complete his statutory four-year term as JCS Chairman in July 1968, to remain in office for another year. Since approval of the Senate would be required, the President had already obtained the concurrence of members of the Senate Armed Services Committee.[2]

Another prospective retiree in 1968 was Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Commander in Chief, Pacific. On 10 April Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., then holding the post of CINCNAVEUR, was nominated as his successor. At the same time, the President selected General Westmoreland's deputy, General Creighton M. Abrams, to become COMUSMACV.[3]

These appointments became effective during the next several months. General Westmoreland relinquished command in Saigon on 11 June and was sworn in as Chief of Staff, US Army, on 3 July. The Senate, meanwhile, had confirmed General Wheeler in office for another year.[4] Admiral McCain assumed

1. NY Times, 2 Mar 68, 3.
2. Ibid., 23 Mar 68, 1.
3. Ibid., 11 Apr 68, 1.
4. Ibid., 11 Jun 68, 1; 4 Jul 68, 3; 4 Jun 68, 31.

the position of CINCPAC on 31 July.[5]

Friendly Forces Resume the Offensive

None of the changes in command had any immediate effect upon the tactical situation in South Vietnam. There the Tet offensive had left both sides temporarily incapable of major action. The enemy had suffered shattering losses in manpower that would take time to replace, while US and ARVN force dispositions had in some degree been disrupted by the need to cope with the wave of attacks on the cities.

The allied military machine was quick to recover. As soon as the enemy offensive had subsided, General Westmoreland seized the opportunity to resume once more the painstaking task of hunting down and destroying the principal enemy forces. He laid plans to clear the five provinces around Saigon and to undertake a major offensive in IV CTZ, while at the same time launching a thrust in I CTZ to relieve the Marines besieged at Khe Sanh. Explaining these plans to his subordinates on 2 March, General Westmoreland stressed the importance of an aggressive attitude. "We must stop thinking about the next VC attack," he emphasized, "and start thinking, all of us, of continuing to carry the attack to the enemy."[6]

The operation in IV CTZ (TRUONG CONG DINH) was launched on 6 March by elements of the US 9th and the ARVN 7th Divisions. This was a long-term action, which was still continuing two months later. At that time, it was combined with Operation PEOPLE'S ROAD, which had begun about the same time with the objective of clearing and repairing the principal highway (Route 4) between Saigon and the Mekong River.[7]

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5. (TS) HQ USMC, Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, entry 31 Jul 68.

6. (TS-NOFORN) Msg, COMUSMACV 02984 to CJCS, 030238Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68.

7. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 60-68, 12 Mar 68; 66-68, 19 Mar 68. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," May 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 245.

Operation QUYET THANG, in the vicinity of Saigon, began on 10 March. It was a larger operation, embracing elements of four US and three ARVN divisions, plus ARVN Marine, Ranger, and National Police units. When it terminated on 7 April, allied forces had inflicted casualties of 1,420 enemy killed and 442 detained, at a cost of 105 US troops killed and 920 wounded.

A new and expanded operation, TOAN THANG ("Final Victory"), with additional US and ARVN units, was then launched to complete the destruction of enemy forces within the Capital Military District. The New York Times characterized this action as the "largest allied offensive of the war in Vietnam, involving the use of more than 100,000 troops."[8]

Press stories stressing the size of the new operation, together with the flamboyant nickname selected for it, offered ground for suspicions that the allies were escalating the war just when the United States was proclaiming a search for peace. When this fact was pointed out to General Westmoreland, he explained that the nickname had been selected by the Vietnamese but that he had concurred, not wishing to do anything that would dampen their enthusiasm. MACV had done its best to keep its announcements in "low key," he continued, but questioning by reporters had elicited information about the size of the forces involved, and press sensationalism had done the rest.[9]

Farther north, Operation PEGASUS, described in an earlier chapter, removed the last threat to the Marine defenders of Khe Sanh in mid-April. It was followed by DELAWARE/LAMSON 216, a reconnaissance in force into an important enemy base in the nearby A Shau Valley. Strikes by B-52s and tactical aircraft preceded a ground and helicopter-borne incursion by US and SVN troops that began on 19 April and proceeded against relatively light opposition. When the operation ended on 17 May, 869 enemy had been killed against 168 US and SVN; 2,565

8. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 60-68, 12 Mar 68; 84-68, 9 Apr 68. NY Times, 11 Apr 68, 1.
9. (TS) Msg, JCS 03965 to COMUSMACV, 112212Z Apr 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 4899 to CJCS, 121212Z Apr 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.

individual and 93 crew-served weapons had been captured, as well as large amounts of ammunition and supplies.[10]

The pattern of activity that had marked the war in the months before the Tet offensive had now come to prevail once more. US and SVN forces were seeking out the enemy, who was attempting to avoid contact while bringing in supplies and reinforcements. General Westmoreland was able to report that "Allied operations during April were highlighted by an unparalleled display of aggressiveness and cooperation by US, ARVN, FW forces and governmental agencies."[11]

Not content, however, General Westmoreland pressed his subordinates to even greater efforts. "Commencing immediately," he told them in a directive on 6 May, "our objective will be to make a major breakthrough toward military victory in South Vietnam. . . . The fighting will be characterized by an aggressive, unremitting, twenty-four hour application of pressure on all enemy elements throughout RVN." The enemy was to be hounded relentlessly, day and night, in all weather; loss of contact would be considered a tactical error. The RVNAF would be assigned a "full role." Support of pacification operations, which "are inseparable from the main offensive," would be given as much attention as any other responsibilities of commanders.[12]

While ground operations were pushed forward with increasing vigor, air and naval warfare continued unabated. Following the President's announcement of 31 March concerning bombing restrictions over NVN, the ROLLING THUNDER campaign was redirected to concentrate on targets south of the 19th Parallel, such as roads, waterways, truck parks, and storage facilities. The number of attack sorties against North Vietnam increased

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10. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 94-68, 20 Apr 68; 118-68, 18 May 68. (TS-GP 3) CM-3265-68 to SecDef, 29 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68. (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 5223 to CJCS et al., 191155Z Apr 68; MAC 5270, 201135Z Apr 68; MAC 6516, 181119Z May 68; OCJCS File DMZ/North I CTZ Reports.

11. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 159-4 (one digit illegible) to CINCPAC, 071442Z May 68, JCS IN 94380.

12. The text of this directive, originally transmitted from COMUSMACV to his subordinate commanders as COMUSMACV 12854, 061047Z May 68, is quoted in full in (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 15262 to Paris, 271808Z May 68, JCS IN 39239, in response to a news story alleging the existence of a message from COMUSMACV that supposedly asserted a need to win the war within three months.

from 5,142 in March to 7,262 in April, and 10,000 each in May and June. The monthly average for the second quarter of CY 1968 was 9,149, as compared with 4,932 per month for the preceding quarter. The stepped-up air effort kept pace with an increase in enemy truck traffic. The monthly average of trucks destroyed rose from 896 during the first quarter to 1,101 in the second.[13]

In the hope of choking off the flow of men and supplies through southern Laos, the US 7th Air Force initiated its southwest monsoon interdiction campaign against targets in that country on 1 April, exploiting the capabilities of the new MUSCLE SHOALS sensor system (later renamed IGLOO WHITE). Beginning on 19 April, 50 percent of the ARC LIGHT force (30 B-52 sorties per day) was allocated for this purpose (Operation TURNPIKE). The monthly average of sorties against Laos, however, dropped from 7,292 for the first quarter of 1968 to 4,596 for the second, presumably reflecting the deterioration of the weather as the monsoon began.[14]

In the naval campaign against North Vietnam's coast (SEA DRAGON), the weight of effort had been shifted southward early in 1968 to provide gunfire support for the forces operating in northern I CTZ. After 31 March this campaign, like ROLLING THUNDER, was restricted wholly to the area south of 19 degrees, but there was no diminution in its intensity.[15]

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13. (S-NOFORN) CIA/DIA, "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1 Apr-30 Jun 68," (S-3198/AP-YA). (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, pp. 66-68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) OJCS Study Group, "1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam (U)," 15 Jan 69, vol. II, pp. 4-2 - 4-3, (hereafter cited as "1968 Year-End Review"). (S) OASD(SA), "Interdiction Campaign Since March 31," 22 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Combat Analysis Group, J-3, "Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia," CAG Statistical Series, vol. I, No. 7, 3 Feb 69.

14. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 4-4. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 10917 to CINCPAC, 180508Z Apr 68, JCS IN 50236. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 12886 to CJCS, 062357Z May 68, JCS IN 88481. (S) OASD(SA), "Interdiction Campaign Since March 31," 22 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

15. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, p. 78. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3-16 - 3-17.

The Second Enemy Attack, May 1968

Following his repulse in the Tet offensive, the enemy turned his attention to repairing his losses. His resupply effort was reflected in the increase in truck traffic already noted. At the same time, the communists refilled their ranks by in-country recruiting and especially by a faster flow of infiltration from the north. US estimates were that infiltration had risen from approximately 7,500 in December 1967 (just about the monthly average for that year) to 24,000 in January 1968. In February the number dropped to 12,000, but immediately thereafter it soared to record numbers: 25,000 in April, 30,000 in March and May.[16]

By the middle of April it had become clear that the enemy possessed both the capability and the intention to attack. Prisoner interrogations, reports of agents, the pattern of enemy troop concentrations, and information supplied by a high-ranking rallier pointed to an offensive that would be nationwide in scope while focusing principally upon Saigon. Various dates given for the launching of the attack fitted with other evidence indicating that the operation was first planned for the middle of the month but was postponed for various reasons. Intelligence warnings were clearer and less equivocal than those available before the Tet offensive. It appeared that the enemy, observing the lack of coordination at that time--when units in II CTZ had "jumped the gun" and swung into action a day ahead of others--had modified his security restrictions and had disseminated advance information more widely to the attacking forces.[17]

It came as no surprise, therefore, when widespread mortar and rocket attacks on cities and towns burst forth on the night of 4-5 May, heralding the beginning of the enemy's second general offensive of 1968. But it soon became evident that no replay of Tet was in the offing. The scope and intensity of the attack fell far short of the earlier one. Aside from Saigon, follow-up ground attacks occurred at only a few

16. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 1-18 (numbers read from bar chart, Fig. 1-10).

17. (S-NOFORN) DIA IBs 76-68, 17 Apr 68; 77-68, 18 Apr 68; 82-68, 25 Apr 68; 84-68, 29 Apr 68. (S) Msgs, Saigon 25643 to State, 250900Z Apr 68, JCS IN 86582; and 26229, 021134Z May 68, JCS IN 80438. (S) CM-3228-68 to SecDef, 23 Apr 68, OCJCS 091 Vietnam Apr 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, p. 249. Some of the evidence warning of this attack has been described in Ch. 50.

places, mostly in I CTZ, and were readily repulsed. Another contrast with the Tet attack was seen in the fact that NVA rather than VC units apparently bore the brunt of the offensive.

As US intelligence had predicted, Saigon was the hub of the attack. Many of the enemy units moving toward the capital were intercepted and engaged by allied forces taking part in Operation TOAN THANG. As a result, only small units--none of battalion size--penetrated the city.[18]

During the next few days, friendly forces fought to eject the enemy from Saigon while the attack ebbed elsewhere. Some US reaction forces had to be moved into the capital. The enemy fought stubbornly, exploiting to the utmost the disruptive capacity of even a small force in an urban environment. Regular forces were aided by VC terrorists who attacked police stations, power plants, and other key installations. On 11 May COMUSMACV was able to report that there had been no significant contacts within the city during the preceding day or night. Contacts continued outside the city, however, as US and ARVN units sought to block enemy withdrawal routes. On 13 May the US and ARVN commands formally announced that the attack had been crushed. On the following day COMUSMACV terminated the special series of message reports initiated when the attack on Saigon began.[19]

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18. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 107-68, 6 May 68; 108-68, 7 May 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 26826 to State, 091022Z May 68, JCS IN 95726. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," May 68. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 5995 to CJCS, et al., 071359Z May 68; (C) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 6299 to CJCS, et al., 141252Z May 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, pp. 248-249. (S) Harold N. Sowers, VC/NVA Operations and Activities in South Vietnam for the First Six Months of 1968 (WSEG Staff Study 144, Nov 68), pp. 49-50, JMF 907/320 (16 Feb 67) (hereafter cited as Sowers, VC/NVA Operations and Activities).

19. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," May 68. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 6040 to CJCS et al., 081121Z May 68; MAC 6081, 091210Z May 68; MAC 6139, 101158Z May 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 68. (C) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 6183 to CJCS et al., 111115Z May 68; MAC 6260, 131242Z May 68; MAC 6299, 141252Z May 68; same file. (S) Sowers, VC/NVA Operations and Activities, pp. 50-52. The May offensive was regarded as lasting from 4-9 May in (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement.

The course of events in SVN had been followed closely in Washington. "What can we do to get additional help to Westmoreland if he becomes involved in another major enemy offensive?" asked Secretary Clifford of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 May before it was clear that the offensive was over. "Very little," was the substance of the JCS reply, delivered on 21 May. Four Army brigades could be made available during July and August, they indicated, but their deployment would leave STRAF wholly devoid of combat-ready forces. To send Marine reinforcements would require further mobilization plus involuntary extension of terms of service. Fortunately the ebbing of the attack spared the Administration the necessity of facing the consequences of another call for reinforcements from COMUSMACV.[20]

The relatively small scale of the so-called "mini-Tet" offensive, together with its timing (a few weeks after the agreement to open talks in Paris), suggested that its purpose was political and psychological rather than primarily military or, in other words, that it was intended to strengthen the enemy's position at Paris. This was the opinion of Ambassador Bunker. Seizure and occupation of all or part of South Vietnam's capital would undoubtedly have constituted a powerful bargaining counter. But the enemy had failed to achieve this goal, and had suffered losses that were quite high in relation to the size of forces engaged, though well below those of Tet. As of midnight 8-9 May, Mr. Bunker estimated that the enemy had lost 5,781 killed in action since the offensive began, as opposed to 804 US and allied troops killed. A later estimate listed approximately 12,500 enemy killed during the first two weeks in May.[21]

For his fresh expenditure of blood, the enemy had two gains to show. On 10 May enemy troops in superior numbers had assaulted a Special Forces Camp at Kham Duc, in western Quang Tin Province (I CTZ). The camp was abandoned by its garrison two days later. This tactical success had potential

20. (S) Memo, SecDef to GEN Wheeler, 13 May 68; (TS) JCSM-315-68 to SecDef, 21 May 68 (derived from JCS 2472/291-1, 18 May 68, as ameded by Dec On 20 May 68), JMF 911/372 (13 May 68).

21. (S) Msg, Saigon 26826 to State, 091022Z May 68, JCS IN 95726. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement.

strategic importance; the site could provide a location for a supply complex to replace the one recently destroyed at A Shau and a springboard for launching attacks eastward toward the coast. COMUSMACV considered that the post could be retaken but that the forces required for that purpose could be better employed elsewhere.[22]

Far more significant--militarily, politically and economically--was the amount of destruction wrought in Saigon, partly by enemy troops and terrorists, partly by allied counteraction. The scale of damage, according to Ambassador Bunker, approached that of Tet. Preliminary estimates were that 20,000 houses had been destroyed in Saigon and Gia Dinh (as compared with 27,000 in the earlier attack), although the figure was later reduced slightly to 17,800. Estimates of refugees ranged from 90,000 to 125,000; the number finally accepted was 107,000.

Mr. Bunker drew attention to the effects of this destruction upon civilian morale. Contrasting enemy attacks on the capital of South Vietnam with the restraint shown by the United States since 31 March, he urged that there be no further concessions so long as North Vietnam felt free to attack centers of population. He pointed out that only a small fraction of enemy forces had been committed to the attack and that intelligence was already warning of another phase of the offensive expected to start soon. "If repeated enemy attacks on Saigon continue to produce this kind of devastation of the city and environs," he warned, "I wonder how long this can be borne without threatening to undermine all that has been achieved here."[23]

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22. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," May 68. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 6210 to CINCPAC, 120858Z May 68; MAC 6222, 121419Z May 68; MAC 6264, 131446Z May 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 68.

23. (S) Msgs, Saigon 27121 to State, 131128Z May 68, JCS IN 11157; 27497, 161220Z May 68, JCS IN 18320; 28566, 291140Z May 68, JCS IN 43930. (C) Msg, Saigon 27539 to State, 171048Z May 68, JCS IN 15635.

The Harassment of Saigon, May-June 1968

The warning of a second phase of the May offensive was soon borne out. A new series of attacks on the capital began, small in scale but potentially deadly in their cumulative effects. Two types of operations were involved. Starting on 18 May Saigon was subjected to intermittent nighttime fire from mortars and 122mm rockets, launched by enemy forces outside the city. At the same time, bands of infiltrators, numbering from 5 to 30, slipped into the city to carry out assassinations and to destroy or sabotage bridges, power and police stations, and other important structures.

The obvious intent of these activities was to increase the burden on South Vietnam's economy, to intimidate the populace, and to demonstrate that the GVN was powerless to protect its citizens even in its own capital. Ambassador Bunker viewed this new campaign with the utmost seriousness. The initial reaction in Saigon, he reported, had been resentment toward the VC, but he feared that this feeling might be redirected toward the United States and the GVN if the attacks continued.[24]

Both MACV and the JGS moved swiftly to take all possible defensive measures against this latest enemy threat. The broad "rocket belt" surrounding Saigon--an area of roughly 300 square miles within which the enemy, with his primitive and readily transportable launching equipment, could deliver fire upon the capital--was placed under 24-hour aerial surveillance. Construction of special radar-equipped observation towers to detect enemy firing positions and to direct counterfire was begun; meanwhile, tall buildings were employed for the same purpose. Counterfire procedures were reviewed, and every effort was made to reduce the time involved.

To cope with terrorist infiltration, plans were made to intercept and engage enemy squads outside the city. Additional ARVN and US units were assigned to the defense of

24. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 119-68, 20 May 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, pp. 250-251. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 7605 to CINCPAC, 091112Z Jun 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. (S) Msgs, Saigon 28566 to State, 291140Z May 68, JCS IN 43930; 29565, 101157Z Jun 68, JCS IN 64371; 29880, 131200Z Jun 68, JCS IN 72383.

Saigon. Expansion of the newly activated civil self-defense corps was accelerated. A Military Governor of Saigon/Gia Dinh was appointed, with full responsibility for the defense of the capital. He was collocated with a Forward Command Post of II FFORCEV, the commander of which (Major General John Hay, USA, Deputy CG, II FFORCEV) served as his senior advisor.[25]

Simultaneously, the Administration in Washington launched a diplomatic counterattack through the medium of the Paris negotiations. At the official session of the meeting of US and NVN delegations on 12 June 1968, Ambassador Harriman spoke out strongly on the subject. He contrasted the damage deliberately inflicted upon Saigon with the exemption of Hanoi, Haiphong, and other North Vietnamese cities from US bombing. Instead of moving toward mutual deescalation, NVN, he declared, "has responded to our restraint by intensifying its own military, subversive, and terrorist efforts in the South." This fact "could have the most serious consequences for these talks." A week later, Mr. Harriman cited condemnations of the attacks on Saigon that had been made by the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom and by newspapers in Oslo, Mexico City, and Madras. "I could keep you here all day reading comments from all over the world similar to those that I have just read," he added.[26]

Shortly thereafter the rocket attacks ceased, the last attack taking place on 21 June. Attempts at infiltration had already been discontinued several weeks earlier.[27] The reasons for these developments were a matter of conjecture. Some ascribed them to the hostile reaction in the world press,

25. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 16638 to JCS and CINCPAC, 100730 Jun 68, JCS IN 63300. (S) CIA Memo, "Combatting the VC Attack Against Saigon," 17 Jun 68, Encl to Memo, Helms to Wheeler, 18 Jun 68; (S-GP 4) CM-3401-68 to SecDef, 15 Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, pp. 249-250, 255-256.

26. Dept of State Bulletin, LIX (1 Jul 68), pp. 12-13; (8 Jul 68), pp. 43-44. The significance of this issue in the Paris negotiations is described more fully in the succeeding chapter.

27. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, pp. 251, 254-255.

others to the effectiveness of the new military measures in Saigon. Ambassador Bunker suggested a third possibility, that the enemy was conserving his resources in preparation for another major attack. In any event, he considered the recent defensive arrangements most impressive: the improved radar and aircraft surveillance, the reduction in reaction time for counterbattery fire (one minute was now the optimum), and the close collaboration between US and ARVN forces engaged in defense of the capital. Early in August he was able to report that US and ARVN forces around Saigon were running no less than 500 ambushes every night. These operations, together with B-52 strikes, would be effective, he believed, in forestalling the major offensive against Saigon that seemed clearly in the offing.[28]

Related to the enemy's destruction of lives and property in Saigon was another problem: the damage wrought by US and ARVN forces in combatting the invaders. On 12 May a member of the staff of the US Embassy in Saigon, Mr. Charles Sweet, had reported that many people in Saigon were angry at what they considered indiscriminate use of allied firepower, particularly aircraft. An officer on MACV's staff concluded, after an investigation, that Mr. Sweet had greatly exaggerated the amount of destruction and had underestimated the strength of enemy forces. He recommended, however, that MACV rules of engagement governing the use of tactical air, helicopter gunships, artillery, and naval gunfire be clarified.[29]

The problem was strikingly dramatized by an incident that took place in Saigon on 2 June. A group of high-ranking SVN officials were watching an attack on a position held by enemy infiltrators. Suddenly a rocket from a US helicopter went astray and landed in their midst. Seven men were

28. (S) Msg, Saigon 32822 to State, 170645Z Jul 68, JCS IN 45436. (S) Msgs, Saigon 31058 to State, 261200Z Jun 68, JCS IN 95876; 31193, 271400Z Jun 68, JCS IN 99683; 34694, 071100Z Aug 68, JCS IN 84286. (C) Msg, Paris 20251 to State, 311605Z Aug 68, JCS IN 42282, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Negotiations Aug-Sep 68.

29. (C) Extract from Memo for Record, Actg CS, MACV, "Evaluation of Saigon Situation," 14 May 68; (C) "Report of Investigation Concerning Destruction Resulting from the VC Offensive of 5-13 May 1968," n.d., sgd by COL Robert W. Marshall, USA, with 1st Ind by COMUSMACV, MAC J-2, 2 Jun 68, Att to JCS 2472/314, 12 Jun 68; JMF 911/052 (14 May 68) sec 1.

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killed, including Saigon's chief of police and the director of the port of Saigon (a brother-in-law of Vice President Ky). The mayor of Saigon and four others were wounded.[30]

In Washington, this tragic accident deepened the alarm that had been aroused by the receipt of Mr. Sweet's report. On 4 June General Wheeler told COMUSMACV that Secretary Clifford had asked him to find a better way of combatting infiltrators. "I ask that this action be done urgently," said the Chairman, "because of the very real concern here in Administration circles and the bad play we are receiving in the news media."[31]

Officers from MACV and the JGS studied the problem and suggested a number of changes in tactics, equipment, and training. They believed that direct-fire weapons and tank/infantry teams should be used in urban areas as much as possible, in preference to air-delivered ordnance. The RVNAF should be furnished with their own 90mm and 106mm recoilless rifles in order to provide their own fire support. Helicopters should be used intensively to maneuver troops and weapons into position to isolate and cordon enemy forces. The decision to use napalm, indirect artillery fire, helicopter gunships, and tactical air for close support in urban areas should be retained at corps-field force level. On 14 June General Abrams informed the Chairman that he had approved these recommendations. General Wheeler passed them to the Secretary of Defense with the observation that he believed that they would have the desired effect.[32]

Interlude, June-August 1968

The ending of the May offensive was followed by another period of relative enemy inactivity throughout most of SVN.

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30. (U) Memo for Record, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, "Ground Operations SVN 2 Jun 1968," 2 Jun 68; (U) Memo, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, to CJCS, "Accidental Delivery of Ordnance," 4 Jun 68; (FOUO) Msg, COMUSMACV 16447 to JCS and CINCPAC, 080817Z Jun 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68.

31. (C) Msg, JCS 6117 to COMUSMACV, 042315Z Jun 68, same file.

32. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 7871 to CJCS, 141007Z Jun 68; (the recommendations were stated in more detail, with supporting justification, in (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8035, to CJCS, 180022Z Jun 68; (S-GP 4) CM-3424-68 to SecDef, 24 Jun 68; same file.

Aside from the continuing attacks on Saigon already described, the most notable enemy action after the middle of May was an abortive effort in Kontum Province (II CTZ), apparently aimed at the city of the same name Anticipating an attack in this region, COMUSMACV had reinforced Kontum Province with the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (drawn from III CTZ), and had concentrated B-52 strikes on the gathering enemy forces. On 25 May, in an apparent beginning of the attack, hostile units struck at several fire support bases surrounding Kontum city. Some bunkers were overrun and occupied, but were promptly recaptured. Although skirmishes continued in the general area, the threatened offensive never materialized, apparently because it had been preempted by US air strikes and ground operations.[33]

By the first week in June the number of attacks initiated by the enemy, which had soared to 277 for the week of 5-11 May, had dropped to 50. The figure declined further in July, reaching a low of 27 for the week of 28 July-3 August. In contrast, the enemy had launched an average of 64 attacks per week during the five weeks preceding the May offensive. Five of those attacks had involved forces of battalion size or larger. During May there were 17 battalion-sized attacks; six took place in June and only two in July.[34]

Encouraging evidence of military progress appeared after the May offensive in the form of group surrenders of enemy personnel. The first such incident during the entire war occurred on 1 May in Thua Thien Province, when 95 enemy troops surrendered to elements of the US 101st Airborne Division. A number of similar incidents took place during June. Noteworthy was the surrender of 31 men, led by their commander, in Gia Dinh Province--the first organized unit to give up. The largest group consisted of 141 men, who gave themselves up to VNMC units near Saigon on 19 June.[35]

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33. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3-5. (S) Sowers, VC/NVA Operations and Activities, p. 160. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 125-68, 27 May 68. (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV 15438 to CJCS, 290841Z May 68, JCS IN 42518; 15856, 020950Z Jun 68, JCS IN 49697. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 16652 to CJCS, 100940Z Jun 68, JCS IN 64017. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," May 68.

34. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement.

35. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, p. 254.

Unfortunately, these proved to be isolated events that did not presage a general collapse of enemy forces.

The enemy's possession of inviolable sanctuaries outside the combat zone left him in possession of the strategic initiative. It remained necessary for friendly forces to adjust their troop dispositions in reaction to his movements. One such adjustment became a matter of importance at high levels in Washington. In June intelligence suggested that the enemy was again strengthening his forces in the northern part of I CTZ, presumably in preparation for yet another offensive. To disrupt this attack and keep the enemy off balance, COMUSMACV planned to adopt a fully mobile posture in that area. Among other measures, he proposed to evacuate the base at Khe Sanh and to use its garrison (then consisting of one battalion) for offensive action. This withdrawal would be made on or about 1 July; the base would of course remain within the operating area of US forces.

Execution of this plan would have been a matter of routine except for the attention that the defense of Khe Sanh had drawn a few months earlier. It was easy to foresee that those who had opposed retention of the Khe Sanh during its siege would seize upon its abandonment as evidence that the lives lost in its defense had been wasted. Recognizing this prospect, General Abrams submitted the plan to General Wheeler. His opinion, in which Ambassador Bunker and Admiral Sharp concurred, was that the military advantages of abandoning Khe Sanh now outweighed any political or psychological costs.[36]

After obtaining approval of the plan by his JCS colleagues and by the Secretary of Defense, General Wheeler submitted it to the President. When he did so, he "ran into headwinds," as he told General Abrams, "associated primarily with the public affairs aspects." The President later approved it, but stipulated that the public announcement

36. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 8046 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 180433Z Jun 68; MAC 8206, 211017Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8250 to CJCS, 220420Z Jun 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 181231Z Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 30199 to State, 171210Z Jun 68, JCS IN 77962.

of the Khe Sanh withdrawal be carefully planned in order to minimize adverse publicity and triumphant enemy propaganda.[37]

There followed several days of intensive discussion between Washington, Saigon, and Honolulu of the wording of a suitable press release. The version finally approved declared that the enemy now had at least eight divisions in I CTZ--two more than in January--and was therefore capable of mounting "several sizeable attacks concurrently." It followed that "mobile forces, tied to no specific terrain, must be used to the utmost to attack, intercept, reinforce, or take whatever action is most appropriate to meet the enemy threats."[38] This announcement was released by MACV headquarters on 27 June (Saigon time). The withdrawal began several days later and was completed on 7 July.[39]

The new strategy adopted in northern I CTZ was connected with a change in the concept of defense against infiltration through the DMZ. The DUEL BLADE anti-infiltration barrier had envisioned a line of strong points along the border of the DMZ near the coast, linked by sensors and observation towers, with additional sensors clustered in the defiles of the mountainous terrain farther west. Construction of the strong points, however, had been seriously hindered by enemy artillery and mortar fire from the DMZ. When the siege of Khe Sanh began in January 1968, work on the barrier was suspended. After the Tet offensive, a new plan which stressed the use of mobile forces for defense, was drawn up and approved by COMUSMACV in June. Work on the strong-point obstacle system

37. (TS) Msgs, JCS 6703 to COMUSMACV, 181355Z Jun 68; JCS 6781, 191959Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 6844 to COMUSMACV, 202134Z Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68.

38. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8250 to CJCS, 220420Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 6929 to COMUSMACV, 221804Z Jun 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 230715Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 7043 to COMUSMACV, 252257Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8515 to CJCS, 261202Z Jun 68; (TS) JCS 7068 to COMUSMACV, 261653Z Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68.

39. NY Times, 27 Jun 68, 1. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 8756 to CJCS et al., 010920Z Jul 68; MAC 9072, 070954Z Jul 68; OCJCS File 24-Hour Summaries 1 through 50.

was again deferred, with the understanding that it might be resumed on five days' notice when permitted by the enemy situation in the DMZ area.[40]

The attack on Khe Sanh had also disrupted plans for a sensor-based antipersonnel barrier (DUMP TRUCK) on the infiltration trails in eastern Laos and the western DMZ. Enemy forces overran the area while the system was undergoing operational tests. Available sensor resources were diverted to the defense of Khe Sanh, where they provided valuable tactical intelligence during the siege. They were again employed in the subsequent incursion into the A Shau Valley, first to locate targets for artillery fire, then to pinpoint air strikes after US forces had withdrawn.[41]

These successful applications of sensors in situations for which they had not originally been designed led to their further employment. At the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, COMUSMACV drafted a proposal to use sensors in connection with combat sweeps, ambushes, surveillance of enemy routes and base areas, convoy protection, and other purposes. Eight operational tests would be conducted in May, June, and July; if they proved successful, operations would then be expanded as rapidly as resources permitted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved this plan (DUCK BLIND) subject to further evaluation after the tests.[42]

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40. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3-25 - 3-26.

41. Ibid., pp. 3-27 - 3-28. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 02461 to CINCPAC, 230100Z Jan 68, JCS IN 52226. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 15840 to CINCPAC, 020625Z Jun 68, JCS IN 49618.

42. (S-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to Dir Def Communications Planning Group, "Increased Use of DYE MARKER/MUSCLE SHOALS Resources for Operations Against the NVA/VC," 5 Apr 68, Att to JCS 2471/66-1, 8 Apr 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 6087 to CINCPAC, 102352Z Apr 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 12363 to CINCPAC, 011052Z May 68, readdressed CINCPAC info JCS, 080216Z May 68, JCS IN 91210; (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 080215Z May 68; (S-GP 3) JCSM-320-68 to SecDef, 21 May 68 (derived from JCS 2471/66-3, 17 May 68); (S-GP 3) Memo, Dep SecDef to CJCS, "DUCK BLIND Plan for Expanding the Use of Intrusion Detection Capability Against the Enemy in South Vietnam," 6 Jun 68, Att to JCS 2471/66-5, 7 Jun 68; JMF 911/321 (5 Apr 68).

The air campaign continued in both NVN and Laos. During July, 14,647 attack sorties were flown over NVN below the 19th Parallel, as compared with a monthly average of 9,149 in the preceding quarter. For the period July through September 1968, the number totaled 38,334, as compared with 27,447 flown during the three previous months. In the Laotian panhandle, where unfavorable monsoon weather continued to prevail, approximately 3,000 sorties per month were flown during the third quarter, in contrast with an average of 4,596 for the second. Operation TURNPIKE, the regular employment of B-52s in the interdiction campaign in Laos, was discontinued on 15 June, but ARC LIGHT strikes continued to be available on a case by case basis.[43]

Unfortunately, none of these efforts sufficed to stem the flow of reinforcements from NVN. The enemy continued to send men southward at a rate of 30,000 or more each month through the months of June, July, and August.[44] By so doing, he made up most of the losses he had suffered in his two sanguinary repulses in February and May. In June, according to MACV estimates, enemy strength in South Vietnam totaled approximately 215,000--not much less than the peak figure of 222,000 in October 1965. But there had been a significant change in the composition of this force since that date. NVA troops in October 1965 had accounted for only 26 percent of the enemy strength; by June 1968 they made up 70 percent of the total. A decline in the quality of the enemy units was also noticeable; many of the new recruits from NVN had been sent forward hastily with inadequate training.[45]

43. (S) OASD(SA), "Interdiction Campaign Since March 31," 22 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68. (S-NOFORN) CIA/DIA, "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1 Jul-31 Oct 68," (S-3378/AP-4A). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 4-8, Fig. 4-2. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 18202 to CDR 7th AF, 250141Z Jun 68, JCS IN 92362. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Combat Analysis Group, J-3, "Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia," CAG Statistical Series, vol. I, No 7, 3 Feb 69.

44. (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 1-18, Fig. 1-10.

45. General Wheeler reported these conclusions in July 1968, following a visit to South Vietnam (which is described in a later section of this chapter). (TS) CM-3489-68 to Pres, 19 Jul 68; Att to JCS 2472/331, 22 Jul 68, JMF 911/399 (19 Jul 68).

Evaluation of the ARC LIGHT Campaign

The powerful B-52, designed originally for strategic air warfare, had come into its own as a tactical weapon by the middle of 1968. Its capabilities for close support of ground troops were effectively exploited during the siege of Khe Sanh, when it was used, along with tactical air and artillery, to break up enemy troop concentrations massing for assault. Prisoners captured around Khe Sanh testified to its devastating physical and psychological effectiveness. Subsequently, COMUSMACV credited intensive B-52 strikes with a major role in blunting the assault on Saigon in early May as well as the offensive in Kontum Province later that month.[46]

B-52 resources continued to be allocated by CINCSAC under authorization from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, subject to limitations established by the Secretary of Defense. Late in 1967 Mr. McNamara had approved an increase in the number of B-52 sorties in Vietnam from 800 to 1,200 per month, effective 1 February 1968. But when the siege of Khe Sanh commenced, COMUSMACV discovered that even this number was insufficient. On 10 February he requested an increase of an additional 40 sorties per day, to be achieved by employing the contingency B-52 force recently deployed to Guam and to Kadena, Okinawa. After obtaining informal approval from the Secretary's office, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 February authorized CINCSAC temporarily to exceed the 1,200 limit in order to support emergency requirements for Khe Sanh and the DMZ. They did not specify an alternative figure. By the end of the month, B-52 sorties were being flown to Vietnam at a rate of approximately 60 per day, or 1,800 per month--just about the maximum that could be sustained with available resources.[47]

On 22 March COMUSMACV asked that the 1,800 rate be continued indefinitely. J-3 studied the problem and concluded that the request was justified, and that aircraft and bomb resources were sufficient to support this rate through December. Deputy Secretary Nitze, however, approved the

46. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3-13 - 3-14. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, p. 241. (C-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 10794 to DIA, 161810Z Apr 68, JCS IN 47706.

47. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1909 to CINCPAC, 101410Z Feb 68; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9947 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 131611Z Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (S-GP 3) JCS 2472/254-2, 2 Apr 68, JMF 911/323 (13 Feb 68).

1,800 per-month figure only through June, stipulating that it should drop to 1,400 thereafter. He announced this decision as part of the Program 6 reinforcement package.[48]

The reduced monthly rate of 1,400 sorties would cost approximately $1 billion, as Mr. Nitze pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 15 April. A further reduction to 800, he continued, would cut this cost almost in half. He therefore asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to study carefully the effectiveness of the ARC LIGHT program and to forward their findings to him, with their assessment of the relative effectiveness of monthly rates of 800, 1,200, and 1,400 sorties.[49]

In an interim reply on 23 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued strongly against any reduction in the 1,800 rate. The full capability of the B-52 would be needed, they declared, to support offensive operations then underway and to sustain the expanded interdiction campaign that had become essential now that most of NVN was safe from bombing. Secretary Clifford accordingly reaffirmed for the time being the existing 1,800 monthly rate.[50]

On 29 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded the results of a more careful study of the effectiveness of ARC LIGHT. It was the unanimous testimony of field force commanders in SVN, they reported, that this program "makes a valuable contribution to achievement of US objectives in Southeast Asia and is a major factor in preventing the enemy from pressing his offensive plans." It was impossible statistically to evaluate its effectiveness or to compare various monthly rates. But even the maximum allocation of 1,800 sorties was insufficient to strike all available targets in

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48. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 8069 to CINCPAC, 220008Z Mar 68 (readdressed by CINCPAC as 220553Z Mar 68, info JCS), JCS IN 87562. (S-GP 3) JCS 2472/254-2, 2 Apr 68, JMF 911/323 (13 Feb 68). (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., "Southeast Asia Deployment Program 6," 4 Apr 68, JMF 907/374 (14 Mar 68).

49. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "B-52 Sortie Rate," 15 Apr 68, Att to JCS 2472/274, 17 Apr 68, JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

50. (S-GP 3) JCSM-257-68 to SecDef, 23 Apr 68 (derived from JCS 2472/270-1, 18 Apr 68); (S) Memo, Mil Asst to SecDef to CJCS et al., "B-52 Sortie Rate," 29 Apr 68, Att to JCS 2472/270-2, 1 May 68; JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

Vietnam, despite a careful screening process at various levels of command to eliminate those judged unprofitable. The Joint Chiefs of Staff therefore urged that the 1,800 figure be continued through December. They further recommended that ten more B-52s be deployed to U Tapao Air Base, Thailand, making a total of 35 in that country. This move would not only reduce the cost of the ARC LIGHT program, but would also partially insure against the possibility that political pressure might force discontinuance of the base in Okinawa, since it would be possible to sustain a monthly rate of 1,710 sorties with the 35 B-52s in Thailand plus the 70 in Guam.[51]

On 22 June Mr. Nitze approved for planning purposes the request to fly up to 1,800 sorties monthly through December. The decision, however, would be reviewed within the next 60 days and at intervals thereafter. He also approved the recommendation to increse the B-52 force in Thailand, subject to approval of the Thai Government.[52]

General Wheeler's Visit to South Vietnam, July 1968

In July General Wheeler, accompanied by Secretary of Defense Clifford, undertook a quick journey to South Vietnam to appraise the progress of the war since his last visit five months earlier. He found the situation much improved. South Vietnam's forces had recovered from the Tet offensive and were steadily expanding and improving under the stimulus of the US assistance program. The security of urban areas had been strengthened, notably around Saigon, where the new measures of defense and counterattack instituted in June were proving effective. Allied "spoiling" actions, carried out by ground troops and by aircraft, were seriously disrupting enemy plans. The enemy's capability to mount widespread offensives had been impaired by his recent defeats. In the hope of obtaining an exploitable success, he was forced to stagger, or rotate, his local attacks, both in time and space, so as to maintain maximum pressure on allied forces.

51. (S-GP 3) JCSM-333-68 to SecDef, 29 May 68 (derived from JCS 2472/274-1, 24 May 68), JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

52. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "B-52 Sortie Rate," 22 Jun 68, Att to JCS 2472/274-2, 24 Jun 68, JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

Nonetheless it seemed probable, according to General Wheeler, that another large-scale enemy effort was impending. MACV's J-2 believed that enemy forces in I CTZ and around Saigon would have completed regrouping and refitting in time to launch attacks within a few weeks, probably about the middle of August. It appeared, however, that General Abrams possessed enough forces to cope with any offensive.[53]

After returning to Washington and reporting his conclusions to the President, General Wheeler told COMUSMACV that the trip "was a great success insofar as Secretary Clifford and I are concerned." At a White House luncheon, Mr. Clifford had praised General Abrams and his subordinates "in the highest terms." "I hope," concluded the Chairman, "that his report and mine have damped some of the anxieties existent earlier here in Washington."[54]

At the same time that he informed COMUSMACV of these developments, General Wheeler took the opportunity to clarify his thinking regarding the impending enemy attack. Reviewing evidence of enemy dispositions available in Washington, the Chairman observed that the enemy appeared to be in a position to attack with division-size forces along the border and simultaneously with smaller units around Saigon. Such a pattern of attack, he observed, "would pose the greatest problems to you and your subordinate commanders."[55]

General Abrams, in reply, doubted that the regimental-size units around Saigon were strong enough to attack. He thought it probable that at least one division would be employed against the capital, probably after diversionary actions had been launched elsewhere. He added that he intended "to accommodate the enemy in seeking battle and in fact to anticipate him wherever possible." He had directed his subordinates to make every effort to find, fix, and destroy enemy forces before they could attack. General Wheeler showed this message to the President, who requested

53. (TS) CM-3489-68 to Pres, 19 Jul 68, Encl to JCS 2472/331, 22 Jul 68, JMF 911/399 (19 Jul 68) sec 1. (S) MACV Briefing for SecDef, 15 Jul 68, same file, sec 1A.
54. (S) Msg, JCS 8442 to COMUSMACV, 261911Z Jul 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68.
55. Ibid.

that COMUSMACV be notified of his hearty approval of this aggressive plan of action.[56]

The prospect of a fresh enemy attack on the cities of SVN was of intense concern to Mr. Johnson. On two occasions, 30 July and 2 August, he discussed with General Wheeler the possibility of resumption of air and naval operations between 19 and 20 degrees if such an attack eventuated. In the end the matter was dropped, but the President expressed his alarm in public. In a news conference on 31 July, he cited intelligence reports of record levels of infiltration and of a sharp increase in truck traffic since the bombing restriction. So long as such massive preparations for a new attack continued, he said, it would be unthinkable to contemplate any further restrictions on the US military effort in SVN.[57]

The Enemy's Third Offensive, August 1968

As July passed into August, evidence of enemy intentions accumulated in volume and in detail.[58] On 12 August, in a memorandum for Secretary Clifford, General McConnell, as Acting Chairman, summarized General Abrams' most recent forecast. An offensive was expected on or about 15 August. Probable targets were the central DMZ, Da Nang and other cities in I CTZ, Ban Me Thuot (II CTZ), and Tay Ninh and other cities on the fringes of III CTZ. An assault on Saigon would probably occur several days after the attack had begun elsewhere.[59]

In the time that remained, the Administration undertook to prepare a plan for announcing the news of the attack in a manner that would minimize its impact on public opinion. The general outline of such an arrangement had been discussed in Saigon during the visit of General Wheeler and Secretary

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56. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 10181 to CJCS, 280742Z Jul 68; (S) Msg, JCS 8593 to COMUSMACV, 302019Z Jul 68 (retransmitted as 302313Z Jul; originally addressed in error to CINCPAC), OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68.

57. (S) Msg, JCS 8594 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 302020Z Jul 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8756 to CINCPAC, 021949Z Aug 68, same file, Aug 68. Dept of State Bulletin, LIX (19 Aug 68), pp. 193-194.

58. (S-NOFORN) DIA IBs 151-68, 2 Aug 68; 152-68, 5 Aug 68; 155-68, 8 Aug 68; 157-68, 12 Aug 68; 158-68, 13 Aug 68; 160-68, 15 Aug 68; 161-68, 16 Aug 68.

59. (S) CM-3573-68 to Pres, 12 Aug 68, Encl to JCS 2472/345, 12 Aug 68, JMF 912/292 (12 Aug 68).

Clifford. It was agreed that, as soon as the attack was manifestly underway, the United States would make clear, through briefings, press conferences, and other announcements, that the action had been fully expected, that US public opinion was one of the targets, and that there was every prospect of another enemy defeat. As the attack developed, successful US and ARVN actions would be stressed, but excessive optimism would at all times be carefully avoided.[60]

The plan was overtaken by events on the night of 17-18 August, when the enemy launched fire and ground attacks at a number of objectives, principally US and ARVN military installations in III CTZ, plus two cities--Loc Ninh and Tay Ninh--on the western edge of that zone. All were repelled except the assault on Tay Ninh, which was conducted by six battalions. Four were halted outside the city, but the other two penetrated and dug in.[61]

General Abrams considered that this attack signaled the beginning of a general offensive but recommended that no announcement of that conclusion be made until events of the next few days had removed all doubt. He thought that these initial operations were diversionary and that the real objectives had yet to be revealed. "We are in good shape everywhere in the country except in Tay Ninh city," he reported on 18 August. "We have got to get the enemy out of this town and promptly."[62] General Wheeler advised the Secretary of Defense (through the NMCC) that the situation "is developing as anticipated by US intelligence," and that "General Abrams can repel any attack made by the enemy."[63]

60. (S-GP 2) Msg, State 220696 to Saigon, 141949Z Aug 68, JCS IN 98570. (S) Msg, Saigon 35464 to State, 151135Z Aug 68, JCS IN 99286. (S) Msg, Saigon and COMUSMACV MAC 11243, to ASD (PA) and AsstSecState (PA), 200207Z Aug 68, (with messages on same subject 17 and 18 Aug 68), OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

61. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 195-68, 19 Aug 68. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 25054 to CJCS, 260930Z Aug 68, JCS IN 30143. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 11181 to CJCS, 181232Z Aug 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 11246 to D/JS, 200428Z Aug 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

62. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 11181 to CJCS, 181232Z Aug 68, same file.

63. (TS) Memo, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, to SecDef, "Correspondence Relating to the Latest Situation in South Vietnam," 18 Aug 68, same file.

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The high volume and intensity of enemy activity continued in the days immediately following. Additional targets were assailed, but the enemy achieved no lasting or important successes. Hostile forces were driven out of Tay Ninh on 18-19 August by elements of the US 25th Infantry Division and SVN RF units, using only small arms fire to minimize destruction of civilian life and property. On the night of 20-21 August the attack spread to IV CTZ, which had hitherto largely escaped. On the following night, 20 rounds of 120mm rocket fire fell upon Saigon.[64]

The principal enemy efforts were made against Da Nang and Ban Me Thuot. Fire attacks on outposts around Da Nang on 20 and 21 August were followed by ground assaults. Some enemy sappers penetrated the city on 23 August, but were soon expelled by ARVN and USMC units. COMUSMACV reported that the attack had cost the enemy 1,200 dead.[65]

The attack on Ban Me Thuot took the form of a diversionary assault on a Special Forces camp at Duc Lap, 31 nm away, which began on the night of 22-23 August. An enemy regiment, supported with 122mm rockets and mortars, penetrated the camp but could not overrun it. By 26 August the attackers had been driven out. COMUSMACV believed that the purpose of this attack was to force the withdrawal of US troops from the vicinity of Ban Me Thuot and thus to expose that city to an assault by the 1st NVA Division. This objective was not attained, however. The Duc Lap camp was successfully defended by its CIDG garrison, reinforced by additional CIDG and ARVN

64. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 196-68, 20 Aug 68; 197-68, 21 Aug 68; 198-68, 22 Aug 68; 199-68, 23 Aug 68; 200-68, 24 Aug 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 24397 to CJCS, 200740Z Aug 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 24529 to CJCS, 210840Z Aug 68, JCS IN 19723. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 25054 to CJCS, 260930Z Aug 68, JCS IN 30143. (S) Msg, Saigon 36074 to State, 221115Z Aug 68, JCS IN 24226. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 11246 to D/JS, 200428Z Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

65. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 199-68, 23 Aug 68; 200-68, 24 Aug 68; 201-68, 26 Aug 68; 202-68, 27 Aug 68. (S-GP 4) COMUSMACV 24858 to CJCS, 240957Z Aug 68. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 25054 to CJCS, 260930Z Aug 68, JCS IN 30143. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 118 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 010943Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 36596 to State, 291115Z Aug 68, JCS IN 37720.

units, with US air and artillery support but with no aid from US infantry. General Abrams praised the performance of the SVN forces in this action as "magnificent."[66]

The offensive slackened after approximately a week.[67] It had approximated the May attack in duration, as well as in level of intensity. There had been fewer ground assaults and more attacks by fire than in the preceding offensive. It differed also from its predecessor in that it had begun slowly and built up over a period of several days; in the May offensive, all the major targets had been assailed in the beginning.

Most of the attacks had been carried out by VC local forces; the major VC and NVA units had presumably been held back to exploit any initial success. It was significant that the enemy had made an evident attempt to hold down casualties, instead of flinging his men into the assault without regard to the cost, as in the earlier offensives of 1968. This more cautious strategy had been reflected in a somewhat lower casualty rate. Approximately 8,500 hostile troops were killed in action between 18 and 29 August, according to COMUSMACV's estimate, as compared with 12,000 between 5 and 16 May.[68]

The major assault on Saigon that had been anticipated never materialized. General Abrams nevertheless remained convinced that the capital had been one of the major objectives. The enemy's strategy, he believed, had been flexible, aimed at achieving initial successes to be exploited as opportunity offered. Capture of outposts or of cities near the border (like Tay Ninh) was expected to provide springboards

66. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 200-68, 24 Aug 68; 201-68, 26 Aug 68; 202-68, 27 Aug 68; 203-68, 27 Aug 68. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Aug and Dec 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 24858 to CJCS, 240957Z Aug 68. (S) Msg, COMUCMACV MAC 11822 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 010943Z Sep 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 12129 to CJCS, 080323Z Sep 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 36596 to State, 291115Z Aug 68, JCS IN 37720.

67. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement, gives dates 18-24 Oct for the third 1968 offensive.

68. (S) Msg, Saigon 36596 to State, 291115Z Aug 68, JCS IN 37720. (S) "Report on Situation in Vietnam," 26 Aug 68, apparently prepared by NMCC for CJCS, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 11822 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 010943Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

noticeable in NVA than in VC units, although some of the latter had had to be filled up with men from NVA, and others had been reduced to recruiting females or males above or below the optimum age. But none of COMUSMACV's commanders suffered from any illusion that the communist forces were disintegrating. "The enemy may not fight as well as he once did," remarked General Abrams, summing up his subordinates' comments, "but he can still prove to be a troublesome foe."[71]

The enemy's increasing reliance on NVA forces was striking. General Wheeler had commented upon it after his return from SVN in July. A CIA assessment prepared two months later, on the basis of estimates furnished by MACV, indicated that 46 of the 58 known enemy regiments consisted entirely of men from NVN, while 9 of the remaining 12 were believed to be over 50 percent North Vietnamese in composition. Even the two regiments known to exist in IV Corps contained some men from the north.[72]

General Abrams' conviction that US and SVN forces had thrown the enemy's attack plans out of kilter received unexpected confirmation from the other side of the globe. An intelligence report forwarded by the Defense Attache in Paris on 31 August ascribed to one of Hanoi's principal delegates to the Paris talks a statement that "Abrams is really hurting us. He seems to know what we are planning to do." Moreover, according to the report, the VC had paid General Abrams a very high compliment: they had marked him for assassination, at all costs, in September, together with his principal subordinates. General Wheeler, commenting on this ominous warning, enjoined General Abrams to "exercise a little extra caution during the weeks ahead." General Abrams replied that he had instituted additional security measures at MACV headquarters and that he and his subordinates were varying their movements to avoid any predictable pattern.[73]

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71. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 11672 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 290805Z Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

72. (S) CIA Memo, "Increasing Role of North Vietnamese in Viet Cong Units," 17 Sep 68, Encl to Memo, Actg DepDir for Intelligence, CIA, to CJCS, 20 Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

73. (S) Msg, Def Attache Paris to Dir DIA and J-2 MACV, 311636Z Aug 68. (S) Msg, CJCS 9951 to COMUSMACV, 031902Z Sep 68; (C) Msg, COMUSMACV 11978 to CJCS, 041146Z Sep 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. A later report from the same source gave the deadline for the assassination as the end of 1968 and asserted that three special commando groups had been formed for the purpose. (S-GP 3) Msg, Def Attache Paris CROC 086 to Dir DIA and J-2 MACV, 301700Z Sep 68, same file.

for assaults on Saigon and other cities. But the scenario did not unfold as the enemy had written it, and his attack never moved beyond the initial stage. "The gradual acceleration of momentum he hoped for was checked at the outset." according to General Abrams.[69]

The failure of the attack was obvious, even more so than in May. Ambassador Bunker ascribed this fact primarily to

> the steady improvement which has taken place in the allied forces: improved intelligence, better all around performance, especially by the ARVN, RF/PF and paramilitary forces, better coordination of all units, the very effective interdiction and spoiling efforts of our forces and skillful and effective application of air power, especially the B-52s. Confidence in their ability to cope with the enemy prevails throughout the Vietnamese and allied forces to a greater degree than ever before.[70]

Part of the explanation, however, probably lay in the declining quality of enemy forces, caused by the replacement of casualties with poorly trained recruits under inexperienced leaders. Senior US commanders, when queried by General Abrams, agreed that NVA troops were deteriorating in training, leadership, and morale. Replacements were being sent in with only one to three months' training, instead of six or eight. Prisoners and defectors testified to the effects of homesickness, fear of allied firepower, food shortages, and disease. No longer was the enemy policing the battlefield as vigorously as before; the number of weapons found abandoned had significantly increased.

The decline in quality was uneven, however, according to the judgment of the commanders. It was most pronounced in units that had been subjected to heaviest military pressure; those located adjacent to the enemy sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia had held up much better. It was also more

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69. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 12129 to CJCS, 080323Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

70. (S) Msg, Saigon 36596 to State, 291115Z Aug 68, JCS IN 37720.

While withdrawing his major forces to their sanctuaries, the enemy also cut down on the flow of replacements from North Vietnam. US estimates of the rate of infiltration (admittedly of somewhat doubtful validity) showed a drop from approximately 33,000 in August to 15,000 in September, with a further decline to 10,000-12,000 in each of the succeeding three months.[77]

The significance of this decline in enemy activity was difficult to appraise, but its consequences were of the utmost importance. By the end of October General Abrams judged that the military situation was favorable enough to justify a decision by the President to cease all bombing of North Vietnam in the hope of beginning negotiations for peace. This decision is described in a later chapter.

The apparent degradation of the enemy's military capabilities, coupled with the growing strength of the RVNAF (as described in the preceding chapter), made it possible to plan for an expansion of the role of SVN's forces in the near future. The Combined Campaign Plan for 1969, issued by MACV and the JGS on 30 September, reflected this development. The corresponding 1968 plan had laid down a broad division of labor between RVNAF and FWMAF units: the former were made primarily responsible for pacification and the latter for destruction of the main VC/NVA forces and bases. The 1969 plan specified that there would be "no functional separation of responsibilities" between RVN and allied forces. "ARVN divisional units," it was stated, "will direct their primary efforts to the destruction of VC/NVA main force units." For this purpose, there was to be a "gradual phase down" of ARVN battalions committed to the support of pacification.[78]

But despite the favorable trend of the war for the allies, there was no indication that the enemy was preparing to abandon the struggle. As early as September there were warnings that he planned yet another of his "winter-spring" offensives, perhaps beginning in the following month. MACV's J-2 concluded that the enemy, far from being discouraged,

77. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 1-18, Fig. 1-10.

78. (S) Combined Campaign Plan 1969, AB 144, 30 Sep 68, JMF 911/350 (30 Sep 68).

Aftermath of the Enemy Defeat

Despite the failure of his August offensive, the enemy maintained a fairly high level of activity during the month of September. The number of enemy-initiated attacks averaged slightly more than 46 per week in that month, as compared with 31 during July and the first half of August. Eleven of the September actions involved forces of battalion size or larger--almost as many as the 12 such attacks recorded in August. Most of the September targets were US Special Forces camps, none of which was captured.[74]

The most serious action in September was another thrust at Tay Ninh. Sharp fighting occurred around the outskirts of that city on 11-12 September; one fire support base was penetrated for a time before the enemy was driven out by US Army forces. There remained some confusion about what happened, but it appeared that some enemy forces (possibly several companies) actually penetrated the city before being ejected.[75]

At the beginning of October the enemy began another period during which he limited his activity to small-scale local attacks, probes, terrorism, and similar annoying but relatively minor actions. For the final quarter of 1968, the weekly rate of enemy-initiated activities dropped to an average of 32. More significantly, only one attack during this three-month period involved forces of battalion size or larger. This action occurred near Loc Ninh (III CTZ) on 13 November, when an estimated 500-700 hostile troops attacked a fire support base defended by an ARVN Ranger battalion. US troops and aircraft were called in and the enemy withdrew, leaving 287 dead on the battlefield. Friendly forces lost only four dead, all ARVN.[76]

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74. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 2-69, 3 Jan 69, Supplement. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Sep 68.

75. (C) Memo for Record, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, "Military Operations in the Tay Ninh City Area," 11 Sep 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 12337 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 120847Z Sep 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Sep 68. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 215-68, 12 Sep 68; 216-68, 13 Sep 68; 217-68, 14 Sep 68.

76. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 2-69, 3 Jan 69, Supplement. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Nov 68. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 268-68, 14 Nov 68; 269-68, 15 Nov 68.

considered that his losses so far had been fully justified by indications that the United States was losing its will to fight. The resignation of Secretary McNamara, the reassignment of General Westmoreland, President Johnson's withdrawal from the 1968 election, the noisy controversy in the United States between "hawks" and doves," the threatened instability of the dollar, and the incessant criticism of US policy by foreign sources--all these developments, when seen from Hanoi, might be fitted together to yield a picture of a nation and its leaders approaching the situation existing in France in 1954. From this viewpoint, it would be unthinkable for the enemy to weaken his resolve or to lower his objectives.79

The month of October came and went with no enemy offensive, but a stream of intelligence continued to warn of plans for large-scale actions.80 General Abrams made only one major readjustment of his forces to meet these threats. Observing a concentration of enemy forces astride the border between Cambodia and III CTZ, he strengthened the defenses of Saigon by bringing down the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) from I CTZ. The movement began late in October and was completed by the middle of the next month.81

Whatever the enemy's military intentions, he was known to be making every effort to repair and rebuild his political and administrative apparatus in South Vietnam, perhaps in anticipation of impending negotiations. Intelligence showed that the Viet Cong were attempting to organize "liberation" or "revolutionary" committees, nominally chosen by election, at every level from district to hamlet, to replace similar groups that had been driven underground or destroyed by allied operations in previous years. This shadow hierarchy could be triumphantly unveiled as the "legitimate" governmental structure at the local level, while the "Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces," the "Front" organization formed

79. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 13146 to CJCS, 281241Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

80. (S-NOFORN) DIA IBs 201-68, 14 Oct 68; 202-68, 15 Oct 68; 204-68, 17 Oct 68; 214-68, 31 Oct 68.

81. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 14472 to CINCPAC, 271008Z Oct 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3-7. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Nov 68.

during the Tet offensive, offered the nucleus of a national "liberation" government to replace the "puppet" regime of President Thieu.[82]

It was obviously necessary to counter this enemy effort. Fortunately the military situation in the closing months of the year made it possible to focus attention on the smaller enemy forces and their local political cohorts, which had now been exposed by the withdrawal of the hard-pressed main forces. "If we are now hopeful of moving from the military to the political contest," observed Ambassador Bunker in a despatch to Washington, "it is primarily because of the success of our military effort." General Abrams accordingly instructed his commanders to expand their spoiling and preemptive operations against main and local forces, base areas, and lines of communication, and at the same time to conduct an intensive drive against the VC political apparatus. They were to cooperate fully with the PHOENIX campaign against the VC infrastructure (see below). General Abrams warned that the enemy must under no circumstances be allowed to win politically what he had been unable to gain on the field of battle.[83]

In a later directive, General Abrams stressed that the war must be viewed as the enemy regarded it--as a single struggle, not one that could be subdivided into big and little battles, or into military and political halves. At the same time, he urged exploitation of the weaknesses in the enemy's logistic system, which was wholly dependent upon the placement of supplies along the intended axes of advance in regions under VC control. Every effort should be made to find and

82. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "Trip Report," 30 Sep 68, and Encl A, "The Political Situation in the Countryside," OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (S) Msg, JCS 10895 to COMUSMACV, 242104Z Sep 68; same file, Oct 68 [sic]. (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 2-11 - 2-12. (S-NOFORN) DIA IBs 223-68, 14 Nov 68; 246-68, 18 Dec 68.

83. (S) Msg, Saigon 41523 to State, 30 Oct 68, JCS IN 75427. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 13117 to CJCS, 280610Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68 [sic].

seize these caches, while at the same time destroying the politico-military structure that provided a favorable environment for enemy military operations.[84]

The President, as usual, heartily approved of COMUSMACV's aggressive strategy. Through Secretary Clifford, he directed that "constant, relentless and persistent pressure" be maintained against the enemy in SVN.[85] These instructions remained in effect after the total cessation of bombing and the beginning of peace talks.

Looking toward the onset of the northeast monsoon season, which would begin in November, General Abrams drafted plans for his own "winter-spring offensive" to take advantage of the expected weather patterns. In September he proposed an intensified air interdiction effort in southern NVN and the Laotian panhandle and a vigorous land campaign against enemy bases and infiltration routes in the Delta--the regions where the monsoon would bring favorable weather. He planned to assign additional forces to IV CTZ for this purpose. Admiral McCain and General Wheeler approved this plan, but Secretary Clifford, when apprised of it, questioned the advisability of increasing US strength in the Delta. ARVN troops were carrying most of the burden there, he pointed out, and it seemed undesirable to "Americanize" this theater of the war. General Abrams replied that the US forces involved would consist entirely of helicopter units, except for one US airmobile brigade that would be needed for the duration of the campaign (approximately 90 days) to seal off the Cambodian border. ARVN and VNMC units, assisted by elements of the US 9th Division already in IV CTZ, would sweep the Delta in search of enemy forces and bases.[86]

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84. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 13848 to CINCPAC et al., 130945Z Oct 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 41523 to State, 30 Oct 68, JCS IN 75427.

85. (TS) Msg, JCS 11890 to COMUSMACV, 161605Z Oct 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68.

86. (TS-NOFORN) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 12535 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 170257Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (TS-GP 3) CM-3662-68 to SecDef, 20 Sep 68, Att to JCS 2472/364, 21 Sep 68; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Northeast Monsoon Campaign Planning," 5 Oct 68, Att to JCS 2472/364-1, 8 Oct 68; (TS) CM-3723-68 to SecDef, 23 Oct 68, Att to N/H of JCS 2472/364-1, 25 Oct 68; JMF 911/520 (20 Sep 68).

The air interdiction campaign in Laos would make full use of the IGLOO WHITE sensor system, which was already providing valuable information on truck movements in the STEEL TIGER area of operations in southern Laos.[87] Sensors had also proved their value as an adjunct to offensive ground operations; indeed, these devices--acoustic, seismic, and electronic--were emerging as a major technological innovation of the war. In September COMUSMACV evaluated the results of the DUCK BLIND test program as highly successful. He requested permission to proceed with the second phase of the plan, which called for greatly increased use of sensors emplaced by hand or by helicopter. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved this request in October. The expanded program was renamed DUFFEL BAG.[88]

Military Operations After 1 November 1968

Speaking to the nation on 31 October, President Johnson announced that he had ordered an end to all "air, naval, and artillery bombardment" of NVN effective 0800 EST, 1 November. This decision, he said, was based on his conviction that it "can lead to progress toward a peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese war."[89]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately issued directives ordering a cessation of all offensive operations against NVN, the DMZ, and the 12-mile territorial waters claimed by NVN, effective at the time indicated by the President (1300Z or 2100H, 1 November). US ground forces were to be positioned south of the DMZ and naval surface units withdrawn below the 17th Parallel. Operations in Laos were not affected, but overflight of NVN or the DMZ by strike forces en route to or from Laotian targets was prohibited. Immediate pursuit into North Vietnamese seas or airspace was authorized "in response to hostile acts and in pursuit of any vessel or aircraft whose actions indicate with reasonable certainty that it is operating in support of the VC/NVA insurgency in South

87. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 231-68, 1 Oct 68.

88. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 200540Z Sep 68; (S-GP 3) JCS 2471/77, 14 Oct 68; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3414 to CINCPAC, 182028Z Oct 68; JMF 911/321 (20 Sep 68). (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3-28.

89. Dept of State Bulletin, LIX (18 Nov 68), p. 517. The events leading up to this decision are described in the succeeding chapters.

COMUSMACV also continued to make full use of the tactical capability of his B-52 force. The enormous firepower dispensed by these aircraft, together with the ease with which they could be shifted from one target to another as occasion required, obviated the need to hold back troops to form a "strategic reserve" in the orthodox sense. The Deputy Secretary of Defense, as noted earlier, had authorized a continuance of the maximum B-52 sortie rate (1,800 per month) through 1968, subject to a proposed review of this decision within 60 days, a review which never took place. In October COMUSMACV had recommended that this rate be continued indefinitely until some major change in the situation should warrant a change. Justification for this recommendation was furnished by the results of a careful and comprehensive appraisal of ARC LIGHT effectiveness, begun by J-3 and DIA several months earlier and completed in November. The study concluded that there was no justification for any reduction in B-52 operations, since valid targets for ARC LIGHT strikes exceeded the force capability by a factor of 5 to 1.[103]

Before the Joint Chiefs of Staff had acted on COMUSMACV's recommendation, the Deputy Secretary of Defense on 26 November suggested adoption of a variable rate of 1,400-1,800 sorties per month in 1969, with a total of 19,200 for the entire year (a monthly average of 1,600). This proposal was based on an assumption that the number of high priority targets would fluctuate in response to changes in intensity of the war as a whole. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in reply, provided a detailed refutation of this assumption and at the same time forwarded a copy of the J-3/DIA study of the subject. The matter remained unresolved at the end of 1968.[104]

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103. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS et al., 191152Z Oct 68, JCS IN 48683. (S-GP 3) "ARC LIGHT Follow-On Study," 18 Nov 68, CAG 4-68, JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68).

104. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "ARC LIGHT Sortie Rate," 26 Nov 68, Att to JCS 2472/389, 27 Nov 68; (S-GP 3) JCSM-711-68 to SecDef, 4 Dec 68 (derived from JCS 2472/389-1, 30 Nov 68); (S-GP 3) CM-3805-68 to SecDef, 4 Dec 68; JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68).

As the year drew to a close, COMUSMACV's monsoon campaign plan was in full swing. SPEEDY EXPRESS, the largest campaign ever undertaken in the Delta, had begun on 30 November. ARVN forces in IV CTZ were using the "pile on" tactic--rapid concentration of forces to smother enemy contacts--developed earlier by US units. A major part of COMUSMACV's assault helicopters and gunships had been moved to the Delta to assist the campaign. Amother center of activity was I CTZ, where at least two enemy divisions--the 2nd and 3rd NVA divisions--were the target of operations involving two USA and two USMC divisions. In III CTZ, US and ARVN units, assisted by the small Thai force, concentrated primarily on clearing the approaches to Saigon and blocking infiltration routes from Cambodia. Smaller operations were underway in II CTZ. All forces had been ordered to provide full support to the accelerated pacification campaign recently initiated by the GVN. A highly promising technique for this purpose had recently been successfully tried out in I CTZ (Operation MEADE RIVER, in Quang Nam Province). It involved a wide cordon thrown about the target area by USMC, ROKMC, ARVN, and National Police units, within which search and clear operations could be conducted with relentless thoroughness.105

The campaign in IV CTZ was supported by a naval operation (SEA LORDS) that began on 1 November, intended to deny the waterways to the enemy and to penetrate into his previously secure strongholds. For this purpose, the Mobile Riverine Force (TF 117) in the Delta had been strengthened by units from TFs 115 and 116, the normal missions of which were GAME WARDEN and MARKET TIME, respectively.106

105. (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 17450 to CJCS et al., 230940Z Dec 68; MAC 17719, 301109Z Dec 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 42365 to JCS, 160834Z Dec 68, JCS IN 72070. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3-7 - 3-8. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 274-68, 21 Nov 68; 290-68, 11 Dec 68. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Dec 68.

106. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012225Z Jan 69, JCS IN 10811. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 17719 to CJCS et al., 301109Z Dec 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3-16 - 3-19.

Reports of enemy plans to launch another offensive continued to be rife.[107] The most plausible such report pointed to an attack on Saigon scheduled for 13 December. As matters turned out, only small-scale actions took place around the capital at that time, but there was some ground for thinking that the enemy had indeed planned a major attempt that had been aborted by B-52 strikes.[108]

Whatever the enemy's intentions, there was no doubt that he was making an effort to put himself in position to launch another attack if he should so elect. In a message on 24 December, replying to a query from the President, CINCPAC detailed the changes in the enemy's military posture in Southern NVN and nearby Laos since the final curtailment of bombing of NVN on 1 November. His logistic center of gravity had been moved southward; new supply depots had been established close to the DMZ. Supplies and troops now moved southward by train at least as far south as Vinh, below the 19th Parallel, and by ship as far as Dong Hoi, approximately 30 miles north of the DMZ. "At present," reported CINCPAC, "the enemy has the capability of dramatically increasing his force in northern SVN in a matter of approximately two weeks rather than about two months as in the past." Even more ominous was the observed shipment of heavy AAA ammunition (85mm and 100mm) into both Laos and SVN, suggesting an intention to escalate the level of conflict, not merely to maintain the status quo in SVN. "If this trend continues, and there appears to be little reason to anticipate otherwise," warned CINCPAC, "a direct and continuing threat of substantial proportions will be created for free world forces early in 1969."[109]

Warnings of an impending winter-spring offensive by the enemy had a familiar ring. So did proposals for various holiday ceasefires, which had become a standard feature of

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107. (S-NOFORN) DIA IBs 215-68, 1 Nov 68; 227-68, 20 Nov 68; 234-68, 2 Dec 68; 239-68, 9 Dec 68; 241-68, 11 Dec 68; 242-68, 12 Dec 68; 244-68, 16 Dec 68; 245-68, 17 Dec 68; 246-68, 18 Dec 68; 247-68, 19 Dec 68; 254-68, 31 Dec 68. (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV 42365 to JCS, 160834Z Dec 68, JCS IN 72070; 43934, 230830Z Dec 68, JCS IN 85677.

108. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 14541 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 121701Z Dec 68; (S-NOFORN-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 17063 to CJCS et al., 131108Z Dec 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68.

109. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 240620Z Dec 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68.

the Vietnam war, solemnly announced at the end of each calendar year. As in 1967, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC recorded their opposition to any such proposals; nevertheless, the United States agreed to a 24-hour Christmas truce, which was observed from 241800 to 251800 December (Saigon time).110 For New Years Day, the VC announced a three-day truce, from 30 December to 2 January, but allied forces observed no ceasefire on this occasion, which, as President Thieu pointed out, had no significance for Vietnamese.111 The matter of a Tet truce was still under discussion between the United States and the GVN, although they had tentatively agreed on a 24-hour period.112 It was to be expected that the allies would approach this subject cautiously, in light of their disastrous experience with the last Tet holiday, which the enemy had chosen as the occasion for his largest military effort.

Political Development and Pacification

Military success on the battlefield, as well as diplomatic success in bringing NVN to the conference table, would go for naught unless the nascent Republic of Vietnam could develop the political strength and stability to enable it ultimately to stand alone as an independent, noncommunist nation after the war ended. Fortunately developments during 1968 suggested that the newly planted institutions of democracy in SVN, fragile though they might be, were growing stronger.

Immediately after the Tet offensive, Ambassador Bunker had commended the performance of the Saigon government, which, far from collapsing as the enemy had hoped, was responding to the emergency in an encouraging manner. Throughout the rest of the year, Mr. Bunker sent back reports that indicated that

110. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 16283 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 270403Z Nov 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 272258Z Nov 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 16464 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 301041Z Nov 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8246 to CINCPAC, 232256Z Dec 68, same file, Dec 68. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 302-68, 26 Dec 68.

111. (S) Msg, Saigon 43858 to State, 2 Dec 68, JCS IN 45810. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8467 to CINCPAC, 280017Z Dec 68.

112. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 16464 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 301041Z Nov 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8246 to CINCPAC, 232256Z Dec 68, same file, Dec 68.

this cautiously optimistic assessment continued to be justified. The elected civilian government gained in strength and confidence. Rumors that it would be overthrown by a coup, which arose several times during the year, proved groundless. President Thieu grew in stature, increasingly playing the role of a civilian head of an elected government rather than the leader of a military junta. He appeared to possess a good understanding of what was required in his country's situation. Most important, he recognized clearly the cardinal importance of the pacification campaign and of the establishment of effective institutions of local government. He made a point of keeping in touch with public opinion through frequent trips to rural as well as urban areas.

Vice President Ky, whose incipient rivalry with Thieu represented a source of possible instability, showed himself willing to cooperate, on the surface at least. His influence, and thus his capacity for mischief, tended to decline as time went by. The legislature (National Assembly) remained in session during most of the year. It compiled a record that Ambassador Bunker judged as creditable, marked principally by the enactment of a mobilization law, and showed a willingness both to cooperate with the executive and to assert its authority against that branch when occasion demanded.

Political development was accompanied by economic progress, although in this sphere of the national life the effects of the Tet offensive had been much more marked. All of the refugees created by that offensive had been resettled by September, and most of the physical destruction had been repaired by the end of the year. A notable feature of economic development in 1968 was the spread of a new strain of "miracle" rice productive of greatly increased yields of that all-important crop. President Thieu frequently exhorted his country's farmers to take advantage of this innovation.

An important step toward SVN's political maturity occurred in May 1968, when President Thieu dismissed the somewhat ineffective prime minister, Nguyen Van Loc, and replaced him with Tran Van Huong, a civilian politician with a reputation for honesty and integrity who had run third in the presidential election of 1967. The fact that this change was made in a constitutional manner, in response to legitimate civilian pressures for more effective government, was in itself noteworthy. Huong's appointment gave the Thieu

administration a much broader political base. His vigorous leadership soon made itself felt in several ways: a stepped-up attack on corruption, a strengthening of the forces of local self-defense, and a new impetus to the campaign against the VC infrastructure, and progress in land reform.

Recognizing the need for a broad and united noncommunist political movement with firm roots throughout the country, Thieu and Huong launched their own party, the Lien Minh, or National Alliance for Social Revolution, in June 1968. It was created by amalgamation of some 60 splinter groups, of the kind that had been the curse of the nation's political life. The new party drew up its own program for social action, aimed at the betterment of the life of the population, although this remained largely on paper.

Less than six months after the Tet offensive, South Vietnam's political progress had become evident even to the New York Times. "Saigon Is Building More Vital Regime," read the headline of a story from Saigon that appeared in that newspaper on 25 July. The reporter described, among other developments, the increasingly effective leadership of President Thieu, the progress in weeding out corrupt and inefficient officials, and the rising confidence of the National Assembly and its members.

As would be expected, there remained flaws in the fabric of South Vietnam's democracy, which Ambassador Bunker did not overlook. The Saigon government showed occasional heavy-handedness in dealing with dissident groups and with press criticism. Its most deplorable action in US eyes was the arrest and prosecution of Truong Dinh Dzu, who had run second in the 1967 presidential election as a "peace" candidate, for publicly advocating an alliance with the NLF.

A matter of particular interest to the United States was a shift in official and public sentiment in SVN toward a possible political settlement. The prospect was viewed with apprehension immediately after Tet; many feared a US "sellout" that would leave them exposed to the VC (whose tender mercies had been revealed in a mass slaughter of their opponents while they occupied part of Hue). But growing confidence in the armed forces and political institutions of SVN made it possible to view with equanimity the prospect of an end to the war. By the end of 1968 the need to settle the conflict through negotiation and compromise was generally recognized by spokesmen for public opinion in SVN.

Ambassador Bunker believed that this development owed something to assurances given to President Thieu by President Johnson in July, when the two leaders held a two-day meeting in Honolulu. They had agreed that the RVN "should be a full participant playing a leading role in discussions concerning the substance of a final settlement" and that the two governments would "act in full consultation with each other, and with their allies." The United States had also promised that it would not "support the imposition of a 'coalition government,' or any other form of government, on the people of South Vietnam," who alone possessed the right to determine their future.

The US decision to stop all bombing of NVN on 1 November in return for the beginning of negotiations led to a dispute over the participation of the GVN in the negotiations. But even this controversy (acrimonious, though fortunately of short duration) had its favorable aspect, in Mr. Bunker's opinion. The independent stance publicly proclaimed by President Thieu strengthened his image as a leader in the eyes of his countrymen, and helped to discredit Hanoi's insistent attacks on him as a US "puppet."[113]

A vital aspect of the politico-economic development of SVN was the pacification campaign--the struggle for the loyalty of South Vietnam's peasantry. On this front, also, the news in 1968 was generally encouraging. The program was seriously disrupted by the Tet offensive. Seventeen of the 51 ARVN battalions assigned to support pacification had to be withdrawn to defend the cities; the organization created to administer the program, headed by Ambassador Robert W. Komer, Deputy to COMUSMACV for CORDS, was temporarily diverted to relief activities. But as the confusion subsided, it became evident that the disruption was less extensive than at first feared, being concentrated principally in I and IV CTZs. Out of approximately 5,000 small outposts or watchtowers, less than 480 had been abandoned or overrun. Losses among the forces connected with pacification amounted

113. The foregoing account of political and economic trends during 1968 is summarized from Ambassador Bunker's weekly situation reports to the President and from (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," pp. 5-22 - 5-29. For the newspaper story cited above, see NY Times, 25 Jul 68, 1. For the Johnson-Thieu meeting of 19-20 Jul 68, see Dept of State Bulletin, LIX (12 Aug 68), pp. 162-165.

to approximately 6,600 RF/PF, 460 police, and 160 RD cadres. Most of these had been killed or captured; desertions were encouragingly low in number. Moreover, the pacification organization was quick to recover. The proportion of the population living in "relatively secure" areas--those graded A, B, or C according to the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) instituted in January 1967--dropped from 67.2 percent at the end of Janury to 59.8 percent a month later, but by the end of March it had risen again to 61.0 percent. Ambassador Komer estimated that approximately 255 hamlets--a very small proportion--had reverted to outright VC control. Of 629 RD teams, 545, or 87 percent, had returned to their hamlets by the end of March, and 519 were sleeping there overnight. For the separate Truong Son (Montagnard) cadre teams, the corresponding figures showed that 88 out of 110 had returned to their assignments.114

Recovery of lost ground continued throughout the rest of the year, according to the indicators of progress employed by US and SVN pacification officials. The declining effectiveness of the enemy's two subsequent attacks was reflected in their lesser impact on pacification. In the May offensive, only one battalion and one company of the ARVN had to be repositioned to defend provincial or district capitals, and only six RD teams were withdrawn. By the end of the month the percentage of population living in "relatively secure" areas stood at 62.1 percent, while that under VC control had declined from 17.9 percent to 17.6 percent during the month of May. The August attack had no discernible physical effect at all. By October, 69.8 percent of the population was considered relatively secure--more than on the eve of Tet. A month later, it had risen to 73.3 percent, slightly higher than the goal that CINCPAC had set for the end of the year (72.0 percent). The increase of

114. (S) Msgs, Saigon 18582 to State, 8 Feb 68; 20175, 22 Feb 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 22579 to State, 20 Mar 68, JCS IN 85672. (S) Msg, Saigon 22386 to State, 181200Z Mar 68, JCS IN 78612. (C) Msg, Saigon 23150 to State, 27 Mar 68, JCS IN 97060. (S) Msg, Saigon 24361 to State, 9 Apr 68, JCS IN 33674, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68, (filed under date 10 Apr, with a convenient tabular summary of the statistics given in the message). (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 0649 to CINCPAC, 051500Z Mar 68, JCS IN 52109.

3.5 percent during November was the largest for any month since the HES was instituted. At the same time, the proportion under VC control dropped from 15.3 percent in October to 13.4 percent in November, and that in the "contested" category, from 14.9 to 13.3 percent.[115]

Progress in pacification, together with military success, contributed to improved results in the Chieu Hoi program, the GVN psychological warfare operation aimed at inducing defections from enemy ranks. The number of "ralliers" (Hoi Chanh) had reached a high monthly rate during the first half of 1967, but declined in the last six months. In January 1968, 1,179 defectors were recorded, an increase of 290 over the preceding month. The Tet offensive was followed by a sharp drop, but after the end of March the rate resumed its upward climb, as shown by the following table:

Month	Number of Ralliers
January	1,179
February	763
March	599
April	1,060
May	1,039
June	1,064
July	1,844
August	1,451
September	1,501
October	2,381
November	2,269
December	3,148
Total	18,298

Although the total was almost 50 percent below the corresponding figure for 1967 (27,178), the upward spurt during the last three months of 1968 was highly encouraging.[116]

115. (S) Msgs, Saigon 27497 to State, 16 May 68, JCS IN 18320; 30500, 20 Jun 68, JCS IN 85053; 37046, 4 Sep 68, JCS IN 48279. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 5-4.

116. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3-21 - 3-22, 5-8, 5-15 - 5-17.

Closely related to pacification and psychological warfare was the PHOENIX (PHUNG HOANG) program for eliminating, by defection, capture, or death, the Viet Cong's political infrastructure (VCI). This was a politico-military operation directed by District Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Centers (DIOCCs). It grew out of an earlier program (ICEX) begun in 1967 under US auspices. The GVN participated under a directive issued in December 1967, but the program lagged until July 1968, when Prime Minister Huong placed the weight of his government behind it.117

When the program began, the GVN set a goal of 1,000 "eliminations" per month for 1968. Initial achievement fell far short of hopes; approximately 600 VCI members were eliminated during each of the first two months of the year. Immediately thereafter, however, the number shot up to over 1,200 and remained near that mark until October 1968, when there was a further increase to over 1,400.118 The support given this program by COMUSMACV during the latter part of 1968 had already been noted. General DePuy, SACSA, who visited SVN in September, characterized the improved results of the PHOENIX program as a "natural outgrowth of the improved overall military/political situation." However, he found the program in its infancy. The numbers of DIOCCs remained far short of what was required, and procedures for investigating, trying, and incarcerating VCI members were quite inadequate.119

In the final analysis, all hopes for pacification were dependent upon effective local defense against communist force. The formation of volunteer self-defense units at the lowest level, able to perform guard duty and thus successively to free the PF, the RF, and the ARVN for offensive operations, was another program pushed forward by Premier Huong. It had its nucleus in a system of hamlet militia, which, after lagging for months, was given a boost by the large number of volunteers who came forward after the Tet offensive. Ambassador Komer reported that as of the end of March, 22,000

117. Ibid., pp. 5-19 - 5-20. (S) Msg, Saigon 31757 to State, 4 Jul 68, JCS IN 22071. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 25488 to CINCPAC et al., 300435Z Aug 68, JCS IN 39329. (TS-GP 1) Encl B to Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "Trip Report," 30 Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

118. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 5-20, 5-21.

119. (TS-GP 1) Encl B to Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "Trip Report," 30 Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

3.5 percent during November was the largest for any month since the HES was instituted. At the same time, the proportion under VC control dropped from 15.3 percent in October to 13.4 percent in November, and that in the "contested" category, from 14.9 to 13.3 percent.[115]

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116. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3-21 - 3-22, 5-8, 5-15 - 5-17.

Clifford. It was agreed that, as soon as the attack was manifestly underway, the United States would make clear, through briefings, press conferences, and other announcements, that the action had been fully expected, that US public opinion was one of the targets, and that there was every prospect of another enemy defeat. As the attack developed, successful US and ARVN actions would be stressed, but excessive optimism would at all times be carefully avoided.[60]

The plan was overtaken by events on the night of 17-18 August, when the enemy launched fire and ground attacks at a number of objectives, principally US and ARVN military installations in III CTZ, plus two cities--Loc Ninh and Tay Ninh--on the western edge of that zone. All were repelled except the assault on Tay Ninh, which was conducted by six battalions. Four were halted outside the city, but the other two penetrated and dug in.[61]

General Abrams considered that this attack signaled the beginning of a general offensive but recommended that no announcement of that conclusion be made until events of the next few days had removed all doubt. He thought that these initial operations were diversionary and that the real objectives had yet to be revealed. "We are in good shape everywhere in the country except in Tay Ninh city," he reported on 18 August. "We have got to get the enemy out of this town and promptly."[62] General Wheeler advised the Secretary of Defense (through the NMCC) that the situation "is developing as anticipated by US intelligence," and that "General Abrams can repel any attack made by the enemy."[63]

60. (S-GP 2) Msg, State 220696 to Saigon, 141949Z Aug 68, JCS IN 98570. (S) Msg, Saigon 35464 to State, 151135Z Aug 68, JCS IN 99286. (S) Msg, Saigon and COMUSMACV MAC 11243, to ASD (PA) and AsstSecState (PA), 200207Z Aug 68, (with messages on same subject 17 and 18 Aug 68), OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

61. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 195-68, 19 Aug 68. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 25054 to CJCS, 260930Z Aug 68, JCS IN 30143. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 11181 to CJCS, 181232Z Aug 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 11246 to D/JS, 200428Z Aug 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

62. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 11181 to CJCS, 181232Z Aug 68, same file.

63. (TS) Memo, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, to SecDef, "Correspondence Relating to the Latest Situation in South Vietnam," 18 Aug 68, same file.

members of this organization had received training and 5,000 had been armed. At the same time, analogous urban organizations, known as civil defense groups, had come into existence, and had enrolled 63,599 members (6,888 of them armed).[120]

In August these organizations were combined to form the People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF), and a rapid expansion began, in which both men and women were enrolled. The government began to overcome a long-standing reluctance to distribute weapons on a large scale lest they fall into the wrong hands. By the end of September, according to GVN, 658,934 persons had been enrolled in the PSDF, of whom 239,264 had received training, while 58,318 weapons had been issued.[121]

Encouraged by indications of progress in the political and psychological offensive against the communist apparatus, the GVN, with US encouragement, adopted a plan for an Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC). It was to begin on 1 November and run for a three-month period, as a kind of trial run for a similar effort during 1969. The general approach was to concentrate on those hamlets in the "contested" categories (D or E under the HES) and to upgrade them to relative security (category C or higher). This objective, if accomplished, would give the GVN at least nominal control of 83 percent of the population and 73 percent of the hamlets, thus putting it in a favorable position to compete with the communists after hostilities ended. The "Accelerated Pacification Campaign" (APC) was intended as the first step. It set a goal of approximately 1,000 hamlets (later increased to 1,263) to be upgraded from D or E to C by 1 February. Other targets set for the APC were: 3,000 VCI "neutralizations" during each of the three months, a total of 5,000 ralliers, and a strength of 1,000,000 for the PSDF, of whom 200,000 would be armed.[122]

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120. (S) Msgs, Saigon 22579 to State, 20 Mar 68, JCS IN 85672; 24361, 9 Apr 68, JCS IN 33674; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68.

121. (S) Msgs, Saigon 34694 to State, 7 Aug 68, JCS IN 84286; 36074, 22 Aug 68, JCS IN 24226; 40697, 19 Oct 68, JCS IN 51528.

122. (S) Msg, Saigon 39342 to State, 030600Z Oct 68, JCS IN 14623. (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 5-4 - 5-7; (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012225Z Jan 68, JCS IN 10811.

Nonetheless it seemed probable, according to General Wheeler, that another large-scale enemy effort was impending. MACV's J-2 believed that enemy forces in I CTZ and around Saigon would have completed regrouping and refitting in time to launch attacks within a few weeks, probably about the middle of August. It appeared, however, that General Abrams possessed enough forces to cope with any offensive.[53]

After returning to Washington and reporting his conclusions to the President, General Wheeler told COMUSMACV that the trip "was a great success insofar as Secretary Clifford and I are concerned." At a White House luncheon, Mr. Clifford had praised General Abrams and his subordinates "in the highest terms." "I hope," concluded the Chairman, "that his report and mine have damped some of the anxieties existent earlier here in Washington."[54]

At the same time that he informed COMUSMACV of these developments, General Wheeler took the opportunity to clarify his thinking regarding the impending enemy attack. Reviewing evidence of enemy dispositions available in Washington, the Chairman observed that the enemy appeared to be in a position to attack with division-size forces along the border and simultaneously with smaller units around Saigon. Such a pattern of attack, he observed, "would pose the greatest problems to you and your subordinate commanders."[55]

General Abrams, in reply, doubted that the regimental-size units around Saigon were strong enough to attack. He thought it probable that at least one division would be employed against the capital, probably after diversionary actions had been launched elsewhere. He added that he intended "to accommodate the enemy in seeking battle and in fact to anticipate him wherever possible." He had directed his subordinates to make every effort to find, fix, and destroy enemy forces before they could attack. General Wheeler showed this message to the President, who requested

53. (TS) CM-3489-68 to Pres, 19 Jul 68, Encl to JCS 2472/331, 22 Jul 68, JMF 911/399 (19 Jul 68) sec 1. (S) MACV Briefing for SecDef, 15 Jul 68, same file, sec 1A.
54. (S) Msg, JCS 8442 to COMUSMACV, 261911Z Jul 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68.
55. Ibid.

Despite the somewhat uneven record of pacification in 1968, the overall results were encouraging enough to induce the GVN to raise its sights for the coming year. The pacification objectives announced for 1969 included the following: to bring 90 percent of the population into the "relatively secure" category; to eliminate 33,000 VCI members; to establish local government in every village; to expand the PSDF to 2,000,000; and to rally 20,000 Hoi Chanh. Priority areas for the 1969 program were selected, without reference to provincial boundaries, on the basis of population density, strategic location, and economic potential. Emphasis was to be placed upon strengthening local self-government by granting more autonomy to village councils, particularly in the development and supervision of self-help projects.[128]

To Ambassador Bunker, appraising the success of the nation-building effort at the end of 1968, the accomplishments of the passing year seemed to promise well for the future. In a message to the President, Mr. Bunker drew attention to a number of actions that were still required: to improve the effectiveness of the government, especially in rural areas; to develop a sound political organization; to strengthen further the RVNAF, particularly the territorial forces; and to provide a better standard of living for the masses. But, continued the Ambassador,

> I think it is undeniable that progress has been and is being made in all of these areas. What is especially encouraging is the fact that the rate of progress has accelerated in recent months. I am convinced that the tide is running more strongly with us now than at any time in the past. I believe that 1968 will go into history as the year in which the strength and love of freedom of the South Vietnamese people was most severely tested and not found wanting. For all of us, it has been a long year of great sacrifice. I am convinced that if we continue patient and confident in our own strength, we will get next year the kind of peace we have sought through so many grim trials.[129]

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128. Ibid., II, pp. 5-31 - 5-34.
129. (S)Msg, Saigon 45163 to State, 19 Dec 68, JCS IN 79360.

1,800 per-month figure only through June, stipulating that it should drop to 1,400 thereafter. He announced this decision as part of the Program 6 reinforcement package.[48]

The reduced monthly rate of 1,400 sorties would cost approximately $1 billion, as Mr. Nitze pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 15 April. A further reduction to 800, he continued, would cut this cost almost in half. He therefore asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to study carefully the effectiveness of the ARC LIGHT program and to forward their findings to him, with their assessment of the relative effectiveness of monthly rates of 800, 1,200, and 1,400 sorties.[49]

In an interim reply on 23 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued strongly against any reduction in the 1,800 rate. The full capability of the B-52 would be needed, they declared, to support offensive operations then underway and to sustain the expanded interdiction campaign that had become essential now that most of NVN was safe from bombing. Secretary Clifford accordingly reaffirmed for the time being the existing 1,800 monthly rate.[50]

On 29 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded the results of a more careful study of the effectiveness of ARC LIGHT. It was the unanimous testimony of field force commanders in SVN, they reported, that this program "makes a valuable contribution to achievement of US objectives in Southeast Asia and is a major factor in preventing the enemy from pressing his offensive plans." It was impossible statistically to evaluate its effectiveness or to compare various monthly rates. But even the maximum allocation of 1,800 sorties was insufficient to strike all available targets in

48. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 8069 to CINCPAC, 220008Z Mar 68 (readdressed by CINCPAC as 220553Z Mar 68, info JCS), JCS IN 87562. (S-GP 3) JCS 2472/254-2, 2 Apr 68, JMF 911/323 (13 Feb 68). (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., "Southeast Asia Deployment Program 6," 4 Apr 68, JMF 907/374 (14 Mar 68).

49. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "B-52 Sortie Rate," 15 Apr 68, Att to JCS 2472/274, 17 Apr 68, JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

50. (S-GP 3) JCSM-257-68 to SecDef, 23 Apr 68 (derived from JCS 2472/270-1, 18 Apr 68); (S) Memo, Mil Asst to SecDef to CJCS et al., "B-52 Sortie Rate," 29 Apr 68, Att to JCS 2472/270-2, 1 May 68; JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

Political complications were introduced into the situation by the fact that the personnel of the 1/18 Cavalry, aided by relatives, had begun agitating to escape assignment to SVN; the White House and Congress had been bombarded with mail on the subject. To cancel its planned redeployment, even on wholly military grounds, might give the appearance of yielding to this pressure and thus start an unfortunate chain reaction. Nonetheless Secretary Clifford, after discussing the matter with Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland, decided to approve General Abrams' request. Accordingly, the heavy equipment of the 1/18 Cavalry was sent to SVN but the unit itself was reassigned to STRAF. No change was made in the Program 6 personnel ceiling.[133]

A noteworthy addition to MACV's Naval component in 1968 was the battleship NEW JERSEY, which was taken out of mothballs and reactivated for duty in Vietnam. Arriving on station on 30 September, it was assigned as part of the naval gunfire support force, relieving a cruiser that had been providing the backbone of the SEA DRAGON campaign.[134]

At the end of the year the strength of US forces in South Vietnam remained slightly below the authorized Program 6 ceiling, as indicated by the following table:

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133. (S) Msgs, CSA WDC 13937 to COMUSMACV, 121816Z Sep 68; WDC 14065, 132333Z Sep 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (C) Msg ODCSOPS/OD DA 881149, to DA et al., 242341Z Sep 68; (U) OSA, "Information for Members of Congress," 25 Sep 68; J-3 Pac Div File, II B 4b(c) 1/18 Armored Cav Sqdn.

134. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to JCS, "Deployment Adjustment Request (N-68-10)," 16 May 68, with DAR, 25 Apr 68, submitted by J-3, JMF 907/374 (1 Mar 68). (S) Fact Sheet on USS NEW JERSEY Operations off VN Coast, 30 Sep-22 Oct 68, OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Oct 68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3-18.

The air campaign continued in both NVN and Laos. During July, 14,647 attack sorties were flown over NVN below the 19th Parallel, as compared with a monthly average of 9,149 in the preceding quarter. For the period July through September 1968, the number totaled 38,334, as compared with 27,447 flown during the three previous months. In the Laotian panhandle, where unfavorable monsoon weather continued to prevail, approximately 3,000 sorties per month were flown during the third quarter, in contrast with an average of 4,596 for the second. Operation TURNPIKE, the regular employment of B-52s in the interdiction campaign in Laos, was discontinued on 15 June, but ARC LIGHT strikes continued to be available on a case by case basis.[43]

Unfortunately, none of these efforts sufficed to stem the flow of reinforcements from NVN. The enemy continued to send men southward at a rate of 30,000 or more each month through the months of June, July, and August.[44] By so doing, he made up most of the losses he had suffered in his two sanguinary repulses in February and May. In June, according to MACV estimates, enemy strength in South Vietnam totaled approximately 215,000--not much less than the peak figure of 222,000 in October 1965. But there had been a significant change in the composition of this force since that date. NVA troops in October 1965 had accounted for only 26 percent of the enemy strength; by June 1968 they made up 70 percent of the total. A decline in the quality of the enemy units was also noticeable; many of the new recruits from NVN had been sent forward hastily with inadequate training.[45]

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43. (S) OASD(SA), "Interdiction Campaign Since March 31," 22 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68. (S-NOFORN) CIA/DIA, "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1 Jul-31 Oct 68," (S-3378/AP-4A). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 4-8, Fig. 4-2. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 18202 to CDR 7th AF, 250141Z Jun 68, JCS IN 92362. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Combat Analysis Group, J-3, "Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia," CAG Statistical Series, vol. I, No 7, 3 Feb 69.

44. (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 1-18, Fig. 1-10.

45. General Wheeler reported these conclusions in July 1968, following a visit to South Vietnam (which is described in a later section of this chapter). (TS) CM-3489-68 to Pres, 19 Jul 68; Att to JCS 2472/331, 22 Jul 68, JMF 911/399 (19 Jul 68).

Strength of US Forces in SVN as of end of 1968[135]

Service	Personnel		Infantry Bns/ Separate Cavalry Sqdns	Divisional Cavalry Sqdns/Recon Bns	Tank Bns	Artillery Bns	Air Defense Bns	Strike Acft Sqdns	Recon/Electronic Acft Sqdns	Interceptor Acft Detachments
	Authorized	Actual								
Army	368,309	360,034	86	6	3	61	4	-	-	-
Navy	37,409	36,346	-	-	-	-	-	16	7	-
Marine Corps	82,241	80,792	21	2	2	10-2/3	1	11	1	-
Air Force	61,541	59,029	-	-	-	-	-	42	13	3
Coast Guard	-	443	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	549,500	536,644	107	8	5	71-2/3	5	69(1)	21(2)	3

(1) Plus 3 detachments (1 AF, 2 Navy).
(2) Plus 5 AF detachments.

135. (S) NMCC, "Summary of US and Third Nation Military Units in Southeast Asia," 30 Dec 68. (Personnel figures are as of 26 December.)

of the Khe Sanh withdrawal be carefully planned in order to minimize adverse publicity and triumphant enemy propaganda.37

There followed several days of intensive discussion between Washington, Saigon, and Honolulu of the wording of a suitable press release. The version finally approved declared that the enemy now had at least eight divisions in I CTZ--two more than in January--and was therefore capable of mounting "several sizeable attacks concurrently." It followed that "mobile forces, tied to no specific terrain, must be used to the utmost to attack, intercept, reinforce, or take whatever action is most appropriate to meet the enemy threats."38 This announcement was released by MACV headquarters on 27 June (Saigon time). The withdrawal began several days later and was completed on 7 July.39

The new strategy adopted in northern I CTZ was connected with a change in the concept of defense against infiltration through the DMZ. The DUEL BLADE anti-infiltration barrier had envisioned a line of strong points along the border of the DMZ near the coast, linked by sensors and observation towers, with additional sensors clustered in the defiles of the mountainous terrain farther west. Construction of the strong points, however, had been seriously hindered by enemy artillery and mortar fire from the DMZ. When the siege of Khe Sanh began in January 1968, work on the barrier was suspended. After the Tet offensive, a new plan which stressed the use of mobile forces for defense, was drawn up and approved by COMUSMACV in June. Work on the strong-point obstacle system

37. (TS) Msgs, JCS 6703 to COMUSMACV, 181355Z Jun 68; JCS 6781, 191959Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 6844 to COMUSMACV, 202134Z Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68.

38. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8250 to CJCS, 220420Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 6929 to COMUSMACV, 221804Z Jun 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 230715Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 7043 to COMUSMACV, 252257Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8515 to CJCS, 261202Z Jun 68; (TS) JCS 7068 to COMUSMACV, 261653Z Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68.

39. NY Times, 27 Jun 68, 1. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 8756 to CJCS et al., 010920Z Jul 68; MAC 9072, 070954Z Jul 68; OCJCS File 24-Hour Summaries 1 through 50.

The only significant increase in third-country strength during 1968 came from Thailand, which had sent a regiment to SVN in 1967. Extensive discussions among the Joint Chiefs of Staff, COMUSMACV, and COMUSMACTHAI, and between the US and Thai Governments, eventuated in an agreement in 1967 that approximately 10,000 men would be added to the small Thai force.[139] Accordingly, some 5,500 men of the RTA Black Panther Division landed in SVN in July and August 1968. The rest of the force was scheduled for deployment in January 1969.[140] Australia increased her contribution to the SVN war by sending a tank squadron to SVN in February and March 1968, in accord with a decision reached in 1967.[141]

The Republic of the Philippines, on the other hand, withdrew approximately 230 men of its Civic Action Group. President Marcos had at first announced that half of the 2,000-man PHILCAG would be withdrawn because of political and budgetary pressure, but US intervention induced him to reconsider this decision.[142]

The total strength of the FWMAF in SVN as of the end of 1968 was 65,731 men. This force contribution, amounting to about 12 percent of the US strength, had a political and psychological as well as a military value. The following table shows the distribution of this strength among the nations involved.

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139. (S) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, I, pp. 272-276.

140. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Jul 68. (S) Memo, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, to Bromley Smith, White House, "Request for Information," 7 Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

141. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 9322 to CINCPAC, 030145Z Apr 68, JCS IN 20746.

142. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 280913Z Jul 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 10366 to CJCS, 010901Z Aug 68; (S-GP 4) DJSM-976-68 to CJCS, 3 Aug 68; (S) Msg, JCS 8884 to CINCPAC, 062036Z Aug 68; same file, Aug 68.

Aside from the continuing attacks on Saigon already described, the most notable enemy action after the middle of May was an abortive effort in Kontum Province (II CTZ), apparently aimed at the city of the same name Anticipating an attack in this region, COMUSMACV had reinforced Kontum Province with the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (drawn from III CTZ), and had concentrated B-52 strikes on the gathering enemy forces. On 25 May, in an apparent beginning of the attack, hostile units struck at several fire support bases surrounding Kontum city. Some bunkers were overrun and occupied, but were promptly recaptured. Although skirmishes continued in the general area, the threatened offensive never materialized, apparently because it had been preempted by US air strikes and ground operations.[33]

By the first week in June the number of attacks initiated by the enemy, which had soared to 277 for the week of 5-11 May, had dropped to 50. The figure declined further in July, reaching a low of 27 for the week of 28 July-3 August. In contrast, the enemy had launched an average of 64 attacks per week during the five weeks preceding the May offensive. Five of those attacks had involved forces of battalion size or larger. During May there were 17 battalion-sized attacks; six took place in June and only two in July.[34]

Encouraging evidence of military progress appeared after the May offensive in the form of group surrenders of enemy personnel. The first such incident during the entire war occurred on 1 May in Thua Thien Province, when 95 enemy troops surrendered to elements of the US 101st Airborne Division. A number of similar incidents took place during June. Noteworthy was the surrender of 31 men, led by their commander, in Gia Dinh Province--the first organized unit to give up. The largest group consisted of 141 men, who gave themselves up to VNMC units near Saigon on 19 June.[35]

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33. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3-5. (S) Sowers, VC/NVA Operations and Activities, p. 160. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 125-68, 27 May 68. (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV 15438 to CJCS, 290841Z May 68, JCS IN 42518; 15856, 020950Z Jun 68, JCS IN 49697. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 16652 to CJCS, 100940Z Jun 68, JCS IN 64017. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," May 68.

34. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement.

35. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, p. 254.

has already been noted. Its consequences were greater for the civilian economy of SVN than for the US military effort, which primarily employed airlift and intracoastal water transportation.[144]

Some thought had to be given to the day when it would be necessary to begin dismantling the huge supply complex in SVN. Planning for the end of hostilities (T-day) had begun in 1967. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved CINCPAC OPLAN 67-69, which provided for withdrawal of US and FWMA forces (except for a MAAG which might include as many as 13,425 men) within six months after fulfillment of the conditions set forth in the Manila Communique.[145] In October 1967 Secretary McNamara circulated draft memorandums to serve as guidelines for the preparation of detailed T-day plans by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Services. Following review and revision, these directives were promulgated on 25 July 1968. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were made responsible for preparing redeployment plans covering three alternative assumptions. The first was that withdrawal would be completed within six months, except for approximately 30,000 US and FWMA troops, including both a MAAG and a small combat force; the other two allowed twelve months for withdrawal, with retention of either 30,000 men or of a larger force (two full divisions plus a MAAG). All three alternatives assumed a "six month period of uncertainty" between T-day and the beginning of withdrawal (R-day).[146]

On 3 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent the Secretary of Defense an initial redeployment schedule, limited to major combat forces, to cover the three assumed contingencies. Mr. Nitze, in reply, suggested some minor changes to be

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144. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012225Z Jan 69, JCS IN 10811. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, chs. 6, 7.

145. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 67-69 (originally 67-68), "A Post-Hostilities Plan for Vietnam," 31 Mar 67; (TS) JCS 2054/705-5, 21 Jun 67; JMF 346 (31 Mar 67) CINCPAC 67.

146. (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., "T-Day Planning," 10 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/170, 11 Oct 67; (S-GP 4) JCSM-686-67 to SecDef, 9 Dec 67 (derived from JCS 2472/170-1, 1 Dec 67); JMF 907/305 (10 Oct 67) sec 1. (S-GP 4) JCSM-189-68 to SecDef, 28 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/170-5, 18 Mar 68); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., "T-Day Planning," 24 Jul 68, Att to JCS 2472/170-7, 29 Jul 68; same file, sec 2.

others to the effectiveness of the new military measures in Saigon. Ambassador Bunker suggested a third possibility, that the enemy was conserving his resources in preparation for another major attack. In any event, he considered the recent defensive arrangements most impressive: the improved radar and aircraft surveillance, the reduction in reaction time for counterbattery fire (one minute was now the optimum), and the close collaboration between US and ARVN forces engaged in defense of the capital. Early in August he was able to report that US and ARVN forces around Saigon were running no less than 500 ambushes every night. These operations, together with B-52 strikes, would be effective, he believed, in forestalling the major offensive against Saigon that seemed clearly in the offing.[28]

Related to the enemy's destruction of lives and property in Saigon was another problem: the damage wrought by US and ARVN forces in combatting the invaders. On 12 May a member of the staff of the US Embassy in Saigon, Mr. Charles Sweet, had reported that many people in Saigon were angry at what they considered indiscriminate use of allied firepower, particularly aircraft. An officer on MACV's staff concluded, after an investigation, that Mr. Sweet had greatly exaggerated the amount of destruction and had underestimated the strength of enemy forces. He recommended, however, that MACV rules of engagement governing the use of tactical air, helicopter gunships, artillery, and naval gunfire be clarified.[29]

The problem was strikingly dramatized by an incident that took place in Saigon on 2 June. A group of high-ranking SVN officials were watching an attack on a position held by enemy infiltrators. Suddenly a rocket from a US helicopter went astray and landed in their midst. Seven men were

28. (S) Msg, Saigon 32822 to State, 170645Z Jul 68, JCS IN 45436. (S) Msgs, Saigon 31058 to State, 261200Z Jun 68, JCS IN 95876; 31193, 271400Z Jun 68, JCS IN 99683; 34694, 071100Z Aug 68, JCS IN 84286. (C) Msg, Paris 20251 to State, 311605Z Aug 68, JCS IN 42282, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Negotiations Aug-Sep 68.

29. (C) Extract from Memo for Record, Actg CS, MACV, "Evaluation of Saigon Situation," 14 May 68; (C) "Report of Investigation Concerning Destruction Resulting from the VC Offensive of 5-13 May 1968," n.d., sgd by COL Robert W. Marshall, USA, with 1st Ind by COMUSMACV, MAC J-2, 2 Jun 68, Att to JCS 2472/314, 12 Jun 68; JMF 911/052 (14 May 68) sec 1.

Chapter 53

THE PARIS NEGOTIATIONS: FIRST PHASE

Evolution of the US Negotiating Position

President Johnson's speech on 31 March, in which he announced restrictions on air operations over NVN and issued a call for negotiations, had been followed by a month of discussions between Washington and Hanoi, ending with an agreement to open formal talks in Paris on 10 May (see Ch. 50). The purpose of these bilateral talks was to consider the possibility of further restrictions upon the bombardment of NVN in discussions that, according to the hope of the Administrations, might move on to general peace negotiations.

The curtailment of US bombing below the 20th Parallel had been a unilateral act. In announcing it, the President had held out the hope of further restrictions on a quid pro quo basis. "Even this very limited bombing of the North could come to an early end," he said, "if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi." This broadly worded statement was compatible with the so-called "San Antonio formula," announced by Mr. Johnson on 29 September 1967, in which the President had expressed a willingness to stop all air and naval bombardment if such action would "lead promptly to productive discussions. We of course assume," the President had continued, "that while discussions proceed, North Viet-Nam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation."[1]

But what kind of "restraint" would be acceptable to the United States in return for an end to "this very limited bombing"? What actions by NVN would constitute "taking advantage" of US concessions? Moreover, should the enemy be required to agree in advance to abjure such actions, or should he be asked only for a promise to enter substantive negotiations and thereafter be trusted to do nothing to

1. Dept of State Bulletins, LVIII (15 Apr 68), p. 482; LVII (23 Oct 67), p. 521.

The Harassment of Saigon, May-June 1968

The warning of a second phase of the May offensive was soon borne out. A new series of attacks on the capital began, small in scale but potentially deadly in their cumulative effects. Two types of operations were involved. Starting on 18 May Saigon was subjected to intermittent nighttime fire from mortars and 122mm rockets, launched by enemy forces outside the city. At the same time, bands of infiltrators, numbering from 5 to 30, slipped into the city to carry out assassinations and to destroy or sabotage bridges, power and police stations, and other important structures.

The obvious intent of these activities was to increase the burden on South Vietnam's economy, to intimidate the populace, and to demonstrate that the GVN was powerless to protect its citizens even in its own capital. Ambassador Bunker viewed this new campaign with the utmost seriousness. The initial reaction in Saigon, he reported, had been resentment toward the VC, but he feared that this feeling might be redirected toward the United States and the GVN if the attacks continued.[24]

Both MACV and the JGS moved swiftly to take all possible defensive measures against this latest enemy threat. The broad "rocket belt" surrounding Saigon--an area of roughly 300 square miles within which the enemy, with his primitive and readily transportable launching equipment, could deliver fire upon the capital--was placed under 24-hour aerial surveillance. Construction of special radar-equipped observation towers to detect enemy firing positions and to direct counterfire was begun; meanwhile, tall buildings were employed for the same purpose. Counterfire procedures were reviewed, and every effort was made to reduce the time involved.

To cope with terrorist infiltration, plans were made to intercept and engage enemy squads outside the city. Additional ARVN and US units were assigned to the defense of

24. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 119-68, 20 May 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, pp. 250-251. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 7605 to CINCPAC, 091112Z Jun 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. (S) Msgs, Saigon 28566 to State, 291140Z May 68, JCS IN 43930; 29565, 101157Z Jun 68, JCS IN 64371; 29880, 131200Z Jun 68, JCS IN 72383.

Specific Objectives

1. Cessation of the Bombing

The US is prepared to agree to a cessation of naval, air and artillery bombardment of North Viet-Nam. In keeping with North Vietnamese statements, it is our understanding that such action on our part will lead promptly to talks in which both sides would be free to raise any elements which they believe would lead to a peaceful settlement. We are prepared in these talks to make arrangements to this end, including agreement on announcement of bombing cessation and subsequent talks.

2. Prompt Talks

Substantive talks should be held within 3 to 7 days following the cessation of bombing.

3. Serious Talks

We should seek explicit confirmation by the North Vietnamese that any topic relevant to the substance of peace could be raised in the substantive talks.

4. Participants

In any substantive discussions we expect to take account of the interests of the South Vietnamese Government and of our Manila allies. Participation in any such discussions affecting South Viet-Nam must not exclude the Government of the Republic of South Viet-Nam.

5. Not Taking Advantage

We should provide an adequate basis for the expectation that North Viet-Nam would not attempt to improve its military position as a result of the US cessation. North Viet-Nam should understand that the US would regard as acts of bad faith inconsistent with its restraints any such attempts. We would consider as examples of bad faith:

a) Artillery or other fire from or across the DMZ.

The course of events in SVN had been followed closely in Washington. "What can we do to get additional help to Westmoreland if he becomes involved in another major enemy offensive?" asked Secretary Clifford of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 May before it was clear that the offensive was over. "Very little," was the substance of the JCS reply, delivered on 21 May. Four Army brigades could be made available during July and August, they indicated, but their deployment would leave STRAF wholly devoid of combat-ready forces. To send Marine reinforcements would require further mobilization plus involuntary extension of terms of service. Fortunately the ebbing of the attack spared the Administration the necessity of facing the consequences of another call for reinforcements from COMUSMACV.[20]

The relatively small scale of the so-called "mini-Tet" offensive, together with its timing (a few weeks after the agreement to open talks in Paris), suggested that its purpose was political and psychological rather than primarily military or, in other words, that it was intended to strengthen the enemy's position at Paris. This was the opinion of Ambassador Bunker. Seizure and occupation of all or part of South Vietnam's capital would undoubtedly have constituted a powerful bargaining counter. But the enemy had failed to achieve this goal, and had suffered losses that were quite high in relation to the size of forces engaged, though well below those of Tet. As of midnight 8-9 May, Mr. Bunker estimated that the enemy had lost 5,781 killed in action since the offensive began, as opposed to 804 US and allied troops killed. A later estimate listed approximately 12,500 enemy killed during the first two weeks in May.[21]

For his fresh expenditure of blood, the enemy had two gains to show. On 10 May enemy troops in superior numbers had assaulted a Special Forces Camp at Kham Duc, in western Quang Tin Province (I CTZ). The camp was abandoned by its garrison two days later. This tactical success had potential

20. (S) Memo, SecDef to GEN Wheeler, 13 May 68; (TS) JCSM-315-68 to SecDef, 21 May 68 (derived from JCS 2472/291-1, 18 May 68, as ameded by Dec On 20 May 68), JMF 911/372 (13 May 68).

21. (S) Msg, Saigon 26826 to State, 091022Z May 68, JCS IN 95726. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement.

in the negotiations if military and political issues were separated, with the former being settled between the United States and NVN, the latter between the GVN and the NLF. Others, who saw the military and political issues as inseparable and believed the GVN should play a role in the settlement of both, favored multilateral talks on a basis of "our side"--the United States and SVN--versus "your side"--NVN and, presumably, the NLF. This position was upheld by MG DePuy, SACSA, in discussions with other officials.[4]

While the instructions for the US negotiating team were being drafted, General Wheeler, on 2 April, had conferred with Ambassador W. Averell Harriman, who had been named to head the US negotiating team. Mr. Harriman expressed a desire to have a list of quid pro quo actions, over and above the minimum US demands, with which to enter the negotiations. At General Wheeler's direction, J-5 drew up a list of seven possible demands upon NVN that might be specified as a basis for complete cessation of air attacks. The minimum demand was abstention from the three NVN actions in the Study Group "no advantage" list: artillery or ground attacks across the DMZ and increase in troop movements into NVN. Other demands were listed in increasing order of severity, ranging from de-escalation of actions of violence against SVN civilians to withdrawal of NVA forces from Quang Tri Province.[5]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered these J-5 proposals and tentatively decided to strengthen them by including certain other demands--notably a "conclusive demonstration" that NVN had begun withdrawal of its forces and supplies from the South, which would admittedly amount to "virtual surrender" by Hanoi. They ordered the paper sent back to J-5 for revision. Meanwhile, they informally transmitted their views to Ambassador Harriman and to LTG Andrew J. Goodpaster, who would serve as chief military advisor to the delegation.

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4. (TS-GP 1) SACSA M-269-68 to CJCS, 8 Apr 68; (TS-GP 1) Memo, MG DePuy and MG Seignious to CJCS, "Negotiations," 8 Apr 68; (TS-GP 1) SACSA M-272-68 to CJCS, 9 Apr 68; OCJCS File 091, Vietnam (Negotiations) Through Apr 68.

5. (TS) Tab A to J-5 T-34-68, 5 Apr 68, JMF 907/503 (5 Apr 68). (TS-GP 4) J-5 T-34-68, 5 Apr 68, same file.

The Second Enemy Attack, May 1968

Following his repulse in the Tet offensive, the enemy turned his attention to repairing his losses. His resupply effort was reflected in the increase in truck traffic already noted. At the same time, the communists refilled their ranks by in-country recruiting and especially by a faster flow of infiltration from the north. US estimates were that infiltration had risen from approximately 7,500 in December 1967 (just about the monthly average for that year) to 24,000 in January 1968. In February the number dropped to 12,000, but immediately thereafter it soared to record numbers: 25,000 in April, 30,000 in March and May.[16]

By the middle of April it had become clear that the enemy possessed both the capability and the intention to attack. Prisoner interrogations, reports of agents, the pattern of enemy troop concentrations, and information supplied by a high-ranking rallier pointed to an offensive that would be nationwide in scope while focusing principally upon Saigon. Various dates given for the launching of the attack fitted with other evidence indicating that the operation was first planned for the middle of the month but was postponed for various reasons. Intelligence warnings were clearer and less equivocal than those available before the Tet offensive. It appeared that the enemy, observing the lack of coordination at that time--when units in II CTZ had "jumped the gun" and swung into action a day ahead of others--had modified his security restrictions and had disseminated advance information more widely to the attacking forces.[17]

It came as no surprise, therefore, when widespread mortar and rocket attacks on cities and towns burst forth on the night of 4-5 May, heralding the beginning of the enemy's second general offensive of 1968. But it soon became evident that no replay of Tet was in the offing. The scope and intensity of the attack fell far short of the earlier one. Aside from Saigon, follow-up ground attacks occurred at only a few

16. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 1-18 (numbers read from bar chart, Fig. 1-10).

17. (S-NOFORN) DIA IBs 76-68, 17 Apr 68; 77-68, 18 Apr 68; 82-68, 25 Apr 68; 84-68, 29 Apr 68. (S) Msgs, Saigon 25643 to State, 250900Z Apr 68, JCS IN 86582; and 26229, 021134Z May 68, JCS IN 80438. (S) CM-3228-68 to SecDef, 23 Apr 68, OCJCS 091 Vietnam Apr 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68, p. 249. Some of the evidence warning of this attack has been described in Ch. 50.

The terms of the written negotiating instructions lost some of their significance in the light of President Johnson's determination that he himself would be the "number one negotiator" for the US team. The President made this fact clear in a meeting with the US delegation on 6 May, just before its departure for Paris. He instructed the members to concentrate on protecting the US interest without worrying about public opinion, which would be his responsibility. He had removed himself from politics, he reminded his hearers, to make certain that he could not be "pressured" into accepting an unsatisfactory settlement. The negotiators were also told to seek an agreement on terms more favorable than the bare-minimum San Antonio formula; if they were unable to do so, he would make the decision when to fall back from the opening position. He added that he expected that the United States would end by accepting this formula and stopping the bombardment of NVN accordingly, but that subsequent negotiations would fail and that it would eventually be necessary to resume the air offensive in order to bring about a settlement of the war.[8]

Opening of the Paris Talks

President Johnson selected a six-man team to represent the United States in Paris. The senior member, Ambassador W. Averell Harriman, was a seasoned diplomat with a reputation for skill and tenacity. His deputy, Cyrus R. Vance, formerly Deputy Secretary of Defense, also held the rank of Ambassador. The military advisor was LTG Andrew J. Goodpaster, Commandant of the National War College. Other advisors were Philip C. Habib of the State Department and William J. Jorden of the NSC Staff. Daniel J. Davidson served as Secretary to the Delegation as well as special assistant to Ambassador Harriman.[9]

In order to make certain that the delegation received up-to-date military information during the negotiations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to make available to General

8. (TS) Memo, BG R. N. Ginsburgh to CJCS, 7 May 68, OCJCS File 091, Vietnam (Negotiations) May 68.
9. (U) "Viet-Nam Mission Delegation List," Tab A of OCJCS File, Briefing Book for VN Mission in Paris.

individual and 93 crew-served weapons had been captured, as well as large amounts of ammunition and supplies.[10]

The pattern of activity that had marked the war in the months before the Tet offensive had now come to prevail once more. US and SVN forces were seeking out the enemy, who was attempting to avoid contact while bringing in supplies and reinforcements. General Westmoreland was able to report that "Allied operations during April were highlighted by an unparalleled display of aggressiveness and cooperation by US, ARVN, FW forces and governmental agencies."[11]

Not content, however, General Westmoreland pressed his subordinates to even greater efforts. "Commencing immediately," he told them in a directive on 6 May, "our objective will be to make a major breakthrough toward military victory in South Vietnam. . . . The fighting will be characterized by an aggressive, unremitting, twenty-four hour application of pressure on all enemy elements throughout RVN." The enemy was to be hounded relentlessly, day and night, in all weather; loss of contact would be considered a tactical error. The RVNAF would be assigned a "full role." Support of pacification operations, which "are inseparable from the main offensive," would be given as much attention as any other responsibilities of commanders.[12]

While ground operations were pushed forward with increasing vigor, air and naval warfare continued unabated. Following the President's announcement of 31 March concerning bombing restrictions over NVN, the ROLLING THUNDER campaign was redirected to concentrate on targets south of the 19th Parallel, such as roads, waterways, truck parks, and storage facilities. The number of attack sorties against North Vietnam increased

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10. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 94-68, 20 Apr 68; 118-68, 18 May 68. (TS-GP 3) CM-3265-68 to SecDef, 29 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68. (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 5223 to CJCS et al., 191155Z Apr 68; MAC 5270, 201135Z Apr 68; MAC 6516, 181119Z May 68; OCJCS File DMZ/North I CTZ Reports.

11. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 159-4 (one digit illegible) to CINCPAC, 071442Z May 68, JCS IN 94380.

12. The text of this directive, originally transmitted from COMUSMACV to his subordinate commanders as COMUSMACV 12854, 061047Z May 68, is quoted in full in (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 15262 to Paris, 271808Z May 68, JCS IN 39239, in response to a news story alleging the existence of a message from COMUSMACV that supposedly asserted a need to win the war within three months.

Minh, who had faced Harriman across the negotiating table at the 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos. His deputy was Ha Van Lau, chief of NVA liaison to the International Control Commission on Vietnam.[13]

On 10 and 11 May the second-ranking delegates, Vance and Lau, worked out procedural arrangements for the conference in discussions that turned out to be surprisingly cordial. Both parties agreed to refer to their meetings as "official conversations" and to use English and Vietnamese as official languages, employing French as a working language. They also agreed that not more than twenty members of each delegation would be present in the meeting room at any time. Tape recording of the plenary sessions would be permitted, but no joint minutes would be kept. Press representatives would be allowed to attend the formal sessions in numbers determined jointly by both delegations and by the host government. Daily meetings would be held, with each session scheduled individually beforehand. The first was set for 13 May at 1030.[14]

The first session took place on schedule at the International Conference Center in the old Majestic Hotel. Nguyen Xuan Thuy fired the opening verbal salvo on behalf of North Vietnam. Setting forth his country's objectives, he repeated the four points that had been proclaimed repeatedly by Hanoi: withdrawal of US forces, temporary restoration of the North and South zones of Vietnam under the terms of the 1954 Geneva Agreement, self-determination for SVN in accord with the program of the NLF, and peaceful reunification of North and South. He assailed the United States and the "puppet" regime in Saigon as aggressors. The primary purpose of the talks, declared Thuy, was to arrange for the "unconditional cessation of the bombing and other acts of war against the DRV." The secondary purpose was to discuss any "problems which interest both sides."[15]

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13. NY Times, 10 May 68, 1. (S) Biographic Information on NVN delegation, OCJCS File, Briefing Book Prepared for VN Mission in Paris.

14. (S) Msg, Paris 13866 to State, 11 May 68. NY Times, 12 May 68, 1.

15. NY Times, 14 May 68, 18.

the position of CINCPAC on 31 July.[5]

Friendly Forces Resume the Offensive

None of the changes in command had any immediate effect upon the tactical situation in South Vietnam. There the Tet offensive had left both sides temporarily incapable of major action. The enemy had suffered shattering losses in manpower that would take time to replace, while US and ARVN force dispositions had in some degree been disrupted by the need to cope with the wave of attacks on the cities.

The allied military machine was quick to recover. As soon as the enemy offensive had subsided, General Westmoreland seized the opportunity to resume once more the painstaking task of hunting down and destroying the principal enemy forces. He laid plans to clear the five provinces around Saigon and to undertake a major offensive in IV CTZ, while at the same time launching a thrust in I CTZ to relieve the Marines besieged at Khe Sanh. Explaining these plans to his subordinates on 2 March, General Westmoreland stressed the importance of an aggressive attitude. "We must stop thinking about the next VC attack," he emphasized, "and start thinking, all of us, of continuing to carry the attack to the enemy."[6]

The operation in IV CTZ (TRUONG CONG DINH) was launched on 6 March by elements of the US 9th and the ARVN 7th Divisions. This was a long-term action, which was still continuing two months later. At that time, it was combined with Operation PEOPLE'S ROAD, which had begun about the same time with the objective of clearing and repairing the principal highway (Route 4) between Saigon and the Mekong River.[7]

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5. (TS) HQ USMC, Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, entry 31 Jul 68.
6. (TS-NOFORN) Msg, COMUSMACV 02984 to CJCS, 030238Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68.
7. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 60-68, 12 Mar 68; 66-68, 19 Mar 68. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," May 68. (FOUO) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 245.

surrender. This conviction was reflected in their arrogant self-assurance. Little progress could be expected so long as they remained under this impression.[18]

In an effort to loosen the rigidity of the NVN negotiating posture, the United States sought the assistance of the Soviet Union. Ambassador Harriman met with Soviet Ambassador Zorin in Paris on 19 May and informed him that NVN's intransigence was sorely trying US patience. It would be impossible, he continued, for the United States to continue its bombing limitation indefinitely unless Hanoi exhibited some matching restraint. Zorin replied that NVN would not budge from its present position, at least not before the US Presidential election. When Ambassador Harriman suggested the possibility of private discussions (perhaps attended by Soviet representatives), Zorin dismissed this proposal as premature.[19]

Zorin's assessment of the NVN position was borne out at the fourth session, held on 22 May. Harriman suggested immediate and genuine demilitarization of the so-called DMZ as a constructive step, but drew only a denial that NVN was violating the Zone. "We all felt that today was a chapter out of 'Alice in Wonderland,'" reported Harriman afterwards. "We kept hearing the refrain, 'It's so because I say it's so.'"[20]

Impact of the Enemy's May Offensive

The Paris talks opened while the enemy's "mini-Tet" attack was in progress, as described in an earlier chapter. A major objective of this attack, in the opinion of Ambassador Bunker, was to reinforce the enemy's negotiating position by success on the battlefield. But the initial assault, centering on Saigon, was thrown back at considerable cost to the attacking forces. The subsequent prolonged siege

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18. Statement made by Ambassador Vance to GEN Wheeler in August 1968, reported in (TS) Msg, CJCS to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, JCS 9019, 091649Z Aug 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

19. (S) Msg, Paris 14365 to State, 20 May 68, JCS IN 25509.

20. (TS) Summary Chronology. (S) Msg, Paris 14502 to State, 22 May 68, JCS in 29385.

people of South Vietnam were for the first time experiencing a sense of pride in the performance of their army, just as they were rallying to support the government in its hour of crisis. If the RVNAF continued to improve their combat record, there was room to hope that they might constitute a major symbol of national unity around which the democratic elements in SVN might rally. If so, the armed forces of RVN might contribute to the successful resolution of the political conflict even as they prepared themselves for their primary task of assuming responsibility for the nation's security after the United States withdrew its forces.

The second phase of the enemy's attack on Saigon--rocket and mortar fire by enemy forces outside the city--began on 18 May 1968. Ambassador Bunker promptly reported to Washington President Thieu's fear that these assaults would seriously undermine confidence in the GVN. The enemy, according to Thieu, had no intention of seriously negotiating and was merely "testing our patience." How long, he wondered, did the United States intend to restrain its air campaign in the absence of reciprocity from the enemy? President Johnson took note of Thieu's fears in a public statement on 23 May. Addressing himself to the attacks on SVN cities, Mr. Johnson declared that he would "not permit the enemy's mortars and rockets to go unanswered."[23]

Privately, the President faced up to the grim possibility that the Paris negotiations might terminate in utter failure, and asked the Departments of Defense and State to examine the possible consequences. Accordingly, Secretary of Defense Clifford, on 24 May, asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to answer the following questions:

> A. What policy should we follow if North Vietnam continues to remain unresponsive in the Paris Talks by refusing reciprocity and refusing to negotiate on other issues until we stop the bombing?
>
> B. If the Paris Talks break down completely or are abandoned, what plan or plans should we follow to achieve a resolution of the conflict?[24]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff replied on 29 May 1968. Answering the first question, they recommended a greatly expanded bombing campaign, to embrace all of NVN except areas close to the Chinese border, which should be "continued until Hanoi begins prompt and productive talks." A decision concerning the beginning of this campaign should be made soon, in order to take advantage of the favorable weather from May to November. They emphatically rejected

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23. (TS) Msg, Saigon 27938 to State, 22 May 68, JCS IN 29204. NY Times, 24 May 68, 1.

24. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Possible U. S. Courses of Action if Paris Talks Stall or Break Down," 24 May 68, JMF 911/305 (24 May 68).

the end of March 1969. But Ambassador Bunker believed that United States officials should not be disappointed if the desertion rate did not subside with time. He explained that intelligence sources had indicated that the VC/NVA forces were having similar problems and that both sides might continue to suffer from desertion because of underlying social factors, such as localism and ethnic and religious antagonisms.[48]

The problems of inadequate leadership also troubled the RVNAF throughout 1968. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had repeatedly warned the Secretary of Defense that leadership shortcomings might prevent the RVNAF from accomplishing any mission expected of them regardless of how much equipment they were given. With the approval of an 850,000-man force structure, the problem of acquiring additional and competent leaders became magnified.

COMUSMACV convinced the Joint Chiefs of Staff that additional officers and NCOs should be provided for the RVNAF.[49] The JGS developed a three-year program to increase the number of officers and NCOs to satisfy the requirements of an 850,000-man force. Ninety percent of that leadership was to be made available by the close of CY 1968. Plans were also made to improve the RVNAF promotion regulations.[50]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided the Secretary of Defense with monthly RVNAF officer/NCO strengths, promotion projects, and evaluation of the promotion program; but OSD officials became skeptical that the JGS was not doing all that should be done to improve the inadequate leadership situation. They considered that the JGS programs would

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48. (C) Tab D to J-5 BP 65-68, 20 Dec 68, JMF /not bound/. (C) Msg, Saigon to State, 14 Sep 68, JCS IN 66904. (C) Msg, COMUSMACV 41264 to JCS, 11 Dec 68, JCS IN 62883; (C) Msg, COMUSMACV 17134 to CJCS, 15 Dec 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68.

49. (C) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization," 1 Nov 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 68.

50. (C-GP 4) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "RVNAF Officer/NCO Strengths and Promotions," 18 Nov 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 68.

recommended. He expressed the view that any bombing beyond the 20th Parallel would be certain to lead to a rupture in the talks, and reaffirmed his doubts that bombing between 19 and 20° N would be efficacious in influencing Hanoi's stance in the negotiations. His views carried the day; the President ordered no change in military operations in the North for the time being.

The case for restraint was strengthened on 3 June when Le Duc Tho, a ranking member of the Hanoi Politburo, suddenly arrived in Paris. No one knew what instructions he might bring with him, but Ambassador Harriman considered that his arrival might at least signal a degree of flexibility in the enemy's position. In view of this possibility, Harriman recommended that consideration of renewed bombing between 19 and 20° N be further deferred.[27]

But it seemed necessary to take some action in light of the continuing enemy harassment of Saigon by artillery and rocket fire and by infiltrators. Ambassador Bunker, on 3 June, declared that there was a "strong argument for linking any cessation of bombing in the north to the cessation of terror attacks on the cities of the south." He suggested that the NVN delegation at Paris be warned that "continued attacks would call for appropriate retaliation," which might take the form of reprisal raids on NVN cities. Ambassador Harriman opposed this suggestion; in his view, to demand a cessation of attacks on Saigon while continuing bombardment up to 19° would violate the terms of the President's offer of 31 March, while any actual attacks on Hanoi or Haiphong would result in a breakoff of negotiations. Instead, he proposed, with Washington's approval, to bring up the matter in the negotiations and to deliver a suitable warning to Hanoi.[28]

Accordingly, on 12 June, at the eighth meeting of the negotiators, Ambassador Harriman condemned the terrorist attacks on Saigon and warned that their continuation could have "most serious consequences" for the negotiations. He followed up this statement, on 19 June by calling attention to criticism of these attacks by other nations. Two days

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27. (S) Msg, Paris 15436 to State, 3 Jun 68, JCS IN 53908.
28. (S) Msg, Saigon 28566 to State, 29 May 68, JCS IN 43930. (S) Msg, Paris 15453 to State, 4 Jun 68, JCS IN 53076. (S) Msg, Paris 16017 to State, 11 Jun 68, JCS IN 66094. (S) Msg, State 17552 to Paris, 3 Jun 68, JCS IN 52604. (S) Msg, State 180491 to Paris, 11 Jun 68, JCS IN 67960.

Regular Forces	
ARVN	387,250
VNN	18,500
VNMC	9,000
VNAF	18,750
Total Reg. forces	433,500
Territorial Forces	
RF	219,000
PF	174,000
Total Terr. forces	393,000
Total RVNAF	826,500

This total was approximately 220,000 greater than a year earlier. Of this increase, 160,000 had been volunteers and the rest draftees.

The GVN had also expanded its paramilitary forces to 127,000 (45,000 in the CIDG and 82,000 in the National Police). In addition, a People's Self-Defense Forces (PSDF) had been organized, with a strength of over 1,000,000 men and women. More than half of these had received some training, and over 100,000 were armed.[45]

This expansion in size was accompanied by an improvement in quality. In the judgment of both CINCPAC and Ambassador Bunker, the RVNAF had improved in aggressiveness, self-confidence, and quality of leadership in 1968.[46] Their assessment was borne out by an increase in the number of battalion-size operations conducted by the RVNAF in the

45. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) OCJCS Study Group, 1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam (U), pp. 5-14, 15 Jan 69. (S) Interv, Robert J. Watson and Arthur A. Chapa with CDR Paul F. Abel, USN, Revolutionary Development South Vietnam Branch, Office of SACSA, 3 Feb 69. (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225.

46. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012225Z Jan 69, JCS IN 10811. (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225.

be expected of Hanoi after the cessation. Ambassador Vance recommended that this proposal be discussed in detail at private meetings between himself and his opposite number, Ha Van Lau. Thuy at first promised merely to take this suggestion under advisement, but later accepted it.31

The prospect of meetings of this nature offered real hope for progress. It was hardly to be expected that much could be accomplished at the public sessions, where the temptation was irresistible to speak for the record with a view to influencing opinion around the world.

Deadlock

On the evening of 27 June, Ambassador Vance met privately with Ha Van Lau and explained in more detail the "two-phase" proposal that had been submitted in outline the day before. He stressed his conviction that the plan went far to meet Hanoi's demands. The United States was willing to promise a total bombing halt subject to an understanding regarding actions by Hanoi that would follow, not precede, the cessation, which could therefore be considered "unconditional." Lau disputed this interpretation, pointing out that the proposal still envisioned concessions as a price for the bomb halt; however, he promised to think it over.32

The plan presented by Ambassador Vance differed in an important respect from the original Soviet proposal. The Soviets had recommended a second "phase" consisting of reciprocal actions to be taken by both sides, following at an unspecified interval of time after the termination of "phase one," i.e., the end of the bombing. This formula resembled one that the United States had drawn up in November 1966; it had been submitted to Hanoi through intermediaries, but the response had been negative. After meeting with Zorin on 28 June and hearing the Soviet plan explained in detail, Ambassador Vance tentatively decided that it offered some promise. If the United States had reasonably firm advance assurance that Hanoi would take some steps toward de-escalation after a bomb halt, it might well afford to agree to compensatory actions of its own at the same time and

31. (S) Msg, State 189086 to Paris, 24 Jun 68, JCS IN 92823. (S) Msg, State 190068 to Paris, 25 Jun 68, JCS IN 94890. (S) Msg, Paris 17053 to State, 26 Jun 68, JCS IN 95930.

32. (S) Msg, Paris 17153 to State, 28 Jun 68.

to exist on T-Day, such as the size and location of enemy forces and the prospect of continuing infiltration.[41] These questions would, of course, be shaped by the terms of any peace agreement. On 12 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a list of "essential conditions for a cessation of hostilities" in RVN. They recommended that US government officials review and agree on the conditions and that they then be forwarded to the US representative in Paris. The US negotiators should be instructed to make all efforts to convince their North Vietnamese counterparts to agree to all the conditions. Their level of success would determine the security situation in RVN once hostilities in RVN had ceased.

If the North Vietnamese agreed to all the conditions, an "optimum" security situation would result. If only partial agreement were achieved, then an "intermediate" situation would remain. But, if most of the conditions were rejected, the "worst" security situation could be expected.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that the Phase II force structure plan had been designed to cope with the "worst" security situation. COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, they stated, had been instructed to develop plans to deal with the "optimum" and "intermediate" situations. But they advised the Secretary of Defense that it seemed wise to continue with present plans to establish a force structure capable of coping with the "worst" situation. As a minimum, they recommended approval of the FY 1970-71 Phase II goals and General Abrams' accelerated plan.[42]

On 18 December, Mr. Nitze approved the Phase II force structure (except for portions dealing with the VNN and with ammunition requirements). He also approved acceleration of the Phase II plan as proposed by General Abrams. Since he had not approved the proposed VNN force structure, the newly

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41. (S) Note to Control Div, "T-Day Planning and Improvement and Modernization of the RVNAF," 2 Dec 68, JMF 907/305 (9 Dec 68).

42. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) JCSM-732-68 to SecDef, 12 Dec 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7580 to CINCPAC, 12 Dec 68; JMF 907/305 (9 Dec 68).

COMUSMACV replied that the B-52 campaign was essential to provide close support for US ground forces operating in northern I CTZ. It was restricted to tactical objectives and therefore could not be compared with the enemy's undirected random fire upon the capital of SVN. His views, with the added endorsement of CINCPAC, were forwarded to Secretary of Defense Clifford with General Wheeler's approval. Ambassador Bunker told the State Department that he fully concurred, and added that "bombing in the north is our major card to play in obtaining from Hanoi the restraints that are needed politically in SVN at this stage." Termination of the B-52 campaign in and near the DMZ should be decided only as part of an overall agreement to restore the DMZ, which in turn should be one element in a "total package of mutual restraints," including an end to terrorist attacks on SVN cities. The Department of State apparently accepted these views and did not pursue the matter further.[36]

On 15 July Vance laid before Lau the elements of the two-phase plan drawn up by the Department of State, characterizing them as a variation on the proposal submitted on 27 June. Lau showed himself willing to discuss them. At the end of the meeting, he promised he would study the plan to see whether it contained anything new.[37]

Two weeks then elapsed, during which the NVN negotiators indicated that they were studying the plan but showed no interest in further private talks at that time. Ambassadors Harriman and Vance were by then beginning to despair of making significant progress within a reasonable time so long as the United States continued on its present track. They set forth their views in a message to Washington on 29 July. They suspected that Hanoi was gambling that the forthcoming Democratic Party nominating convention would produce an irreparable cleavage in public opinion--one that might fatally undermine the US negotiating position and stampede the next Administration into a "precipitous withdrawal." The danger was increased by the unmistakable

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36. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 9376 to CJCS, 120915Z Jul 68; (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 130036Z Jul 68; (S-GP 3) CM-3476-68 to SecDef, 12 Jul 68; OCJCS File 091, Vietnam (Negotiations) 1 Jun-31 Jul 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 32558 to State, 13 Jul 68.

37. Msg, Paris 18012 to State, 16 Jul 68, JCS IN 04200.

they urged that COMUSMACV be authorized to continue progress toward Phase II goals.37

The United States ceased all bombing of NVN on 31 October, as described in a later chapter. This action caused General Abrams some concern because he saw that it strengthened the possibility of substantive negotiations leading to the mutual withdrawal of US/NVN forces in the near future. On 9 November, he recommended that the United States begin implementation of the Phase II RVNAF improvement and modernization program as rapidly as possible. He proposed an accelerated version of the Phase II plan that would permit completion by FY 1972. It called for two actions as follows. First, some equipment in the hands of US forces would have to be turned over to the RVNAF. Second, the RVNAF Phase II force structure would be expanded to 877,090. The additional 27,090 personnel would be assigned to long lead-time and on-the-job training programs to prepare the RVNAF for transition to Phase II without having to draw the needed personnel from the ARVN or the RF as previously planned. This action would permit retention of the strong ground force structure currently being built under Phase I. Once the new personnel were trained and the RVNAF was able to absorb the additional equipment, new units would be formed and provided with equipment taken from selected US units. Most of these additional RVNAF personnel would be assigned to the VNN and the VNAF.38

The Secretary of Defense considered the Phase II plan and General Abrams' accelerated version of that plan until mid-December. During that period, officials within the Department of Defense reviewed the costs involved in building a RVNAF force structure of the size envisioned in Phase II.

Army officials pointed out that the Phase II equipment requirements would have an adverse effect on the readiness

37. (S-GP 4) JCSM-678-68 to SecDef, 13 Nov 68, same file, sec 8. (S-GP 3) Tab B to J-5 BP 65-68, 20 Nov 68, JMF /not bound/.

38. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 34325 to CINCPAC, 9 Nov 68, JCS IN 93364. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Nov 68, JCS IN 20488. (S-GP 4) MACV Report, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization - Phase II," 25 Dec 68, JCS 2472/406, JMF /not bound/.

The plan had been discussed with Under Secretary of State Katzenbach and Assistant Secretary Bundy during their trips to Paris. It was decided that Ambassador Vance should return to the United States immediately after the 31 July meeting to explain the plan more fully.[38]

The originators of this plan characterized it as "a return to the San Antonio formula." In fact, it placed the narrowest possible interpretation upon the formula: the United States would make "assumptions" about what the enemy would do but would not ask Hanoi to confirm them. Moreover, it was very close to the minimum "fallback" position with which Ambassador Harriman had entered the negotiations. The "assumptions" specified in the plan were identical with those contained in Ambassador Harriman's written instructions except for the additional stipulation of the freedom of SVN cities from attack.

The reception of this plan within the Administration is not documented by available records, but it was never put into effect. The President had evidently decided that the time was not yet ripe to retreat to the last line of diplomatic resistance. The month of August came and went with no dramatic political démarche at Paris.

The President's decision perhaps owed something to the fact that the enemy was preparing for his third offensive. In a public statement on 31 July 1968, Mr. Johnson ruled out any further concessions for the time being in view of recent massive enemy movements of troops and supplies into SVN. On the other hand, he also rejected, after some discussion, the possibility of resuming the bombing up to 20°N. This contingency was again considered when the enemy's attack finally began on 18 August, but was again rejected, presumably on the basis of assurances from General Abrams that he could cope with the situation.[39]

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38. (S) Msg, Paris 18692 to State, 29 Jul 68. (TS-GP 1) Msg, MG Seignious to CJCS, CROC 056, 29 Jul 68.

39. (TS) Msgs, JCS 9364 and 9366 /CJCS/ to COMUSMACV, 18 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

extend their coverage of territory and to assume responsibility for RD programs currently undertaken by ARVN forces, which would thus be released for regular ground operations. The rest of the proposed increase (9,785 men) would be assigned to long lead-time training programs, such as those for mechanics, communications-electronics technicians, and airplane pilots, as a first step in preparing the RVNAF for eventual transition to Phase II.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed an uncertainty that the RVNAF would be able to sustain a force level of 850,000 in the long run. However, they felt that even a short-term increase in forces would have its advantages. Not only would it permit expansion of the RF, but it would reduce the supply of manpower available to the enemy.[34]

Mr. Nitze approved the increase in RVNAF force levels to 850,000 on 1 November.[35]

The second and third modifications were minor and dealt with changes in RVNAF equipment requirements. Mr. Nitze approved them on 14 November and 6 December respectively.[36]

Planning for Phase II

The JCS plan for the second phase of RVNAF modernization, submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 15 November 1968, was intended to provide a force capable of coping with a "residual" insurgency threat after US, FW, and NVA forces had been withdrawn. Such a threat was defined as one involving up to 130 VC maneuver battalions (possibly including some NVA fillers), capable of regimental-size combat operations on a scale approximating that of 1964-1965. To meet this contingency, the plan

34. (S-GP 3) Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (Force Structure Increase) (U)," 23 Oct 68, on JCS 2472-14; (S-GP 4) JCSM-633-68 to SecDef, 25 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-15), JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 8.

35. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., "Increase in RVNAF Force Structure (U)," 1 Nov 68, Att to JCS 2472/272-16, same file, same sec.

36. (C-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5528 to CINCPAC and CSA, 14 Nov 68. (C-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7087 to CNO and CINCPAC, 6 Dec 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 9.

Chapter 54

THE PARIS NEGOTIATIONS: END OF THE BOMBING CAMPAIGN

The Diplomatic Thaw

The United States had seized upon the "two-phase" proposal of the Soviet Union in the hope of breaking the stalemate in the Paris negotiations. Details of the US version of this proposal were discussed in August 1968 in meetings between Ambassador Vance and Ha Van Lau, but there was little evidence of progress. Vance stressed that President Johnson was prepared to stop the bombing as soon as he received some indication of what course of action Hanoi would follow subsequently. Lau interpreted this statement as another demand for "conditions." The North Vietnamese spokesman also objected to the US insistence upon GVN participation in subsequent negotiations. Vance pointed out that Hanoi would not confer "recognition" upon the GVN merely by sitting at the same negotiating table; it was precisely for this reason that the United States was willing to talk to the NLF.1

Harriman and Vance were convinced that there would be no break in the deadlock unless the United States unilaterally terminated offensive operations against NVN territory.2 The President remained unwilling to do so. He asked the advice of COMUSMACV concerning the possible effects of an end of the bombardment. General Abrams replied on 23 August that the air interdiction program in the panhandle of NVN had been the principal cause for a reduction in the number of southward-moving trucks to 150-200 per day, as contrasted

1. (S) Msgs, Paris DELTO 556 to State, 5 Aug 68, JCS IN 00979, DELTO 627, 20 Aug 68.

2. Views of Ambassadors Harriman and Vance as reported by Mr. Samuel Berger, of the Embassy staff in Saigon, after visiting Paris and returning via Washington. (TS) Msg, JCS 9905 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 302257Z Aug 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS, MAC 12067, 061000Z Sep 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations) Aug-Sep 68.

Since the plan emphasized ground combat strength, only limited expansion was envisioned for ARVN logistic units and for the VNN and VNAF. Combat elements of the ARVN, including the RF/PF, would be allocated more than 64,000 of the planned increase of 84,001 men, with the rest distributed to the VNN and VNAF. It was anticipated that later, during Phase II, the ARVN would be reduced to allow expansion of the other services.

The JCS schedule called for the Phase I ARVN forces to be trained and ready for activation by the end of the third quarter of FY 1970 and the VNN and the VNAF by the end of the second quarter of FY 1971. The limited expansion envisioned for the VNN would take place during 1969. The entire RVNAF force structure could be modernized by the end of FY 1973, but achievement of Phase I objectives would depend on the ability of the Services to provide equipment on schedule and on the capacity of the RVNAF to absorb and utilize US materiel.[31]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that COMUSMACV believed the RVNAF capable of assuming an increased share of combat operations during FY 1969-70 if the Phase I Plan was implemented. But they reiterated their earlier warning that even after expansion and modernization the RVNAF might not be able to meet their objectives, because of deficiencies in training, morale, and leadership. They warned also that if US forces were withdrawn without adequate guarantees (such as those envisioned in the Manila Communique of 1966), the RVNAF would continue to require support by residual US forces. They stressed that the Phase I plan could not be implemented at the expense of other SEA or non-SEA programs without a further deterioration of an already unsatisfactory US world-wide military posture.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval of the Phase I plan along with the necessary additional funding and procurement authority. They also asked that COMUSMACV be given authority to make minor adjustments or revisions

31. (S-GP 4) JCSM-524-68 to SecDef, 29 Aug 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-7), JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 3. (S-GP 3) JCSM-577-68 to SecDef, 2 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-9), same file, sec 4A.

attacks on major cities and provincial capitals, or 3) a refusal by Hanoi to enter promptly into negotiations, in which the GVN must be included.[6]

At a meeting of the National Security Council on 25 September, the President and his advisors discussed the possibility of ending the bombing on the basis of the San Antonio formula narrowly defined, that is, on the basis of "assumptions" about NVN's future actions. At the conclusion, the President announced the following decisions:

1) Three conditions were basic to a cessation of offensive operations against NVN. These were the ones set forth in the letter to Kosygin: observance of the DMZ, absence of attacks on major cities, and the presence of the GVN in the subsequent negotiations.

2) Before ending offensive operations against NVN, it would be necessary to know what actions the enemy would undertake in regard to these conditions.[7]

The President had now come down to what one of his principal advisors, Mr. Walt Rostow, later termed his "hard and fundamental position."[8] A comparison with the original minimum position, as reflected in the instructions given to Ambassador Harriman in April 1968, shows how the focus of discussion had shifted. Thus the new list of US requirements made no reference to levels of infiltration as such; on the other hand, the demand for GVN participation was now stated far more explicitly than before. The issue

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6. This letter has not been found, but its contents were summarized by the President in a meeting at the White House in the early morning of 29 October. (TS) "Notes of the President's Meeting with Secretary Rusk . . . /et al/ October 29, 1968," no sig, OCJCS File Correspondence/Messages Pertaining to 1 November 1968 Cessation of the Bombing of North Vietnam. (Hereafter cited as (TS) Notes of the President's Meeting, 29 Oct 68.)

7. (TS) Msg, JCS 10964 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 252252Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations) Aug-Sep 68.

8. Statement by Rostow during White House briefing, 31 Oct 68, as reported in (C) Msg, State 265238 to Saigon et al, 1 Nov 68, JCS IN 80526, OCJCS File Correspondence/Messages Pertaining to 1 November 1968 Cessation of the Bombing of North Vietnam.

also approved the proposed FY 1969 force structure for ARVN combat units, for ARVN and VNMC artillery battalions, and for the RF/PF, as well as the planned activation of two VNAF helicopter squadrons. While he did not approve the rest of the plan, he instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review the RVNAF program in two phases. The Phase I plan would concentrate on maximizing the ground combat power of the ARVN, rather than on building a balanced RVNAF. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were to indicate the actions that the United States should take to reach this goal, assuming that the United States would continue participating in the war at presently approved levels. The Phase II plan should delineate a program to build a RVNAF force structure capable of coping with an internal insurgency if both NVA and US forces withdrew. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were to assume that the GVN would receive any necessary equipment as early as possible and that it would eventually acquire most of the facilities currently being used by US forces. Mr. Nitze asked that a preliminary report on Phase I be submitted to him by 15 August 1968.[26]

While these plans were being prepared, Mr. Nitze and the Joint Chiefs of Staff took steps to carry out the RVNAF expansion and modernization already approved for FY 1968. Owing to Mr. Nitze's decision temporarily to withhold funds, General Westmoreland approved a somewhat lower strength objective than had been authorized in Washington--751,513 instead of 801,215. But the process of mobilization set in motion by the GVN soon outstripped this goal. By the end of June 1968 the RVNAF had reached a strength of 765,050.[27]

The GVN's mobilization efforts were thus outpacing US support. The Joint Chiefs of Staff therefore recommended that, as an interim measure, the Secretary of Defense authorize the Military Departments to program certain equipment for ARVN combat and combat support units due to

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26. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (U)," 25 Jun 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-2), JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 2.

27. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3920 to CINCPAC, 2 Jul 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 4080 to CINCPAC, 5 Jul 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 2. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 19762 to CINCPAC, 9 Jul 68, JCS IN 29587, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 3.

1) Would the United States stop the bombing after it had received a clear answer to the question of GVN participation in the ensuing negotiations?

2) After such an answer had been given, would the United States consider the answer to this question to constitute a "condition" or "reciprocity" for stopping the bombing?

Harriman and Vance replied to the second question first. Participation of the GVN, they said, was in no sense a demand for reciprocity; it was a part of the US definition of "serious" talks. How could negotiations be meaningful unless Saigon's representatives took part? As for the first question, only the President could answer it. But they reminded the NVN negotiators of the other issues included in the US position: respect for the DMZ and an end to indiscriminate shelling of cities. "It is important to understand," they continued, "that we are not talking about reciprocity or conditions but the simple fact that after a cessation of all bombardment the President's ability to maintain that situation would be affected by certain elemental considerations. We do not look at them as a condition for stopping the bombing but as a description of the situation which would permit serious negotiations, and thus the cessation, to continue."

Le Duc Tho pointed to these words as an admission that an end of the bombing on these terms would be "unconditional." The US spokesmen took no issue with this interpretation. There followed a round of cautious verbal fencing in which Tho and Thuy vainly pressed their antagonists for an answer to their first question, while Harriman and Vance, with equal lack of success, sought a commitment that Hanoi would accept the presence of the GVN if this question were answered affirmatively. The meeting closed with an agreement that the US negotiators would consult Washington.12

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12. (S) Msg, Paris 22253 to State, 11 Oct 68.

the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw grave risks in a policy that would turn over the main combat role to the RVNAF too rapidly.[23]

On 23 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted the plan requested by Mr. Nitze on 16 April. It was designed to shift the burden of the war gradually to the GVN, completing the process by the end of FY 1973. It assumed that the RVNAF, when enlarged and improved, could successfully cope with the Viet Cong in the absence of large-scale infiltration, but that some US support would continue, especially for the GVN Navy and Air Force.

Under the JCS plan, the RVNAF would be expanded in three increments, or phases. The first phase would go into effect immediately and would run through FY 1968. During this period, the RVNAF would increase to the newly authorized FY 1968 strength of 717,214 and would be provided with modern equipment. The second increment would be implemented during FY 69, when the RVNAF would be further enlarged to 801,215 men, with additional modernization. The final phase would run from the close of FY 1969 through FY 1973. No detailed plans for this period were scheduled, since, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out, it was impossible at that time to determine the rate at which the RVNAF could absorb modern equipment. However, they did provide contingency measures for the third phase that allowed the RVNAF to take over equipment in the hands of selected US units if US and NVN forces withdrew from South Vietnam.

As to the ultimate effects of the plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that:

> the RVNAF, even though expanded and modernized may continue to suffer from important deficiencies, such as training, leadership, and morale, which may limit RVNAF capability to achieve the objectives established for it.

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23. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Discussion Topic for SecDef-JCS meeting, Monday, 29 Apr 68," 26 Apr 68; (TS) J-3 TP 42-68, 29 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

President Thieu of South Vietnam was also consulted, and he agreed to a bombing cessation on these terms, subject to an understanding that the allies would continue to press the offensive in the south and to keep up the interdiction campaign in Laos, and that the bombing would be resumed if the enemy violated Mr. Johnson's conditions. "After all," he said, "the problem is not to stop the bombing, but to stop the war, and we must try this path to see if they are serious."[15]

The President then consulted the troop-contributing countries, who agreed to go along with the settlement on his terms. On 14 October he consulted his key advisors: Secretaries Rusk and Clifford, the Chairman and other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CIA Director Helms, and General Taylor. Their judgment was that Hanoi was serious about negotiations and that the military risks involved in a settlement on these terms were "low and manageable."[16]

Armed with this consensus, the President instructed Ambassador Harriman to give NVN an affirmative reply to the question posed by Le Duc Tho on 11 October and to press for an agreement on a date for a bombing cessation, with subsequent negotiations to begin a day later.[17] But the NVN negotiators raised new obstacles. In the words of one US official, "Hanoi turned a bunch of rabbits loose in the house."[18] Objecting that one day's delay between the end of the bombing and the opening of substantive talks was insufficient, they sought an interval of several weeks, which they reduced successively to two weeks, then to one, finally settling for three days. They also wanted a joint communique that would describe the bombing halt as "unconditional," and a subsequent statement describing the ensuing negotiations as a "four-power conference" in order to enhance the prestige of the NLF. The United States rejected

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15. (TS) Notes of the President's Meeting, 29 Oct 68.
16. Ibid.
17. (C) Background Press Briefing at White House by W. Rostow, 31 Oct 68, as reported in (C) Msg, State 265238 to Saigon et al, 1 Nov 68, JCS IN 80526, OCJCS File Correspondence/Messages Pertaining to 1 November 1968 Cessation of the Bombing of North Vietnam.
18. "The Bomb Halt Decision," Life, 15 Nov 68, p. 87.

for the RVNAF program. Negotiations might well lead to a "freeze" on force levels and armaments in RVN or to restrictions on postwar US military aid to the GVN. It was therefore important to bring the RVNAF to maximum strength as rapidly as possible.

Realization of these facts shaped the JCS reply to Mr. Nitze. On 15 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told him that the goal should be

> ...to bring the RVNAF to a self-sufficient posture prior to any freeze, and thus create the largest sustainable RVNAF in-being prior to a negotiated settlement.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were thinking in terms of building an RVNAF force structure capable of coping with a "residual internal insurgency threat," but not of defeating a renewed invasion from North Vietnam.

They felt confident that the 801,215 force level could be reached even before the end of FY 1970, the date originally proposed by COMUSMACV. Recognizing that the armor, artillery, transport, construction, engineer, and other special equipment could not arrive in RVN in time to arm new recruits, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested that the new personnel could be armed with available M2 carbines and assigned to existing units as light infantrymen until the equipment could be deployed. The carbines might be provided as an interim weapon until M16s became available. They also recommended that all RVNAF, including RF/PF, be provided with M16s.[19]

This JCS memorandum apparently "crossed" one from the Deputy Secretary of Defense that showed that Mr. Nitze was thinking along the same lines. As he wrote:

> We have embarked upon a course of gradually shifting the burden of the war to GVN forces. We now must support as quickly as possible and to the maximum extent feasible efforts of the GVN to enlarge, improve, and modernize their armed forces.

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19. (S-GP 4) JCSM-233-68 to SecDef, "Accelerated Expansion of the RVNAF (U)," 15 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

President Johnson opened the meeting by narrating the course of the negotiations up to that point. He then summarized the substance of the "understanding" reached with North Vietnam on 27 October:

-- Hanoi has agreed in a secret minute and in our discussions to begin serious talks toward peace in Vietnam -- talks which would include representatives of the Government of South Vietnam.

-- We have made it clear to them that a continuation of the bombing cessation was dependent, first, on respect for the DMZ, and second, upon there being no attacks on the cities.

-- The Soviet Union, which has played a part in this negotiation, knows these circumstances intimately. Their understanding has been reaffirmed at the highest level in the last few days.

-- Both Hanoi and Moscow are clear that we shall continue reconnaissance of North Vietnam. That is why we agreed to stop only acts of force and not acts of war.

"It is the universal judgment of our diplomatic authorities," continued the President, "that North Vietnam's acceptance of GVN participation is a major event -- potentially setting the stage for an honorable settlement of the war." He cautioned his hearers against public statements referring to "conditions" for ending the bombing, but indicated his belief that Hanoi realized that the bombing would be resumed if the "understanding" were violated.

After some further remarks, Mr. Johnson began an intensive cross-examination of General Abrams, during which he made it clear that Abrams' judgment would carry more weight than that of anyone else. Asked about probable enemy intentions, the General replied that he expected that the enemy would abide by the agreement to respect the DMZ, but that another attack on Saigon could eventually be expected.

"If the enemy honors our agreement, will this be an advantage militarily?" asked the President. "Will it compensate for a lack of bombing up to the 19° parallel?" General Abrams answered both questions affirmatively.

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

On 19 March, General Wheeler informed the Secretary of Defense that it was important that the United States authorize expansion of the RVNAF force structure beyond the authorized FY 1968 level of 685,739 in order to permit the GVN to fill unit shortages, to sustain the momentum of RVNAF procurement and training programs, and to show US support of the GVN mobilization efforts. He recommended that this be done immediately by authorizing the addition of 31,475 personnel spaces previously authorized for expansion of the RVNAF during FY 1969.[15]

US Presidential Decision to Shift Major Portion of War Effort to GVN

President Johnson's decision to send only a limited number of US reinforcements to South Vietnam after the Tet offensive -- approximately 24,500 instead of the 206,000 requested by General Westmoreland -- has been described in an earlier chapter. In reaching this decision, the President determined to prepare the RVNAF to assume a greater share of the war effort. In his speech to the nation on 31 March 1968, Mr. Johnson applauded the GVN's recent mobilization efforts and stated:

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14. (TS) Msg, Saigon 21733 to State, 11 Mar 68, JCS IN 64635.

15. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) CM-3128-68 to SecDef, 19 Mar 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68). (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 07327 to CINCPAC, 15 Mar 68, JCS IN 72264.

Secretary Rusk had left the meeting to await a telephone call from Ambassador Bunker, who had been instructed to confer with the SVN President for the purpose. Shortly after six o'clock, Rusk called the President to report startling news from Bunker. Thieu had refused to approve the agreement. The interval between the bombing halt on 29 October and the opening of negotiations on 2 November was too short, he maintained. He wished Vice President Ky to head the SVN team, but more time would be required to enable him to assemble a delegation and to release the Vice President from his other duties.[24]

What to do? The President and his weary advisors reconvened to thrash out the alternatives: to proceed without Thieu's concurrence or to ask NVN for a delay. The first course of action, as Secretary Rusk observed, might lead to a disastrous split between Washington and Saigon, in which case the 29,000 lives and $70 billion expended by the United States in SVN would go for naught. General Wheeler pointed out that the GVN possessed the power to sabotage any agreement with Hanoi by conducting air raids on its own, since the RVNAF was not under MACV command. But any attempt to postpone the bombing halt ran the risk of angering Hanoi and upsetting the agreement reached after so many weeks of wrangling in Paris. Some suspected that Thieu was deliberately stalling in the hope that the Republican Party would capture the Presidency on 5 November, believing that he could expect stronger US support with Richard M. Nixon in the White House. They argued that Thieu had been given ample opportunity to select a delegation and to make other preparations in advance of the final agreement.

The President finally decided to seek a postponement in the effective dates of the Paris agreement. It was not of "world-shaking importance," he observed, whether substantive negotiations began on 2, 4, 6, or 8 November. "Let's see if they are serious," he said, referring to President Thieu's government. He then obtained an agreement from the NVN negotiators in Paris, resetting the bombing halt for 0800 EST on 1 November and the opening of negotiations on 6 November.[25]

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24. (TS) Notes of the President's Meeting, 29 Oct 68.

25. Ibid. The President's action in obtaining a revision of the Paris agreement of 27 October is not documented in this or other available records, but is evident from what occurred subsequently.

The level of hostilities in the urban areas had forced the GVN to supplement ARVN forces with RF/PF units redeployed from the countryside. As a result, some 96 RF companies and 388 PF platoons in II, III, and IV Corps had changed their mission or their location as of 29 February. US advisors reported that RF/PF capabilities had been degraded in 20 of the 44 provinces but felt that the units had performed better than expected. In most cases these units held their positions and fought the enemy forces.

MACV also reported that the performance of the Air Force and the Marine Brigade had been highly effective while that of the Navy had been excellent.

The Tet attacks amplified some problems in the RVNAF that the United States had been attempting to rectify prior to the offensive. Key among these were short-comings in weaponry and transportation. RVNAF forces had been equipped with less sophisticated weapons than those of the enemy, whose modern Russian AK-47 assault rifles, light and heavy machine guns, and antitank and artillery rockets had given him fire superiority. The shortage of transportation facilities had in many cases prevented RVNAF personnel on leave from rejoining their units during the offensive.[7]

On 3 February, General Westmoreland requested that the United States accelerate delivery of the M16 rifles, M60 machine guns and M29 mortars he had requested for the RVNAF prior to the Tet hostilities. He also asked that the RVNAF be provided with additional armored personnel carriers and helicopters.[8]

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7. (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 282. (S-GP 4) MACV, Report-Reassessment of RVNAF Status, as of 29 February 1968, 21 Mar 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68). (S) Msg DCG USARV to CSA, 121200Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (TS) CM-2973-68 to Spec Asst to Pres for National Security Affairs, 13 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 12-29 Feb 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 20928 to State, 1 Mar 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225.

8. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01586 to CJCS, 3 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. Tab C to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

"sellout." Occasional enemy rocket shells falling upon Saigon during these discussions gave point to their apprehensions. But the strongest objection raised by Thieu and his colleagues was to the prospect of meeting with representatives of the NLF under conditions that might imply an equality of status between that organization and the elected GVN. For Thieu, the issue was one of real substance, not a mere detail. He sought various procedural guarantees that would have insured against recognition of the NLF as a separate entity. Since these amounted to a demand that Hanoi virtually repudiate the NLF, Bunker dismissed them as unrealistic. At one point, the SVN officials urged a delay to enable them to open negotiations themselves with Hanoi concerning the status of the NLF. Bunker pointed out that the United States had done everything possible to meet the legitimate SVN demands when it arranged for talks on a two-side basis. He saw no reason why the GVN, like his own country, could not talk to the NLF on the basis of the "your side/our side" formula.

Ambassador Bunker and his aides finally left the Presidential palace at 0745 on 1 November (1845 EST, 31 October). Everyone present knew by then that President Johnson would soon go on the air to announce the bombing halt, without the concurrence of the GVN.[27]

The President's Announcement of 31 October

President Johnson planned to make a public announcement of the bombing halt on the evening of 31 October 1968, roughly twelve hours before the agreement with Hanoi would take effect. On that morning, the Joint Chiefs of Staff met and decided to send the President fresh assurance of their concurrence. They reached the following agreement (as reported by the Chairman):

> a. In the light of the understandings reached in Paris between our negotiators and those of the DRV, the military situation in Vietnam is such that cessation

27. (C) Bunker Background Press Briefing to US Correspondents, 4 Nov 68; (S) Msg, Saigon 41768 to State, 3 Nov 68; same file.

The RVNAF continued to show improvement throughout 1967. In October of that year the United States agreed to support a rise in force levels to 685,739 for FY 1968. The new RVNAF force structure would include:

ARVN	301,468
VNN	16,003
VNMC	7,321
VNAF	16,448
RF	183,546
PF	160,953
Total	685,739

GVN officials planned to support the rise in force levels by lowering the draft age to 19, extending tours of service by one year, and recalling some reservists. During FY 1969, the GVN would expand the draft to include 18-year-olds and would extend tours of service by an additional six months.[3]

In November 1967, General Westmoreland announced that his headquarters was taking further actions to improve the effectiveness of the RVNAF. Efforts were being made to improve their equipment, organization, leadership, training, morale, and management. Additional attention was also to be given to the US advisory effort.[4]

In line with these objectives, he requested delivery of ten items of equipment during 1968 to accelerate the modernization of RVNAF firepower, mobility, and communications. These items included M16 rifles, M79 grenade launchers, M60 machine guns, 81mm mortars, howitzers, trucks, radios, and additional ammunition allocations. Most of these items, including the M16s, were approved for delivery during 1968, but some were held up pending decision on the FY 1969 RVNAF force structure.[5]

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3. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1967, pp. 187-90.
4. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 10726 to CJCS, 9 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.
5. (S) Tab C to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

the cities are being shelled and where the demilitarized zone is being abused." The President thus revealed the substance of the "understanding" reached with Hanoi, though he was careful to make no reference to "conditions" for the bombing halt.

The President pointed out that he was taking this step after receiving assurance from his military advisors that no increase in US casualties was likely. "I cannot tell you tonight specifically in all detail why there has been progress in Paris," he said. However, he suggested several "hopeful events" that might have helped to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table: the growing strength of the GVN, the steady improvement in the RVNAF, and the "superb performance" of US forces.

Referring to his renunciation of reelection ambitions on 31 March 1968, Mr. Johnson declared that he had "devoted every resource of the Presidency to the search for peace in Southeast Asia." In conclusion, he promised to continue this attempt while he remained in office:

> I do not know who will be inaugurated as the 37th President of the United States next January. But I do know that I shall do all that I can in the next few months to try to lighten his burdens. . . . I shall do everything in my power to move us toward the peace that the new President -- as well as this President and, I believe, every other American -- so deeply and urgently desires.29

The President had now taken the fateful step that had been urged upon him for months by US "doves," whose ranks included some of the most prominent members of his own political party. Among many vociferous opponents of the war, in the United States and elsewhere, it had become virtually an article of faith that only the stubborn insistence of the United States upon the necessity of dropping bombs upon a small nation prevented the conclusion of peace in Vietnam. The President's action would put this conviction to the test in the weeks to come.

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29. Dept of State Bulletin, LIX (18 Nov 68), pp. 517-519.

indication of Hanoi's lack of good faith. He warned that a NVA/VC offensive would measurably set back the possibility of talks.[55]

Only a few hours later, however, the NVN representative in Vientiane unexpectedly delivered another note to Ambassador Sullivan proposing Paris as the site for talks commencing on or about 10 May.[56] The Administration at once decided to accept Hanoi's proposal and so informed its allies. Admittedly, Paris was less than ideal, but it was acceptable for initial talks. If the French Government created difficulties, a change in the site could be arranged for the substantive negotiations to follow.[57]

After obtaining agreement from the allies, President Johnson announced on 3 May that the United States Government accepted Hanoi's proposal to meet in Paris on 10 May. The President spoke of his belief that in Paris the parties would receive fair and impartial treatment. He also expressed hope that this agreement on initial contacts would lead to peace in Southeast Asia, but added a cautionary note for those who might expect too much from the talks: "This is only the first step. There are many, many hazards and difficulties ahead."[58]

55. NY Times, 3 May 68, p. 1
56. "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 70.
57. Ibid., p. 71.
58. "The President's News Conference of May 3, 1968," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, GPO: Washington, D.C., pp. 741-742.

Ambassador Bunker's judgment was borne out when, with the passage of time, Thieu's position softened and he eventually agreed to join the Paris talks. On 26 November the GVN announced "that it is prepared to participate in the new talks in Paris with the Hanoi Delegation to show the good will of the Republic of Viet-Nam and to test the good faith of Hanoi." The statement declared that the objections raised by the GVN "have been given satisfaction in their essential aspects" and that "the sovereignty of the Republic of Viet-Nam has been respected." At the same time, another statement put out jointly by the US and SVN governments provided assurances that were satisfactory from Thieu's viewpoint. It noted a clear understanding, accepted by Hanoi, that "our side" would be "constituted as separate delegations of the Republic of Viet-Nam and the United States." But the "persons on the other side of the table," regardless of the way they might be organized, would be regarded "as members of a single side, that of Hanoi, and for practical purposes as a single delegation." This position was "consistent with our view of the nature of the so-called National Liberation Front." The statement pointed out also that Hanoi had been told during the preceding discussions that the presence of the NLF would involve "no element of recognition whatever." Moreover, in future negotiations the GVN delegation would "play a leading role," and would "be the main spokesman on all matters which are of principal concern to South Viet-Nam."[32]

Coincident with these announcements, President Johnson released a statement hailing Saigon's decision to join the Paris talks, which, he said, "opens a new and hopeful phase in the negotiations." At the same time he warned that "we must expect both hard bargaining and hard fighting in the days ahead."[33] There seemed little reason to quarrel with this prediction. The situation in SVN could perhaps be compared with that reached during the Korean War by July 1951, when the communists had agreed to negotiations. Two years of seemingly interminable haggling had then ensued, during which the armies went on fighting.

It was perhaps worth noting that the settlement of the Korean War had involved the United States in controversies,

32. Dept of State Bulletin, LIX (16 Dec 68) pp. 621-622.
33. Ibid., p. 621.

The apparent deadlock over a talk site, coupled with this massive NVN logistical buildup indicating a pending NVA/VC offensive in SVN, prompted General Wheeler on 23 April to direct CINCPAC to make contingency plans for resuming the bombing of NVN beyond the 20th parallel. The plans were to cover three target options, each for a minimum of two days of strikes, and capable of being executed on short notice and with maximum surprise.[48]

By this time, President Johnson was also showing increased concern over the high infiltration rate. The decline in NVA/VC initiated attacks since his 31 March speech was gratifying, but the ever-increasing infiltration of men and supplies into SVN was viewed by the Administration as a clear violation of the "no advantage" conditions of the President's 1967 San Antonio formula. As Secretary of Defense Clifford interpreted the formula, infiltration was not expected to exceed "normal levels." A normal level for personnel had been estimated at around 6,000 men per month. Estimates of the infiltration rate for April, while admittedly "rougher" than usual, ran as high as 20,000--a peak rate for the entire war.[49]

By the Administration's estimate, North Vietnam was taking an intolerable military advantage of the bombing restrictions. Nevertheless, the President did not feel that he could resume the bombing above the 20th parallel, at least not as a first step. The unannounced restriction of the bombings between the 19th and 20th parallels was another matter.

On 28 April, the President indicated to General Wheeler that he was considering the possibility of resuming the bombing between these two parallels, and would probably make a decision on April 30. If he did decide to resume air strikes in this area, he wanted to make certain they would come as a surprise in order to insure maximum destruction. Accordingly, General Wheeler instructed CINCPAC to be prepared to resume strikes in this region in line with the President's suggestions.[50]

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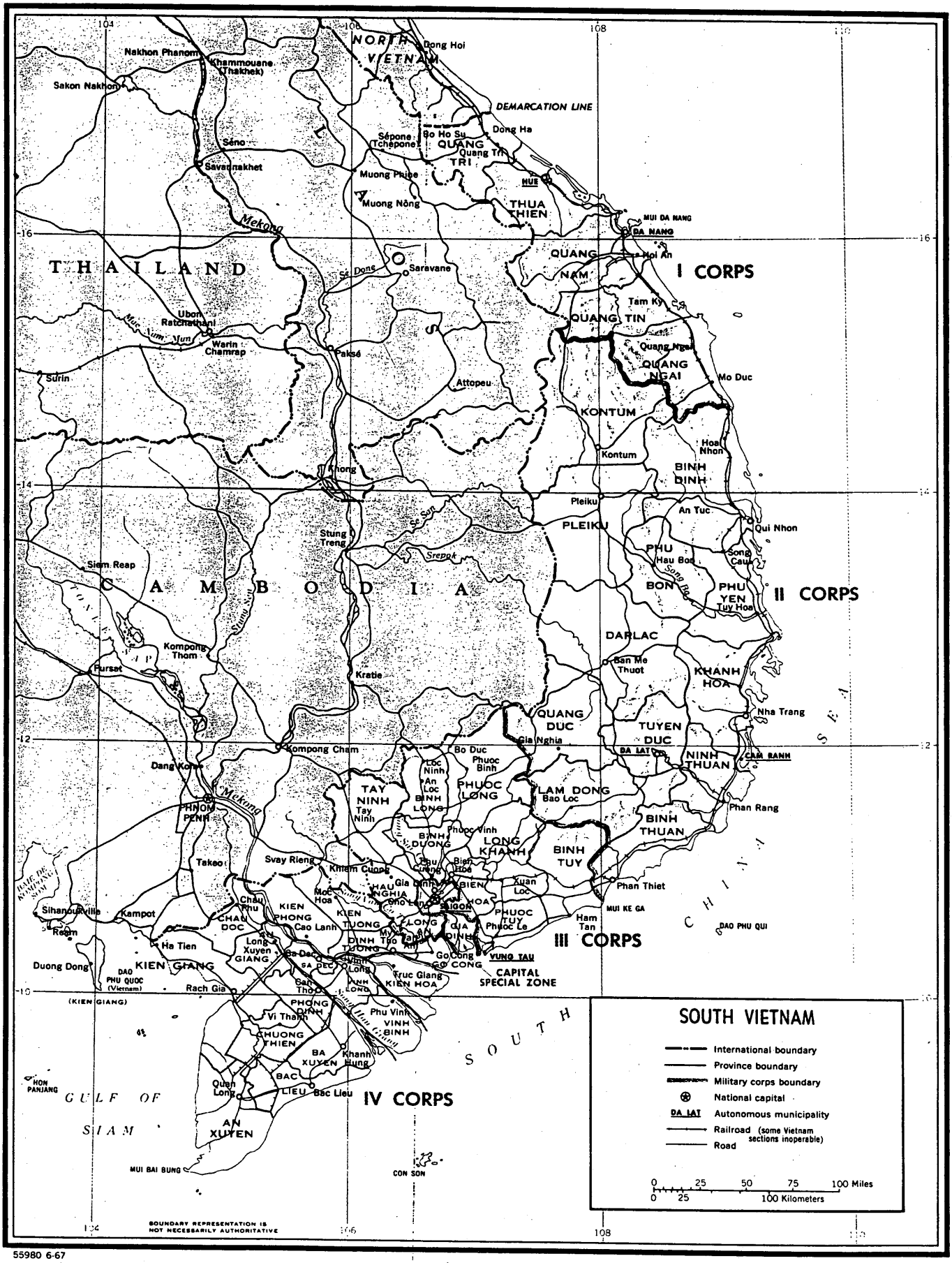
48. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7218 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16-30 Apr 68). See Ch. 52 for a detailed account of the pending NVN/VC offensive.

49. NY Times, 2 May 68, p. 1.

50. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4569 to CINCPAC, 28 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16-30 Apr 68).


NORTH VIETNAM
Dong Hoi
DEMARCATION LINE
Dong Ha
Bo Ho Su
QUANG TRI
Quang Tri
HUE
THUA THIEN
MUI DA NANG
DA NANG
Hoi An
QUANG NAM
I CORPS
Tam Ky
QUANG TIN
Quang Ngai
QUANG NGAI
Mo Duc
KONTUM
Kontum
Hoai Nhon
BINH DINH
Pleiku
PLEIKU
An Tuc
Qui Nhon
PHU BON
Hau Bon
Song Cau
PHU YEN
Tuy Hoa
II CORPS
DARLAC
San Me Thuot
KHANH HOA
Nha Trang
TUYEN DUC
Gia Nghia
BA LAT
NINH THUAN
CAM RANH
LAM DONG
Bao Loc
Phan Rang
BINH THUAN
BINH TUY
Phan Thiet
MUI KE GA
Ham Tan
DAO PHU QUI
S E A
C H I N A
Sakon Nakhon
Nakhon Phanom
Khammouane (Thakhek)
Sépone (Tchepone)
Séno
Savannakhet
Muong Phine
Muong Nong
Mekong
THAILAND
Saravane
Se Dong
Ubon Ratchathani
Mun
Mun
Warin Chamrap
Paksé
Attopeu
Surin
Khong
Stung Treng
Se San
Srepok
CAMBODIA
Siem Reap
Stung Sen
Kompong Thom
Pursat
Kratie
Kompong Cham
Bo Duc
Loc Ninh
Phuoc Binh
An Loc
PHUOC LONG
BINH LONG
TAY NINH
Tay Ninh
Dang Kor
Mekong
PHNOM PENH
Takeo
Svay Rieng
Khiem Cuong
Phuoc Vinh
BINH DUONG
LONG KHANH
Phu Cuong
Bien Hoa
Xuan Loc
Gia Dinh
HAU NGHIA
Moc Hoa
Go Dau Ha
SAIGON
BIEN HOA
PHUOC TUY
Phuoc Le
Sihanoukville
Kampot
Kep
Ha Tien
CHAU DOC
Chau Phu
KIEN PHONG
Cao Lanh
KIEN TUONG
Long Xuyen
GIANG
Ba Dec
SA DEC
DINH TUONG
Vinh Long
Go Cong
VUNG TAU
CAPITAL SPECIAL ZONE
Tan An
Tan An
Tan An

The United States had now offered a list of fifteen possible locations. NVN, however, was quick to charge that none satisfied the two conditions that the US itself had insisted upon. Many of the countries on the list were not neutral, and most had no diplomatic relations with North Vietnam. It thus rejected all of the sites recommended by the US. North Vietnam repeated its preference for Warsaw, and charged the United States with "full responsibility for delaying the talks between the two sides." The United States replied that Warsaw was not acceptable as a site because Poland was a direct contributor to the Vietnamese war.[40]

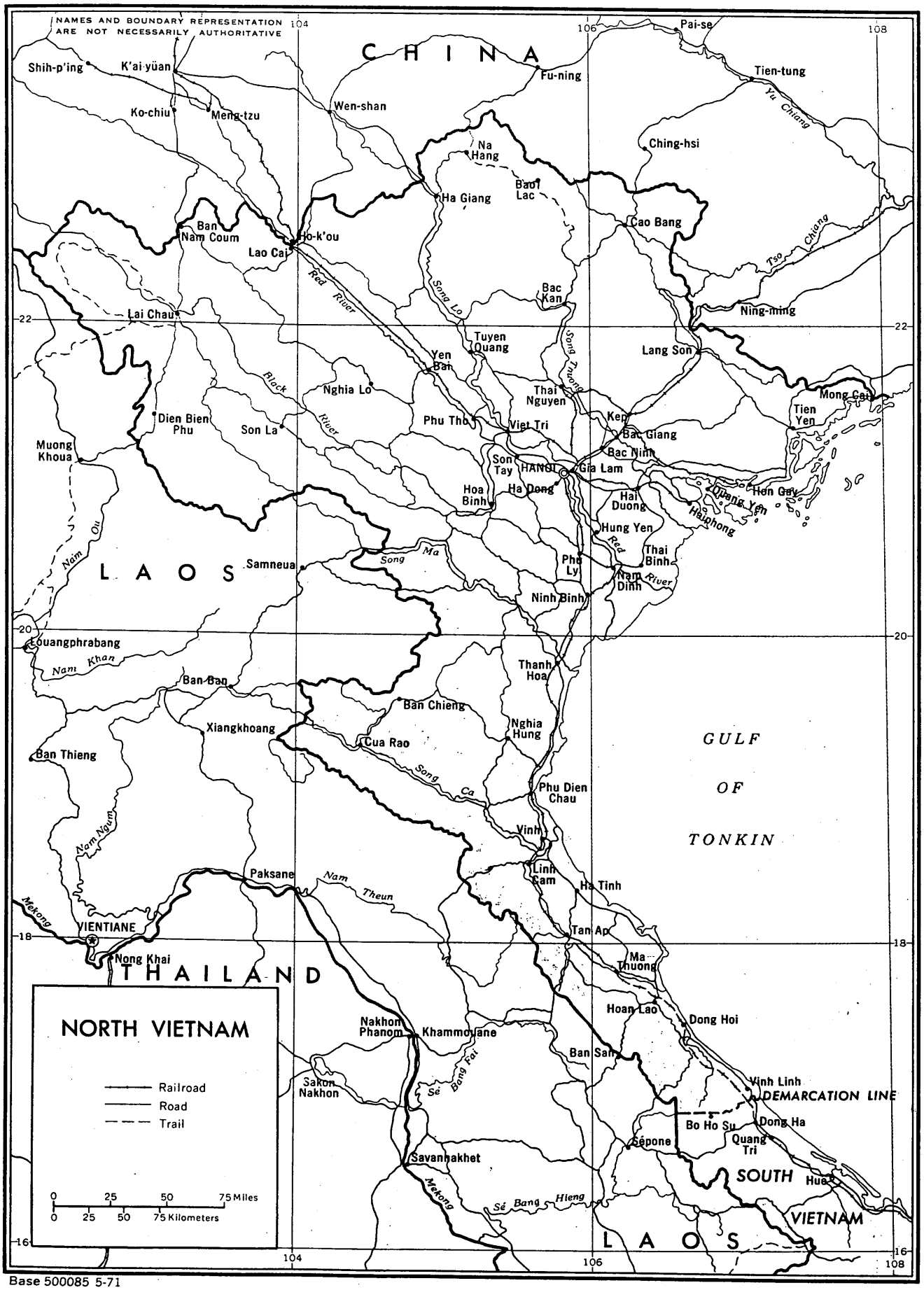
In subsequent public statements, Secretary Rusk expressed his impatience with NVN's intransigence. Almost three weeks had passed since the President had ordered a restriction on the bombardment of NVN. In this time, the United States had suggested fifteen sites while NVN had offered only two. This record, Rusk felt, showed none of the flexibility indicated in Hanoi's 3 April message. "While the US was businesslike in proposing sites, NVN engage[d] in polemics. . . . meanwhile NVN infiltration continues and is growing in face of US unilateral act of deescalation."[41]

Increasing Enemy Threat and the Question of Expanding ROLLING THUNDER

Secretary Rusk's doubts about NVN's sincerity with regard to the talks had increased with recent reports from the field. Before mid-April enemy-initiated actions had declined sharply. Some observers were inclined to view this as evidence of deescalation on the part of NVN. Others, including the allied military field commanders, believed that the decline resulted from the continuing general allied offensive, which forced the enemy to withdraw to comparatively safe sanctuaries in the border areas of Cambodia and Laos where he could regroup his forces and prepare for another offensive of his own.[42]

Evidence that the enemy was indeed preparing for a new offensive began to mount by mid-April. On 18 April a COMUSMACV intelligence survey of enemy LOCs in the DMZ area revealed a massive enemy effort underway to move large quantities of

40. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
41. Ibid., p. 39.
42. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS et al., 130212Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).



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Map II

accommodate a large number of diplomats and the world press. It was also in a neutral country. This made it the favorite choice for the US Government.[31] Still, Switzerland was a European nation, and North Vietnam did not have a mission there, which made its acceptance by NVN unlikely. For this reason, the President stated his readiness to consider "any reasonable alternative suggestions" by the DRV.[32]

For the next five days there was no official reply from Hanoi. On April 8, the day the President had proposed for the beginning of talks in Geneva, the NVN Representative in Vientiane delivered Hanoi's brief, formal reply. Hanoi pointedly ignored President Johnson's Geneva proposal, but agreed to meetings at the ambassadorial level, and suggested Phnom Penh, Cambodia, as an appropriate place. If the US was not agreeable to Phnom Penh, then it was open to "another place to be mutually agreed upon." President Johnson publicly acknowledged this message, but made no reference to its content.[33]

In his official reply on 9 April, the President ruled out Phnom Penh on the grounds that the United States did not have there a diplomatic mission, which was necessary to insure secure communications. The President repeated his preference for Geneva, but also proposed four Asian sites as possible alternatives, with the first meeting to take place on 15 April: Vientiane, Rangoon, Djakarta, or New Delhi.[34]

The NVN reply, dated 11 April, countered with a suggestion of Warsaw, with a date of 18 April for the beginning of the talks.[35] This suggestion came as a surprise, since it had been expected that NVN would insist on an Asian site. Warsaw was clearly unacceptable to the US because Poland's assistance to NVN did not qualify it as a neutral in the Vietnam war. But rather than address itself to this second suggestion in private, the United States Government decided to prod Hanoi publicly. Accordingly, the White House issued a comparatively lengthy public statement that went beyond the mere acknowledgement of Hanoi's latest response. "On serious matters of this kind," the statement read, "it is important to conduct talks in a neutral atmosphere, fair to both sides. The selection of an appropriate site in neutral territory, with adequate communications facilities, should be achieved promptly through

31. (TS) Project B, OCJCS File, Viet-Nam Negotiating Book.
32. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 2.
33. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
34. (TS-GP 3) Msg, State 143729 to Vientiane, 9 Apr 68, JCS IN 33785, OCJCS File, CROCODILE Outgoing, (1-30 Apr 68).
35. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 11.

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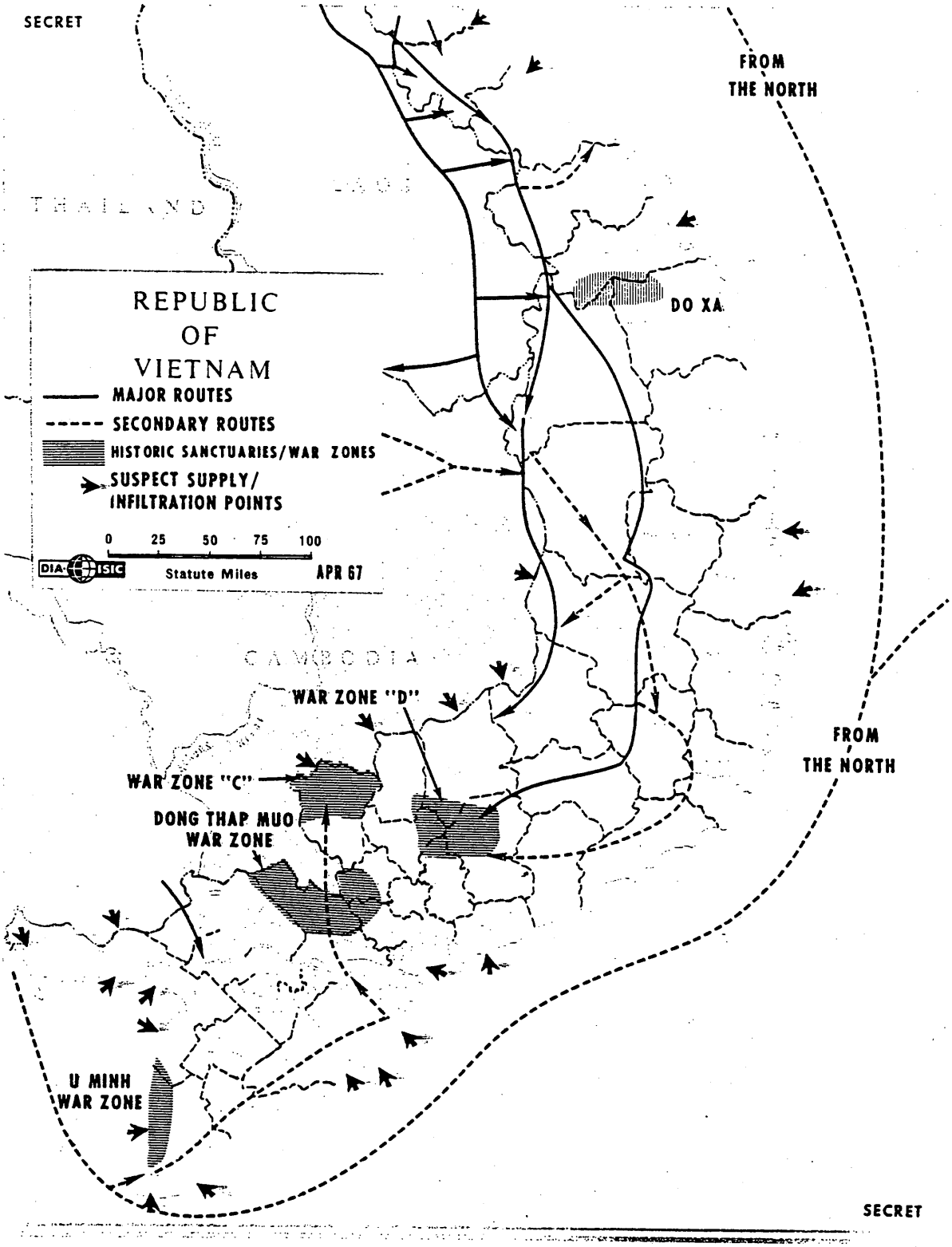
1967

VC/NVA SUPPLY AND INFILTRATION ROUTES



MAP III

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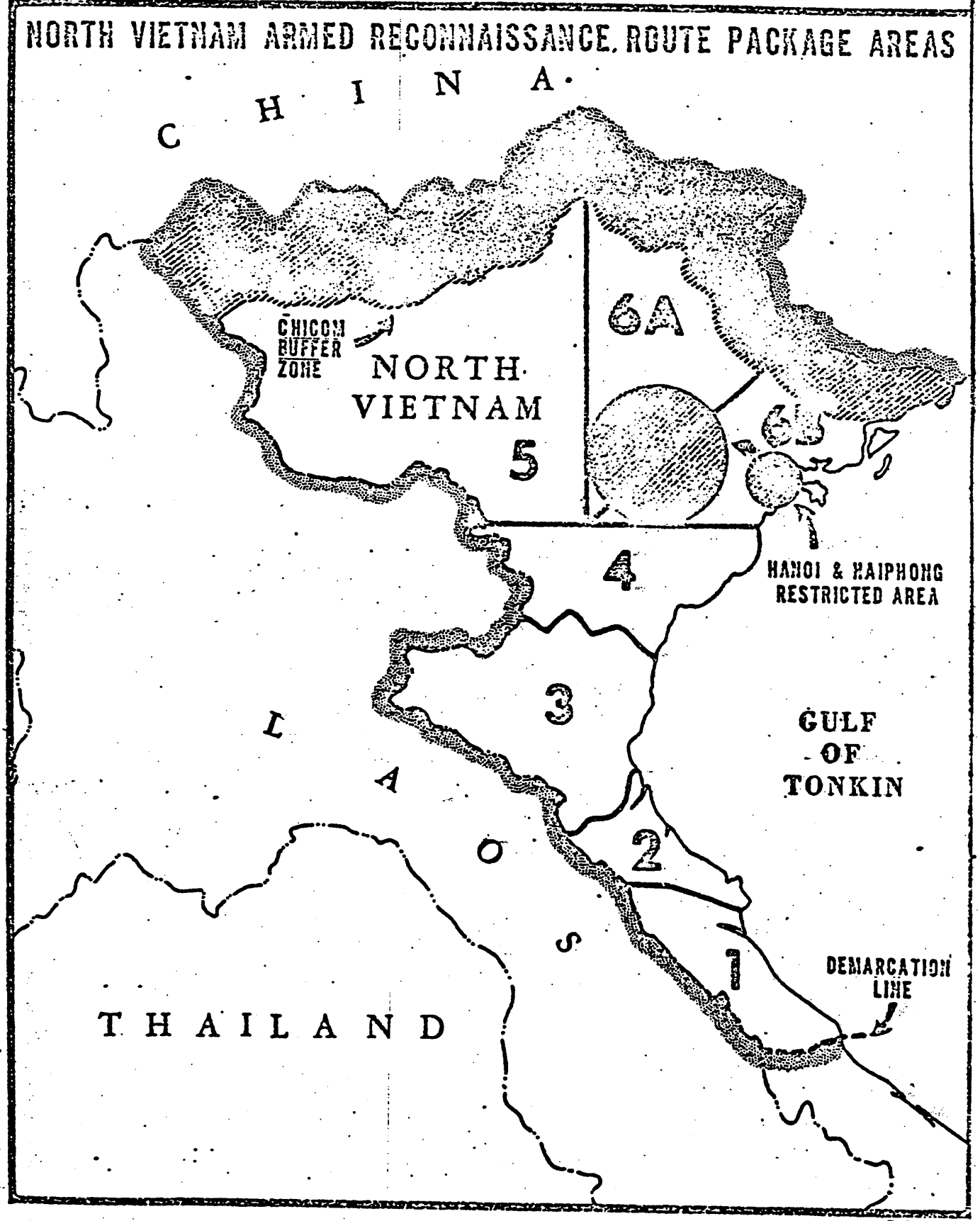
Chau. It was his guess that Red China had carried out the attack with the aim of ending the US-NVN contacts that they had opposed from the beginning.[22] Choosing to forego any public speculation on the matter, Secretary Clifford merely declared US innocence in the incident in a press conference on 8 April.[23]

The Lai Chau incident, however, did prompt the US to place restrictions on its military operations in Laos. In a message sent out on the day of the Hanoi broadcast, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to discontinue, until further notice, BARREL ROLL air strikes in the ALPHA, BRAVO, and COCO areas of Laos that bordered northwest NVN.[24] BARREL ROLL operations in other areas along the Laos-NVN border above the 19th parallel were still authorized, but had to be conducted under positive forward air control (FAC).[25] These restrictions were in sharp contrast to the level of operations the US had actually intended to carry out in Laos. In fact, Ambassador Sullivan in Vientiane, on the eve of the President's speech, had been instructed to assure Prince Souvanna that air strikes in Laos would be augmented rather than curtailed.[26]

The Administration's fear of any action in NVN that might subject it to a charge of deliberately trying to sabotage the prospective talks soon affected the actions of its allies as well. General Westmoreland had been approached by the Vietnamese Air Force on 12 April about the introduction of its recently acquired F-5 squadron in the air interdiction program north of the DMZ. General Westmoreland, in a cable to General Wheeler, expressed his fear that, while such a step would mean an increase of only six sorties per day, the fact that it would mark the first use of jet aircraft by RVN might give it an escalatory connotation.[27] General Wheeler, after conferring with Secretary Clifford, agreed with General Westmoreland and asked that he take steps to get the VNAF to withdraw its request. "As you

22. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC HWA 1213 to CJCS, 13 Apr 68, same file.
23. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," p. 6
24. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5540 to CINCPAC et al., 4 Apr 68.
25. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 5617 to CINCPAC et al., 5 Apr 68; JCS 5686, 6 Apr 68.
26. (TS) Msg, VIENTIANE 5814 to CINCPAC, 12 Apr 68, JCS IN 39897, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).
27. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 4893 to JCS, 12 Apr 68, same file.

ROLLING THUNDER



Map IV

actions in any way. Recognizing the impossibility of concealing the extent of these actions in the presence of more than six hundred reporters in SVN alone, General Wheeler could suggest only that General Westmoreland be instructed not to modify his plans, but to try to "play them in low key." Every effort, in other words, should be made by COMUSMACV to describe Operation PEGASUS and related actions as the usual run of offensive operations against the enemy in order to provoke as little adverse criticism as possible.[16]

Hanoi's Positive Response: Further Restrictions on Military Operations

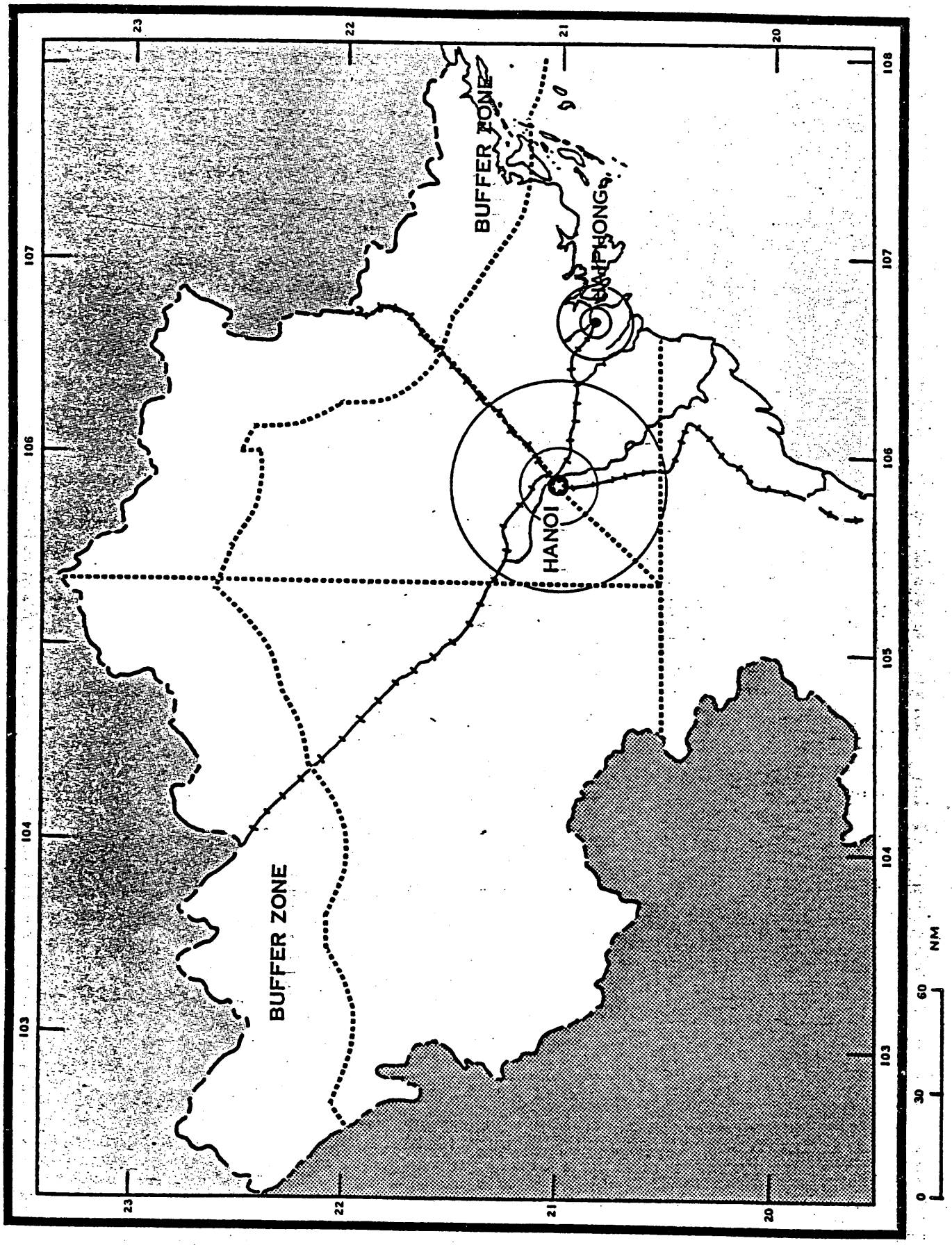
Throughout 1 and 2 April the Administration essentially was preoccupied with its critics. There was no word from Hanoi until the morning of 3 April, when Radio Hanoi relayed the North Vietnamese Government's first response to the President's speech. The text of the Hanoi statement followed its usual harsh line, but with one important exception: it was no longer insisting on a complete cessation of the bombing before contacts between the US and NVN were made. Now, as the statement read, "the DRV Government declares its readiness to send its representatives to decide with the U.S. side the unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts by the United States against the DRV so that talks could begin."[17]

The President seized upon this brief but seemingly promising passage. In a broadcast of his own later that same day, he reiterated his willingness to send representatives "to any forum at any time" to discuss ways in which the war could be brought to an end. "Accordingly," the President went on, "we will establish contact with the representatives of North Viet-Nam."[18]

Previously, when diplomatic feelers had been put out for talks with the North Vietnamese, there had been some instances where coordination between these efforts and military actions in the field was inadequate. (See Ch 40.) This time the

16. (S) Msg, JCS 3564 to COMUSMACV, 31 Mar 68, OCJCS 091 Vietnam (14-31 Mar 68).
17. (TS) "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE," Encl to Memo, ExecSecy, Dept of State to SecDef et al., 6 Apr 68, p. 2 (hereafter cited as "Summary Chronology - Operation CROCODILE"), OCJCS File, CROCODILE, Outgoing (1-30 Apr 68).
18. Ibid.

NORTHERN NVN (with sanctuary areas)



MAP V

Unfortunately the President's public vagueness on the exact limitations of the bombing curb misled many of his critics into thinking that it was much closer to the DMZ than the 20th parallel and thus a greater concession than was actually the case. Senator Fulbright, who had not been taken into the President's confidence prior to the delivery of the speech, was among these. He had called the President immediately after the speech to congratulate him on the move and the next day enthusiastically joined his like-minded colleagues on the Senate floor to praise the President for his major unilateral concession in behalf of peace.[12]

The President's critics, however, did not labor very long in their exaggerated conception of the magnitude of the bombing curb. At the very moment the Senate was praising the President for his actions on 1 April, a UPI news release from Saigon had reported a US air strike against the city of Thanh Hoa which was located more than two hundred miles north of the DMZ. In disbelief Senator Fulbright sought verification of the strike and on the following day, 2 April, ruefully observed in the Senate that he had been mistaken about the magnitude of the President's gesture and of its significance as a move towards peace. "I thought," said Fulbright, "he would in a significant way stop the bombing in an effort to stop the war." Instead, it was a "very limited step" and one "not calculated to bring a response from North Vietnam." Senator Mansfield, who had been busy at his desk plotting the position of Thanh Hoa on a map, rose to the defense of the President. Here, for the first time, Senator Mansfield publicly revealed the 20th parallel as being the demarcation line for the bombing that President Johnson had in mind when he announced the bombing curb, and pointed out that Thanh Hoa was within the prescribed area. The President's language could have been clearer, Mansfield admitted, but its vagueness stemmed from his wish to avoid giving the enemy a clear sanctuary and not from a desire to deceive his critics. Mansfield went on to say that while he had personally preferred a greater restriction on the bombing than the President had ordered it was nevertheless a substantial concession and a serious bid for a negotiated peace.[13]

12. NY Times, 3 Apr 68, pp. 1 and 14.
13. Ibid.

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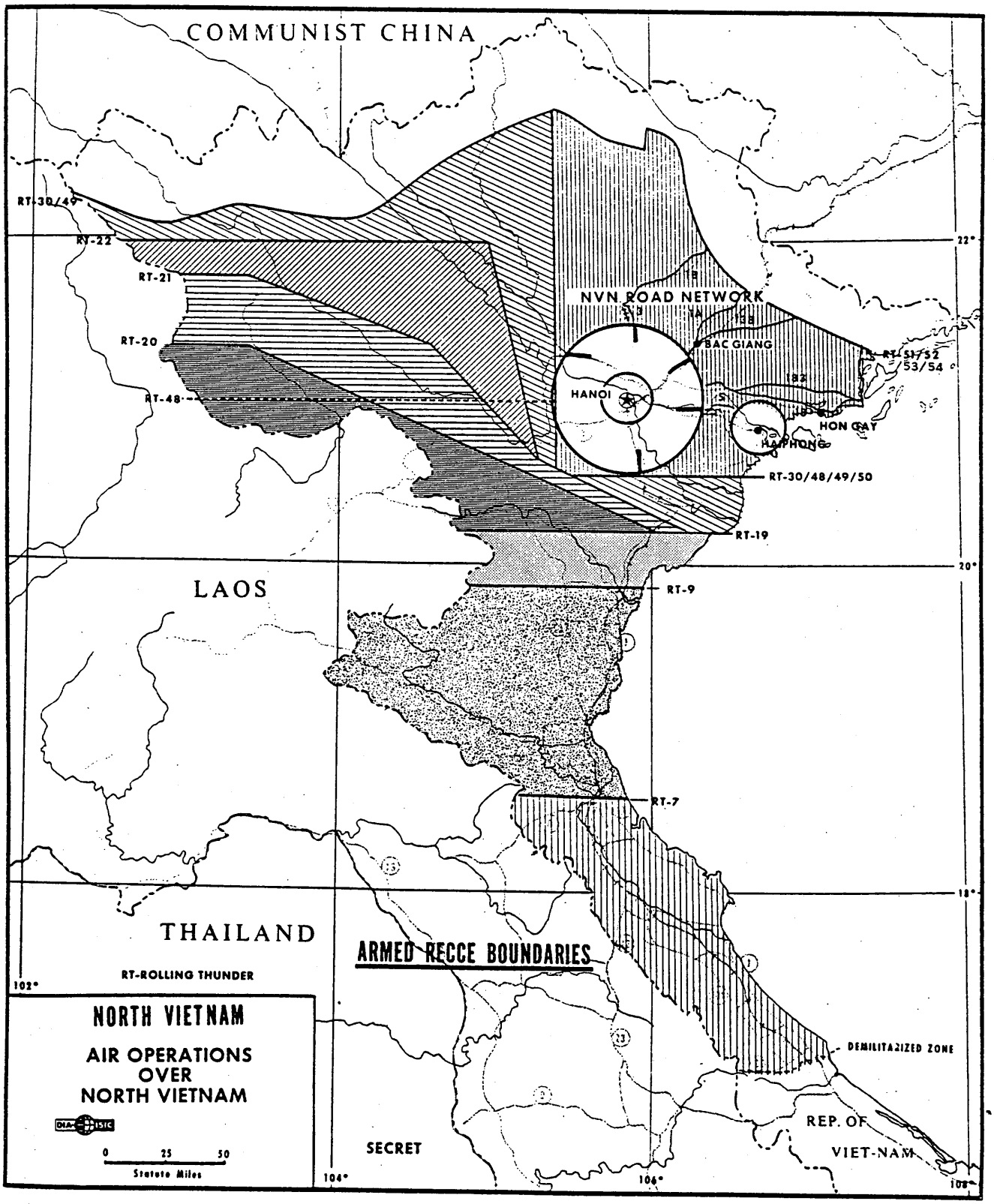
ROLLING THUNDER
Armed Recce Boundaries through RT 54



MAP VI

~~SECRET~~ NO FOREIGN DISSEM

Within minutes after transmitting his orders to CINCPAC limiting operations in NVN, General Wheeler sent another message to COMUSMACV conveying the President's instructions for operations in SVN. Here, there was to be no change. General Westmoreland's efforts to regain the initiative after the Tet offensive were to continue unabated, including his planned Operation PEGASUS which was designed to eliminate the remaining threat to Khe Sanh, and which was scheduled to begin on 31 March, the same day the bombing restrictions were to take effect.[6] These instructions were in keeping with the President's intention to assume a strong fight-and-talk posture for any negotiations that might materialize with NVN.

Replying to General Wheeler's order to restrict air operations, Admiral Sharp revealed some chagrin at the short notice he had been given:

> Again I have been caught completely unaware of an impending major change of policy on the air war . . . . Frankly I simply cannot understand why I am not forewarned of the possibility of such important decisions . . . . In summation, I have not been kept informed . . . . If this results from decision by higher authority then I suggest revision of this policy be urgently requested.[7]

Admiral Sharp was also concerned because the President's decision contravened his repeated recommendations that ROLLING THUNDER be expanded as the weather over NVN improved. Had these recommendations been given any consideration? Another question in his mind was whether or not the thirty-day figure mentioned by General Wheeler, in his assessment of the consequences of the restriction, was intended to indicate the actual duration of the bombing curb.[8]

General Wheeler replied that he had informed Admiral Sharp of the President's decision as soon as he had received it himself. He went on to assure him that he and the Service

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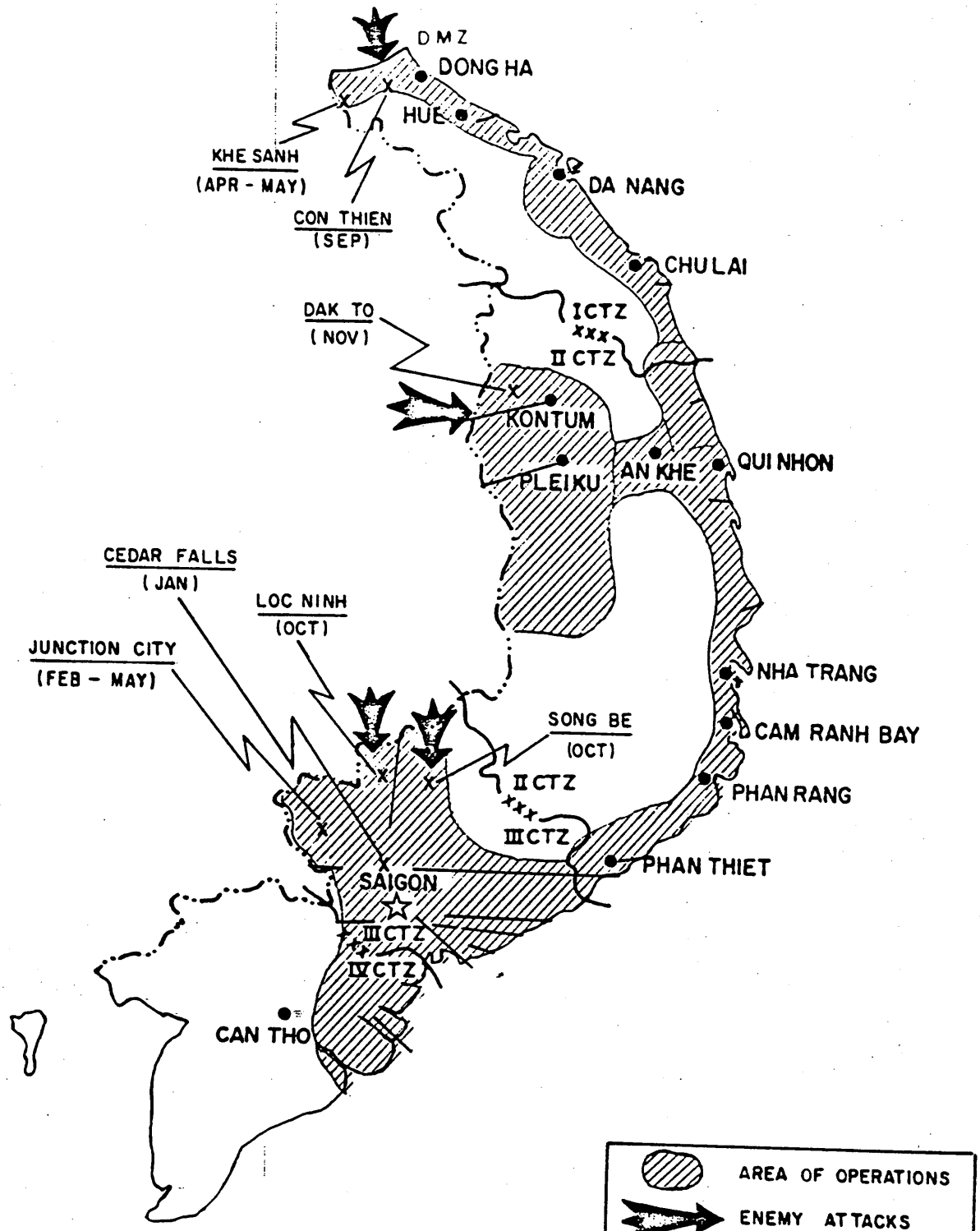
6. (S) Msg, JCS 3564 to COMUSMACV, 31 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (14-31 Mar 68). For a description of Operation PEGASUS see Ch. .

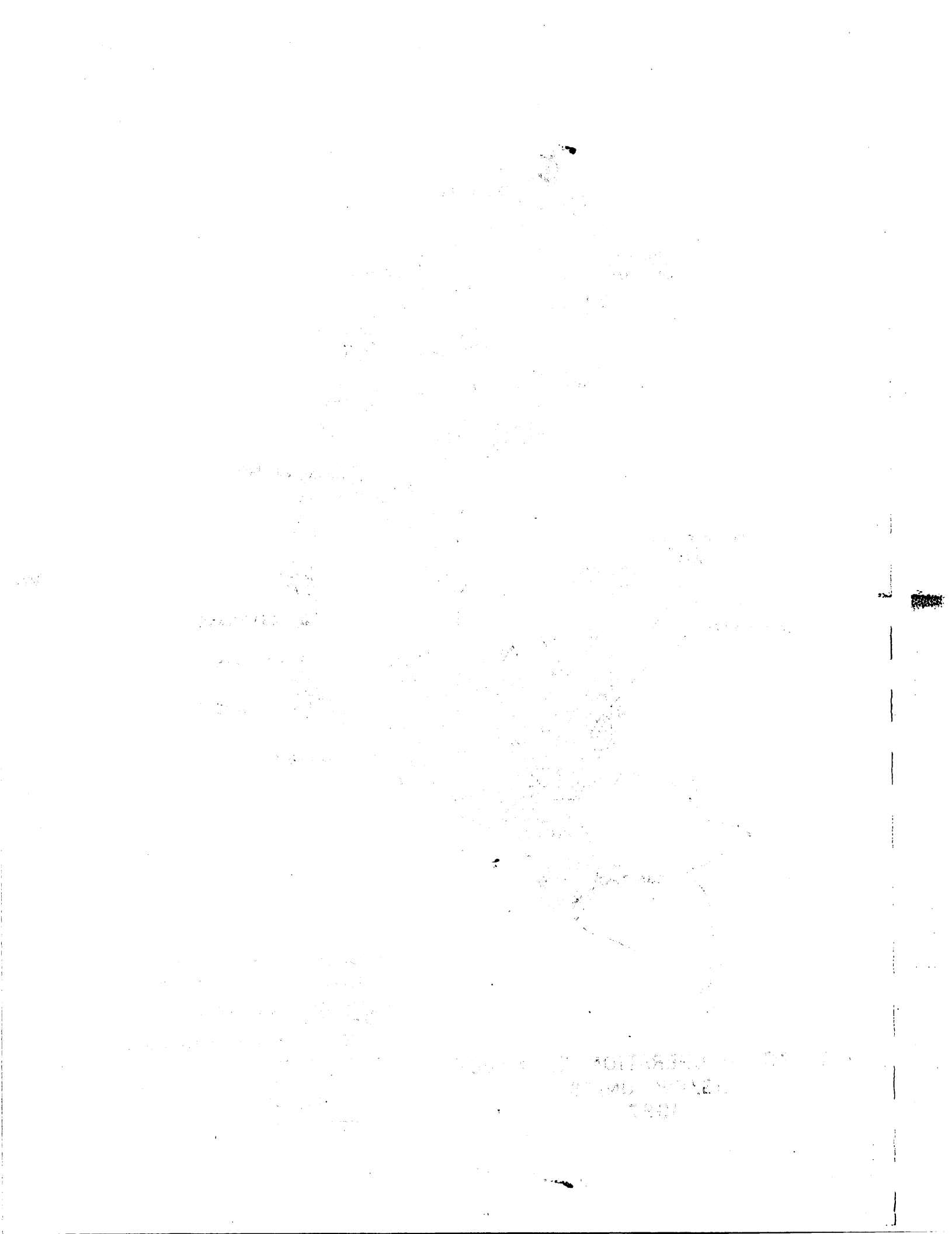
7. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 010315Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1-15 Apr 68).

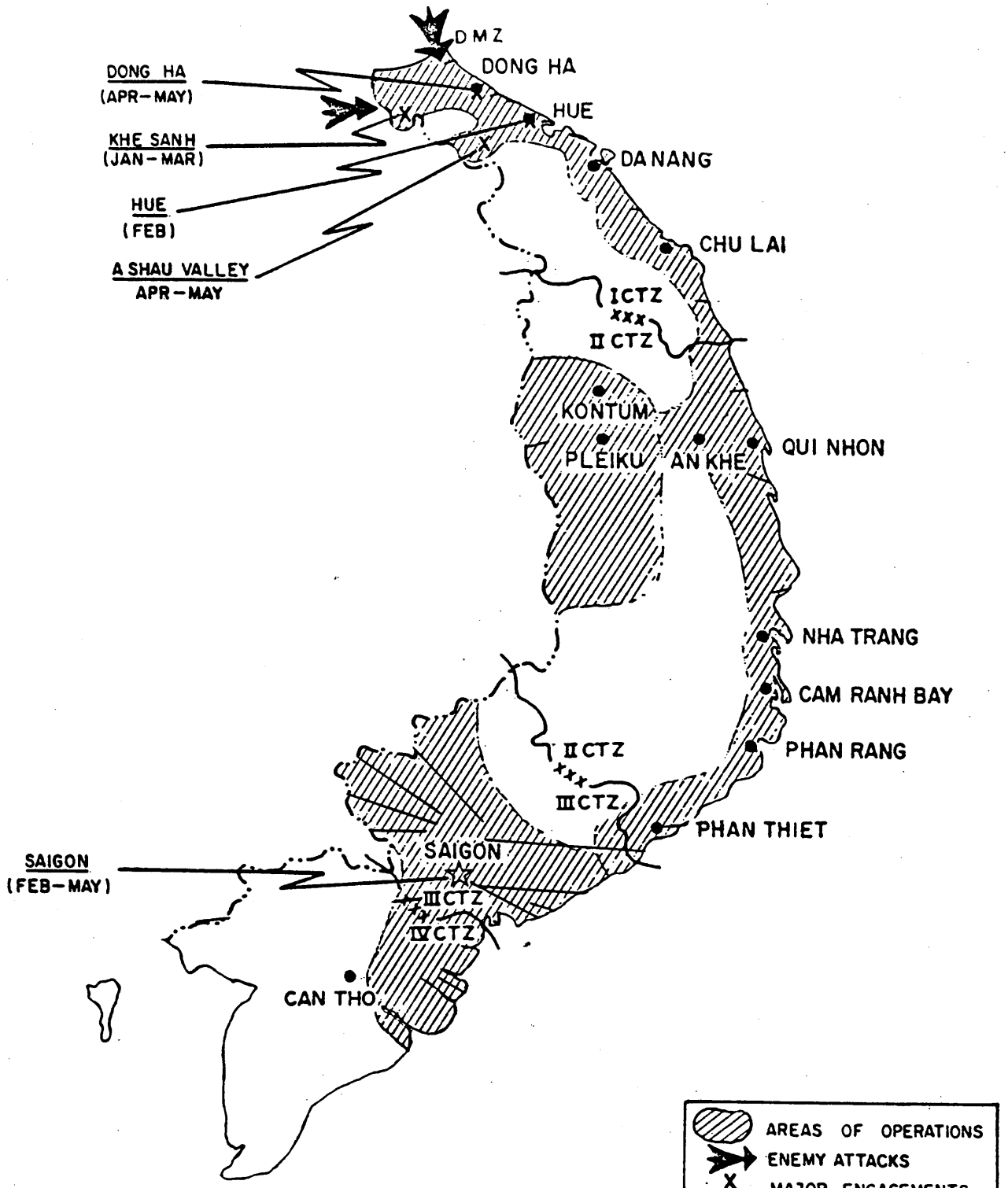
8. Ibid.



AREAS OF OPERATION OF MAJOR US/FW UNITS 1967

Map VII





AREAS OF OPERATION OF MAJOR US/FW UNITS 1968

Map VIII

in that direction, he announced that he was "taking the first step to deescalate the conflict," by unilaterally reducing the level of hostilities:

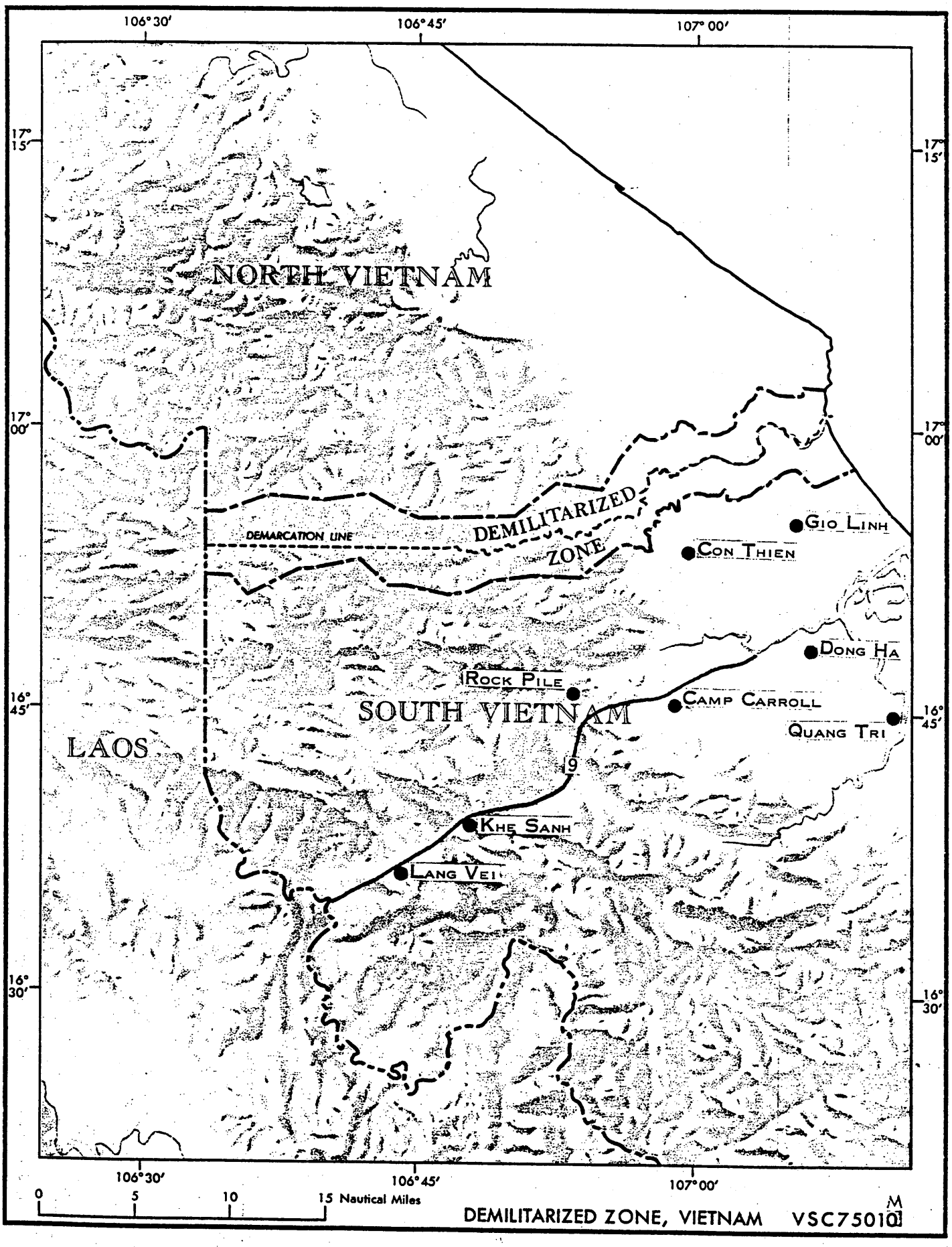
> Tonight I have ordered our aircraft and our naval vessels to make no attacks on North Vietnam, except in the area north of the demilitarized zone where the continuing enemy buildup directly threatens Allied forward positions and where the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to that threat.

Mr. Johnson did not delimit the precise area in which attacks would continue. He pointed out, however, that "the area in which we are stopping our attacks includes almost 90 percent of North Vietnam's population and most of its territory." At the same time, he promised that "even this very limited bombing of the North could come to an early end if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi."

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

The President told his hearers that approximately 11,000 men had been sent to South Vietnam on an emergency basis a few weeks earlier. Now, he continued, support forces totalling 13,500 men would be added over the next five months, in accord with JCS recommendations. Some of these men would be drawn from Reserve units that were to be called up for service. He did not indicate the number of reservists to be mobilized. He estimated that actions taken since the beginning of the year to strengthen US forces in South Vietnam (and also those in Korea), and to build up the RVNAF, would require an additional $2.5 billion in expenditures in the current fiscal year and $2.6 billion in the following year.

The DMZ and Khe Sanh Area



Map IX

areas to 3 and 1.5 nm respectively "appears to stand a good chance of approval."[51] Simultaneously the Department of State asked Ambassador Bunker's opinion of proposals that the United States discontinue or sharply limit the bombing campaign. The Ambassador replied that these proposals were most unwise; they would raise doubts about US intentions, feed the latent anti-Americanism that the Viet Cong were exploiting, and endanger the "new mood of unity and anti-Communism" in the country.[52]

A key development in the progress toward a decision within the Administration was a meeting of the President's Senior Informal Advisory Group on 25-26 March. Members of the group included Dean Acheson, George Ball, Arthur Dean, McGeorge Bundy, Cyrus Vance, and Douglas Dillon and Generals Ridgway, Taylor, and Bradley. On 25 March the group met at the State Department for a series of briefings. The meeting was also attended by a number of high government officials. General DePuy (SACSA) described the military situation in SVN and Mr. George Carver, of CIA, the state of internal security in that country. Mr. Phil Habib, of the Department of State, discussed South Vietnam's political situation, while Mr. William Bundy, of the same Department, appraised the prospects for negotiations.[53]

On the following day the members met with the President, in a meeting attended by General Wheeler. Reportedly they advised Mr. Johnson to reject any idea of military escalation and urged him instead to intensify efforts to reach a political solution. Since this verdict represented a reversal of opinion for most of the members of the group, its impact upon the President must have been striking.[54]

This advice presumably played a role in the President's decision to restrict sharply the number of reinforcements granted COMUSMACV under Program 6. Events soon showed that the President had decided also to adopt the other part of

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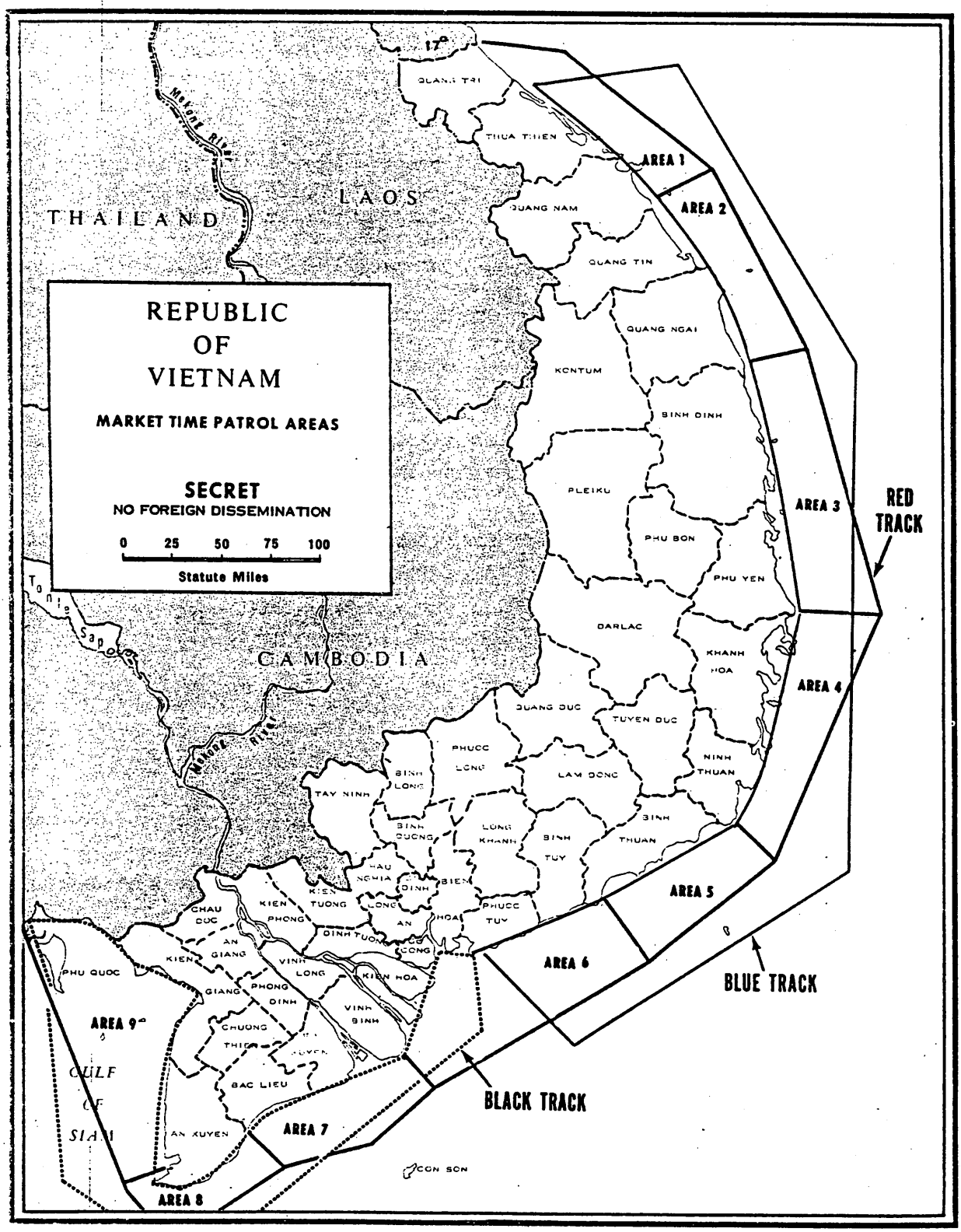
51. (TS) Msg, JCS 03023 to CINCPAC, 161657Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68.

52. (TS) Msgs, State 131732 to Saigon, 16 Mar 68; Saigon 22548 to State, 20 Mar 68.

53. (UNK) "Schedule and Participants in Special Meetings," undated, OCJCS File, 091 Vietnam Troop Build-up and Call-up, 16 Mar - (filed under date 25 Mar 68); (TS) Interv, Robert J. Watson with BGEN Robert N. Ginsburgh, Chairman's Staff Group, 24 Jan 69.

54. Washington Post, 9 Feb 69, p. A 16; NY Times, 7 Mar 69, p. 14 (The Post story erroneously dates the two-day meeting a week early, i.e., 18-19 March.)


REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
MARKET TIME PATROL AREAS
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THAILAND
LAOS
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GULF OF SIAM
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Tonle Sap
QUANG TRI
THUA THIEN
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QUANG TIN
QUANG NGAI
KONTUM
BINH DINH
PLEIKU
PHU BON
PHU YEN
DARLAC
KHANH HOA
QUANG DUC
TUYEN DUC
NINH THUAN
LAM DONG
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AREA 6
AREA 7
AREA 8
AREA 9
RED TRACK
BLUE TRACK
BLACK TRACK

MAP X

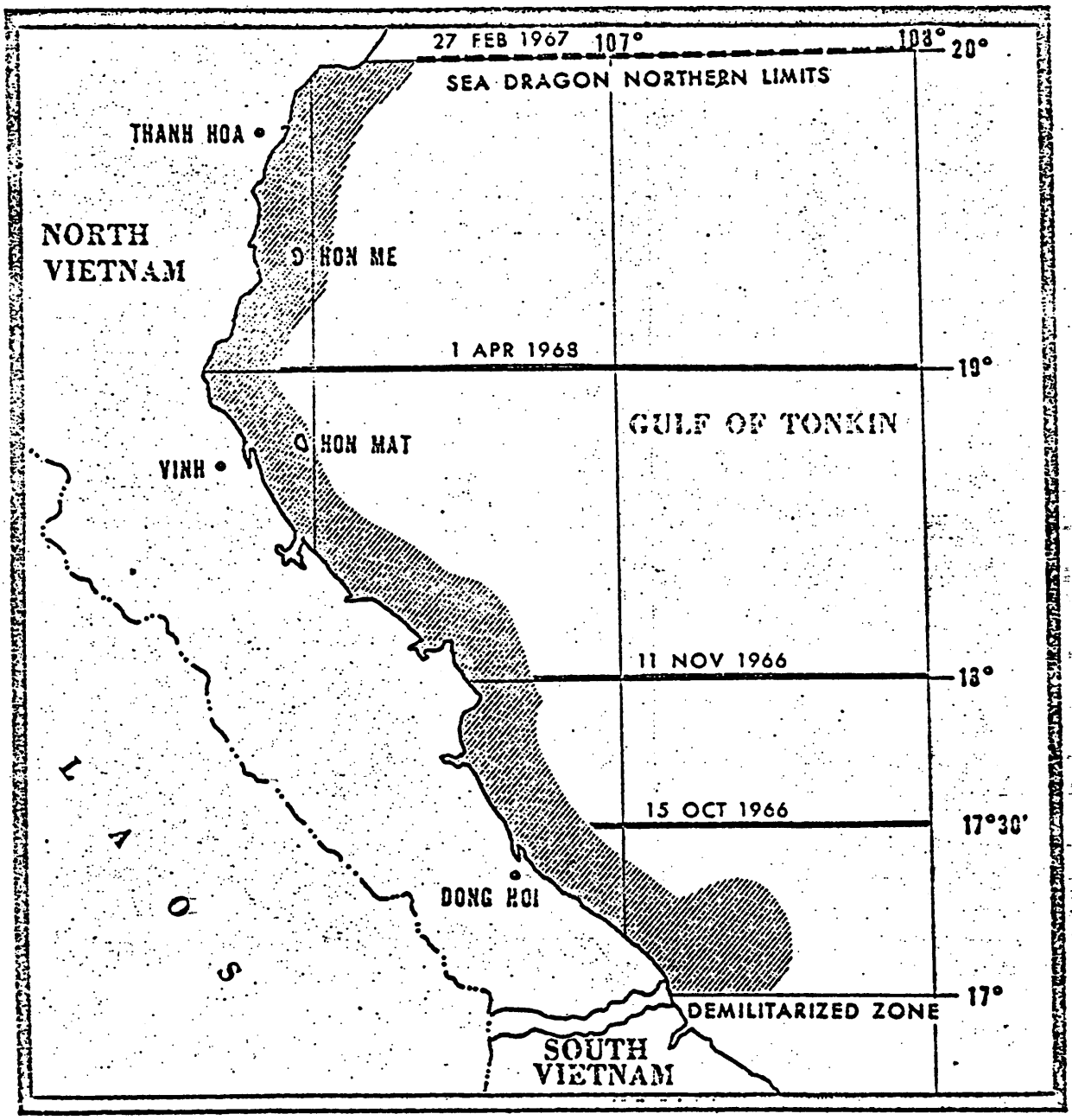
defense. The implication was that US forces in South Vietnam should go on the defensive. Major General DePuy rejected this suggestion, arguing that it was "illusory to suggest that there was some brand new, more clever way to fight in Vietnam." He believed that he succeeded in dissuading Mr. Acheson to some extent. An extremely pessimistic view was expressed by Mr. Richard C. Steadman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) for East Asia and Pacific Affairs; he judged the situation "utterly hopeless," and believed that the only solution was "to cut our losses, go on the defensive and seek the earliest possible way out." Mr. Acheson was "unprepared to accept this point of view," pointing out that "if we do make a decision in Washington that the situation is hopeless, it then automatically becomes a fact."[47]

At this juncture, a sudden financial crisis was added to the Administration's troubles. On 13 March the London gold market suspended trading amid intense speculation. The international monetary system seemingly stood on the brink of collapse, a victim of the Vietnam war and of Congress' refusal to approve a tax increase. The President had presented a $186,000,000,000 budget, in which expenditures for Vietnam totaled $25,700,000,000. Of the $2,900,000,000 increase in a $79,800,000,000 defense budget, $1,300,000,000 was directly attributable to the war. Accordingly, Tom Wicker in the New York Times ascribed the monetary crisis to "Guns, Butter and Folly"; in his opinion, fulfillment of Westmoreland's request had become "an economic impossibility."[48] Indeed, General Wheeler wrote COMUSMACV on 16 March that the fiscal crisis and the troop deployment issue together had "placed the Government in as difficult a situation as I have seen in the past five

47. (TS-GP 1) SACSA M-185-68 to CJCS, 13 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68. The strategic debate within the Administration after the Tet offensive is imperfectly documented in available records, but has since been described in various press accounts. Two noteworthy examples are in the Washington Post, 9 Feb 69, p. 1, and the NY Times, 6-7 Mar 69, p. 1. The Times story is longer and more detailed, but both generally accord with such documentary evidence as is available. It is apparent that both were based on extensive interviews with cognizant officials (most of them doubtless civilians, inasmuch as some animus toward the military viewpoint appears). Both emphasize that a major role in leading the President toward his final decision was played by Secretary Clifford, whose own position changed from "hawk" to "dove" as a result of the Tet offensive and COMUSMACV's request for reinforcements.

48. NY Times, 17 Jan 68; 17 Mar 68.

SEA DRAGON OPERATION AREAS



Map XI

Following further discussion, Program 6 was sharply reduced. General Westmoreland, accepting the impracticability of large-scale reinforcements, reviewed his requirements in the light of the improved situation after the defeat of the Tet offensive and the recovery of the RVNAF. He then cut back his estimated requirements for the immediate future to the following: permanent retention of the two units shipped in February (or their equivalents), the three TFS still due under Program 5, two more TFS, one armored cavalry squadron, and additions to the Navy Mobile Riverine Force. COMUSMACV believed that these reinforcements, with forces already available, would "provide us the means necessary to contain further enemy initiated actions while continuing forward progress in most areas." They would be adequate for any eventuality other than "heavy enemy reinforcements from the north." General Wheeler, in a hurried meeting with General Westmoreland at Clark AFB on 24 March 1968, indicated that these additional forces represented the limit of what the President would grant.[44]

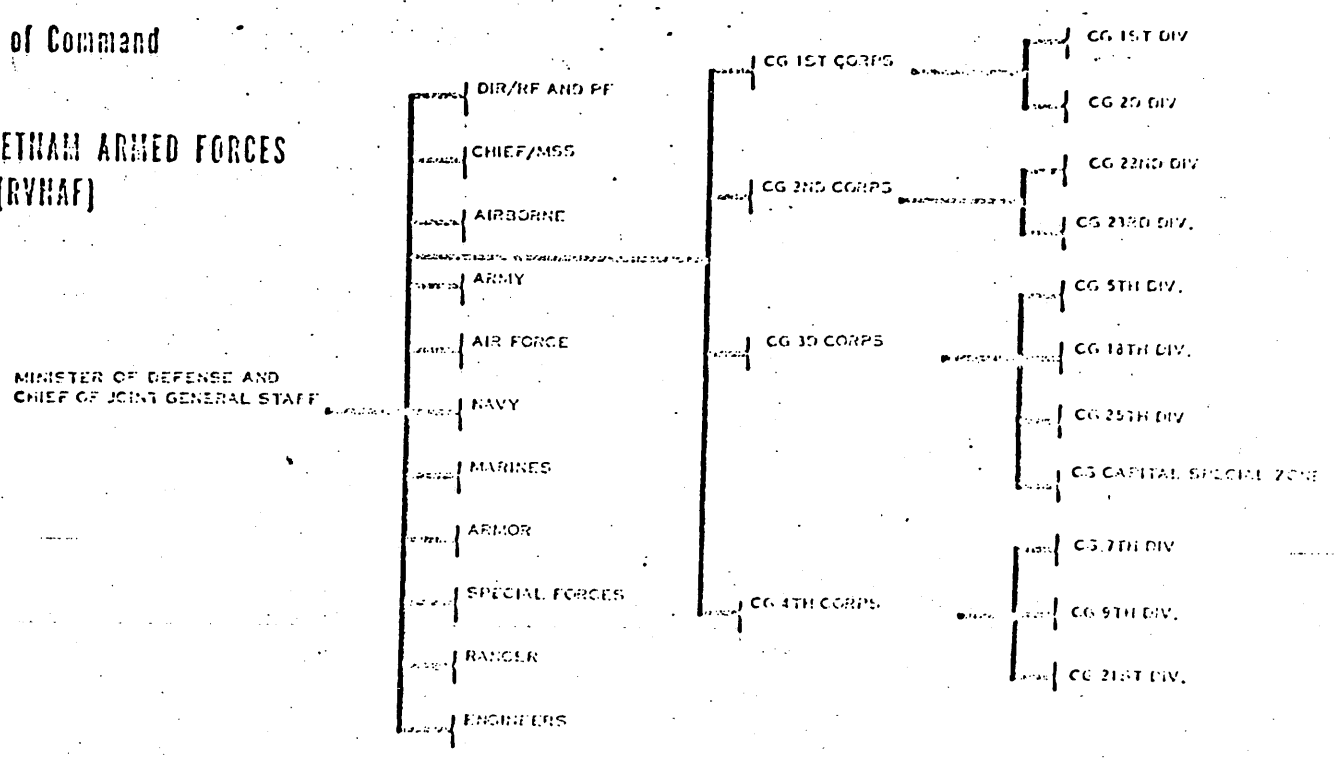
As finally approved in early April, Program 6 established a new troop ceiling of 549,500--an increase of 24,500 over Program 5. Approximately 11,250 of this increase would consist of combat troops; this figure included the reinforcements already sent (the 3d Brigade, 82nd Airborne, to be converted to a separate light infantry brigade, and the 27th Marine RLT, which was to be replaced by an Army mechanized brigade), plus an armored cavalry squadron and two TFS. The remainder consisted of engineer, artillery, and other support units, and constituted COMUSMACV's principal net gain under Program 6.

The new ceiling assumed that the "civilianization" program would go forward as originally planned, starting in September 1968. Other elements of Program 6 included the following: deployment of three TFS authorized under Program 5 but not yet sent; an increase in the B-52 sortie rate from

44. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 4192 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 271333Z Mar 68; (S) Msg, JCS 3449 to COMUSMACV, 280152Z Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 16 Mar - .

Chain of Command

REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM ARMED FORCES (RVNAF)



CONFIDENTIAL

Chart A

In other words, General Westmoreland would receive some reinforcements immediately but the decision on his requested addition of 205,000 men would be deferred for the time being. These measures should be accompanied, according to the committee, by an effort to galvanize the ARVN to improve its performance.

The committee noted that even COMUSMACV's full reinforcement plan would provide no truly satisfactory answer to the Vietnam problem. It would "Americanize" the war and might frustrate South Vietnam's political development. The members therefore suggested a "study in depth, to be initiated immediately, of possible new political and strategic guidance for the conduct of US operations in South Vietnam." Such an analysis might conclude that COMUSMACV should not be expected either to destroy or to expel the enemy.

On the question of ROLLING THUNDER, the committee divided. Some members, notably General Wheeler, sought a substantial expansion of targets and authority in and near Hanoi and Haiphong, including the mining of Haiphong harbor, and the extension of SEA DRAGON operations up to a Chinese buffer zone. Other members favored nothing more than a "seasonal step-up" in air operations through the spring.

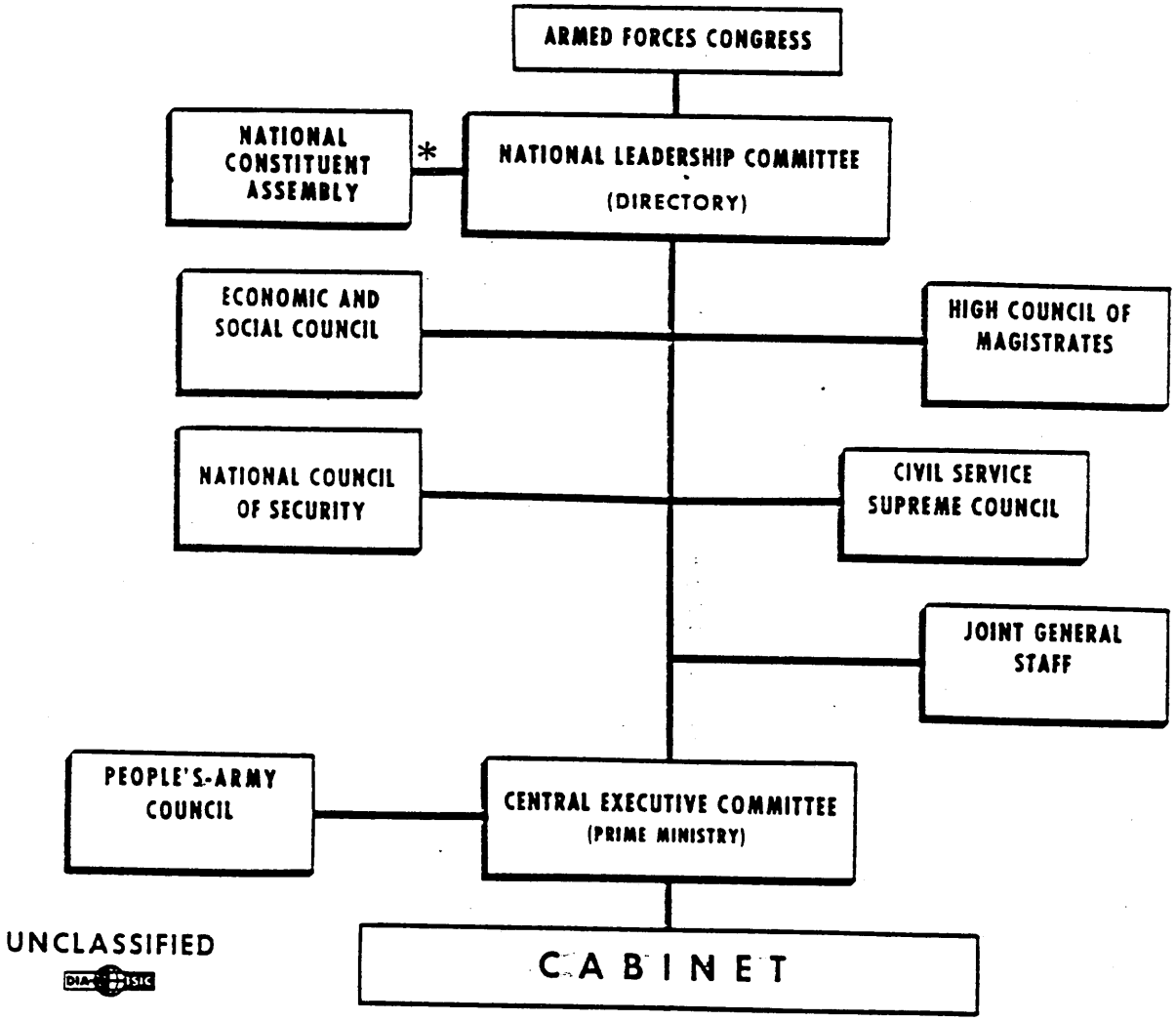
With regard to negotiating options, however, the committee agreed in doubting that Hanoi would be prepared for a "serious move toward peace" in the near future, except on its own terms. They therefore recommended that the San Antonio formula should remain as the "rock bottom" US negotiating position; any change in terms appeared to be "extremely unwise" at present.[38]

The President did not at once render a formal decision, but it soon became clear that the committee's recommendations regarding deployments would be generally followed. Indeed, there was at first a disposition to allow somewhat larger forces than those proposed by the committee. In a meeting on 8 March 1968, the President agreed to cancel the tentative decision to "civilianize" 12,545 spaces in MACV and thus at

38. (TS) Msg, JCS 02590 to COMUSMACV, 051658Z Mar 68. (TS) "Draft Memorandum Prepared by Special Committee," 4 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM

(ESTABLISHED 19 JUNE 1965 BY A PROVISIONAL CONVENTION. AMENDMENTS BY DECREE)



UNCLASSIFIED

DIA ISIC

NOTE: The National Constituent Assembly is an elected body established by GVN Decree-Law 21/66. Its members were elected on 11 September 1966 and drafted a constitution which was promulgated on 1 April 1967. An agreement has been reached between the Directory and the Assembly allowing it to remain as a quasi-legislative body, for the purpose of drafting such things as election procedures, until a new government can be elected.

Chart B

On 5 March, Secretary Rusk reviewed a possibility that had been discussed and discarded in mid-1967. In a memorandum to Secretary Clifford, he suggested the President might announce that bombing attacks would henceforth "be limited to those areas which are integrally related to the battlefield." ROLLING THUNDER would continue "presumably as far North as Vinh"; full bombing could resume in the event of either a major attack on Khe Sanh or a second wave of assaults against the cities. The advantage of this course of action was that it "would shift away from the logical debates about words and put the problem on the de facto level of action. If Hanoi took no corresponding military action, the bombing would be resumed."[35]

Public opinion had been shaken even far more severely than these proposed reappraisals might indicate. Speaking to General Wheeler on 7 March, Secretary Clifford warned the Chairman that "the American public cannot stand another shock such as that administered by the Tet offensive." MACV now must be "conservative in assessments of the situation and enemy capabilities," thus placing the Administration in "a strong public information position." Unless this were done, Clifford believed, Westmoreland's request for major reinforcements "will be made much harder--perhaps impossible--to sell . . . ." In a message to Westmoreland, General Wheeler observed, "I must admit that Secretary Clifford's assessment is shared by me . . . ." In a further communication to COMUSMACV on 8 March, the Chairman stated that "I feel I must tell you frankly that there is strong resistance from all quarters to putting more ground force units in South Vietnam." A call-up of reserves and concomitant actions, he declared, "will raise unshirted hell in many quarters . . . ."[36]

By mid-March, a Senatorial revolt against further escalation seemed imminent. In the course of an 8 March floor debate Robert Kennedy declared that it had become "immoral and intolerable to continue the way we are." William Fulbright demanded that the President consult Congress before making any further decisions, and announced that the Tonkin Gulf resolution was a "contract based on misrepresentation"

35. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 5 Mar 68, same file.
36. (S) Msg, CJCS to COMUSMACV, JCS 2721, 7 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68. (TS) Msg, CJCS to COMUSMACV, JCS 2767, 8 Mar 68, JMF 911/374 (9 Mar 68).

US MILITARY CASUALTIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

As of 28 December 1968, the total number of combat-associated casualties suffered by US military personnel (USA, USN, USMC, USAF, USCG) in Southeast Asia, increased to 222,870. This figure excludes MIA and captured. The following presents the significant data:

	KIA	WIA HOSPITALIZED	WIA NOT HOSPITALIZED
1961	11	2	1
1962	31	41	37
1963	78	218	193
1964	147	522	517
1965	1,369	3,308	2,806
1966	5,008	16,526	13,567
1967	9,378	32,371	29,654
TOTALS (1961-1967)	16,022	52,988	46,775
1968 (thru 28 Dec)	14,521	46,655	45,909
TOTALS TO DATE	30,543	99,643	92,684
CURRENTLY MIA:	917		
CURRENTLY CAPTURED:	326		

(C)

(S-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 1-69, 2 Jan 69, p. 20.

situation necessitated a northward shift of forces).[30]

Admiral Sharp endorsed COMUSMACV's troop request, but pointed out that it could not at once affect the situation. He therefore urged a major step-up in the air campaign, to be followed by "a combined amphibious and air mobile campaign against North Vietnam as early as the weather and the current situation permits." On 9 March 1968 Admiral Sharp reported that, in accordance with his instructions, COMUSMACV had submitted plans for an amphibious/airmobile/airborne assault on North Vietnam, to be followed by a swing southward through the DMZ to destroy enemy forces and materiel. CINCPAC requested authority to conduct this operation--DURANGO CITY--on or about 1 June.[31]

This judgment in favor of an enlarged sphere of military operations was supported by staff studies undertaken within the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In two examinations made at the Chairman's direction, J-5 emphatically endorsed the first of the five options under study by the Clifford Committee. J-5's Southeast Asia Branch concluded that the initiation of a strategic ground offensive in North Vietnam, coupled with the expansion of existing strategic air and naval campaigns, "would hasten the accomplishment of U.S. objectives in South Vietnam and successfully conclude the war." Similarly, the Short Range Branch of J-5 judged that implementation of Option One "will greatly reduce risks to Free World forces in South Vietnam and will accomplish U.S. objectives more rapidly than the forces of the other options." Reviewing this latter paper, the Army Chief of Staff wrote General Wheeler that, while he supported the force levels recommended in Option One, he did not approve the implication that expanded ground operations into Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam would be allowed. "The guidance for consideration of the option did not include a change in basic national objective nor alter political guidance in any way," he pointed out. General Johnson believed that, consequently, the strategy pursued by CINCPAC and COMUSMACV must continue to

30. (TS-NOFORN) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 02951 to CJCS, 020947Z Mar 68; MAC 02956, 021109Z Mar 68; MAC 02962, 021223Z Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010823Z Mar 68, JCS IN 44082. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 032253Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 092348Z Mar 68, JCS IN 62030.

~~TOP SECRET~~

US ARMED FORCES IN THE RVN

END OF YEAR PERSONNEL STRENGTH[a]
(In Thousands)

	1965	1966	1967	1968
TOTAL	184.3	385.3	485.6	536.7
Army[b]	116.8	239.4	319.5	360.2
Navy	8.4	23.3	31.7	36.7
Air Force	20.6	52.9	55.9	58.7
Marine Corps	38.2	69.2	78.0	80.7
Coast Guard	.3	.5	.5	.4

a. Detail may not add to totals due to rounding.
b. Excludes Army Replacements and Returnees.

Source: (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia (U), CAG Statistical Series, Vol. No. 7, 3 Feb 69, Combat Analysis Group, J-3, OJCS; (S) Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, OASD(C), Combat Analysis Group, J-3, OJCS.

~~TOP SECRET~~

Chart D

Harris poll taken shortly after Tet recorded a rise in war support to 74 percent, as compared with 61 percent in December. Similarly, the Gallup survey reported that "hawks" now outnumbered "doves" by 61-23 percent. But at the same time, Gallup found that support for the President's conduct of the war had fallen to 35 percent and approval of his overall performance to 41 percent.

Even clearer was the shock of the Tet offensive in the minds of minds of many of those who might be considered leaders or molders of public opinion. Thus the New York Times declared that "the facts of life about the war have finally been made unmistakeably clear to everyone in the United States, from President Johnson on down." Similarly, Senator Robert F. Kennedy proclaimed that events had "finally shattered the mask of official illusion," revealing the impossibility of a military solution.[27]

Against this backdrop, General Wheeler undertook his visit to South Vietnam on 23-25 February, as described in the last chapter. On his return, he brought with him COMUSMACV's new list of requirements. This list called for no less than three additional divisions and 15 tactical fighter squadrons--a total of 206,756 spaces over and above the current ceiling of 525,000 men. General Westmoreland wished the first increment to be deployed by 1 May; it should consist of one mechanized brigade, one armored cavalry regiment, the remaining two regiments of the Fifth Marine Division, and eight tactical fighter squadrons.[28]

For the Administration, this request, which would require large-scale mobilization and additional appropriations, was potential political dynamite. Inevitably, the response was a reexamination of current strategy in Vietnam to see if US objectives could be achieved with a smaller investment of resources. "My report on the situation in South Vietnam and your force requirements touched off an intense discussion of where we stand and where we are going in the war," reported General Wheeler to COMUSMACV on 29 February. The President had turned over COMUSMACV's request to a newly appointed committee headed by the newly designated Secretary of Defense, Mr. Clark Clifford. This committee, which included General

27. NY Times, 4 Feb 68; 9 Feb 68; 13 Feb 68; 14 Feb 68; 18 Feb 68.
28. (TS) JCS 2472/237, 28 Feb 68, JMF 911 (27 Feb 68).

RVN ARMED FORCES

END OF YEAR PERSONNEL STRENGTH[a]
(in thousands)

	1965	1966	1967	1968
GRAND TOTAL	691.5	735.9	798.8	1010.9
Nat'l. Military Forces				
Regular Army	267.9	284.0	302.8	380.3
Navy	14.5	17.3	16.0	18.9
Marines	7.4	7.0	8.0	9.1
Air Force	12.8	14.6	16.1	18.6
Total - Regular	302.6	322.9	342.9	426.9
Regional	132.2	149.9	151.4	219.8
Popular	136.4	150.1	148.8	172.5
Total - National	571.2	622.9	643.1	819.2
Para-Military/Security Forces				
CIDG	28.4	34.7	38.3	42.3
National Police	52.3	58.3	73.4	78.4
Armed Propaganda Teams	-	-	-	3.8
Kit Carson Scouts	-	-	.3	1.5
RD Cadre	-	-	37.0	45.9
Truong Son Cadre	-	-	6.7	7.0
Total	120.3[b]	113.0[b]	155.7	178.9

a. Detail may not add to totals due to rounding.
b. Difference between total as shown and actual sum of figures is the result of an unknown distribution of the remaining personnel into the other four categories.

The President, however, tended to favor one of Mr. McNamara's more moderate alternatives. On 16 February Mr. Walt Rostow informed General Wheeler that, while no decision had been made, Mr. Johnson was considering a call-up of 40,000 reservists in units plus a request to Congress for the necessary appropriations, but with no further action for the moment. Reporting this development to his colleagues, General Wheeler directed the Joint Staff to study further actions to improve the US posture in Southeast Asia, indicating the rationale for the recommendation for authority to extend terms of service and to call up individual reservists.[20]

Three days earlier, on 13 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed the deployment to South Vietnam by air of one airborne brigade task force of the 82d Airborne Division (at a strength of approximately 4,000) and one Marine regiment (reinforced) from the Fifth Marine Division, about 5,200 men. Both were to be deployed on a temporary basis.[21] These orders were carried out swiftly. The 27th Marine Regimental Landing Team arrived at Da Nang on 17 February 1968. Four days later the Third Brigade, 82d Airborne, reached Chu Lai.[22]

Strategy Debated

Apart from COMUSMACV's need for immediate reinforcements, a case could be made for a larger overall force in SVN to carry out the US long-range strategy there. On 8 February 1968 General Westmoreland had informed General Wheeler that his staff was restudying requirements, on the assumption that the 525,000 ceiling in Program 5 would be lifted. A preliminary estimate of additional requirements included an additional US infantry division and the ROK Light Infantry Division already under discussion, plus additional helicopter and

20. (TS) CM-2976-68 to CSA et al., 16 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

21. (S) Msgs, JCS 9926 to CSA et al., 130218Z Feb 68, and JCS 9929 to CMC et al., 130341Z Feb 68; JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68) sec 2.

22. (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 242.

~~TOP SECRET~~

FREE WORLD MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN THE RVN

END OF YEAR PERSONNEL STRENGTH[a]
(in thousands)

	1965	1966	1967	1968
TOTAL	22.4	52.6	59.4	65.6
Australia	1.5	4.4	6.8	7.6
Korea	20.7	45.6	47.8	49.2
New Zealand	.1	.2	.5	.5
Philippines	.072	2.1	2.0	1.6
Republic of China	.014	.030	.030	.029
Spain	-	.012	.013	.012
Thailand	.016	.2	2.2	6.0[b]

a. Detail may not add to totals due to rounding.
b. Preliminary data.

~~TOP SECRET~~

Chart F

Early on 12 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff finally received from General Westmoreland an unequivocal statement that he "desperately" needed reinforcements to enable him to hold the northern I CTZ without endangering other areas. He pointed out that he was 25,000 short of the ceiling of 525,000 men that had been authorized for South Vietnam. "I need these 525,000 troops now," he declared. He urged immediate deployment of a Marine regiment package and a brigade package of the 82d Airborne, with the remaining elements of these units to be sent later. "Time is of the essence," he declared. He asked that the Secretary of Defense and the President be informed of his views, in which Ambassador Bunker had concurred.[15] In a further communication, General Westmoreland addressed himself to General Wheeler's account of the 11 February White House meeting:

> I am expressing a firm request for additional troops, not because I fear defeat if I am not reinforced, but because I do not feel that I can fully grasp the initiative from the recently reinforced enemy without them.[16]

Meeting at 0930 on 12 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the new and urgent appeal from General Westmoreland. They agreed to reconvene that afternoon, at which time the Army and Marine Corps would provide information on the impact of deployments to South Vietnam and on the minimum levels of reserve mobilization required.

Before this subsequent meeting could be held, however, General Wheeler was unexpectedly summoned to the White House. There the President announced that he had decided to approve COMUSMACV's request, that is, to deploy at once a brigade of the 82d Airborne and a Marine RLT. At 1600 that afternoon General Wheeler informed his colleagues of this decision, at the same time directing the Joint Staff to prepare a study of the necessary reserve mobilization and legislative actions.[17]

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15. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and CJCS, 120612Z Feb 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68.

16. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 02018 to CJCS, 121823Z Feb 68. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb-15 Mar 68.

17. (S) Note to Control Div, "Deployments to SVN," 12 Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

~~TOP SECRET~~

VC/NVA PERSONNEL STRENGTH IN THE RVN
(in thousands)

	1965 as of 31 Dec	1966 as of 31 Dec	1967 as of 31 Dec	1968 as of 31 Oct
TOTAL ENEMY CONFIRMED FORCES	221.2	282.9	240.3	238.7
TOTAL COMBAT FORCES	90.0	114.1	122.3	125.4
- NVA	26.6	48.9	59.2	72.2
- VC Main/Local Forces	63.4	65.2	63.1	53.2
TOTAL OTHER	131.2	168.8	118.0	113.3
- NVA Admin Svcs	-	.4	.6	1.8
- VA - Guerrilla Forces	89.9	126.8	79.9	78.0
- Admin Svcs	41.3	41.6	37.5	33.5

considered that his losses so far had been fully justified by indications that the United States was losing its will to fight. The resignation of Secretary McNamara, the reassignment of General Westmoreland, President Johnson's withdrawal from the 1968 election, the noisy controversy in the United States between "hawks" and doves," the threatened instability of the dollar, and the incessant criticism of US policy by foreign sources--all these developments, when seen from Hanoi, might be fitted together to yield a picture of a nation and its leaders approaching the situation existing in France in 1954. From this viewpoint, it would be unthinkable for the enemy to weaken his resolve or to lower his objectives.79

The month of October came and went with no enemy offensive, but a stream of intelligence continued to warn of plans for large-scale actions.80 General Abrams made only one major readjustment of his forces to meet these threats. Observing a concentration of enemy forces astride the border between Cambodia and III CTZ, he strengthened the defenses of Saigon by bringing down the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) from I CTZ. The movement began late in October and was completed by the middle of the next month.81

Whatever the enemy's military intentions, he was known to be making every effort to repair and rebuild his political and administrative apparatus in South Vietnam, perhaps in anticipation of impending negotiations. Intelligence showed that the Viet Cong were attempting to organize "liberation" or "revolutionary" committees, nominally chosen by election, at every level from district to hamlet, to replace similar groups that had been driven underground or destroyed by allied operations in previous years. This shadow hierarchy could be triumphantly unveiled as the "legitimate" governmental structure at the local level, while the "Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces," the "Front" organization formed

79. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 13146 to CJCS, 281241Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

80. (S-NOFORN) DIA IBs 201-68, 14 Oct 68; 202-68, 15 Oct 68; 204-68, 17 Oct 68; 214-68, 31 Oct 68.

81. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 14472 to CINCPAC, 271008Z Oct 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3-7. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Nov 68.

NORTH VIETNAM PERSONNEL INFILTRATION INTO THE RVN[a]

	1965	1966	1967	1968
TOTAL	35,300	89,800	91,500	116,200
Accepted	26,000	58,800	60,600	78,900
Possible	9,300	31,000	30,900	37,300

a. The nature of enemy infiltration into the RVN made it difficult to detect many groups until after they had been in the country for six months or longer.

Data Definition

Accepted Confirmed: A confirmed infiltration unit/group is one which is accepted in South Vietnam on the basis of information provided by a minimum of two PWs or returnees (Hoi Chanh) from the unit/group, or two captured documents from the unit, or a combination of personnel and documents.

Accepted Probable: Probable infiltration unit/group is one which is accepted in South Vietnam on the basis of information provided by one PW or returnee (Hoi Chanh) from the unit/group, or a captured document supported by information from other sources which can be evaluated as probably true.

Possible: A possible infiltration unit/group is one which may be in South Vietnam on the basis of information which can be evaluated as possibly true even though no PW, returnee or document is available to verify the reports.

seize these caches, while at the same time destroying the politico-military structure that provided a favorable environment for enemy military operations.[84]

The President, as usual, heartily approved of COMUSMACV's aggressive strategy. Through Secretary Clifford, he directed that "constant, relentless and persistent pressure" be maintained against the enemy in SVN.[85] These instructions remained in effect after the total cessation of bombing and the beginning of peace talks.

Looking toward the onset of the northeast monsoon season, which would begin in November, General Abrams drafted plans for his own "winter-spring offensive" to take advantage of the expected weather patterns. In September he proposed an intensified air interdiction effort in southern NVN and the Laotian panhandle and a vigorous land campaign against enemy bases and infiltration routes in the Delta--the regions where the monsoon would bring favorable weather. He planned to assign additional forces to IV CTZ for this purpose. Admiral McCain and General Wheeler approved this plan, but Secretary Clifford, when apprised of it, questioned the advisability of increasing US strength in the Delta. ARVN troops were carrying most of the burden there, he pointed out, and it seemed undesirable to "Americanize" this theater of the war. General Abrams replied that the US forces involved would consist entirely of helicopter units, except for one US airmobile brigade that would be needed for the duration of the campaign (approximately 90 days) to seal off the Cambodian border. ARVN and VNMC units, assisted by elements of the US 9th Division already in IV CTZ, would sweep the Delta in search of enemy forces and bases.[86]

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84. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 13848 to CINCPAC et al., 130945Z Oct 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 41523 to State, 30 Oct 68, JCS IN 75427.

85. (TS) Msg, JCS 11890 to COMUSMACV, 161605Z Oct 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68.

86. (TS-NOFORN) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 12535 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 170257Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (TS-GP 3) CM-3662-68 to SecDef, 20 Sep 68, Att to JCS 2472/364, 21 Sep 68; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Northeast Monsoon Campaign Planning," 5 Oct 68, Att to JCS 2472/364-1, 8 Oct 68; (TS) CM-3723-68 to SecDef, 23 Oct 68, Att to N/H of JCS 2472/364-1, 25 Oct 68; JMF 911/520 (20 Sep 68).