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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM

1969 - 1970

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AUTHORITY

This volume has been prepared by historians in the Historical Division of the Joint Secretariat in accordance with professional standards of historiography. Inasmuch as the content of the volume has not been considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it is to be construed as descriptive only and not as constituting the official position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on any subject.

G. E. COOKE
Brigadier General, USAF
Secretary, JCS

FOREWORD

This volume of the series, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, was prepared by the Special Projects Branch of the Historical Division. A senior historian, Mr. Willard J. Webb, was the principal author and coordinator of the contributions of other Branch members. The work proceeded under the general supervision of the successive Chiefs of the Special Projects Branch, Dr. Robert J. Watson and Mr. Vernon E. Davis. The latter also performed the final editing, while Mrs. Janet W. Ball directed all aspects of the preparation of the manuscript for publication.

E. H. GIUSTI
Chief, Historical Division
Joint Secretariat

NOTE ON PARAGRAPH CLASSIFICATION

The security classification of all information contained in this volume is derivative. The classification of any particular paragraph is that of the most highly classified document cited in the footnote indicating the source of the information.

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Chapter 1

DETERMINING THE POLICY JANUARY-MARCH 1969

The Setting

At the beginning of 1969, the United States had been involved in combat operations in South Vietnam for over three and a half years. A total of 30,614 Americans had lost their lives and the war had cost an estimated $52.2 billion. Yet, the United States was apparently no nearer its objective of eliminating the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese aggression in the south than when it entered the struggle. President Lyndon B. Johnson's political judgment had led him to pursue a limited war in Vietnam, but as the fighting continued, this policy satisfied neither those opposed to the war nor the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The latter, responsible for the strategic direction of the campaign, consistently sought expanded operations and authorities during the first three and a half years of the war. They believed that provision of more forces, enlarged operating areas, and increased authorities would bring a successful conclusion of the war, but the full extent of the JCS recommendations was never granted. On the other hand, as the conflict continued, the antiwar sentiment in the United States grew increasingly strident in demands for an immediate end to the US involvement.[1]

The first serious efforts to negotiate a settlement of the war began in 1968 when the enemy, after many refusals, finally responded to US initiatives. In February of that year, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had launched a surprise Tet offensive in South Vietnam. Although the attack resulted in a costly military failure for the enemy, this sudden show of strength and the public shock it caused in the United States and elsewhere proved a psychological victory for the Communists and increased the US public discontent with the war. President Johnson

1. The casualty figure is from (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 11-70, 14 Jan 70. The expenditure total is the estimated "full cost" as set forth in DOD (Comptroller), The Economics of Defense Spending, A Look at the Realities, July 1972, p. 149.

limited the US bombing of North Vietnam at the end of March and called for negotiations to end the war. Talks between the United States and North Vietnam commenced in Paris in mid-May, but soon deadlocked. In an effort to get the stalled discussions moving, President Johnson on 31 October, just five days before the US presidential election, announced the suspension of the US bombing of North Vietnam and the expansion of the Paris talks to include the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and the National Liberation Front (NLF). The widened negotiations began a few days later, but quickly bogged down on procedural questions.[2]

The New Administration

Despite the lack of success in the Paris talks, the year 1969 opened with an aura of expectation with regard to Vietnam. Richard M. Nixon would assume the presidency on 20 January, and his new Administration would enter office uncommitted to the Vietnam policies and decisions of the preceeding four years. In his acceptance of the Republican nomination in early August 1968, Richard Nixon had pledged that "an honorable end to the war in Vietnam" would be the first foreign policy objective of his presidency. He did not indicate precisely how he would accomplish this objective, dwelling instead on the thought that only a new administration, not tied to the past mistakes, could successfully end the hostilities. During the campaign he opposed an immediate US withdrawal or the imposition of a coalition government on South Vietnam, but he refused to elaborate further on Vietnam policy while negotiations were continuing. To do so, he said, would jeopardize the talks and lead the North Vietnamese to believe that better terms could be obtained from him than from the Johnson Administration. Mr. Nixon had won the election by a narrow margin, and the US public awaited a further exposition of his Vietnam policy.[3]

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2. See The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, Chs. 50, 53, and 54.

3. NY Times, 9 Aug 68, 1; 23 Sep 68, 31; 8 Oct 68, 1; 10 Oct 68, 50; 28 Oct 68, 1; 7 Nov 68, 1. Theodore H. White, The Making of the President, 1968 (1969), p. 372.

The public was not immediately satisfied in its desire for details of Mr. Nixon's Vietnam policy. Several days after his victory, the President-elect informed the press that he would refrain from comment on foreign affairs until Inauguration Day. He would do nothing in this field, he said, unless he had discussed it with the President and the Secretary of State. After meeting with President Johnson on 11 November to discuss arrangements for an orderly transition, Mr. Nixon announced that the Johnson Administration would speak for itself and for the incoming Administration as well during the next two months. Mr. Nixon told newsmen that progress on a Vietnam settlement could be expected only if "the parties on the other side" realized that the current Administration "is setting forth policies that would be carried forward by the next Administration." The President-elect named former Ambassador Robert D. Murphy as his representative with the Johnson Administration for the transition of foreign affairs. President Johnson made no changes in Vietnam policy during his final weeks in office.[4]

Although Mr. Nixon had on several occasions during the campaign compared the situation in Vietnam if he should win to that confronting President Eisenhower in Korea in early 1953, he did not follow the Eisenhower example and travel to the scene of the war. The President-elect declined President's Thieu's invitation to visit South Vietnam. Nor did he send a personal representative to the Paris peace talks as suggested by the US Representative, W. Averell Harriman. Mr. Nixon's announced reason for avoiding a prominent role was that he did not wish to take any action that might hinder President Johnson's peace efforts.[5]

In early December 1968, the President-elect named Henry A. Kissinger of Harvard University as his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. Dr. Kissinger headed Harvard's International Seminar and Defense Studies Program and was to become President Nixon's closest adviser on foreign affairs. It happened that he had recently completed an article dealing with the Vietnam negotiations. This piece, published in the January 1969

4. NY Times, 8 Nov 68, 1; 12 Nov 68, 1 and 34; 15 Nov 68, 1.
5. Ibid., 8 Nov 68, 1; 6 Dec 68, 1.

issue of Foreign Affairs but appearing in late 1968, gave some notion of the thinking of the incoming Administration. Dr. Kissinger believed that "the commitment of 500,000 Americans" had settled the issue of the importance of Vietnam and that the matter of confidence in American promises was now involved. He criticized the lack of US planning and preparation for negotiations, observing that: "Where Hanoi makes a fetish of planning, Washington is allergic to it." This, he said, led to rigidity in advance of formal negotiations and excessive reliance on tactical considerations once discussions began. The best way to make progress, Dr. Kissinger suggested, might be to seek agreement on ultimate goals first and then work back to the details to implement them. No matter how irrelevant its political conceptions or how inappropriate its strategy, the United States was so powerful, Dr. Kissinger wrote, that North Vietnam could not force the withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam. He quickly added that the US military strength had no political corollary and that the United States had thus far been unable to create a political structure capable of surviving a US withdrawal.

In the Foreign Affairs article Dr. Kissinger defined the limits of US commitment in two propositions: the United States could not accept a military defeat or a change in the political structure of South Vietnam brought by external military force; but once NVN forces and pressures were removed, the United States had no obligation to maintain a government in Saigon by force. Therefore US objectives should be: (1) to bring about a staged withdrawal of external forces, both North Vietnamese and US; (2) thereby to create the maximum incentive for the contending forces in South Vietnam to work out their own political agreement. Dr. Kissinger concluded by pointing out that a negotiating procedure and definition of objectives could not guarantee a settlement. If Hanoi proved intransigent and the war continued, the United States should seek as many of its objectives as possible unilaterally. Such an approach would include, he said: a strategy to reduce casualties and protect the population; continued strengthening of the South Vietnamese forces to permit a gradual withdrawal of some US forces; and encouragement of the Saigon government to broaden its base

to strengthen it for the political contest with the Communists, which it must eventually undertake.[6]

On 28 December 1968, the President-elect met with his key foreign policy and national security advisers. The meeting included Dr. Kissinger, Ambassador Murphy, Secretary of State-designate William P. Rogers, and Representative Melvin R. Laird, the prospective Secretary of Defense. General Andrew Goodpaster, Deputy COMUSMACV and Mr. Nixon's military adviser, also attended. Among other matters, the conferees considered Vietnam. Mr. Nixon directed his advisers to present him with "realistic" options on Vietnam by 20 January. He hoped, shortly thereafter, to select the course or courses to pursue in Vietnam, devising a "coherent strategy" for Vietnam early in his Administration. He assigned Dr. Kissinger the task of coordinating this effort.[7]

Reorganization of the National Security Council System

Richard M. Nixon became President on 20 January 1969. In his inaugural address he spoke only in generalities. He did not mention Vietnam directly, but with respect to the war he stated:

> Let this message be heard by strong and weak alike: The peace we seek--the peace we seek to win--is not victory over any other people, but the peace that comes "with healing in its wings"; with compassion for those who have suffered; with understanding for those who have opposed us; with the opportunity for all the peoples . . . to choose their own destiny.[8]

On the day he assumed office, President Nixon directed far-reaching changes in the organization and operation of the National Security Council. He established a National Security Council Review Group to examine papers prior to submission to the NSC to assure that: issues treated therein were worthy of NSC attention; all realistic

6. NY Times, 3 Dec 68, 1. Henry A. Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," Foreign Affairs, Jan 69, pp. 211-234.
7. NY Times, 29 Dec 68, 1.
8. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, 1969 (1971), pp. 1-4. (Hereafter cited as Public Papers, Nixon, 1969.)

alternatives were presented; relevant facts, including cost implications, were included; and all departments and agency views were adequately set out. The President named his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to chair the Review Group; other members included representatives of the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The President also instituted a NSC Under Secretaries Committee and brought the existing regional Interdepartmental Groups and the Political-Military Interdepartmental Group under the NSC structure. The Under Secretaries Committee was headed by the Under Secretary of State and consisted of the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The President directed the Under Secretaries Committee to consider the following: issues referred to it by the NSC Review Group; problems of overseas operations not appropriate for NSC or presidential consideration or that could not be resolved at the Interdepartmental Group level; and such other operational matters as might be referred to it jointly by the Under Secretary of State and the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The several Interdepartmental Groups would discuss and decide interdepartmental issues that could be settled at the assistant secretary level, prepare policy papers for the NSC, and produce contingency papers on potential crisis areas for NSC review. In addition, the President announced his intention to appoint ad hoc groups within the framework of the NSC system to deal with particular problems.[9]

Three weeks later, on 13 February, the President formed such an ad hoc interdepartmental group to "facilitate the orderly planning and implementation of policy on Vietnam." The Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam would prepare policy and contingency papers for the NSC Review Group and the Council itself. The President called upon the Secretary of State to designate a representative to head the Group. Additional members included representatives of the Secretary of Defense,

9. (C-GP 4) NSDM 2, 20 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2488/1, 21 Jan 69, JMF 001 (20 Jan 69) NSC.

the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Director of Central Intelligence. Other agencies might be represented at the discretion of the chairman.[10]

Subsequently the President added another body, the Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG), to assist him and the National Security Council in policy formulation. This Group was created on 16 September 1969 to undertake "on a continuous basis" systematic analysis of US programs and activities in Vietnam. Dr. Kissinger chaired the VSSG and the other members were the Under Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (the same as the Under Secretaries Committee, but with a different chairman). The President wanted the VSSG to conduct its affairs "without prejudice to the existing interdepartmental framework concerned with day-to-day operational matters on Vietnam."[11]

As a part of his 20 January reorganization of the NSC system, President Nixon also initiated two new series of documents to inform the departments and agencies of presidential action. The first of these, the National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM), would report presidential decisions, whether or not they resulted from NSC meetings. The second, the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM), would initiate studies for NSC consideration. At this same time, the President discontinued the National Security Action Memorandums (NSAM), which had been introduced by President Kennedy.[12]

In this reorganization President Nixon discarded the "Tuesday Lunch," that informal group of advisers who had assisted President Johnson in policy decisions, and also the Senior Interdepartmental Group. The functions of those two bodies would now be carried on by the Review Group and the Under Secretaries Committee under formally defined terms of reference. These new groups would review and refine issues before they reached the NSC and the President. By this change President Nixon apparently hoped

10. (~~C~~-GP 4) NSSM 21, 13 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/438, 15 Feb 69, JMF 911/001 (12 Feb 69).
11. (~~TS~~) NSDM 23, 16 Sep 69, JMF 001 (CY 1969) NSDMs.
12. (~~C~~-GP 4) NSDM 1, 20 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2488, 21 Jan 69, JMF 001 (20 Jan 69) NSC.

to avoid some of the weaknesses that had reportedly arisen from the informal staffing and agenda procedures of the Tuesday Lunch. The new NSC document series would insure that all decisions were formally recorded, overcoming Dr. Kissinger's criticism of the Johnson Administration system (under which decisions had often been conveyed orally to the departments, with frequent uncertainty about what precisely had been decided). The NSC reorganization reflected Mr. Nixon's desire for a more structured policy-making apparatus and the restoration of the National Security Council as the principal formal channel for advice to the President.[13]

To conform with the revamped NSC organization, the Secretary of Defense called upon G. Warren Nutter, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ASD(ISA)), to serve as the representative of his office on the NSC Review Group and to provide support for the Secretary of Defense in his capacity as a NSC member. Secretary Laird also directed the Assistant Secretary (ISA) to support the Deputy Secretary of Defense in his responsibilities as a member of the NSC Under Secretaries Committee and to serve as the OSD representative on the various NSC Interdepartmental and ad hoc groups. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, named the Director of the Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5) of the Joint Staff as his representative on the NSC Review Group. When the President established the NSC Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam, General Wheeler assigned two Joint Staff officers, the Special Assistant for Counter-insurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) and the Chief of the Far East Division, Plans and Policy Directorate, to represent him on the Group.[14]

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13. (S) Memo, Henry A. Kissinger to President-elect (Nixon), "Proposal for a New National Security Council System," 3 Jan 69, same file.

14. (C-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., 25 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2488/7, 28 Jan 69; (S) CM-3876-69 to Dr. Kissinger, 21 Jan 69; JMF 001 (20 Jan 69) NSC. (S) DJSM-270-69 to Dr. Kissinger, 19 Feb 69, JMF 911/001 (13 Feb 69). In June 1969 the number of JCS representatives on the Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam was reduced to one. The Chief of the Far East Division, J-5, became the representative and SACSA his alternate. (C-GP 3) DJSM-879-69 to Dir J-5 and SACSA, 12 Jun 69, same file.

On the recommendation of both the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Mr. Laird directed the maintenance of close coordination between his office and the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OJCS) in NSC matters. To expedite and simplify this coordination, the Secretary ordered the preparation of single talking papers with a joint ISA/JCS position on issues before the Under Secretaries Committee, the Review Group, or the Council itself. In instances where a joint position could not be formulated, divergencies between the OSD and OJCS views would be clearly identified. Official communications regarding NSC matters, originating either from the Chairman's office or from the ASD(ISA), would pass through the Secretary's office. In addition, Mr. Laird approached Dr. Kissinger, asking that all communications from the White House for the Department of Defense come through the Secretary of Defense. Dr. Kissinger agreed with that procedure on the understanding that it did not affect the direct access between the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the statutory role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the principal military advisers to the President and the National Security Council.[15]

A Vietnam Review

On the day following his assumption of the presidency, Richard Nixon ordered a sweeping review by the concerned government departments and agencies of every facet of the Vietnam situation. He addressed a series of searching questions, relayed by Dr. Kissinger in NSSM 1, to the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US Ambassador in Saigon, and COMUSMACV. President Nixon sought not merely answers, but any differing views, together with the

15. (U) Memo, ASD(ISA) and CJCS to SecDef, "DOD Participation in National Security Council Affairs," 23 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2488/7, 25 Jan 69; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., same subj, 25 Jan 69, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2488/7, 28 Jan 69; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS and ASD(ISA), "National Security Council," 22 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2488/6, 23 Jan 69; (S) Memo, SecDef to Dr. Kissinger, same subj, 22 Jan 69; (U) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, same subj, 25 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2488/6-1, 30 Jan 69; JMF 001 (20 Jan 69) NSC.

reasons for the disagreements. From this analysis and information, he wanted to develop a consensus to serve as the basis for policy decisions concerning Vietnam.

The President's questions fell into six categories: the environment of negotiations, the enemy forces, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF), pacification, the political situation in South Vietnam, and US military operations. With respect to the first category, the questions included the following: Why had the North Vietnamese agreed to come to Paris? Was Hanoi under active pressure from Peking and Moscow regarding the negotiations? Were there identifiable factions within the Hanoi government? In this same group was a query, prompted by a recent National Intelligence Estimate, concerning the impact of various outcomes in Vietnam on the entire Southeast Asia situation.

The President's questions about the enemy covered such diverse matters as: why North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units had quit the RVN in the previous summer and fall; why the Viet Cong (VC) forces had become relatively dormant; whether attrition would outstrip the enemy's replenishment ability; and to what extent the action of friendly forces controlled the enemy's rate of attrition. In addition, he asked if the enemy could launch a large-scale offensive within the next six months. The President also desired information on the main channel of enemy military supply.

Regarding the RVNAF, the President wanted both opinions and evidence from all parties on the extent of improvement. He requested comments on RVNAF discipline and desertion rates, and a judgment of the ability of the RVNAF to cope with the VC, with or without US support, if the NVA were withdrawn. He also asked to what extent the RVNAF could hold its own against the NVA, assuming various levels of US support. He sought views on further necessary changes in the RVNAF and how they might be brought about.

The pacification program was the subject of a number of questions, both broad and specific. The President wanted an appraisal of the security situation and of the balance of influence between the VC and the NLF at key periods since 1961. Could more improvement be expected in the countryside in the next two years than in the past? The President asked how the US and RVN forces could change their practices in order to win, and what changes the enemy

might conceivably adopt that would inadvertently play into allied hands. Addressees were asked about the proportion of the rural population under VC control, the verified numbers of Communist "infrastructure" personnel killed or arrested in the past year, and the disruptive effects on the Communist apparatus of such actions.

The political questions were intended to illuminate the attitudes of the various factions in the RVN and the pattern of existing political alignments, all against the background of US influence and interests in Vietnam. Particularly, President Nixon wanted to know how US influence could be used to attain a strong noncommunist political orientation within South Vietnam after a "compromise settlement of hostilities."

On the subject of US military operations, the President inquired about changes in force deployments and tactics during the past year and what had been the impact of the changes. This question was followed by another that revealed the direction of the President's thinking: "In what different ways (including innovations in organization) might US force levels be reduced to various levels, while minimizing the impact on combat capability?" Other questions called for evaluations of ARC LIGHT, ROLLING THUNDER, and the interdiction campaign in Laos.[16]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense all prepared separate responses to the President's questions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded their reply, incorporating the answers of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, to the Secretary of Defense on 4 February. The Secretary submitted all the views of Defense Department origin to the White House on 10 February. The responses of the Central Intelligence Agency and of the Department of State, including the US Embassy in Saigon, reached the President during the same period.[17]

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16. (S-GP 3) NSSM 1, 21 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2472/413. 22 Jan 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 1.

17. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV 1285 to DJS, 29 Jan 69; CINCPAC to DJS, 310512Z Jan 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-58-69 to SecDef, 4 Feb 69, App to JCS 2472/413-2, 1 Feb 69, same file, sec 2. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "NSSM No. 1; Situation in Vietnam," 10 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-4, 11 Feb 69; (S-GP 1) Memo, SpecAsst for Vietnamese Affairs, CIA to CJCS, "The

The NSC staff prepared an analytical summary of the replies and circulated it to the original addressees for comment. After refinement and correction at a meeting of the NSC Review Group, a revised version of the summary was disseminated by Dr. Kissinger on 22 March, with a view to NSC consideration later in the month.[18]

Dr. Kissinger's summary indicated agreement in a number of areas. It was the general consensus that the RVN and allied position had recently been strengthened; that the Republic of Vietnam had improved its political position in certain respects, though it remained weakest--and the VC/NLF strongest--in the rural areas; and that Hanoi was attempting to chart a course basically independent of Moscow and Peking. Further, all the participants conceded the following: the RVNAF could not then, or in the foreseeable future, stand alone against the VC and sizable North Vietnamese forces; although the enemy had suffered some reverses, he had not abandoned his primary objectives and still had sufficient strength to pursue his goals; the enemy "basically" controlled the casualty rates for both sides and could still launch major offensives; and the enemy was participating in the Paris talks for a number of reasons, including a desire to pursue his objectives at lower cost, but was not there primarily out of weakness.

More prominent than the areas of agreement were the substantial differences of opinion among the participating departments and agencies. In these differences, the respondents generally divided into two main schools of thought. The first usually included COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the US Embassy in Saigon.

CIA's Response to National Security Study Memorandum 1," 10 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-2, 11 Feb 69; same file, sec 3. (S-GP 1) Memo, SecState to Pres, "National Security Study Memorandum Number 1," 18 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-5, 18 Feb 69, same file, sec 4.

18. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to Members of NSC Review Gp, "NSSM 1 - Vietnam Questions," 14 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-6, 17 Mar 69; (TS-GP 1) TP for ASD(ISA) and Dir, J-5, for NSC Review Gp Mtg, 20 Mar, "NSSM 1 - Vietnam Questions," 20 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-7, 21 Mar 69; (TS-GP 3) Memo, NSC staff to Vice Pres et al., 22 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-8, 24 Mar 69; JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 5.

This group took a hopeful view of both current and future prospects. The second group was "decidedly more skeptical about the present and pessimistic about the future" and comprised the OSD, the CIA, and--to a lesser extent--the Department of State.

The optimistic school saw the enemy's presence at the Paris negotiations and his lessening of military activity as the result of allied pressures. The opposing faction attributed these developments to political motives of the enemy. Disagreements over the quality of the RVNAF and their ability eventually to assume the defense of the country were particularly acute. The military (COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff) gave great weight to the statistical evidence of RVNAF improvement, while the OSD and CIA emphasized remaining obstacles and pointed out that qualitative factors must also be considered in evaluating the RVNAF.

On the question of possible US force reductions, the COMUSMACV/JCS view was that any reduction in force levels would cause proportional reductions in combat capability. Officials of OSD, on the other hand, believed that US forces could be reduced as the RVNAF expanded and improved. Some, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, assigned much greater effectiveness to past and current bombing operations in Vietnam and Laos than did others. The COMUSMACV/JCS view was that a vigorous interdiction campaign against land and sea supply routes could compel North Vietnam to abandon the struggle; the "civilians" (State, OSD, and CIA) believed that the enemy would still be able to maintain a flow of supplies. Advances in pacification were hailed by the first school, but discounted by the second as illusory and more the result of a faulty evaluation system than of real progress. Some respondents believed there had been recent improvements in the RVN political scene, but others focused on the weaknesses that the Republic of Vietnam must overcome if it was to survive.[19]

19. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to Members of NSC Review Gp, "NSSM 1 - Vietnam Questions," 14 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-6, 17 Mar 69; (~~TS~~-GP 3) NSC Staff Memo to SecState et al., 22 Mar 72, Att to JCS 2472/413-8, 24 Mar 69; JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 5.

The Secretary of Defense Visits Vietnam

In early March, while the above responses were still being refined, President Nixon dispatched Secretary of Defense Laird to Vietnam. As the first high-level member of the new Administration to view the situation there, Secretary Laird thought of his visit as "the beginning of a concerted and dedicated attempt . . . to come to grips with the complexities and practicalities of the Southeast Asian conflict." He described the purpose as to "determine how we could achieve our objectives in Southeast Asia, consistent with our vital national interests." In attempting to make such a determination, the Secretary used four assumptions: (1) no breakthrough in Paris was likely in the near future; (2) the United States would not "escalate" its purpose beyond the limited objective of allowing the South Vietnamese people to determine their own future; (3) such self-determination required a capability for sustained self-defense and self-reliance; (4) North Vietnam would not voluntarily abandon its aim of political control of the south.

Accompanied by General Wheeler, Secretary Laird visited South Vietnam for five days beginning 5 March 1969. There he talked with US Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and General Creighton W. Abrams, COMUSMACV, and traveled to I, II, and IV CTZ areas. He also met with RVN leaders, including President Nguyen Van Thieu, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, and Prime Minister Tran Van Huong.

The importance of the visit lay less in the briefings Secretary Laird received in Vietnam than in the clear message he carried from the new Administration to the US military leaders and RVN officials. The American people expected the new Administration to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion, Mr. Laird told the US military commanders, and a satisfactory conclusion to most Americans meant eventual disengagement of US troops from combat. He informed his hearers that it was their task to find the means to shift the combat burden "promptly, and methodically," to the South Vietnamese.[20]

20. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, March 5-12 1969," 13 Mar 69, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS to SEA, Mar 69.

In a similar vein, Secretary Laird pointed out to President Thieu that the previous Administration had run out of public support on Vietnam. The new one had a breathing spell in which to seek a solution, but this was of strictly limited duration--roughly six months to a year. Mr. Laird told President Thieu that the most immediate problems were the improvement of the RVNAF and the assumption by South Vietnam of a greater share of responsibility for the fighting.

The Secretary reminded President Thieu that over the years, successive administrations had made one optimistic report on Vietnam after another to the Congress and people of the United States. The Nixon Administration, he said, hoped to avoid that pitfall. It did not want to give the impression of success either on the battlefield or at the negotiating table when there was none. Secretary Laird remarked that the Communists had succeeded in convincing many people that they were the ones who wanted peace. He asked both President Thieu and Vice President Ky what could be done about this matter, but neither had a ready answer.[21]

Returning home after stopping off to visit CINCPAC, Secretary Laird assured President Nixon that all the civilian and military leaders with whom he had conferred--US as well as South Vietnamese--agreed that the allies in South Vietnam had and could maintain enough military strength to keep the enemy from military victory. But because of operational restrictions, none of these leaders saw a military victory for US and allied forces "within the foreseeable future."

The Secretary described for the President the current military situation in Vietnam. He commended the US fighting men in Southeast Asia and stated that the course of the war in all four CTZs seemed favorable to the allies although consolidation of political control by the Republic of Vietnam was proceeding slowly. He reported increased enemy use of border sanctuaries and suggested

21. (S-GP 3) Memo of Conv, Pres Thieu, SecDef, et al., 8 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/463, 8 Apr 69; (S-GP 3) Memo of Conv, Prime Minister, SecDef, et al., 8 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/462, 8 Apr 69; JMF 911/975 (CY 69).

modification of existing rules of engagement to permit more effective action against that growing threat.

Secretary Laird brought to the President's attention the matter of Termination Day (T-Day) planning. This planning, begun in 1967, provided for the rapid removal of US personnel and the turnover of military equipment to the South Vietnamese in the event of a political settlement and a termination of hostilities. Secretary Laird noted that the US delegation in Paris continued to refer to the terms of the 1966 Manila Communique, which the United States had often cited during 1967 and 1968 with regard to peace efforts in Vietnam. Under the Communique, allied forces would begin withdrawal concurrently with the withdrawal of NVN troops; total US and allied withdrawal would be completed not later than six months after the removal of all NVN forces and the cessation of all infiltration. The Secretary had serious questions about the terms of the Manila Communique, believing that the initiation of the Paris negotiations had rendered them obsolete. The Paris talks might produce a withdrawal formula either more gradual or more precipitate than that contemplated at Manila. In any event, he said, the United States must insure that the entire Defense establishment understood the need to refine the concept of T-Day planning and develop a detailed program for withdrawal of US troops and transfer of US equipment as hostilities diminished and finally terminated.

The Secretary of Defense reported that the RVNAF modernization program had brought the South Vietnamese forces to a total strength of more than a million men. He had found, however, no indication that the current rate of improvement would ever make possible a significant reduction in the US military contribution in South Vietnam. The present program, he observed, was designed only to build a RVN force to cope with the VC insurgency. The US military authorities believed that no possible modernization program would enable the RVNAF to cope alone with a threat comparable to the present level of aggression. But Mr. Laird could not accept the proposition that substantial numbers of US forces would have to remain to contain the NVN threat, if a political settlement proved unobtainable. Neither did he accept the MACV staff premise that no US personnel reduction would be possible in the absence of total withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops. "The emphasis can and must be shifted," he recommended, "to measures through which South Vietnam can achieve a

self-defense capability that will strengthen our joint hand in Paris and prevent ultimate military defeat if political settlement proves impossible."

Secretary Laird concluded his report with a recommendation for withdrawal of some US troops from Vietnam in 1969. The qualitative and quantitative improvement of the RVNAF to date, although less than desired, should permit the redeployment of between 50,000 and 70,000 US troops from Southeast Asia during the remainder of the year. He was convinced that this redeployment would in no way jeopardize the security of the remaining US and allied forces. Further, he held that such a reduction was essential in order to enhance the support of vital US interests worldwide, to stimulate increased self-reliance on the part of the Republic of Vietnam, and to sustain the US public support for continued operations in Vietnam. Plans to accomplish this redeployment should be initiated at once. They should provide for continued substantial replacement of US with South Vietnamese forces in the following years.[22]

The NSC Meeting of 28 March

After considering Secretary Laird's report and the revised summary of answers to his questions on Vietnam, the President assembled the National Security Council on 28 March 1969 to review Vietnam policy. The participants, in addition to the statutory members, were General Wheeler, Richard Helms, the Director of Central Intelligence, Philip Habib of the US delegation to the Paris talks, and Ambassador Bunker and General Goodpaster from Saigon. The agenda for the meeting included two papers dealing with negotiations, prepared by the NSC Vietnam Ad Hoc Group, and the revised summary of responses to the President's questions on Vietnam.

The first Ad Hoc Group paper offered a general strategy for the negotiations. The overall objective of this strategy was to provide the South Vietnamese people the opportunity to determine their own future free of outside interference. As the fundamental, immediate objective, the strategy called for some form of agreement on mutual withdrawal. The paper also included a number of secondary

22. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, March 5-12 1969," 13 Mar 69, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS to SEA, Mar 69.

objectives, such as reunification of Vietnam, international recognition of reunification, regional economic assistance for North Vietnam, and other matters that would not arise until later in the negotiations.

The second Ad Hoc Group paper dealt exclusively with a mutual withdrawal. The objective should be the removal of North Vietnamese military forces and "other elements" from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Adequate inspection and verification machinery should be provided to make certain that enemy forces did in fact withdraw and that they returned to their own country. The Ad Hoc Group had been unable to define the US forces to be included in a mutual withdrawal, and the paper for the NSC meeting presented two alternatives. The first provided for the withdrawal of all US and allied combat and "combat related" forces, but with retention of US military advisory and logistic personnel. The second would maintain in South Vietnam, "at least for a period of time," selected combat and "directly-related combat" forces.[23]

At the 28 March meeting the President accepted the negotiations strategy and withdrawal papers as providing the general outline for a diplomatic settlement. The United States should make it clear, President Nixon said, that it would withdraw all forces from Vietnam if North Vietnam accepted a mutual withdrawal and gave guarantees of inspection and verification. With regard to the question of the timing of a mutual withdrawal, the President considered that an extended period might be required. The Ad Hoc Group paper had indicated that the United States should not invoke the Manila Communique either in public or private, but also should avoid any repudiation of it. The President now said that the United States need not commit itself to withdraw within six months after all enemy forces departed, as provided in the Manila formula. He

23. (S) Memo, AsstSecState to Chm, NSC Review Gp, "Revised Draft Paper on Over-all Negotiating Strategy and a 'Game Plan'" and "Revised Draft Paper on Mutual Withdrawal," 21 Mar 69, Tabs A and B, to (S) TP for SecDef and CJCS (NSC Mtg of 28 Mar 69), "Papers for Vietnam Negotiations," n.d., JMF 077 (21 Jan 69) (NSC Review Gp Mtg, 28 Mar 69).

thought that some US combat forces, as well as a sizable MAAG, would have to remain in Vietnam "a long time."

The participants of the meeting realized that a negotiated mutual withdrawal might not be immediately attainable, and the discussion turned to the possibility of the South Vietnamese assuming a larger combat role, with a concurrent reduction of US forces. Secretary of State Rogers raised this subject when he asked, "Can we turn over more of our functions to the GVN?" Ambassador Bunker responded that the answer depended on the further improvement of the RVNAF. The President then inquired how this "de-Americanization," as he termed it, would affect the North Vietnamese. Some felt it would incline them to hasten negotiations, but there was no consensus.

General Goodpaster observed that the RVNAF had indeed improved--"qualitative capability has not dropped while quantitative improvements have become realities." He thought the time had arrived when the United States could realistically plan to withdraw some forces, though it would not be appropriate to make the final decision until mid-year. Even then, he cautioned, any decision should depend on prevailing circumstances and the latest assessment of the RVNAF. Secretary Rogers stressed the need for "some discernable progress" toward de-Americanization. The President agreed, stating that it must occur in "a deliberate way from a position of strength, not weakness." He thought that replacement of US forces with South Vietnamese troops should begin within six to eight months. In the course of the discussion, Secretary Laird suggested the term "Vietnamization" to replace the more awkward "de-Americanization." This suggestion received de facto acceptance and the term soon passed into general use.[24]

Four days later, on 1 April 1969, the decisions reached by the President were published in NSDM 9. He approved the negotiations strategy and mutual withdrawal papers, thereby

24. (S) TP for SecDef and CJCS (NSC Mtg of 28 Mar 69), "Papers for Vietnam Negotiations," n.d.; (TS) TP for SecDef and CJCS (NSC Mtg, 28 Mar 69), "Revised Summary of Responses to NSSM 1: The Situation in Vietnam," n.d.; long-hand notes on the back of pages of these TPs, taken by CJCS in the 28 Mar 69 NSC Mtg; JMF 077 (21 Mar 69) (NSC Review Group Mtg, 28 Mar 69).

adopting a set of diplomatic objectives, together with a course of action to obtain them.[25] He directed that, in the absence of a mutually agreed withdrawal, the United States would take no action to lower the tempo of the fighting. Nor would the United States initiate any proposal along this line in the Paris negotiations. If North Vietnam suggested some form of limitation on the hostilities, the United States would consider it, the President instructed, only in the context of mutual troop reduction. With regard to the definition of US forces for withdrawal, the President decided that "all combat forces" could be withdrawn from South Vietnam if North Vietnam met specific conditions for removal of its forces from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and gave guarantees on verification and maintenance of the agreement. As to the timing of a mutual withdrawal, he stated that there would be no public repudiation of the Manila formula. In practice the United States could control the timing of the completion of its withdrawal, based on its own determination of whether or not Hanoi had fully met the conditions of the agreement. The key point, the President stressed, was not the timetable but the securing of North Vietnam's compliance with the withdrawal conditions.

In furtherance of the decisions stemming from the 28 March NSC meeting, the President directed preparation of a number of papers on various aspects of negotiations and the terms of a settlement in Vietnam. He wanted a study of phased withdrawal under conditions of either mutual withdrawal or a unilateral US withdrawal with RVNAF troops assuming the combat role. In addition, he asked for study of the means of verifying a mutual withdrawal and for a detailed analysis of a political settlement for South Vietnam, accompanied by a separate paper on international guarantees for such a settlement. In light of the consensus at the NSC meeting that it was appropriate to begin planning the substitution of South Vietnamese for US forces without awaiting other developments, the President also ordered the preparation of a "specific plan timetable for Vietnamizing the war."[26]

25. For the development of the US negotiating position, see Ch. 12.

26. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NSDM 9, 1 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/459, 2 Apr 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 1.

The 28 March NSC meeting and the subsequent presidential decisions marked the first step in the development of the Nixon Administration's Vietnam policy. In continuing to seek a negotiated mutual withdrawal, and in rejecting any reduction in the level of fighting except as a part of a mutual withdrawal, President Nixon in effect reaffirmed the basic policy of the Johnson Administration. But the decisions of 1 April 1969 went beyond the Johnson policy in one important respect. President Nixon had determined that the time was right to begin reducing the US involvement in Vietnam, regardless of the progress in negotiations. This would be done by shifting the combat role to the South Vietnamese forces and progressively withdrawing US forces--"Vietnamization," as Secretary Laird had labeled it. The President did not actually begin the process in April, nor did he fix the extent or schedule for it, but he did initiate specific planning for Vietnamization, indicating that it should begin within six to eight months. Now, for the first time since its involvement in the Vietnam war, the United States was moving toward a reduction of its effort. This reduction, the President apparently hoped, would dampen domestic opposition to the war and allow his Administration more time to find a diplomatic solution.

Chapter 2

MILITARY STRATEGY AND TACTICS JANUARY-MARCH 1969

President Nixon assumed office at a time when the US military forces in Vietnam were at their peak of strength and effectiveness. Following the repulse of the 1968 Tet offensive, allied troops had regained the initiative and had held it ever since. The enemy had been unable or unwilling to mount another massive attack. This favorable military situation afforded the new President a breathing spell for his re-examination of Vietnam policy, as described in the preceding chapter. Nevertheless the danger of a new flareup of enemy effort was ever present and was very much in the minds of President Nixon and his advisers. They were compelled to follow the tactical situation in Vietnam as closely and carefully as had President Johnson.

Friendly Forces

United States forces in Vietnam at the beginning of 1969 totaled 536,040.[1] The bulk of this total consisted of ground combat troops, including nine divisions (seven Army and two Marine) plus four Army brigades and various other units. All US forces, of whatever Service, were under the operational control of General Creighton W. Abrams, USA, who held three titles: Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV); Commanding General, US Army Vietnam; and Senior Adviser to the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF).

Other Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF), or Third Country Forces as they were also called, served under General Abrams' operational control. They consisted of 7,661 Australians, 516 New Zealanders, and 6,005 Thai troops. The Republic of Korea had almost 50,000 troops in South Vietnam

1. For a tabulation of allied strength figures and a list of major US ground combat units in Vietnam at the beginning of 1969, see Tables I, II, and IV following this chapter. Slightly different strength figures for the end of 1968, taken from other sources, are given in The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, Part III, Charts D, E, and F.

but had not placed them under COMUSMACV. Their relationship to the US forces was one of coordination and cooperation. Also serving in Vietnam, but classed as noncombatants, were a Philippine civic action group, a small military advisory group from the Repulbic of China (Taiwan), and a Spanish medical mission.

The RVNAF, including both the Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF), had attained a strength of 819,209 as 1969 began. South Vietnamese paramilitary forces included the National Police (NP) with 80,000, the Rural Development (RD) cadre of 46,750, and the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) with 43,000.[2] (For detailed strength figures, see Table I following this chapter.)

The US command organization in the field was based on a geographic division of the country into four corps tactical zones (CTZs). In I CTZ all US forces were under the Commandng General, III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF). The I and II Field Force Commanders controlled US troops in the II and III CTZs, respectively. Each of these three commanders acted as senior adviser to the GVN commander in his zone. In IV CTZ, the US commander bore only the title of "Senior Adviser," since the number of US troops was too small to justify a "field force" designation. Two of the Service component commanders of MACV--the Commanding General, Seventh Air Force, and the Commander, US Naval Forces Vietnam--similarly acted as advisers to their GVN counterparts.[3] (See Table III following this chapter for identification of these officers.)

Allied Strategy and Deployment

The allied strategy developed for 1969 provided for a "one-war" concept with all allied elements--RVNAF, US, and FWMAF--joining in a round-the-clock attack against the enemy. Combat operations, pacification, and RVNAF improvement received equal priority. This politico-military strategy was embodied in a Combined Campaign Plan, developed jointly by COMUSMACV

2. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. IV-8, IV-28, VI-2. (S) Briefing Notes for GEN McConnell, "Vietnam Situation," 14 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.
3. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. IV-1 - IV-8.

and the RVNAF Joint General Staff (JGS) and approved by the other FWMA commanders. Under it, the RVNAF and the FWMAF were given the mission of defeating the NVA/VC forces and assisting the Republic of Vietnam to extend control throughout South Vietnam. To combat the enemy, the Plan called for sustained, combined ground, air, and naval operations against VC/NVA forces, base areas, and lines of communication. For the extension of RVN control, the Plan envisioned the securing of towns, cities, and military bases, along with measures to prevent infiltration, "clear and hold" military operations, and support of pacification.

The Combined Campaign Plan made no functional separation of responsibilities between the RVNAF and the FWMAF. The RVNAF, in preparation for the time when it would assume the entire responsibility for the fighting, was expected to participate as fully as possible in all types of operations. The Plan specified the employment of the RVNAF and FWMAF in the following interdependent roles: (1) offensive operations against enemy forces and base areas in South Vietnam; (2) surveillance and reaction operations along the DMZ and the Laotian and Cambodian borders and in coastal waters; (3) protection of towns, provincial capitals, and cities; (4) territorial security operations. Air forces would conduct close air support and interdiction operations, carry out aerial reconnaissance of operational areas and infiltration routes, and identify enemy troop concentrations. Naval forces would continue to patrol coastal and inland waterways.

Territorial security was a major aspect of the allied strategy. The Combined Campaign Plan called for the regular RVNAF troops and the FWMAF to expand security around the cities and towns. Once areas were secured, the South Vietnamese territorial forces, the RF and PF, would maintain the areas. The PF would provide "local security" for hamlets and villages; the RF would maintain "territorial security" and defend lines of communications, political and economic centers, and governmental installations. This arrangement, it was planned, would relieve regular units of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) of these security missions. Other RVN internal security forces would perform regular police functions, attack the enemy's political organizations and the Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI), and take preventive measures against sabotage, terrorism, and banditry.

The overall mission assigned allied forces was to destroy the enemy, but emphasis varied from one zone to another in accord with local conditions. Forces in I CTZ would operate against enemy troops coming across the DMZ and the Laotian border. In addition, they would protect Hue and Da Nang and the main lines of communication--Routes 1 and 9. In II CTZ, attention was to be placed on destruction of enemy forces in the highlands and protection of the populated coastal lowlands. The primary efforts in III CTZ would be to counter infiltration from Cambodia and to protect and extend the security area around Saigon and Gia Dinh. Destruction of enemy bases and the clearance and defense of land and water LOCs were the primary tasks in IV CTZ. Allied forces were deployed in accordance with this scheme, with priorities being given in the following order: first, the area around Saigon--the western portion of III CTZ and the northern part of IV CTZ as far south as the mouth of the Mekong Delta; second, I CTZ from the DMZ to Quang Ngai; third, the highlands area of II CTZ, to be held by minimum forces, backed by ARVN and ROK units. The deployment of allied maneuver battalions is shown in the following table:[4]

	US	FW/ARVN	Total
I CTZ	46	40	86
II CTZ	17	48	65
III CTZ	41	64	105
IV CTZ	7	42	49
Total	111	194	305

(For a listing of the major US units in South Vietnam at the beginning of 1969, see Table IV following this chapter.)

4. (S) RVNAF/FWMAF 1969 Combined Campaign Plan, 30 Sep 68, JMF 911/350 (30 Sep 68) sec 1A. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. II-5 - II-22. (TS) MACV Fact Book-Supplemental Data (Item ID), n.d., JMF 911/075 (14 Mar 69) sec 1B. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM, 1-69, 2 Jan 69.

The protection of major population centers was an integral part of the allied strategy for 1969. Particular significance was attached to Saigon, Hue, and Da Nang. Not only were these cities thickly populated, but they had great psychological importance. This fact had been underscored by the worldwide impact of the 1968 enemy Tet offensive.

Protection of Saigon was the responsibility of the Capital Military District, a joint US/RVNAF headquarters. Under its command were 19 battalions (6 US and 13 RVNAF), disposed in three concentric rings about the city. Their mission was to search out enemy forces approaching Saigon and engage them as far from the city as possible. Particular attention was given to the corridors northwest of the city that ran to the main VC/NVA concentrations along the Cambodian border.

The inner and outer defense rings had 24-hour aerial surveillance; armed helicopters, together with AC-47 and AC-119 gunships using airborne forward air controllers, provided close air support. In addition, eight 60-foot towers provided "flash-ranging" for counterartillery fire, and night patrols roved the area to ambush enemy units. Within the city, COMUSMACV and the RVNAF conducted training in street fighting. Similar preparations, on a smaller scale, had been made for Hue and Da Nang[5]

The Enemy

Enemy forces in South Vietnam consisted of NVA troops, VC regulars and guerrillas, and the so-called "administrative services." At the beginning of 1969, the strengths of these forces were estimated as follows:

NVA	121,000
VC	37,000
Guerrillas	59,000
Admin Services	42,000
Total	259,000

5. (S) CM-3896-69 to SecDef, 29 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

These figures included not only the enemy troops within the territorial boundaries of South Vietnam but also those in the contiguous areas of Laos, Cambodia, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and in North Vietnam immediately above the DMZ.[6]

Among the major NVA units above the DMZ were the 304th and 320th Divisions and the 88th, 90th, and 102d Regiments. The Joint Staff put the enemy maneuver battalion strength in South Vietnam in mid-January at:[7]

	NVA	VC	Total
I CTZ	51	22	73
II CTZ	30	17	47
III CTZ	34	43	77
IV CTZ	___	33	33
Total	115	115	230

The Tet and post-Tet offensives of 1968 had inflicted severe losses on the VC/NVA, and an aggressive allied counteroffensive had spoiled enemy plans for a third attack in August and September 1968. As a result, the enemy had withdrawn major forces to border area sanctuaries and remote base areas to refit and retrain. Simultaneously, he had undertaken an examination of plans and tactics for future operations. This evaluation resulted in a shift from a strategy of immediate all-out military victory to a longer term political one. The enemy would still mount large unit

6. Estimates of enemy strength in South Vietnam at the beginning of 1969 showed the usual variations. A Joint Staff estimate in mid-January 1969 gave the enemy strength in South Vietnam and the sanctuary areas along the borders at about 300,000. This included an estimated 30-40,000 NVA troops withdrawn into North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, of whom 18-20,000 were still considered a threat to South Vietnam. (S) Briefing Notes for GEN McConnell, "Vietnam Situation," 14 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

7. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1968, vol I, p. 89. (S) Briefing Notes for GEN McConnell, "Vietnam Situation," 14 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

attacks when opportunities presented themselves, but he would rely primarily on small unit actions, particularly sapper attacks, and extensive use of guerrillas. The new strategy provided for continued infliction of US casualties, which North Vietnam believed the US public would find prohibitive, and for the defeat of the pacification program. All this would be accomplished, the enemy planned, while reducing losses and conserving military strength. This new concept would be accomplished in two stages, the first consisting of intensified military and political activity to create "favorable conditions" for a more widespread offensive during the second. The revised strategy was issued by the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) as Resolution 8 of October 1968, which served as the basic directive for the approaching winter-spring campaign.[8]

Although US officials were unaware of the existence of COSVN Resolution 8 at the beginning of 1969, they did sense a change in enemy intentions. A Joint Staff briefing for the Acting Chairman, General John P. McConnell, on 14 January 1969 noted that allied operations in 1968 had forced the enemy to withdraw significant numbers of troops into North Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian sanctuaries. It was expected that the enemy would shift major emphasis from military to political objectives to secure domination of South Vietnam and would combine political, psychological, and military actions to attain his goals both in South Vietnam and at the Paris talks. The Joint Staff also warned of possible attacks on cities in South Vietnam to begin the winter-spring offensive as part of a fight-and-talk strategy.[9]

A CIA review of the situation in Vietnam, circulated during the latter part of January, reached similar conclusions. The CIA paper reported considerable debate in Hanoi over the correct strategic line and its proper tactical execution. The choice was between an "offensive strategy," looking once again for dramatic military results, and the adoption of a more flexible combination of political and military tactics. The CIA believed that the latter had been chosen and forecast the possibility of stepped-up enemy military actions at any time, including terrorist attacks on urban areas.[10]

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8. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. III-116 - III-117, E-5.

9. (S) Briefing Notes for GEN McConnell, "Vietnam Situation," 14 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

10. (S) CIA Report, "The Situation in Vietnam: Overview and Outlook," 24 Jan 69, same file.

General Abrams had also observed the change in enemy tactics and activities. In early January, he reported to CINCPAC that the enemy was building up logistic support north of the DMZ, in the Laotian Panhandle, and in the border areas of Cambodia. He predicted a strong enemy attack on the pacification program. Several days later, on 17 January, COMUSMACV reminded his subordinate commanders that the Paris peace talks were moving into a new phase and warned that the enemy would stage attacks at times calculated to influence the negotiations.[11]

The Nixon Administration Takes Over

On the day following his inauguration, President Nixon discussed the military situation in Vietnam with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Expressing the view that the US negotiating position would best be served by maintaining maximum pressure on the enemy, the President asked if there were any additional ways of doing so (within the current ground rules). General Wheeler replied that, as far as he knew, the only possibility would be through the continuing improvement of the RVNAF. At the direction of the President, however, he referred the question to the two responsible commanders, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC.[12]

Both commanders assured General Wheeler that everything possible was being done within existing authorities to maintain the maximum pressure on the enemy. They reminded him of their previous recommendations for authority to operate in the DMZ[13] and the border areas of Cambodia. Consequently,

11. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, COMUSMACV 509 to CINCPAC, 12 Jan 69; (S-GP 4) COMUSMACV 760 to CDR 7th AF et al., 17 Jan 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

12. (TS) Msg, CJCS 0885 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 22 Jan 69, same file.

13. Authority for US forces to operate in the DMZ between North and South Vietnam had been severely limited at the time of the 1 November 1968 bombing halt over North Vietnam. At that time, the United States had discontinued all offensive operations in the Zone with certain exceptions: COMUSMACV could send small, squad-sized patrols into the DMZ south of the Provisional Military Demarcation Line (PMDL); he could react if enemy forces attacked across the DMZ; he could attack identified enemy forces or installations in the DMZ below the PMDL with either artillery or tactical air; and he could respond to enemy fire from within the DMZ with either gunfire or air attack. But US ground forces could not enter the DMZ

on 29 January 1969, General Wheeler recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he seek presidential approval for expanded authorities in both the DMZ and Cambodian border areas. Included were: (1) conduct of ground operations in the DMZ south of the Provisional Military Demarcation Line (PMDL) as required to counter enemy activity; (2) employment of artillery, air, and naval gunfire in the DMZ, both north and south of the PMDL to counter enemy forces attacking through or from the DMZ; (3) pursuit of VC/NVA forces in contact into Cambodia to a depth of 5 kilometers by ground forces and 10 kilometers by air; (4) employment in Cambodia of long-range reconnaissance patrols consisting entirely of US personnel organic to US field forces; (5) use of artillery and air strikes on an on-call basis against observed enemy targets and forces in Cambodia to a depth of 10 kilometers south and 20 kilometers north of Route 13.[14]

The President did not authorize operations in the DMZ or the Cambodian border area. Rather, he still hoped to increase pressure on enemy forces within South Vietnam. On 1 February, Dr. Kissinger relayed the President's wishes to General Wheeler. Following further discussions, during which the President's intentions were clarified, General Wheeler on 2 February transmitted the following questions to COMUSMACV: Had the enemy stepped up his efforts since 1 January, or since 20 January? If so, what actions could be taken by the allied forces to counteract those efforts? With regard to the latter question, the President wanted to know: "Do we have a capability in-country or elsewhere to counteract with guerrilla attacks against North Vietnam? What assets could be used? Against what targets?" General Wheeler told COMUSMACV that he had already partially answered the last query by informing the President that the allies had no assets in North Vietnam. He suggested that General Abrams' reply consider the use of partisan groups smuggled into the north by sea or air.[15]

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without authorization from the "highest authority." See The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, pp. 52-34 - 52-36.

14. (S-GP 3) Msgs, COMUSMACV 1102 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 24 Jan 69; (TS) Actg CINCPAC to CJCS 262243Z Jan 69; (TS) CM-3895-69 to SecDef, 29 Jan 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

15. (TS) Memo, COL D.P. McAuliffe, OCJCS to Actg CJCS, GEN McConnell, n.d.; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 1414 to COMUSMACV, 2 Feb 69, same file.

Both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC responded to the President's queries, and the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John P. McConnell, forwarded a summary of their views to the President on 6 February. There had been only a slight upward trend in enemy aggressiveness in South Vietnam since 1 January, and no significant change in the level of observed activity in North Vietnam. What General McConnell pointed to particularly was a marked upsurge in enemy actions in Laos. Not only had the enemy increased his logistical activity there, but he was also taking steps to protect his lines of communication by bringing in more antiaircraft artillery. Some 134 artillery positions had been added since the initiation of the bombing halt on 1 November.

Responding to the President's question concerning actions to counteract the enemy buildup, General McConnell reiterated that there was no way of increasing pressure on the enemy if operations were strictly limited to South Vietnam. He mentioned General Wheeler's request of 29 January for increased authorities for the DMZ and Cambodia. He added that COMUSMACV was already attempting to counter the threat in Laos with strikes against specific road segments, using variable tactics to prevent the enemy from concentrating his road repair crews and air defense.

As for guerrilla attacks within North Vietnam, General McConnell said that neither the United States nor the Republic of Vietnam had such a capability. These operations could only be conducted by an active resistance movement in North Vietnam, the establsihment of which would require a long time. Harassing actions could be taken, he believed, if authorization were granted. Patrol boats could be used to strike NVN shipping or to mount cross-beach raids against undefended lines of communication. Helicopter-borne raiding parties of indigenous forces operating out of Laos could raid enemy lines of communication and other targets and could mine highways or carry out ambushes on them. Of these measures, however, both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC felt that only the harassment of shipping would be effective enough to justify the risks.[16]

16. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 041050Z Feb 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69. The MACV reply (MACV 1510, 3 Feb 69) has not been seen. (TS-GP 3) CM-3914-69 to SecDef, 6 Feb 69, same file.

Since early January indications had been mounting that the enemy was preparing to reintensify his military activities in South Vietnam. Photo reconnaissance and sensor reports revealed an upsurge in supply movements through Laos. Captured enemy documents referred to a forthcoming winter-spring campaign, and US units seized large caches of recently hidden munitions and rice. Agents, enemy prisoners, and ralliers all told of enemy plans to attack Saigon and other cities in South Vietnam during the approaching Tet season. A resumption of large-scale infiltration and the movement of main-force units from peripheral areas toward known objectives were detected. A CIA assessment of 24 January warned that terrorist and sapper attacks on Saigon and other major South Vietnamese cities could come at any time.[17]

The possibility that the enemy would shortly reintensify the hostilities confronted President Nixon and his advisers with difficult decisions. In choosing the US response the President had to consider a number of factors, including the degree of dissatisfaction with US involvement among the American people and their hopes for consistent progress toward its termination. Should he order strong counteractions, accepting the likelihood that this would set off a new wave of protest in the United States, or should he restrict the fighting by US forces to a defense of their own security, at the risk of seeing the enemy reverse the allied gains of the past several years? Or was there some intermediate course that would yield a more favorable overall result?

The choice of response to an enemy offensive would depend in part on how it was judged to relate to the conditions of the 1 November 1968 bombing halt. In late October 1968, the United States had agreed to stop all bombardment of North Vietnam; in return, North Vietnam in a secret minute consented to begin serious talks, with South Vietnamese representatives included in the negotiations. At that time, the United States made clear to the leaders

17. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 509 to CINCPAC, 12 Jan 69; (S) Briefing Notes for GEN McConnell, "Vietnam Situation," 14 Jan 69; (TS-GP 2) Msg, COMUSMACV 766 to CJCS, 17 Jan 69; (S) CIA Report, "The Situation in Vietnam: Overview and Outlook," 24 Jan 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

in Hanoi that continuation of the bombing cessation depended on their respecting the DMZ and refraining from attacks on the South Vietnamese cities. When President Johnson announced the bombing halt on 31 October, he revealed the substance of the US expectations but did not state them as specific conditions. Later, the United States insisted that these expectations were, in fact, conditions and part of the understanding, but the North Vietnamese denied this interpretation. Sould an attack on the South Vietnamese cities occur, President Nixon would have to decide whether or not to treat it as a violation of the 1968 understanding.[18]

The President and his advisers took up these questions at once, and consideration of various responses to enemy initiatives continued for the next two months. As the initial step of this consideration, Dr. Kissinger told the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence on 25 Janury 1969 that the President wished to see "as soon as possible" the US plans for reacting to an assault on Saigon. He cited reports than enemy infiltrators were assembling for such an attack to be carried out "in the next two weeks."[19]

On the basis of recommendations from CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already reached conclusions on the measures that should be executed in the event of a step-up in enemy activity, including attack on Saigon. After obtaining confirmation that the views of the two commanders were unchanged, General Wheeler on 28 January sent the Secretary of Defense a recommendation for reprisals consisting of air and naval bombardment of NVN military, industrial, and communications installations south of 19 degrees north latitude. The actions should be conducted for a minimum of 48 hours, and perhaps longer if necessary. Their effect, General Wheeler believed, would be to demonstrate the seriousness with which the United States viewed attacks on cities, besides impairing the enemy's capability to support sustained operations in South Vietnam. He asked that these recommendations be forwarded

18. For a detailed account of the agreement on the 1968 bombing halt agreement, see The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, pp. 54-9 - 54-15.

19. (S-GP 3) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecState et al., 25 Jan 69, Encl to Att to JCS 2472/419, 29 Jan 69, JMF 911/520 (25 Jan 69).

to the President, accompanied by a suggestion that Mr. Nixon might wish to discuss them with the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense. On the following day, General Wheeler provided the Secretary with a detailed description of the defensive arrangements for Saigon and other cities.[20]

General Wheeler's recommendations assumed enemy attacks of considerable intensity. In reply to an oral query from Dr. Kissinger, General McConnell, as Acting Chairman, submitted separate proposals applicable in case of "minor" enemy assaults. They consisted of limited naval bombardment and air strikes against various ports and military targets in the southern portion of North Vietnam.[21]

After considering these responses, President Nixon on 13 February directed the preparation of an integrated politico-military plan for joint US-GVN response to attacks of any scale. He also desired a plan for use in the event of President Thieu's assassination. These plans were to be prepared by the NSC Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam and submitted to the NSC Review Group by 17 February.[22]

Both plans were completed on schedule. For an attack on South Vietnam's cities, the Ad Hoc Group envisioned four broad options: to ignore the attack completely; to register diplomatic protests while issuing a warning to the enemy; to station US naval units off North Vietnam as a stronger warning; and to retaliate militarily. Twenty-three retaliatory actions were listed, of which 21 were various forms of attack on North Vietnam, ranging from naval harassment to full resumption of air and naval operations throughout the country. The other two were attacks on enemy forces in the DMZ (north of the PMDL) or in

20. (TS) Msgs, CJCS 1087 to Actg CINCPAC, 26 Jan 69; Actg CINCPAC to CJCS, 270537Z Jan 69; (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV 1208 to CJCS, 27 Jan 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69. (TS-GP 3) CM-3892-69 to SecDef, 28 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2472/419, 29 Jan 69; (S-GP 1) CM-3896-69 to SecDef, 29 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2472/419-1, 29 Jan 69; JMF 911/520 (25 Jan 69).

21. (TS-GP 3) CM-3903-69 to SecDef, 3 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/419-2, 4 Feb 69, same file.

22. (S-GP 3) NSSM 22, 13 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/419-3, 15 Feb 69, same file.

Cambodia. In dealing with the possibility of assassination, the Ad Hoc Group outlined measures varying from complete "hands off" to direct intervention aimed at insuring a regime favorable to US interests. The preferred alternative was a limited US reaction to prevent violence and bring about an orderly succession.[23]

The NSC Review Group considered these two papers, but did not act on them. The Group intended to use them as "a common frame of reference for analyzing the situation in Vietnam" and as the "framework" for recommendations to the President.[24]

Meanwhile, apprehension over an approaching enemy offensive had continued. On 6 February 1969, General McConnell, as the Acting Chairman, informed the Secretary of Defense of intelligence warnings of an enemy attack during the Tet period, which would begin on 17 February. Allied forces were ready for such an attack, General McConnell reported. But he reminded the Secretary that despite a clear-cut allied military victory in the 1968 Tet offensive, the enemy had achieved a major psychological coup in the United States and throughout the world. General McConnell was concerned that the same thing might occur in 1969. Recognizing that this matter was outside the purview of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General McConnell urged Secretary Laird and his colleagues in the Administration to "maintain the initiative in the psychological area" by preparing the public for a possible enemy offensive.[25]

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23. (~~S~~-GP 3) Memo, NSC Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam to Chm NSC Review Grp, "Contingency Plans for Viet-Nam," 17 Feb 69, Encl to Att to JCS 2472/419-4, 18 Feb 69, same file. A talking paper, prepared jointly by representatives of ISA and the Joint Staff, commented on the plan for response to Thieu's assassination. The representatives of the two staffs saw in this plan an undesirably large degree of US involvement and warned that any US intervention "should take into account the limits of our knowledge of Vietnamese politics." See Att to JCS 2472/419-5, 20 Feb 69, same file.

24. (~~TS~~) Draft State/Def msg to COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and Paris, n.d. (with buck slip for the CJCS dated 21 Feb 69), OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69 (loose).

25. (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-3919-69 to SecDef, 6 Feb 69, Encl to Att to JCS 2472/430, 19 Feb 69, JMF 911/320 (6 Feb 69).

The Secretary of Defense replied on 14 February expressing appreciation and assuring the Chairman that the Administration was aware of this problem. Not only Defense spokesmen, but also MACV, the Department of State, and the White House were emphasizing to the press the enemy's capability to launch an offensive. They would continue to do so, Mr. Laird added.[26]

Meanwhile, enemy preparations continued. A COMUSMACV assessment in mid-February reported 250 indications during the previous 30 days of an impending offensive. Intelligence revealed that the enemy, although not yet positioned for attacks on Hue, Da Nang, or Saigon, was ready for major attacks on Tay Ninh and the Bien Hoa/Long Binh complex. General Abrams predicted a two-phased enemy offensive: an increase in small-scale activity and armed propaganda, especially in Saigon, accompanied by political agitation; a second phase of extensive coordinated attacks by fire on Bien Hoa, Tay Ninh, and district capitals near Saigon. He believed that the offensive would begin during Tet or shortly thereafter.[27]

Tet came and went, however, without an enemy offensive. Allied forces observed a 24-hour cease-fire from 161800 to 171800 (local time) February 1969. In light of enemy violations during previous holiday truces, General Abrams, Ambassador Bunker, and President Thieu had agreed that the Tet truce should be as short as possible. During the actual cease-fire, both US and RVNAF troops remained on full alert and RVNAF personnel were granted a minimum of special leave. The enemy initiated 197 incidents during the stand-down, of which 84 were judged significant. Eight US troops were killed and 94 wounded; enemy losses were estimated at 151 killed with 19 suspects detained.[28]

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26. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Responses to a Possible 1969 Tet Offensive in South Vietnam," 14 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/430, 19 Feb 69, same file.

27. (S) Point Paper for General Wheeler, "Possible Major Enemy Offensive," n.d. (based on COMUSMACV assessment of 14 Feb 69). OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69.

28. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-8 - V-9.

On 22 February, COMUSMACV and Ambassador Bunker warned Washington that large-scale attacks were expected that day or the following. All US and RVN forces had been placed on full alert. The enemy would undoubtedly pay a heavy price, but fighting might last for several days or even weeks in some areas. "We think that the main purpose of these attacks," Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams said, "is to try to produce another shock in the United States such as took place last year at Tet. The enemy would like to show how tough, determined, and capable they are, show their omnipresence, and produce heavy US casualties in order to further alienate American support for the war." Another object was to set back the Accelerated Pacification Program. By relating the timing of attacks to President Nixon's trip to Europe, the two US officials commented, Hanoi probably hoped to find the President unprepared to focus on events in Vietnam and reluctant to order retaliatory attacks against North Vietnam from abroad. Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams considered retaliation imperative if the enemy attacked on the scale indicated by current intelligence.[29]

The Post-Tet Enemy Offensive

This prediction from Saigon proved accurate, and in the early morning hours of 23 February, the enemy launched his widely anticipated offensive. It began with a series of over 100 country-wide indirect fire attacks, including the first rocket attack on Saigon in over three months. The enemy also attacked Da Nang, as well as 17 provincial and 28 district capitals. The attack focused predominantly on military forces and installations. There were several concurrent ground attacks in remote areas of I and III CTZ, but most of the enemy main force regiments avoided contact. United States casualties during the first 48 hours of the offensive totaled 56 killed and 373 wounded. Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces and other FWMAF casualties for the same period were 98 killed with 250 wounded. Nineteen South Vietnamese civilians were killed and 22 wounded; enemy casualties were placed at 320 killed with 24 detained.[30]

29. (S) Msg, Amb Bunker and COMUSMACV (Saigon 3402) to State, 22 Feb 69, JCS IN 17609.

30. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 2372 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 23 Feb 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 44-69, 24 Feb 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-41, V-49 - V-50.

Assessing the enemy offensive on 24 February, General Abrams advised Washington that the objectives of the attacks seemed to be to present an appearance of strength throughout South Vietnam while conserving men and munitions, to confuse the allies as to future enemy intentions, and to force the revelation of allied positions and plans. General Abrams concluded that the enemy had accomplished "very little" by this initial flurry of attacks. No major Government-held objective, he pointed out to General Wheeler, had been seized. He added a caveat, however:

> We have as yet seen only the first phase of the enemy's offensive. Major attacks by strong enemy units in critical areas in the next 48 hours appears to be the enemy's most likely course of action.[31]

On the following day, 25 February, Secretary Laird cabled a report of the offensive to the President in Europe. His message included the substance of a Defense Intelligence Agency assessment, which suggested that the purpose of the attacks was to show that the allies could not neutralize the enemy military strength and viability. The "scale and intensity" of the offensive, according to DIA, was much lower than the 1968 Tet attack. The enemy still had not committed main force units to any appreciable extent, and preliminary information indicated that enemy activity was already declining. "It is noteworthy," concluded DIA, "that the enemy has still not mounted ground attacks across the DMZ or launched significant ground attacks against population centers."[32]

General Abrams' prediction of a second phase of the offensive by main force enemy units was not fulfilled. The slackening of enemy activity, noted by Secretary Laird in his report to the President, continued. There were scattered indirect fire attacks on allied installations and forces and on villages and towns throughout South Vietnam, but on a gradually declining scale. Sporadic rocket firings on Saigon continued into early March. The

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31. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 2385 to CJCS, CINCPAC, and Amb Bunker, 24 Feb 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69.
32. (TS) Msg, SecDef to Dr. Kissinger, 251754Z Feb 69, same file.

ground fighting in I and III CTZs lasted for a week and then dropped to "a relatively low level."[33]

Consideration of Retaliation

With the launching of the enemy offensive, US officials immediately began considering appropriate retaliation. Early on 23 February, General Wheeler cabled COMUSMACV and CINCPAC that it might be "expedient" for General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker to recommend a response by allied forces, "particularly in view of the rocket attack on Saigon." General Wheeler suggested naval fire or air strikes against North Vietnam below 19 degrees north. General Wheeler told CINCPAC that it would be "desirable" to alert fleet units for appropriat selected targets.[34]

Both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC replied the same day, recommending a 96-hour naval gunfire and air strike reprisal against North Vietnam between 17 and 19 degrees north, to begin on 24 or 25 February. Ambassador Bunker supported their views. If US forces did not respond promptly, he told the Secretary of State, the enemy would be encouraged to continue the attacks, some of which clearly violated the understandings made with Hanoi at the time of the bombing halt three and a half months earlier.[35]

A CIA assessment the following day, 24 February, presented several arguments against such a retaliatory strike. The CIA noted that the enemy attack on the cities to date had been of a moderate scale as compared with those of the previous year. To retaliate by bombing North Vietnam, the CIA stated, would appear to many to be "disproportionate to the provocation" and might renew both domestic and international criticism of the US Government. The CIA also

33. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-41, V-49 - V-50, V-82. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 50-69, 3 Mar 69, 43-69, 6 Mar 69.

34. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2253 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC (info SecState, SecDef, and Dr. Kissinger) 230541Z Feb 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69.

35. (TS-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV 2372 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 231110Z Feb 69; (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC to CJCS and COMUSMACV, 231047Z Feb 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69. (S) Msg, Saigon 3429 to State, 231000Z Feb 69, JCS IN 18666.

doubted that the bombing would cause the enemy to suspend or modify the offensive. In fact, it might persuade him that he could intensify his action without prejudicing world opinion. Such a bombing of North Vietnam, the CIA added, might cause Hanoi to suspend the Paris talks. On the other hand, failure by the United States to respond to the offensive might strain US relations with South Vietnam.[36]

Available sources provide no evidence that the COMUSMACV/CINCPAC proposal was considered at the policy level. In any event, the reprisal was not initiated.

On 26 February, COMUSMACV reported significant enemy initiatives in northern I CTZ. He added that several NVA regiments were just north of the DMZ prepared to attack allied forces. He urged the removal of restrictions on operations in the southern half of the DMZ, together with authorization to react to enemy operations there. There would be no necessity, he added, for ground forces to cross the PMDL. General Wheeler passed this information to the Secretary of Defense on the same day, supporting General Abrams' request. General Wheeler proposed that the recommendation be forwarded by message to the President in Europe.[37]

The Secretary of Defense did not forward the recommendation for DMZ authorities to the President while he was in Europe. Rather, he waited and talked with President Nixon upon his return to Washington on 2 March. Secretary Laird replied to General Wheeler on 4 March. Although sharing the Chairman's concern, he wished, if possible, to hold down the level of violence in the DMZ area. He noted that North Vietnam's performance in regard to the understanding on operations across the DMZ had substantially decreased military activity and allied casualties in northern I CTZ. He was concerned that unlimited employment of allied forces might increase military action there, and he asked General Wheeler for other alternatives to meet the threat in the DMZ. In the interim, Mr. Laird directed the

36. (~~TS~~) CIA Memo for the Director of Central Intelligence, "Reactions to US Retaliatory Air and Naval Strike Against North Vietnam Between the DMZ and the 19th Parallel," 24 Feb 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69.

37. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 2500 to CINCPAC (info CJCS), 26 Feb 69; (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-3969-69 to SecDef, 26 Feb 69, same file.

exercise of maximum restraint in allied incursions. He reminded General Wheeler that COMUSMACV already had authority to operate in the DMZ to preserve allied forces and, when actually in contact with the enemy, to maneuver into the DMZ up to the PMDL for this purpose.[38]

The failure of the allies to respond to the enemy offensive aroused some comment in the United States. The President was asked about it at his news conference on 4 March. There was speculation, a reporter said, that the Nixon Administration was being tested, particularly as to the understanding reached the previous November 1 on the bombing halt. What, the reporter inquired, was the President's opinion?

The President replied that, although the current offensive was comparable to the previous year's in terms of the number of attacks, its intensity was less. He speculated on the enemy's motives and concluded that, whatever they were, the offensive had failed. As to the understanding, the President said:

> we are examining this particular offensive, examining it very carefully, to see whether its magnitude is in violation of that understanding. Technically, it could be said that it is in violation. Whether we reach the conclusion that the violation is so significant that it requires action on our part is a decision we will be reaching very soon if these attacks continue at their present magnitude.

The President remarked that the Secretary of Defense was traveling to South Vietnam the next day and would look into this matter.[39]

Secretary Laird, accompanied by General Wheeler, reached Saigon on the morning of 6 March. Several hours before their arrival, enemy rockets struck the city. Commenting on these attacks at an airport newsconference, Mr. Laird

38. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnam Demilitarized Zone (U)," 4 Mar 69, same file. (In this memo, Secretary Laird appeared to be speaking for himself and gave no indication that he was relaying guidance from the President.)
39. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 182-184.

said: "Such sadistic attacks against the civilian population are, in my view as Secretary of Defense, a violation of the understanding between the United States and North Vietnam." He cautioned that no one should mistake US patience and forbearance as a sign of weakness. The United States would not tolerate continued enemy acceleration of the war and attacks against the people of South Vietnam. He concluded by stating:

> I do not want to issue warnings nor make threats. I do want, however, to state unequivocally that if these attacks continue unabated, an appropriate response will be made.[40]

While the Secretary of Defense and General Wheeler were in South Vietnam, consideration of reprisals continued in Washington. Two actions under discussion were northward movement of certain fleet elements in the Gulf of Tonkin and increased air reconnaissance over North Vietnam. Both were designed for psychological effect to test North Vietnamese reaction to a possible resumption of air and naval bombardment. As General Wheeler had explained to CINCPAC just before departing from South Vietnam, the fleet movement was "an action lying at the lower end of the spectrum" of possible reactions. On 7 March 1969, both of these actions received higher approval, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued the necessary instructions. They directed the stationing of naval units farther north and closer to North Vietnamese territory for a "short period." Existing restrictions on naval operations north of 20 degrees were rescinded, but US forces were not permitted to enter into the 12-mile territorial sea claimed by North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also directed an immediate increase in air reconnaissance of North Vietnam. On 15 March, they ordered another movement of naval units farther north into the Gulf of Tonkin and extended the increased air reconnaissance for another week. Following this extension, both naval operations off Vietnam and air reconnaissance of North Vietnam returned to the level existing prior to 7 March.[41]

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40. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 53-69, 6 Mar 69. (U) Msg, COMUSMACV 13830 to SecDef et al., 6 Mar 69, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS to SEA, Mar 69.

41. (~~S~~) Msgs, CJCS 2624 to CINCPAC, 4 Mar 69; (TS-GP 3) JCS 4184 to CINCPAC, 8 Mar 69; (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCS 4162 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, and COMUSMACV, 7 Mar 69; (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCS 4785

On 10 March, when the enemy offensive was visibly declining in intensity, General Abrams submitted to Washington a detailed assessment of the situation in South Vietnam. In his opinion the enemy offensive had failed. It had caused no adverse effect on either the RVNAF or the popular confidence in the RVNAF. Nor had it harmed pacification to any significant extent. It had, however, produced a measurable impact on enemy strength. During the first two weeks, the enemy had suffered nearly 19,000 permanent losses: 12,000 killed; probably 4,200 dead of wounds or permanently disabled; 1,000 captured; and 1,400 Hoi Chanh ralliers.

After reviewing the offensive to date, COMUSMACV assessed probable enemy strategy and tactics for the coming months. The enemy realized that he could not win militarily and had, therefore, turned to neogitiations. His objectives were US withdrawal and a coalition government in South Vietnam. The enemy saw an opportunity to achieve both in what he read as growing US impatience and haste to settle the war. To speed withdrawal, the enemy would attempt to erode US determination by projecting the impression of an endless war with continuing casualties and high costs. The enemy's military efforts for the near future, COMUSMACV said, would most likely be "a cyclical continuation of the post-Tet formula"--widespread, coordinated activity, consisting largely of stand-off attacks by fire to hold down his personnel losses, with selected ground attacks on secondary targets. These actions would be accompanied by an effort to expand operations in rural areas.

General Abrams viewed the enemy sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia as the "key element" of the operations in South Vietnam. It was through their use, he explained, that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were able to sustain a prolonged war against a superior allied force. To increase pressure on the enemy, COMUSMACV asked for a number of additional authorities. None of them was newly conceived. They included: (1) resumption of air and naval attacks against military targets in North Vietnam, below 19 degrees

to CINCPAC, 15 Mar 69; (TS-GP 1) JCS 4784 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, and COMUSMACV, 15 Mar 69; (TS-GP 3) JCS 5703 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, and COMUSMACV, 27 Mar 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 69.

north, in reprisal for the post-Tet bombardment of South Vietnamese cities; (2) conduct of operations in the southern part of the DMZ; (3) limited ground and air attack of selected enemy base areas along the South Vietnamese border with Cambodia and Laos; (4) expanded air and guerrilla operations in Laos; (5) tactical air and artillery support for covert activities in Cambodia (DANIEL BOONE operations).[42]

Secretary Laird and General Wheeler returned to Washington on 12 March, and the Chairman immediately provided the Secretary with his thoughts and observations resulting from the trip. He concluded that the "current series of enemy attacks" had failed militarily and psychologically. He believed, however, that, if attacks on the cities persisted, the United States must respond. He based this opinion on two reasons: the Republic of Vietnam would be under great pressure to retaliate in kind; and beyond a certain point, US restraint would be interpreted as confirmation of the North Vietnamese contention that the US bombing halt was unconditional and that the United States had misled the South Vietnamese Government regarding the circumstances leading to the cessation. General Wheeler saw the enemy troop and logistic buildup in the DMZ and in the border areas of Cambodia and Laos as "most striking and dangerous situations." Enemy operations from these areas, he told Secretary Laird, were the "prime cause" of US casualties.

General Wheeler concluded his report with several recommendations in line with his observations: (1) the next rocket attack on Saigon, Hue, or Da Nang must be met with an appropriate retaliation--preferably naval and/or air attacks on North Vietnam; (2) COMUSMACV should receive immediate authorization to conduct offensive operations in the southern half of the DMZ; (3) COMUSMACV should be tasked with the preparation of plans to destroy enemy base areas and sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos.[43]

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42. (~~TS~~-GP 3) COMUSMACV Rpt, "Situation in South Vietnam," 10 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/447, 13 Mar 69; (TS-GP 1) Subpar IID (Additional Authorities Required) to above COMUSMACV Rpt, Att to JCS 2472/447-1, 14 Mar 69; JMF 911/399 (10 Mar 69).

43. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CM-4001-69 to SecDef, 12 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/445, 13 Mar 69, JMF 911/399 (12 Mar 69).

The following day, 13 March, the Secretary of Defense reported to President Nixon on the trip. Like COMUSMACV and General Wheeler, he believed that the current enemy offensive was destined for failure. The enemy's efforts would gain no territory, he said, nor would they bring any permanent reduction in pacification. The offensive had had little impact on the morale of the South Vietnamese people or on their support for the government. Secretary Laird surmised that the enemy's objectives were not primarily military, but rather psychological and political. Perhaps, he said, the enemy's desire was to demonstrate that he retained control of the level of fighting in South Vietnam and, by doing so, to gain a stronger negotiating position in Paris.

While assuring the President that the offensive would be contained, Secretary Laird conceded that the enemy retained the ability to conduct similar campaigns in the future, at least intermittently. This ability stemmed, Mr. Laird said, from continued Soviet and Chinese Communist resupply of North Vietnam and from enemy use of border sanctuaries in Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam. Consideration should be given, he believed, to "border area operations" that would, at least temporarily, "diminish the advantage to the enemy of our self-imposed geographical restrictions."

Secretary Laird also discussed the enemy attacks on the civilian population in relation to the "understanding" with North Vietnam, on the basis of which the bombing of NVN territory had been stopped. He viewed the assaults as "clearly inconsistent" with that understanding, but also pointed out that they were "not significant militarily." They had not added to the jeopardy of US forces, nor had they adversely affected South Vietnamese morale. He observed that there had been no rocket attacks on Saigon since the morning of 6 March. He concluded that any further "significant" shelling or rocketing of the major South Vietnamese cities should bring an appropriate US response.

But what kind of response would be appropriate? Secretary Laird believed that bombing of North Vietnam would accomplish little of military value. Although it might demonstrate continued commitment to South Vietnam, it would probably revive criticism both at home and abroad, placing the Administration in the same position as the

Johnson Administration had found itself a year previously. Consequently, he favored a political or diplomatic retaliation, such as a temporary suspension of attendance at the plenary Paris sessions. If a military action was decided upon, he suggested "a well-considered and effective operation" against an enemy target in the border areas. This, he felt, would provide an appropriate signal to the enemy and would achieve some military benefit.[44]

In addition to the reprisals suggested by Secretary Laird, the President was also considering various other possibilities. The White House staff had requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider possible responses to the VC/NVA actions in South Vietnam, to include specific plans for a "surgical" strike on the Haiphong area; mining of the Haiphong Harbor; and the sinking of a ship in the Haiphong Channel. General Wheeler forwarded the requested plans to the Secretary of Defense on 13 and 14 March. The "surgical" plan provided for an air and naval strike against five targets of military significance in the Haiphong complex, including two airfields, a power plant, a railroad bridge, and a rail yard. When giving this plan to the Secretary, General Wheeler advised that a sustained bombardment would be preferable to such a selective retaliatory attack. The aerial seeding of three deepwater areas in the approach to the channel, the channel itself, and the narrow passage through the Canal Maritime were the main features of the mining plan for Haiphong port. General Wheeler found this plan feasible, but believed North Vietnam would be able to accommodate to such mining unless it was combined with an intensive air campaign. To block the Haiphong Channel, using a submarine for the purpose, would be feasible; the required forces and munition were already available in the Pacific area. General Wheeler emphasized, however, that the plan would require ten weeks to execute. Before sinking the submarine, it would be necessary to make a clandestine hydrographic survey of the Channel, to seed the shallow waterway approaches to the port, and to notify foreign governments of the action.[45]

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44. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC March 5-12, 1969," 13 Mar 69, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS to SEA, Mar 69.

45. (TS-GP 2) Fact Sheet prepared by J-3, "Additional Actions Against NVN (TS)," 8 Mar 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 69. (TS-GP 1) CM-3994-69 to SecDef, 14 Mar 69;

While these measures were under review in Washington, the enemy provided an additional incentive for reprisal. On 15 March, Washington Time (16 March local time), four enemy 122-mm rockets struck Saigon, wounding one civilian and damaging a building. Apparently hoping to keep the situation under control, the President ordered that "there be absolutely no comment by any Government official or military commander" on this incident. What reprisals, if any, were considered in response to this attack are not indicated in the available record. Presumably, the shelling was not deemed significant enough to warrant a reaction, for there was no US response.[46]

On the day of the Saigon rocket attack, General Wheeler again raised with the Secretary of Defense the question of operations in the DMZ. Intelligence continued to indicate considerable enemy activity there. The Chairman believed that the enemy was exploiting the current operational restrictions in the DMZ to inflict maximum US casualties while avoiding large military actions, which might prompt resumption of US operations against North Vietnam. He also thought that North Vietnam was taking advantage of the restrictions to tie down allied military power near the DMZ, thereby diverting it from enemy targets in I CTZ. When, earlier in March, the Secretary had turned down the Chairman's request for unlimited authorities for ground operations in the southern DMZ, he had asked for appropriate alternatives. General Wheeler still supported his original request, but assessed for the Secretary four other possibilities: (1) continuation of current authorities; (2) reinforcement of friendly forces to offset the enemy buildup above the DMZ, but without added authorities; (3) consideration of COMUSMACV's recommendations for ground action south of the PMDL on a case-by-case basis; (4) authorization of ground actions in the DMZ below the PMDL with time and force limits as well as prior notification requirements. He favored the last alternative, requesting approval to conduct ground operations below the PMDL with forces as large as a brigade and for not longer than five

(TS-GP 1) CM-4006-69 to SecDef, 13 Mar 69; (TS-GP 1) CM-4000-69 to SecDef, 13 Mar 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Bulky), Mar 69.

46. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 62-69, 17 Mar 69. (S) Memo, Pres to SecState and SecDef, "March 16 Rocket Attack on Saigon," 15 Mar 69, same file.

days. This authority would allow General Abrams to conduct limited sweeps to counter enemy activity.[47]

Authorization for such action had been sought earlier and had drawn the objection that heavy preliminary bombardment would be required in order to avoid severe casualties from NVN artillery north of the PMDL. General Wheeler consulted COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, who expressed the view that any US forces sent into the DMZ would be protected in large part by their mobility and that counterbattery fire or tactical airpower, used in accordance with existing rules of engagement, could suppress the hostile artillery.[48]

Another possible retaliatory action considered by the United States was a VNAF strike in North Vietnam supported by US air units. This possibility had been raised during Secretary Laird's visit to South Vietnam. On 22 March, General Abrams submitted such a plan to Washington. Because of the limted VNAF capability, the plan provided for only initial token VNAF participation with the USAF carrying the main burden of the strike. Neither General Abrams nor CINCPAC recommended the plan for execution. Rather, they suggested it only as a contingency plan for the future.[49]

The enemy pursued his offensive throughout the remainder of March, but at a rapidly decreasing rate of activity. After the 15 March rocket firing on Saigon, there were scattered attacks on various cities, towns, and hamlets throughout South Vietnam, including one each on Da Nang, Quang Ngai, Quang Tri, and Bien Hoa Base as well as a final attack of three rockets on Saigon on 30 March. After the initial week of the offensive, ground action had dropped off significantly, and this low level continued throughout the remainder of the month. Some ground assaults

47. (TS-GP 1) CM-4010-69 to SecDef, 15 Mar 69 same file.

48. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, CJCS 3512 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 21 Mar 69; CINCPAC to CJCS, 230318Z Mar 69; COMUSMACV 3797 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 25 Mar 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 69.

49. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, COMUSMACV 3701 to CINCPAC, 22 Mar 69; CINCPAC to CJCS, 230154Z Mar 69; same file.

and convoy ambushes were attempted, but failed to produce any decisive results.[50]

As the enemy offensive dwindled, so did the occasion for consideration of reprisals. The National Security Council formed an ad hoc committee to study the possibility of limiting maritime imports into North Vietnam. This committee reviewed possible aerial mining and scuttling operations in Haiphong Harbor, using the JCS plans, and also considered a naval blockade of the north. But none of these actions was implemented.[51]

By the beginning of April the enemy post-Tet offensive had ended. United States officials, in Vietnam and in Washington, agreed that the offensive had failed. The enemy had not achieved a significant military victory, nor had he captured world attention as he did a year earlier. Neither had he goaded the United States into abandoning its restraints--if that had been one of his intentions. The United States had considered reprisals throughout the post-Tet attacks. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, COMUSMACV, and CINCPAC had all favored military retaliation in the form of air and naval strikes against North Vietnam, as well as expanded DMZ operations. But the United States limited its response to two low-key actions--fleet movements in international waters off North Vietnam and two weeks of increased air reconnaissance over the country.

The degree to which the recommendations for strong action were seriously considered by the Administration is not indicated in available records. It seems clear that the President and the Secretary of Defense were reluctant at that time to take any action that might reverse the declining tempo of military activity in Vietnam. The President was doubtless hoping that the negotiations in Paris would begin to yield substantive results. Throughout the remainder of 1969, as the succeeding chapters show, the

50. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 64-69, 19 Mar 69; 65-69, 20 Mar 69; 66-69, 21 Mar 69; 67-69, 22 Mar 69; 68-69, 24 Mar 69; 69-69, 25 Mar 69; 71-69, 27 Mar 69; 73-69, 29 Mar 69; 74-69, 31 Mar 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-49 - V-50.

51. (TS-GP 1) Memo, LTG John B. McPherson (Asst to CJCS) to NSC Ad Hoc Committee on Limiting Maritime Imports into NVN, 28 Mar 69, OCJCS File 091-Vietnam, Mar 69.

Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to press for liberalization of the rules binding General Abrams' tactical initiative. But it was not until near the end of the year, when the enemy's diplomatic intransigence had exhausted the President's patience, that the JCS recommendations for a wider range of action began to receive a sympathetic hearing.

TABLE I

US Forces in South Vietnam 1969

	1 Jan 69	31 Dec 69
Army	359,313	330,648
Air Force	58,029	58,463
Navy	37,541	30,236
Marine Corps	80,716	55,039
Coast Guard	441	433
	536,040	474,819

Third Country Forces in South Vietnam 1969

	1 Jan 69	31 Dec 69
Australia	7,661	7,672
Republic of China	29	29
Republic of Korea	50,003	48,869
New Zealand	516	552
Philippines	1,576	189
Spain	12	10
Thailand	6,005	11,568
	65,802	68,889

(TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. IV-28.

TABLE II

RVNAF 1969

	1 Jan 69	31 Mar 69
ARVN	380,270	380,625
VNN	18,882	22,524
VNAF	18,625	20,583
VNMC	9,134	8,716
RF	219,762	237,814
PF	172,536	174,367
	819,209	844,629

	30 Jun 69	30 Sep 69	31 Dec 69
ARVN	392,686	401,595	416,278
NVN	24,635	26,401	30,143
VNAF	24,527	29,385	36,469
VNMC	9,314	10,504	11,528
RF	249,553	254,800	260,455
PF	175,118	206,998	214,383
	875,833	929,683	969,256

(TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VI-2, VI-52.

TABLE III

US Commanders in Vietnam 1969

COMUSMACV	GEN Creighton W. Abrams, USA	
DEPCOMUSMACV	GEN Andrew J. Goodpaster, USA GEN William B. Rosson, USA	from May 69
DEPCOMUSMACV for Air Opns/ Commander, 7th Air Force	GEN George S. Brown, USAF	
DEPCOMUSMACV for CORDS	AMB William E. Colby	
Chief, USAF Advisory Group	BG Charles W. Carson, USAF BG Kendall S. Young, USAF	from Aug 69
Chief, Naval Advisory Group/ COMNAVFORV	VADM Elmo R. Zumwalt, USN	
Senior Advisor I CTZ/ CG III MAF	LTG Robert Cushman, USMC LTG Herman Nickerson, Jr., USMC	from Mar 69
Senior Advisor II CTZ/ CG I FORCEV	LTG William R. Peers, USA LTG Charles A. Corcoran, USA	from Mar 69
Senior Advisor III CTZ/ CG II FORCEV	LTG Walter T. Kerwin, Jr., USA LTG Julian J. Ewell, USA	from Apr 69
CG DMAC/SA USAAG IV CTZ*	MG George S. Eckhardt, USA MG Roderick Wetherill, USA	from Jun 69

*Senior Advisor, IV CTZ was redesignated as CG, Delta Military Assistance Command/SA, US Army Advisory Group, IV CTZ in April 1969.

TABLE IV

Major US Ground Combat Units in Vietnam,
1 January 1969

Army

1st Cav Div (Ambl)
101st Abn Div (Ambl)
1st Inf Div
4th Inf Div
9th Inf Div
23rd Inf (Americal) Div
25th Inf Div
1st Bde, 5th Inf Div (Mech)
199th Inf Bde
3d Bde, 82d Abn Div
173d Abn Bde
11th Armd Cav Regt
1st Sqdn, 1st Cav
2d Sqdn, 1st Cav
1st Bn (Mech), 50th Inf

Marines

1st Mar Div
3d Mar Div

Chapter 3

MILITARY POLICY AND ACTIONS APRIL-JULY 1969

By the beginning of April 1969, President Richard M. Nixon had completed his Vietnam review and decided upon the policy for his Administration. The United States would seek a negotiated settlement in Vietnam while simultaneously keeping strong military pressure on the enemy. If the diplomatic approach proved unsuccessful, the United States would transfer an expanding share of the combat to the Republic of Vietnam and begin withdrawal of US forces as the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) grew stronger.

But, during 1969, several factors arose that worked against the decision to maintain firm military pressure on the enemy. The first factor was budgetary constraints. Mr. Nixon had campaigned for the presidency calling for reductions in Federal expenditures, and he entered office committed to pruning the budget. This meant reductions in all departments, including the Department of Defense, and Defense cuts--no matter how carefully managed--affected the war in Vietnam.

Another factor was a change in the actual conduct of the war. After the failure of his post-Tet offensive in March 1969, the enemy turned to a strategy intended to conserve his forces while inflicting increasing US casualties. Consequently, he avoided large battles, relying instead on terrorism and brief pushes against populated areas and US installations. Some, both within and without the US Government, saw in this change in strategy an enemy signal that should be met by a corresponding lowering of US military action in South Vietnam. The debate spilled over into the public press and helped to rekindle public opposition to the war in the United States. Opponents of the war, quieted by the bombing halt in November 1968 and the assumption of office by the new Administration in January 1969, began to grow impatient with President Nixon's lack of progress in ending the war. Opposition revived in the spring of 1969 and increased throughout the remainder of the year. The anti-war movement pressed the Administration to end the war or, at least, to reduce US casualties and involvement.

Throughout these developments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought to maintain pressure on the enemy in Vietnam. With this end in view, they strove to retain the resources available to field commanders and to widen, or at least to maintain, the freedom of action of US forces. In submitting their advice and requests to Melvin R. Laird, the Joint Chiefs of Staff found a Secretary of Defense finely attuned to the political and fiscal aspects of the Vietnam conflict--one who continually urged them toward lines of action that would result in a reduction of US effort. This division within the Defense establishment reflected the problem facing the President in Vietnam: to strike a balance between keeping maximum pressure on the enemy and meeting the public demand for evidence that the war was truly "winding down."

Budget Considerations

The most imminent pressures on the Joint Chiefs of Staff in April 1969 were budget considerations and the requirement to reduce military costs and their effect on military operations in Vietnam. Just five days before he left office, on 15 January 1969, President Lyndon B. Johnson has sent his FY 1970 budget to the Congress. He proposed expenditures of $195.3 billion, including a Defense budget of $81.5 billion (or $79.0 billion exclusive of atomic energy matters and certain Defense-related activities such as the Selective Service System). President Nixon had initiated an immediate budget review upon entering office on 20 January, in fulfillment of his campaign pledge to reduce Federal spending. In compliance with the President's directive, the Secretary of Defense on 28 January ordered the Military Departments to review the FY 1970 budget proposal submitted by the previous Administration to assure consistency with the objectives of the President.[1]

1. Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1970, 15 Jan 69, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968-69, II, pp. 1273-1306. The Budget of the United States Government, 1970, p. 73. (S-GP 1) Memo, DSecDef to Secys of MilDepts and CJCS, "Pilot Studies of Alternative Military Objectives and Budgets," 24 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2458/501, 27 Jan 69, JMF 557 (24 Jan 69) sec 1. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Secys of MilDepts, "Revision of FY 1969 and FY 1970 Programs," 28 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2458/504, 30 Jan 69, JMF 570 (28 Jan 69).

As a result of the Defense review, Secretary Laird told the House Committee on Armed Services on 1 April 1969 that Defense expenditures in the "January budget" had been reduced by $1.1 billion to a new estimated total of $77.9 billion. (The Secretary, obviously, was subtracting the reduction from the $79.0 billion figure in the Defense estimate of the Johnson budget rather than from the total Defense figure of $81.5 billion.) President Nixon publicly announced on 12 April total reductions of $4.0 billion, including the $1.1 billion in Defense outlays, in the FY 1970 budget. These cuts, the President believed, would "enhance our economic security without risk to our national security."[2]

ARC LIGHT Sortie Reductions

An immediate effect of the new budget restrictions was to reduce the intensity of the B-52 bombing campaign (ARC LIGHT). Throughout most of 1968, COMUSMACV had been authorized to employ a maximum of 1,800 B-52 sorties per month. In December of that year, however, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, over the objections of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had ordered a cutback.[3] Effective 1 January 1969, he had decided, a variable rate of between 1,400 and 1,800 monthly, or an average of 1,600 sorties per month, would be flown instead of the 1,800 monthly authorized throughout most of 1968. Both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC objected to this decision, and the 1,800 monthly rate was continued while the new Administration reviewed Vietnam operations and costs.[4]

Concerned that the sortie rate might be reduced, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 18 February 1969 a CINCPAC/COMUSMACV appraisal of ARC LIGHT requirements. Both commanders considered the ARC

2. Hearings, Military Posture, H. Com on Armed Services, 91st Cong, 1st sess, H-3-14, pp. 1744-1745 (hereafter cited as H. Hrgs, Military Posture). Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 278-280.

3. See The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, p. 52-39.

4. H. Hrgs, Military Posture, pp. 1749-1750. (TS-GP 3) Encl (p. 27-1) to Memo, SecDef to Pres, "NSSM No. 1, Situation in Vietnam," 10 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-4, 11 Feb 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 3.

LIGHT program essential to the achievement of US objectives in Southeast Asia and an important factor in preventing the enemy from mounting offensives. General Abrams used the B-52 force as a highly mobile reserve to respond to tactical emergencies. The 1,800 sortie rate provided the "equivalent punching power" of several ground divisions and afforded COMUSMACV a degree of tactical flexibility without constantly moving major troop units. There was no weapon in the conventional arsenal, COMUSMACV believed, to substitute for the B-52. Therefore the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that it would be "militarily inadvisable" to reduce the ARC LIGHT monthly rate below 1,800 until there was a major strategic or tactical change to warrant such action.[5]

Secretary Laird took no immediate action, but he told the House Committee on Armed Services on 1 April 1969 that budget stringencies would not allow continuation of the 1,800 monthly rate beyond June 1969. While noting the military objection, he pointed out that to continue the 1,800 rate through June 1969 would require an additional $25.1 million in FY 1969 funds. Even a 1,600 monthly rate, if maintained through FY 1970, would cost $27.4 million above the original budget amount; however, Secretary Laird believed that this level of B-52 activity was necessary.[6]

The same day, General Wheeler notified CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of the Secretary's testimony and warned that the B-52 sortie level would be cut to 1,600 beginning in July 1969. "I think this is indicative," he told the two field commanders, "of the seriousness of the budgetary situation, for I know the SecDef is aware of the value you attach to the B-52 capability."[7]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not content to let the decision on ARC LIGHT levels pass without further objection. On 26 April, they reiterated to the Secretary of Defense the importance of the B-52 operations. Even the existing 1,800 monthly rate was not adequate; there were already more than five times as many profitable targets as could be attacked.

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5. (S-GP 3) JCSM-97-69 to SecDef, 18 Feb 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/389-5, 7 Feb 69, JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68) sec 2.
6. H. Hrgs, Military Posture, pp. 1749-1750.
7. (TS) Msg, CJCS 3939 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 1 Apr 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 69.

On 16 May, they again argued against reduction in the B-52 effort, citing to the Secretary of Defense an impending reduction of tactical air assets[8] as an additional reason for not cutting back on ARC LIGHT.[9]

Finally, on 18 June 1969, the Secretary of Defense responded to the JCS pleas. Maintenance of the 1,800 level would cost about $100 million in added FY 1969 and 1970 funds and would have to be offset by reductions in some part of the air effort in Southeast Asia. "Considering the large number of sorties that have been made available by the halt in bombing in North Vietnam," he hoped some reduction in air action could be made without significant impact on combat operations in South Vietnam or Laos. He put a choice to the Joint Chiefs of Staff: ARC LIGHT sorties could be maintained at 1,800 per month through FY 1970 with a $100 million reduction in tactical air operations, or ARC LIGHT could be reduced to 1,600 sorties a month with no reduction in currently planned tactical air activity.[10]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were hesitant to make such a choice. After consulting CINCPAC, they advised the Secretary on 27 June that both air capabilities, tactical and B-52, were essential at the present levels. This was especially true, they said, in light of the President's recent announcement of the withdrawal of the first US troops from Vietnam.[11] If forced to choose, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would reluctantly support the ARC LIGHT reduction as the less undesirable alternative. Presumably they accepted the reasoning of CINPAC, who had justified such a preference on two grounds: a cutback of tactical air capability would mean withdrawal of some fighter squadrons, and if the war took a sudden turn for the worse, upward adjustment of the B-52 sortie rate would be easier to achieve than sending fighter aircraft back to South Vietnam;

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8. See below, pp. 66-69.

9. (S-GP 3) JCSM-253-69 to SecDef, 26 Apr 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/389-7, 22 Apr 69; (S-GP 3) JCSM-308-69 to SecDef, 16 May 69, Encl to JCS 2472/389-8, 15 May 69; JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68) sec 2.

10. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "ARC LIGHT Sortie Rate (U)," 18 Jun 69, Encl to JCS 2472/389-9, 19 Jun 69, same file.

11. See Ch. 4.

and for the ARVN, as it assumed increased responsibility for ground operations, direct and immediate tactical air support would be more beneficial than B-52 operations.[12]

The Secretary of Defense replied on 15 July 1969 that some reduction in air activity was unavoidable; the only alternative would be a supplementary appropriations request, which had been ruled out. He therefore approved the 1,600 monthly rate for ARC LIGHT, in preference to reducing the tactical air effort in South Vietnam or Laos. The Secretary added that he was willing to reconsider alternative air allocations as long as they were within the budget limits. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not pursue any other alternatives; they directed implementation of the 1,600 rate on 18 July 1969. Even that rate remained in effect only two and a half months; in October 1969, budget strictures were to force a further reduction to 1,400 sorties per month.[13] (See Chapter V.)

Tactical Air Reduction

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff chose to lower the B-52 monthly sortie rate in preference to cuts in tactical air capability in Vietnam, that decision did not spare tactical air resources in Southeast Asia from reductions brought on by the budget tightening. During the preparation of replies to the presidential questionnaire on Vietnam, analysts in the Office of the Secretary of Defense observed that it was reasonable to expect some force reduction as a consequence of the 1 November 1968 bombing halt in North Vietnam. Specifically, they suggested the withdrawal of an attack carrier from Vietnam action. Two weeks later, on

12. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 221818Z Jun 69; (S-GP 3) JCSM-401-69 to SecDef, 27 Jun 69, Encl to JCS 2472/289-10, 25 Jun 69; JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68) sec 2.

13. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "ARC LIGHT (B-52) Sortie Rate," 15 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/389-11, 17 Jul 69; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 4891 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, COMUSMACV, and CSAF, 18 Jul 69; same file. There is no evidence in JCS files to support the statement in COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. I-4, that: "In April, B-52 raids in-country were curtailed as a further demonstration of US willingness to de-escalate the conflict."

26 February 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary of Defense that the Navy could not maintain the current attack carrier posture within FY 1970 resources and recommended the reduction of WESTPAC attack carriers from five to four, effective 1 July 1969. The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the recommendation on 25 March 1969.[14]

The question of withdrawing tactical fighter squadrons from South Vietnam also arose at this time. A year earlier, in March 1968, the United States had deployed six Air National Guard squadrons of F-100 tactical fighters to PACOM--two to the Republic of Korea and four to South Vietnam. These units were scheduled to return to the United States by late spring 1969 and to be replaced with F-4 squadrons. On 24 March 1969, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force suggested to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the replacement of the four squadrons in South Vietnam with only two F-4 squadrons as a means of reducing forces and, hence, costs. The resulting degradation of combat capability would, he believed, be acceptable. The following day, the Director of the Joint Staff, Vice Admiral Nels C. Johnson, relayed this proposal to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. He added that, should the proposal be implemented, two additional F-4 squadrons would be kept in a high state of readiness in the United States for rapid movement to Southeast Asia if the situation required.[15]

Both commanders objected vehemently. They saw nothing in the current military situation to warrant a unilateral reduction in combat power and stressed the importance of tactical air to counter the continuing enemy efforts to build up logistic bases and troops in Laos and border areas. General Abrams, particularly, complained of Service actions to curtail his combat capability without consulting him, and CINCPAC concurred with General Abrams' objection.[16]

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14. (TS-GP 3) Encl (pp. 26-2 - 26-3) to Memo, SecDef to Pres, "NSSM No. 1, Situation in Vietnam," 10 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-4, 11 Feb 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 3. (S-GP 4) JCSM-110-69 to SecDef, 26 Feb 69, Encl to JCS 2147/490-1, 20 Feb 69; (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "CVA Force Levels (U)," 25 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2147/490-3, 26 Mar 69; JMF 466 (12 Feb 69).

15. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM C-29-69 to JCS, 24 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2147/492, 25 Mar 69, JMF 907/376 (24 Mar 69). (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3648 to CINCPAC (info COMUSMACV), 25 Mar 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 69.

16. (TS-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV 4016 to CINCPAC and 4036 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 30 Mar 69; CINCPAC to CJCS, 302318Z Mar 69 and 010255Z Apr 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 69.

General Wheeler assured the two field commanders on 1 April 1969 that "the Chiefs share your concern and are trying to make the best of a very difficult situation." The proposed cutbacks, he explained, stemmed from "the demands of the White House, in concert with Treasury and BOB, that the Federal budget be reduced as part of a Government-wide, determined effort to cool the economy." The Department of Defense had been required to take "expenditure cuts in excess of $1 billion below the FY 70 budget of the previous Administration." General Wheeler went on to relate that there had recently been a series of high-level meetings within the Department of Defense on this problem. The meetings had generated "considerable in-house review," but there had not been time to consult with the field. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not happy with this procedure, General Wheeler said, since what had resulted might best be described as a selection of the "least unacceptable" alternatives.[17]

On 9 April, the Secretary of Defense suggested a variation in the original proposal. He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider the possibility of withdrawing two tactical fighter squadrons from Thailand instead of from South Vietnam. General Wheeler passed this request to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV for comment. He advised the two commanders that the Joint Chiefs of Staff remained firm in the view that it was militarily unsound to reduce forces in Southeast Asia unless the enemy showed some sign of reciprocating. Nevertheless, General Wheeler warned them to be prepared to accept a cut of two tactical fighter squadrons in Southeast Asia.[18]

After receiving the views of COMUSMACV and CINCPAC the Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed to the Secretary of Defense on 18 April their opposition to any reduction of air assets in Southeast Asia until there was positive evidence of a significant reduction in the enemy threat. If for reasons other than military a decision was made to withdraw two fighter squadrons without replacement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff preferred that the reduction be made in South Vietnam rather than Thailand. All the Thailand-based squadrons, as well as 25 percent of the South Vietnamese-based tactical sorties, were fully committed to missions outside of Vietnam.

17. (TS) Msg, CJCS 3939 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 1 Apr 69, same file.

18. (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Tactical Aircraft Withdrawals (C)," 9 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2147/494, 9 Apr 69, JMF 376 (9 Apr 69). (TS-GP 3) Msg, CJCS 4502 to CINCPAC (info COMUSMACV), 12 Apr 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 69.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff could see, therefore, no operational advantage in withdrawing tactical air forces from Thailand since such action would only raise the probability of more South Vietnam-based sorties being flown outside the country. In addition, the Thailand-based squadrons were used in the essential task of disrupting infiltration through Laos and for that reason should not be reduced.[19]

The Secretary of Defense carried out the reduction of tactical air resources in Southeast Asia, but he did accept the JCS view on where the reduction should occur. On 8 May 1969, he ordered two F-4 squadrons from the United States to replace the four Air National Guard squadrons being withdrawn from South Vietnam; two other F-4 squadrons would be retained in the United States at least until 1 July, and might or might not be sent after that date.[20]

But the matter of the replacement of the tactical fighter squadrons in South Vietnam was still not settled. Of the two F-4 squadrons ordered to Vietnam by the Secretary of Defense, one was temporarily diverted to the Republic of Korea. On 16 May 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary for authority to move this squadron to Vietnam and to deploy the two F-4 squadrons being held in the United States. Eventually, on 14 June 1969, the Deputy Secretary approved the first request, but the two additional squadrons in the United States were never sent to Vietnam. The spaces were eliminated from the complement of the Seventh Air Force, and US air assets in South Vietnam were reduced by two squadrons.[21]

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19. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-236-69 to SecDef, 18 Apr 69, Encl to JCS 2147/494-1, 16 Apr 69, JMF 376 (9 Apr 69).

20. (TS-GP 1) DJSM-692-69 to JCS, 8 May 69, Att to JCS 2147/492-1, 8 May 69, JMF 907/376 (24 Mar 69).

21. (S-GP 3) JCSM-308-69 to SecDef, 16 May 69, Encl to JCS 2472/389-8, 15 May 69, JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68) sec 2. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2538 to CSAF, CINCPAC, and CINCSAC, 14 Jun 69. (Draft of the msg had notation of Mr. Packard's approval.) Both the draft and the msg are in JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68) sec 2. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. IV-13.

The Conduct of the War

With the subsiding of the enemy's post-Tet offensive in March 1969, the course of the war underwent a marked change during the ensuing three months. The enemy abandoned large battles and offensives for local actions and terrorist activities, and the intensity of the fighting declined considerably. He paused to regroup and refit, limiting operations during April and early May to attacks-by-fire on allied military installations and population centers. Ground contact was restricted to small unit engagements, the only exceptions being two regimental-sized attacks in III Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). [22]

During this lull, the United States obtained information from prisoners and captured documents of an enemy plan for a summer campaign. Set forth in Directives 81 and 88, the plan continued the strategy, adopted in the fall of 1968, of seeking a long-range political victory in the place of an immediate military one. Scheduled for the period May through July, the summer offensive would combine military and political action. The plan placed emphasis on "economy of force" tactics and on harassment of US forces in order to increase US casualties. By concentrating on US troops, the enemy hoped to increase American dissatisfaction with the war and thus gain his political objectives. The plan also provided for political activity in rural areas to prepare for a possible settlement involving coalition government.[23]

To implement this strategy, the enemy plan called for country-wide "high points" of military activity each month as opposed to the general offensive strategy pursued in 1968 and the early months of 1969. High points would consist of attacks-by-fire coupled with sapper and terrorist actions against US facilities and RVN-controlled population centers; main and local forces would attack ARVN and allied field positions. The new tactics were designed to support political goals and did not require a sustained level of military activity. The resulting monthly peaks of military action, the enemy believed, would refocus world attention

22. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. III-177 - III-178.
23. Ibid., p. III-120. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 5636 to CINCPAC, 3 May 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 69.

on the war, renewing anti-war sentiment in the United States and countering US and GVN assertions that the Communist forces were losing their effectiveness. In addition, the enemy anticipated that the change would improve the morale of his troops and strengthen his bargaining position at the Paris talks.[24]

General Vo Nguyen Giap indirectly acknowledged the shift in Communist strategy and tactics to the North Vietnamese public several months later. In a speech before an NVN Air Force Congress on 22 June, General Giap stressed conservation of force and protracted war, stating that North Vietnam would use "minimal force to oppose an overpowerful enemy" and "ordinary weapons" against the much better equipment of the other side. The implication was that the enemy would avoid frontal clashes involving large troop units.[25]

The first high point of the enemy summer campaign occurred during the night of 11-12 May, when the enemy launched a country-wide series of attacks-by-fire and limited ground actions. North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops shelled Saigon, Hue, and more than 30 allied positions during the night. The most intense fighting took place in the A Shau area of I CTZ, in the western highlands of II CTZ, and in Tay Ninh Province in III CTZ. There was also a series of terrorist attacks in Saigon that killed at least 13 persons and wounded about 100. By 13 May, the high point had ended. More than 200 attacks had been noted, the largest number in a comparable span of time since the 1968 Tet offensive. But their intensity and severity were far below the level of the 1968 attack; only 49 were deemed "major," and friendly casualties were relatively light. The allies regarded the enemy activity as motivated, at least in part, by a desire to show that a 10-point peace plan issued by the Viet Cong the previous week was not a sign of military exhaustion.[26]

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24. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. III-120. (C) CM-4620-69 to SecDef, 8 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69. NY Times, 10 May 69, p. 31.

25. The text of the speech was not available, but it was discussed and quoted in (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Military Strategy in Southeast Asia," 2 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2339/302, 3 Jul 69, JMF 907/520 (2 Jul 69).

26. (S-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 6018 to CJCS, 12 May 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 69. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 110-69 (Supp), 12 May 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. III-123 - III-124; III-181; V-41. NY Times, 12 May 69, 1; 13 May 69, 1.

On the day before the May high point began, allied forces launched Operation APACHE SNOW in the sparsely inhabited A Shau Valley, in the western part of I CTZ, 43 miles south-southwest of Quang Tri City. This multi-regiment operation included two battalions of the 9th Marine Regiment and four each from the 101st Airborne and the 1st ARVN Infantry Divisions. The objective was to destroy enemy caches, forces, and installations and to prevent the escape of enemy forces into nearby Laotian sanctuaries.

The operation began with a heliborne assault into the thickly jungled mountains along the Laotian border west of the valley in an attempt to trap enemy forces. The friendly forces then swept eastward, but for the first two days made little contact with the enemy. On 12 May US airborne troops encountered heavy enemy fire from bunkers deep within Aphia Mountain, which overlooked the A Shau Valley, and which was designated Hill 937 in allied operations. After calling in artillery and tactical air strikes, US troops made no less than five attempts to capture the hill. They finally succeeded on 20 May, but at a heavy cost: 45 Americans killed and 290 wounded.[27]

Major General Melvin Zais, USA, Commander of the 101st Airborne, termed the capture of the hill "a great victory by a gutty bunch of guys." "Real victories," he said, "don't come easily." The struggle for Hill 937, however, had received worldwide attention, and some were uncertain how "real" the victory was. During the operation, the troops had complained of the difficulty of the battle, nicknaming the mountain "Hamburger Hill" because it "chewed men up like meat." There was also considerable press speculation during the battle over the reasons for both the dogged enemy defense and the tenacious allied assaults.[28]

On the day the US forces took Hamburger Hill, Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts rose in the US Senate to

27. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 110-69, 12 May 69; 113-69, 15 May 69; 114-69, 16 May; 115-69, 17 May 69; 118-69, 21 May 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-56 - V-57. NY Times, 20 May 69, 1; 21 May 69, 1.

28. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. V-57. NY Times, 20 May 69, 1; 21 May 69, 1.

to question the operation. It was "senseless," he charged, "to send our young men to their deaths to capture hills and positions that have no relation to this conflict." He believed "American lives were too valuable to be sacrificed for military pride." Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania immediately rebutted Senator Kennedy's charge, urging his colleagues not to "second guess" the battlefield tactics, "because we are not there."

This exchange and the extensive press coverage given the Hamburger Hill battle and the resulting combat deaths generated further discussion by editorial writers and columnists, drawing attention more pointedly than before to the relationship between casualties and military strategy. The Hamburger Hill losses, combined with those incurred during the 11-12 May enemy high point, caused concern at some levels within the US Government that the military commanders in Vietnam were operating without sufficient regard for the impact of casualty figures on public opinion.[29]

On 21 May, in anticipation of questioning on Hamburger Hill, General Wheeler provided Secretary Laird with a report on the battle, in the form of a draft memorandum for the President. The action had been directed against two enemy battalions entrenched on the hill, since in that position they had dominated the local area, protecting an important infiltration route from Laos into South Vietnam and preventing allied disruption of enemy logistics activity in the A Shau Valley. The larger purpose was to preempt new enemy initiatives and to protect the gains represented by "the accelerating progress of the pacification program, the rebuilding of Hue and the decline of VC/NVA influence on the population in northern I CTZ."[30]

On the following day, the US Command in Saigon issued a statement defending the Hamburger Hill battle. According to the Command spokesman: "We were not fighting for terrain as such. We did not attack the hill for the purpose of taking a hill. We were going after the enemy." The attack on the enemy in this remote mountain area, it was said, prevented him from massing for an intended attack on Hue, some 30 miles to the east.[31]

29. NY Times, 21 May 69, 1.
30. ~~(C-GP 3)~~ CM-4247-69 to SecDef, 21 May 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 69.
31. NY Times, 22 May 69, 1.

On 23 May, White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler defended both the Hamburger Hill battle and allied tactics in Vietnam. The action had been undertaken in response to enemy activity and represented no change in US tactics or military strategy. He claimed that enemy initiatives, rather than those of the United States, determined the US casualty rate. "Our activity and our actions in South Vietnam in the previous weeks have not increased, in terms of the initiatives we have taken," he said. "Our studies confirm that casualty rates are largely the result of enemy-initiated action." The US objective was to maintain "a level of military activity which would meet the objectives of security of the population and our allied forces and deprive the enemy of the expectation of imposing a political solution there." Three days later, Mr. Ziegler again denied that the recent rise in US casualties in South Vietnam resulted from changes in allied tactics.[32]

United States casualties for the next week dropped sharply, and the controversy subsided. Meanwhile, US troops withdrew from Hamburger Hill on 28 May. A spokesman for the 101st Airborne announced that the allied forces had completed their search of the mountain and were continuing their "reconnaissance-in-force" mission through the A Shau Valley. Operation APACHE SNOW, of which Hamburger Hill was the most significant battle, ended on 7 June. Casualties for the operation were 113 US killed and 627 wounded; 22 ARVN killed and 106 wounded. Reported enemy casualties totalled 977 killed and 7 detained.[33]

While attention was focused on Hamburger Hill, a more important battle, the ARVN Ben Het-Dak To Campaign, was being waged in northern Kontum Province in II CTZ. It was the first major independent RVNAF operation of the war and was anxiously watched by US military advisers as a test of RVNAF effectiveness. For a month, from early May until early June, ARVN and CIDG forces engaged two NVA regiments in the rugged area just east of the Cambodian, Laotian, and RVN tri-border area. In a series of actions, beginning with the May high point and continuing through 5 June, the ARVN and CIDG forces successfully defended the Ben Het CIDG Camp, located on Route 512, and drove the enemy from the

32. Ibid., 24 May 69, 1; 27 May 69, 4.
33. Ibid., 28 May 69, 8; 30 May 69, 2. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 133-69, 9 Jun 69.

area. The RVNAF forces acquitted themselves well in heavy combat against strong NVA main force elements. The enemy lost over 1,200 men killed in action while RVNAF casualties amounted to less than 200. Although US advisers and combat support elements assisted in the campaign, Vietnamese commanders held sole tactical responsibility and no US ground troops participated in the operations.[34]

Except for the Hamburger Hill and Ben Het battles, enemy activity dropped to a low level following the May high point. For a 24-hour period from 0600, 30 May to 0600, 31 May, local time, US and RVNAF troops observed a "temporary cessation of offensive operations" in commemoration of Buddha's birthday. During the night of 5-6 June, however, the enemy unleashed the second high point of his summer campaign with over 200 shellings on allied installations and populated areas in South Vietnam. He relied heavily on attacks-by-fire through the lower half of South Vietnam, though activity also increased slightly in I and II CTZs. The enemy also launched a few ground assaults. The most significant occurred in Tay Ninh Province against a Fire Support Base of the 25th Infantry Division, where 401 enemy soldiers were killed. The intensity of the enemy shellings was generally low; enemy losses, however, were higher than in the May high point. General Abrams reported that enemy activity during the 5-6 June period was about three-quarters that of the previous month's peak while enemy casualties were 90 percent of those of the May attacks. By 7 June, the level of enemy action had returned to that existing prior to the 5-6 June attacks, and enemy activity declined noticeably during the remainder of June and continued at a low level throughout July. Main force units avoided major contact and many moved to border and base areas to regroup and refit. Enemy infiltration into South Vietnam also declined during the summer.[35]

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34. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 110-69, 12 May 69; 112-69, 14 May 69; 117-69, 20 May 69; 118-69, 21 May 69; 119-69, 22 May 69; 121-69, 24 May 69; 123-69, 27 May 69; 128-69, 3 Jun 69; 131-69, 6 Jun 69; 134-69, 10 Jun 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-72 -V-73, H-1 - H-4.

35. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 5806 to Actg CJCS and CINCPAC, 7 May 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 69. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 126-69, 31 May 69. (C) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV 7827 to CINCPAC, 9 Jun 69; (S-GP 4) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV 7322 to CINCPAC, 10 Jun 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 69. [Over]

Allied operations in the spring and early summer of 1969 continued in much the same pattern as in late 1968 and early 1969. United States troops, assisted by the RVNAF, exerted heavy pressure on the enemy, seeking to draw him into combat. Multi-battalion actions throughout South Vietnam sought to find, fix, and eliminate VC/NVA main force units and deny them an opportunity to reorganize and redistribute their men and resources. Within the four CTZs, the allied military commanders shifted their units in response to intelligence indications of enemy concentrations. Allied forces also conducted operations to extend security, protect population areas, and support pacification, and US forces carried out daily reconnaissance and training exercises with the Rural and Popular Force units defending the cities and towns.

The allies placed particular emphasis on the protection of Saigon. The Capital Military Assistance Command (CMAC), composed of US and RVNAF troops, carried out offensive actions in Gia Dinh Province and adjacent areas to counter ground and rocket attacks against Saigon. These operations attempted to locate enemy caches and to interdict infiltration routes, thereby denying the enemy the resources and staging areas needed for attacks on the capital.[36]

The Search for Expanded Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) Authorities

When the United States halted bombing operations in North Vietnam on 1 November 1968, it also suspended all military operations in the DMZ, and no ground forces were permitted to enter the Zone without presidential approval. This prohibition, in the opinion of the field commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, allowed the enemy a sanctuary for staging operations in the northern part of I CTZ and resulted in increased allied casualties there. Consequently, the spring and summer of 1969 saw a continuing effort by COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to regain authority for operations in the DMZ. In response to the

~~(TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. III-43; III-124, III-184, III-187 - III-188, V-41. NY Times, 6 Jun 69, 9.

36. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-41 - V-42, V-96.

enemy post-Tet offensive in late February, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sought the removal of restrictions on operations in the DMZ, but the Secretary of Defense, desiring to hold down the "level of violence," had not granted the request. General Wheeler had raised the question again in mid-March, but no action was taken.[37]

On 3 April 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of their intention to ask again for modification of the DMZ rules of engagement. Specifically, they wanted authority to send units, up to brigade-size, into the Zone below the Provisional Military Demarcation Line (PMDL). Such operations would not exceed five days in length and would require a 48-hour notification to Washington prior to initiation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff cautioned the two field commanders that these modifications were proposals only and did not change the current rules. There had been no indication in "discussions with higher authority" that approval was likely soon.[38]

Perhaps because the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not expect early action, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC did not comment on the proposed rules for over a month; General Abrams submitted his comments on 11 May and Admiral McCain the following day. Both supported the JCS proposals, but felt they did not go far enough. They objected to the five-day limitation and urged removal of the current prohibition on B-52 strikes in the DMZ, a stipulation not included in the JCS proposals.[39]

General Wheeler submitted the proposal for increased DMZ authority to the Secretary of Defense on 13 May 1969. Following the suggestions of COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, the proposed rules now incorporated authority for B-52 strikes in the DMZ and contained no time restrictions on operations or size limitations on the use of ground forces. Citing his previous requests for augmented authorities in February and March, General Wheeler told the Secretary that the enemy

37. See Ch. 2.

38. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, JCS 6069 to CINCPAC (info COMUSMACV), 3 Apr 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 69.

39. The COMUSMACV reply is not found in the JCS files, but it was referenced, discussed, and concurred in by CINCPAC in (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 120544Z May 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 69.

now had twelve infantry and four artillery regiments in or near the DMZ. Current restrictions handicapped friendly forces in responding to this threat. In addition, it was apparent from the experience of the past six months that the enemy had used the DMZ as an infiltration route and supply base for activities in northern I CTZ and would probably continue to do so. Consequently, General Wheeler considered the situation in the DMZ sufficiently changed from early February to warrant approval of the new request.[40]

The Secretary of Defense presented the Chairman's proposals to Dr. Kissinger the following day. Secretary Laird did not believe that current intelligence or enemy actions justified either ground or B-52 strikes in the DMZ at that time. Suitable targets did not exist or, at least, had not been identified. He did believe, however, that COMUSMACV should have authority to use B-52s against specific targets south of the PMDL (though not, he added, in the period immediately following the President's forthcoming speech[41] on Vietnam).[42]

Dr. Kissinger and the President agreed with the Secretary, and on 16 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized the conduct of B-52 strikes on "selected, clearly identified significant enemy targets" in the DMZ south of the PMDL. Normally, 24 hours advance notice to Washington would be required; however, the Chairman was empowered to waive this requirement in cases of fleeting targets constituting an immediate threat to allied forces.[43]

This enlarged authority only partially fulfilled the military requirements for DMZ operations, and both the field commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to seek modification of the rules. On 18 May 1969, CINCPAC pointed out that B-52 aircraft attacking targets adjacent to the DMZ might on occasion find it necessary to fly over North

40. (TS-GP 1) CM-4217-69 to SecDef, 13 May 69, same file.
41. See below, pp. 85-86.
42. (TS) Memo, SecDef to Dr. Kissinger, "Operations in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)," 14 May 69, Encl to (TS-GP 1) J3M-964-69 to CJCS, 16 May 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 69.
43. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CJCS 9473 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 16 Mar 69, same file.

Vietnamese territory and requested that they be allowed to do so. Apparently without referring this request to higher authority, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC the following day that the overflight authority could not be granted.[44]

In late June, COMUSMACV asked permission to use artillery and mortars for unobserved suppressive fire against enemy activity and lines of communication in the southern half of the DMZ. General Abrams explained that, during the past six weeks, his forces had been taking increased casualties from enemy fire originating in the DMZ. Current rules allowed US forces to fire into the DMZ only at visually sighted targets and active weapon positions. The enemy took advantage of this situation, fighting close to the DMZ during the day and resupplying his forces through the Zone in relative safety at night. General Abrams realized that ground action would be the most effective means of eliminating enemy artillery from the DMZ, but, in view of the "present political atmosphere," he was asking only for authority to use his artillery and mortars against targets detected by intelligence reports or by electronic means. CINCPAC concurred with COMUSMACV's request, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded it to the Secretary of Defense on 7 July 1969.[45]

The Secretary of Defense disapproved the request on 23 July. Although the enemy continued to violate the DMZ, Mr Laird did not consider the violation as flagrant as before the November bombing halt. Until a more direct threat developed, he wanted to avoid actions that could invite increased enemy action.[46]

While the COMUSMACV request for authority to shell enemy targets in the DMZ was under Washington review, the question of overflight of North Vietnam by IRON HAND (fighter)

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44. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msgs, CINCPAC to JCS, 180300Z May 69, JCS IN 94770; CJCS 9520 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 19 May 69, same file.

45. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msgs, COMUSMACV 8088 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 24 Jun 69; CINCPAC to CJCS, 252358Z Jun 69; same file, Jun 69. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CM-4397-69 to SecDef, 7 Jul 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69.

46. (~~TS~~) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Operational Authorities in the Demilitarized Zone South of the Permanent Military Demarcation Line (S)," 23 Jul 69, same file.

aircraft arose. On 23 June 1969, COMUSMACV requested this authority from CINCPAC in order to protect ARC LIGHT operations near the border of North Vietnam. CINCPAC granted the authority three days later with the caveat that such penetrations must be limited to the area and time needed to support the B-52 force.[47]

In Washington, the Director of the Joint Staff thought aporoval of this authority should be obtained from the Secretary of Defense because of the political sensitivity of operations involving NVN territory, as well as previous precedents for sanction of such operations by higher authority. Accordingly, on 14 July 1969, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified the Secretary of Defense of the CINCPAC authorization and requested the Secretary's concurrence. General Wheeler found the CINCPAC action "prudent" and in accord with the rules of engagement issued at the time of the 1 November bombing halt, which permitted commanders the "inherent right" of self-defense for their forces. But the Secretary did not agree, stating that he did not wish to extend such contingency authority at that time, and General Wheeler directed CINCPAC to rescind the authority.[48]

By the end of July 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had obtained only authority for selected ARC LIGHT strikes against established targets in the southern half of the DMZ. They had been unsuccessful in securing approval for either ground action in the DMZ or unobserved firing into the Zone, but they were to continue to press for enlarged authorities in the DMZ in the months ahead. The Secretary of Defense had disapproved most of the JCS requests for more lenient rules, hoping to avoid intensification of the fighting. Concerned with public opinion and knowing that adherents of the anti-war movement in the United States were already becoming restive over the deliberate pace of President Nixon's progress toward ending the war, he wished to avoid fueling their protests.

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47. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUCMACV 36920 to CINCPAC, 23 Jun 69; (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 261915Z Jun 69; same file.

48. (S-GP 3) DJSM-1079-69 to CJCS, 10 Jul 69; (S-GP 3) CM-4428-69 to SecDef, 14 Jul 69; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "IRON HAND ARC LIGHT Support (U)," 7 Aug 69; same file. (S-GP 3) Msg, CJCS 9994 to CINCPAC, 13 Aug 69, OCJCS file 091 Vietnam, Aug 69.

The Effects of Casualty Rates on Military Policy

President Nixon entered office conscious that opposition to the Vietnam war had been a factor in preventing his predecessor from seeking another term and fully aware of the importance of retaining public support. One sensitive factor affecting public opinion was the US casualty rate in Vietnam, and the new Administration realized that continuing high casualties would increase pressure for a precipitate settlement of the conflict. Some public and private figures in the United States believed that aggressive US action in Vietnam resulted in high US casualties; they favored curtailment of US offensives in favor of less costly operations.

The question of casualties came up at one of the earliest NSC meetings in the new Administration. In late January, Dr. Kissinger asked General Wheeler for an analysis of the casualties of both sides that would show the effect of actions initiated by friendly forces as compared with those begun by the enemy. General Wheeler passed this request to COMUSMACV, who replied on 2 February, explaining that efforts over the past two years had established how difficult it was to develop a valid basis for such assessments. For instance, the comparison became almost meaningless if it included data from the many standoff attacks initiated by the enemy, in which no troop assault occurred. General Abrams was able to present figures and ratios for a number of engagements, comparable in scope, in which the originator of the action could be clearly identified. Based on these examples, he concluded that the enemy had the ability to influence the level of casualties, both friendly and enemy, by choosing whether to attack or to avoid contact. Whatever the level of activity, however, the enemy had been unable to make any appreciable reduction in the overall casualty ratio, so unfavorable to him. General Abrams believed the ratio of five to one in favor of friendly forces, established during several months of 1968, was "fairly" accurate.[49]

49. (S) Msg, JCS 1204 to COMUSMACV, 28 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69. (S-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 1469 to CJCS, 2 Feb 69, same file, Feb 69. (Indication of the NSC consideration is contained in a handwritten notation on the COMUSMACV msg.)

General Wheeler passed on these statistics to the Secretary of Defense, supplemented with graphs to illustrate trends in overall casualties since 1965. He believed they demonstrated that in any action involving troop contact (whether initiated by friendly or by enemy forces), superior allied firepower resulted in very high casualties for the enemy. In the enemy's standoff attacks by fire, the enemy had time to remove many of his casualties before a body count could be made, so that the ratio appeared less unfavorable to him. General Wheeler concluded that, while ratios varied for specific operations, the overall trend continued to run in favor of friendly forces.[50]

In late March, General Abrams submitted to General Wheeler "a deeper analysis" of the casualty ratio problem. His principal conclusion was that "the actions with most favorable results, from a standpoint of casualties, are those initiated by friendly forces." General Abrams found that both friendly and enemy forces suffered fewer losses when they attacked than when they stood on the defensive. For example, during two periods of activity in February and March 1969, enemy-to-friendly "kill ratios" had amounted to 22.0:1 and 15.5:1 in actions initiated by the allies, compared with only 1.4:1 and 2.8:1 when the enemy attacked. Only harassment, terrorism, and attacks-by-fire gave the enemy consistently favorable casualty ratios.[51]

General Abrams' analysis arrived in Washington at a time when the casualty issue was particularly sensitive. There had been growing public speculation that expanded US operations were causing the high US losses. Mr. W. Averell Harriman, the former chief US negotiator at the Paris talks, contended that the enmy post-Tet offensive had been preceded by a sharp increase in US ground activity. On 23 March 1969, the New York Times charged that US forces had stepped up ground patrols and engagements following the 1 November 1968 bombing halt, thus bringing about increased fatalities on both sides during the four-month lull preceding the post-Tet offensive. At the end of March, total US combat deaths in Vietnam had reached 33,641, surpassing the figure for the Korean War.[52]

50. (S) CM-3945-69 to SecDef, 17 Feb 69, same file.
51. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 3806 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 25 Mar 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 69.
52. Time, 11 Apr 69, 18. NY Times, 23 Mar 69, 1.

By late March, many were growing impatient with President Nixon's lack of progress in ending the war. The leaders of the anti-war movement had been willing to give the new President time to take effective control, but after two months it was apparent to them that he was not meeting their demands for an immediate US withdrawal from Southeast Asia. As a consequence, they began preparations for renewed agitation against the war, and the first public demonstrations since President Nixon took office occurred on 5 April. In marches in cities across the country, including New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, demonstrators demanded an end to the war and the return of US troops from Vietnam.[53]

The increasing public concern over US casualties, as well as a belief by some within the Administration that US combat deaths might be reduced by a lowering of US effort in Vietnam, generated considerable pressure for a change in strategy. General Wheeler gave an indication of the pressure in a message to COMUSMACV on 3 April 1969:

> The subject of US casualties is being thrown at me at every juncture: in the press, by the Secretary of Defense, at the White House and on the Hill. I am concerned that decisions could be made in response to strong pressure inside and on the Administration to seek a settlement of the war which could be detrimental to our objectives or to adopt a defensive strategy in South Vietnam.

The situation was made worse by the fact that figures for the period 1 February through 29 March ostensibly showed US casualties to be higher than those of the RVNAF. General Wheeler did not believe that these figures represented the actual situation, but rather were the result of slow and faulty RVNAF reporting. He did not want COMUSMACV to limit his operations, but he did ask General Abrams to explore the matter of casualty reporting with the RVNAF Joint General Staff.[54]

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53. NY Times, 6 Apr 69, p. 1.

54. (S) Msg, CJCS 4092 to COMUSMACV, 3 Apr 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 69. COMUSMACV did bring the matter to the attention of the South Vietnamese, and an improved RVNAF reporting system was adopted. As a result, by early June 1969, casualty reports showed RVNAF losses much above those of the United States. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 7579 to CJCS, 14 Jun 69, same file, Jun 69.

To counterbalance the growing demand on the Administration for adoption of "a purely defensive posture" as a way to reduce US casualties in South Vietnam, General Wheeler decided to present his views to the Secretary of Defense. On 28 March 1969, he dispatched to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV a draft of the memorandum he proposed to use. After considering the replies of the two commanders, the Chairman circulated the draft to his colleagues, seeking united support for its presentation as an expression of JCS views. The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded the memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 14 April 1969.[55]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff firmly opposed any change in strategy in Vietnam. They repeated COMUSMACV's conviction that attacks initiated by friendly forces resulted in lower casualties for the United States than those launched by the enemy. They observed that harassment, terrorism, and attacks-by-fire were the only actions consistently giving the enemy a favorable casualty ratio. Therefore adoption of defensive posture by US forces would only provide the enemy easy targets for his most effective type of action and would forfeit the advantages of superior mobility and firepower--advantages that could best be exploited by exercise of the initiative. To surrender the initiative now, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, would repeat the tragedy of the French forces in Indochina, who, having abandoned the offensive, were:

> strangled in their bunkers by an ill-fed, ill-equipped force which, armed with initiative and freedom of action, killed and captured 15 percent of the French Army in Indo-China--and broke the spirit of the French forces in the field and the Government of France at home.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also thought that a defensive strategy would harm the morale of both US and RVNAF troops.

They pointed out to the Secretary that enemy troops and munitions coming from Laos and Cambodia were largely responsible for current US and RVNAF casualties. "How long

55. (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 3805 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 28 Mar 69, same file, Mar 69. (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-4063-69 to Service Chiefs, 4 Apr 69; (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-224-69 to SecDef, 14 Apr 69; JMF 911/175 (11 Apr 69).

we must continue to sustain . . . casualties from the enemy's unimpeded use of these sanctuaries," they said, "involves questions of significant international and national importance." They and the field commanders all believed destruction of such areas would reduce friendly losses and "go far toward making a US force reduction feasible."

It was the professional judgment of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, fully supported by CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and their commanders, "that to change the pattern of our operations in South Vietnam from offensive to defensive would increase, rather than decrease, casualties," jeopardizing US objectives in Vietnam. The importance that the Joint Chiefs of Staff attached to this matter was evident in the fact that they requested the Secretary of Defense to forward their memorandum to the President.[56]

There is no evidence of a formal action by the Secretary of Defense forwarding the memorandum to the White House. At his 18 April news conference, however, the President was asked about casualties and his reply indicated a familiarity with the JCS position. The President said that he had studied the question to determine whether US or enemy action increased friendly losses. What he found was that US casualties increased substantially during enemy attacks. He added that he had not and did not intend to order any reduction in US action.[57]

Although the lull in combat operations in April brought reduced US casualties in South Vietnam, public dissatisfaction over the lack of measurable progress in ending the war continued. In an attempt to enlist public opinion in support of more positive goals, President Nixon addressed the nation on 14 May 1969. After noting the intensive review by his Administration of "every aspect" of the Vietnam policy, he turned to the US objective in Vietnam. The United States would not withdraw unilaterally from Vietnam nor accept a settlement in Paris amounting to "a disguised American defeat." Then, in what amounted to a subtle change in US policy, the President discussed what was acceptable. The United States had ruled out "attempting to impose a

56. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-224-69 to SecDef, 14 Apr 69, same file.
57. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, p. 300.

purely military solution on the battlefield . . . . What we want is very little, but very fundamental. We seek the opportunity for the South Vietnamese people to determine their own political future without outside interference." In elaboration, the President said that the United States sought no bases or military ties in Vietnam.

Although the President did not explicitly so state, it was clear from his remarks that policy no longer demanded a democratic government in South Vietnam or the defeat of the Communist insurgency. What the President did say was that the United States would accept any government in South Vietnam resulting from the "free choice of the South Vietnamese people themselves." The United States had no intention, President Nixon continued, of imposing any form of government on South Vietnam, nor would it be a party to such coercion. In addition, the United States did not object to reunification, if that was the "free choice of the Vietnamese people." The President then went on to spell out a proposal for a negotiated settlement based on mutual withdrawal.[58]

The President's speech failed to allay dissatisfaction with the war. The following day, six Democratic Congressmen introduced a resolution that asked the President to withdraw 100,000 US troops unconditionally and to call for a cease-fire. A long-time opponent of US involvement, Senator Frank Church, expressed bitter disappointment that the Nixon plan for ending the war was "the same as the Johnson plan."[59]

As described earlier in this chapter, the battle for Hamburger Hill in late May again raised the question of strategy and casualties and unleashed a torrent of criticism against military operations in South Vietnam. Mr. W. Averell Harriman disputed the Administration's justification that US forces had to keep the enemy off balance and spoil his attacks before they were launched. He argued that US actions were responsible for continued enemy activity. If the United States would take the lead in scaling down the war, he said, the enemy would follow suit.[60]

58. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 369-375. See Ch. 12 for a discussion of the President's mutual withdrawal proposal.

59. NY Times, 16 May 69, 9.

60. Ibid., 1 Jun 69, IV 1.

The Hamburger Hill battle also raised questions in the mind of Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The battle, together with the sharp increase in US casualties and recent statements by "some United States officials" on military strategy, caused the Senator to question whether US military action was consistent with overall US objectives. In order to assist his Committee in evaluating developments in Vietnam, Senator Fulbright asked the Secretary of Defense on 24 May 1969 for the precise text of the order for the conduct of operations in Vietnam prior to the bombing halt and subsequent changes including the order currently in force.[61]

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, G. Warren Nutter, asked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide an answer for the Senator, since the information desired seemed to be "primarily of a military command nature." General Wheeler replied on 10 June that the broad guidance for military operations in Vietnam had not changed either before or after the November bombing halt. The objectives were to make North Vietnamese support of the Viet Cong as costly as possible, to defeat the Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam and force withdrawal of the North Vietnamese forces from the south, and to extend the Republic of Vietnam's control over all of South Vietnam. The language supplied by General Wheeler was taken directly from the CINCPAC mission statement in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan for FY 1970 (JSCP-70), issued in late December 1968.[62]

The Secretary of Defense couched his reply to Senator Fulbright on 26 June in more careful language than that suggested by General Wheeler. He told the Senator that US objectives in Vietnam had not changed. In broad terms, COMUSMACV's mission, both before and after 1 November 1968, was to assist the Government of Vietnam and its armed forces in defeating externally directed and supported aggression and to attain "a stable and independent noncommunist government." The conduct of the war, Secretary

61. (U) Ltr, Senator J. William Fulbright to SecDef, 24 May 69, Att to (TS-GP 1) JCS 2472/496, 27 Jun 69, JMF 911/079 (CY 69).

62. (U) Memo, ASD(ISA) to CJCS, "Request for Information by Sen. Fulbright," 3 Jun 69; (TS-GP 3) CM-4312-69 to ASD(ISA), 10 Jun 69; Atts to JCS 2472/496, 27 Jun 69; same file. For JSCP-70 see (TS-GP 3) SM-827-69 to Distribution list, 31 Dec 68 (derived from JCS 1844/507), JMF 510 (7 Dec 68) sec 2A.

Laird continued, consisted of a multitude of day-to-day decisions, "requiring that military commanders be vested with the authority as well as responsibility to accomplish the mission in accordance with national policy directives."

The Secretary also explained to Senator Fulbright why a defensive strategy in Vietnam was unrealistic. Intelligence revealed that enemy plans continued to concentrate on inflicting US casualties. To adopt a defensive posture, withdrawing into fixed cantonments, the Secretary said, would only make it easier for the enemy to conduct mortar, rocket, and artillery attacks against US forces. Commanders in the field must have "the latitude to find, fix, and destroy enemy positions."

In addition, Secretary Laird furnished Senator Fulbright detailed figures on US and RVNAF troop strengths, ground and air operations, and casualties. These statistics documented the expansion of the ARVN and the cutback of US air support (as measured in numbers of sorties, though with no decrease in tonnage of munitions expended.)[63]

Combat action in Vietnam entered another lull following the 5-6 June enemy high point, and US casualties again dropped. This, combined with the presidential announcement on 8 June[64] of the first US troop withdrawals from Vietnam, tended to lessen the public clamor for definite action to end the war.

But the President's withdrawal announcement did not satisfy all the critics. Former Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford, in an article in Foreign Affairs appearing in mid-June, called for larger and faster troop withdrawals than those indicated by President Nixon.[65] Mr. Clifford also supported the Harriman thesis--if the United States reduced its military action in South Vietnam, the enemy would do likewise. He suggested that, concurrently with troop withdrawals, the United States order its commanders to discontinue applying "maximum military pressure"

63. (TS-GP 1) Ltr, SecDef to Senator J. William Fulbright, 26 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/496, 27 Jun 69, JMF 911/079 (CY 69).
64. See Ch. 4.
65. For a discussion of the Clifford proposal on withdrawal see Ch. 4, p. 114.

on the enemy and seek instead to lower the level of fighting. The public statements of US officials, Mr. Clifford asserted, showed that there had been no change in the policy of "maximum military effort." He concluded that the result had been "a continuation of the high level of American casualties, without any discernible impact on the peace negotiations in Paris."[66]

At a news conference on 19 June 1969, a reporter referred to the Clifford article and asked President Nixon if he intended to instruct US commanders in Vietnam to lower the military pressure. In reply, the President repeated his statement that US casualties were in direct ratio to the level of enemy attacks. "We have not escalated our attacks. We have only responded to what the enemy has done." It took two to reduce the level of fighting, the President observed, suggesting that, if the enemy followed the US example of withdrawing one-tenth of its forces, a reduction in the level of fighting would occur. As for orders to military commanders, Mr. Nixon stated that General Abrams was expected to conduct the war with a minimum of American casualties, and the President believed he was carrying out that order "with great effectiveness."[67]

The decline in enemy action in South Vietnam, which followed the early June high point, continued into July, and the low level of hostile action became the basis for new demands that US operations be scaled down. Secretary of State William Rogers mentioned the decrease in enemy attacks and infiltration at a press conference on 2 July and was immediately and aggressively questioned on whether or not these developments would bring a change in orders to US forces to relax the pressure on the enemy. Later the same day, Senator George McGovern spoke on the Senate floor, charging that the Administration's policy of maximum pressure on the enemy obstructed the Paris talks. On 5 July, Mr. Harriman again urged the United States to seize "the opportunity of a new lull" in the war to arrange a mutual reduction in forces. Believing that previous opportunities had been missed, he added: "I don't think we'll make much

66. Clark M. Clifford, "A Vietnam Reappraisal," Foreign Affairs, Jul 69, pp. 601-622.
67. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 471-472.

progress on a political solution until we find a way to reduce the fighting and violence."[68]

A Review of the US Mission and Strategy in Vietnam

The Secretary of Defense also had reservations about the mission of US forces in South Vietnam and the resulting military operations, and on 2 July 1969, he told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he considered it desirable to review military strategy in Vietnam. In recent weeks the Secretary had been impressed by a number of factors affecting the war: the 22 June speech by General Giap stressing conservation of force and protracted war; the lull in the war and, particularly, the decline in enemy infiltration as described in a recent estimate by COMUSMACV; the progress in strengthening the RVNAF; and the stringent US budgetary guidelines, coupled with the unlikelihood of supplemental appropriations, which required reductions in Defense activities. He also mentioned the President's 14 May speech, which had ruled out both a military solution in Vietnam and a US commitment to insure any particular political outcome there, as well as the President's hope, expressed at his 19 June news conference, that the United States could withdraw 100,000 troops from Vietnam in 1969. These developments, the Secretary found, confronted the United States with a series of "unique and important trends" in the war and made mandatory "a broad and deep reassessment of our military strategy and the employment of our land, sea, and air forces in Southeast Asia." He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare such a reassessment.[69]

On the evening of 7 July the President met with his key advisers to review Vietnam policy. The available record does not indicate the attendance, but General Wheeler, who was present, said that it was "small" and at the "highest level" and that the discussion was thorough and wide-ranging. The political climate was considered at some length, and General Wheeler later told CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that

68. Secretary Rogers' News Conference, 2 Jul 69, State Dept Bulletin, 21 Jul 69, pp. 41-49. NY Times, 6 Jul 69, 3; 7 Jul 69, 2.

69. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Military Strategy in Southeast Asia," 2 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2339/302, 3 Jul 69, JMF 907/520 (2 Jul 69).

"the political situation here is not good." The President considered that public opinion would hold "until about October," when some further action on his part would be required.

Attention then turned to the lull. Some of the participants, not including General Wheeler, believed that if the present low level of enemy activity continued, a decision on further US troop withdrawals, with suitable announcement, could and should be accelerated.[70] As an indication of the pressure on the President, General Wheeler reported to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that "people in opposition here" were "very vociferous" in support of the Harriman thesis. They argued that the enemy was trying to reduce the level of combat, but that the United States, constantly increasing the pressure, would not cooperate. Hence the continuing casualties were the fault of the United States.

As a consequence of this discussion, General Wheeler was instructed to determine if COMUSMACV's directive could be rephrased. The object was to rewrite the mission statement in a manner that would not change the nature of the operations, but would indicate that the objective was different. General Wheeler had not agreed that the directive should be modified. He explained to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC that there was no intention to change the pattern of operations in Vietnam, which must still allow for maximum pressure on the enemy. What was involved, he said, was "semantics," adding: "I think we will come up with words having to do with Vietnamization, protection of population, and GVN stability." General Wheeler stressed the extreme sensitivity of this matter. "Obviously, this is an area wherein your public affairs people would have to be most discreet," he told COMUSMACV and CINCPAC.[71]

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70. For coverage of the discussion of troop withdrawal at this July meeting, see Ch. 4, pp. 114-115.

71. (TS) Msg, CJCS 8357 to Dep COMUSMACV and C/S PACOM, 9 Jul 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69. Because General Abrams and Admiral McCain happened to be absent from their headquarters at that time, General Wheeler sent the message to their subordinates with instructions to relay it "under secure conditions."

The directive in question was part of the overall mission assigned CINCPAC in JSCP-70, issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 31 December 1968. It provided for assistance to the Republic of Vietnam and its armed forces "to defeat the externally directed and supported communist subversion and aggression" and to attain "a stable and independent noncommunist government" there. In addition, the JSCP assigned the following subordinate undertakings:

> (1) make as difficult and costly as possible the continued support of the Viet Cong by North Vietnam, and cause North Vietnam to cease its direction of the Viet Cong insurgency . . . ;
> (2) defeat the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Armed Forces in South Vietnam and force withdrawal of the North Vietnamese Armed Forces;
> (3) extend Government of Vietnam dominion, direction, and control over all of South Vietnam;
> (4) deter CPR intervention and defeat such intervention if it occurred.[72]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed this mission statement at a meeting on 14 July. On the same day, General Wheeler talked with Secretary Laird, who asked him to visit Vietnam to assess the current situation and consult with the field commanders on military strategy.[73]

General Wheeler arrived in Vietnam on 16 July 1969 and conferred with both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. Subsequently, he despatched a summary of this discussion to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington. It had been agreed that a change in the mission statement would entail "substantial dangers." There was the matter of credibility, not only for COMUSMACV, but also for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and even the President. Any change in the mission statement might well create the impression that the Government was

72. (~~TS~~-GP 3) SM-827-68 to Distribution List, 31 Dec 68 (derived from JCS 1844/507), JMF 510 (7 Dec 68).
73. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Ann F to JCSM-443-69 to SecDef, 18 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2339/306, 29 Jul 69, JMF 911/305 (28 Jul 69) refers to draft papers considered by the JCS on 14 Jul 69 on the subject of an updated mission statement for US forces in Southeast Asia. (~~TS~~) CM-441-69 to SecDef, 21 Jun 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69.

misleading the public, since the field commanders would find it "difficult, if not impossible," to identify for newsmen any resulting changes in operations. In addition, any mission change would bring serious problems with the Republic of Vietnam and the governments of the other troop-contributing countries, all of whom might interpret it as the beginning of an early, wholesale US withdrawal. Such a revision could also weaken the morale of both US and RVNAF troops while at the same time encouraging the enemy to persist in his struggle.

With reference to the US casualty rate, General Wheeler and the US commanders he consulted thought a change in the mission could have the opposite effect of the one expected. The Chairman reported General Abrams' conviction that he must continue to conduct "mobile, offensive-type operations," since to do otherwise would give the enemy the initiative, "with an inevitable rise in US casualties" and a setback in the pacification process. "We would expect the press to watch the casualty figures very closely and to interpret any increase, or indeed any lack of diminution, as evidence that General Abrams is not carrying out the instructions of higher authority." Finally, it seemed doubtful that the contemplated change in the mission statement would be sufficient to further the negotiations in Paris or satisfy the critics in the United States.[74]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also received separate views from General Abrams, who saw no grounds for a revolutionary change in either US strategy or tactics in Vietnam. Pressure was put on the enemy wherever and whenever he was found, using the tactics best suited to the situation. "To do less would only increase the intensity and duration of his recurring offensives," raising friendly casualties and disrupting pacification.[75]

On 18 July 1969, while General Wheeler was still in Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary

74. (~~PS~~) Msg, CJCS to JCS, n.d. [ca. 17 Jul 69]. The original msg is not available in the JCS files, but a copy was forwarded to SecDef as Ann F to JCSM-443-69, 18 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2339/306, 29 Jul 69, JMF 911/305 (28 Jul 69).

75. (~~TS~~) "General Abrams' Views on Strategy and Tactics," Ann E to JCSM-443-69 to SecDef, 18 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2339/306, 29 Jul 69, same file.

of Defense their views on the subject. Passing on to the Secretary the arguments set forth by General Wheeler, they stressed the inherent danger in revising COMUSMACV's mission and urged that the current statement be retained. But, recognizing the "political pressures" involved, they submitted two alternatives. The first made no change in the "mission" proper, but amended the related "undertakings" to stress improvement of the RVNAF and transfer of the combat effort to the South Vietnamese. The second restated the objectives in South Vietnam in a less sweeping way, making clear that the purpose of the war was merely to assist the Republic of Vietnam; it made no reference to defeat of Communist aggression or establishment of a non-communist government. This latter alternative assumed a change in political goals, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that it be rejected. If a change in the mission was required, they preferred adoption of their first alternative.[76]

General Wheeler returned from Vietnam on 20 July. Just prior to his departure from Saigon, he told reporters that he saw no evidence of any enemy peace signal in the month-long lull in enemy combat activity. The US battlefield tactic of relentlessly pursuing enemy forces remained unchanged, he declared, adding that he approved that style of fighting.[77]

On 21 July, General Wheeler reported to the Secretary of Defense on his trip. After reviewing the current military scene, which he described as better than at any time since he began visiting Vietnam, he discussed military strategy. He opposed any change in COMUSMACV's concept of operations and supported the JCS position forwarded to the Secretary on 18 July. The pattern of operations, he pointed out, had in fact already changed, in response to the other side's shifting tactics. The enemy was holding most of his larger formations in remote sanctuaries in South Vietnam or just across the borders, while smaller guerrilla units carried out attacks by fire, ambushes, or terrorist acts. Major allied forces were accordingly seeking to maintain contact with the larger enemy elements and disrupt their movements, leaving the South Vietnamese troops to cope with the small

76. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-443-69 to SecDef, 18 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2339/307, 29 Jul 69, JMF 911/305 (28 Jul 69).
77. NY Times, 22 Jul 69, 1.

enemy units still active in the country. Considering these changes, together with the misunderstanding arising from references to "maximum pressure on the enemy" and the erroneous belief that mobile operations cost more casualties than static defense, General Wheeler had suggested that COMUSMACV discontinue use of the phrases "search and destroy" and "reconnaissance in force." General Abrams had agreed, and General Wheeler anticipated the use of a phrase such as "pre-emptive operations" or words to that effect.

General Wheeler concluded with praise for the concept being followed by General Abrams. The field commander had "consistently" frustrated enemy objectives and had "incurred the lowest level of casualties consistent with achieving our minimum stated objectives in Southeast Asia." To adopt tactics allowing the enemy to move men and supplies at will, General Wheeler said, would only increase friendly casualties and permit renewed enemy attacks against South Vietnamese cities.[78]

On the following afternoon, 22 July, General Wheeler and the Secretary of Defense discussed COMUSMACV's mission statement. Mr. Laird maintained that there had been a change in political goals as evidenced by the statement in the President's 14 May speech that the United States did not seek a military victory in South Vietnam. He believed that the guidance in the JSCP was not in accord with the President's speech. The political objective set forth there--the attainment of an independent noncommunist government in South Vietnam--was contrary to offers by both President Nixon and President Thieu to accept the result of a free election in South Vietnam. General Wheeler countered that he saw no conflict. Surely the United States did not desire a Communist government in South Vietnam, and military superiority would be required to achieve even the minimum US objectives. The Secretary assured him that there was no desire or intent to change the pattern of operations in South Vietnam, which both he and the President felt were "being carried out in the most efficient and effective manner" and in a fashion that kept casualties to a minimum.

The Secretary continued that he could find no basis for the argument that a change in the mission statement would

78. (TS) CM-4441-69 to SecDef, 21 Jul 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69.

jeopardize COMUSMACV's credibility. If such a problem arose--and he discounted the possibility--the onus would be on US political leaders rather than the military commander. General Wheeler, not entirely convinced, foresaw problems arising when inquisitive newspaper reporters in South Vietnam probed to find out the practical effects of the change in COMUSMACV's instructions. The Secretary also indicated that he favored the second alternative mission statement recently proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but added that a decision could await the President's return from his trip to Asia and Europe in early August.[79]

Meantime, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were preparing their reassessment of strategy for Southeast Asia that the Secretary of Defense had requested on 2 July. After obtaining the comments of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, they submitted their reassessment to the Secretary of Defense on 26 July 1969. The Joint Chiefs of Staff examined US military strategy in Southeast Asia as a whole and specifically in South Vietnam. They concluded that the enemy's fundamental objective had not changed. He sought to extend his influence, unifying all of Vietnam under Communist control. To achieve this objective, the enemy had to defeat US forces or cause them to withdraw. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also considered recent indications of possible changes in US political goals in Vietnam, including the President's 14 May speech, but considered them to be "not of such a nature as to require any change in US military strategy . . . ." In sum, neither side had changed its objectives, and the present US military strategy thus remained valid. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did note that the enemy had reduced his level of activity, but they doubted that this change was permanent. Consequently, they saw no reason to revise the mission of US forces in South Vietnam.[80]

Meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 28 July 1969, Secretary Laird gave them his decision, confirming it in a memorandum of the same date to General Wheeler. The mission derived from JSCP-70 must be revised, the Secretary said, to conform with recent presidential statements and to reflect COMUSMACV's current tactics. Inverting an argument

79. (TS) Msg, CJCS 9134 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 23 Jul 69, same file.

80. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3957 to CINCPAC (info COMUSMACV), 3 Jul 69. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/302-1, 23 Jul 69; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-459-69 to SecDef, 26 Jul 69, Encl to JCS 2339/302-1, 23 Jul 69; JMF 907/520 (2 Jul 69).

put forth earlier by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary said that the failure to make such a change might injure the credibility of both the President and General Abrams. He presented the Joint Chiefs of Staff a draft statement of mission that he believed more adequately met "current and anticipated" conditions in Vietnam. This draft resembled the second and less-favored alternative submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 18 July. It omitted the commitment to a noncommunist government, stating the US objective as assistance to the South Vietnamese in preserving the opportunity to decide their own political future free of outside interference.[81]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were still not convinced that a change in the mission statement was needed, and they told the Secretary on 30 July that his draft was "suitable" only if the President insisted on a change. They again invited attention to a possible loss of credibility if the change was not accompanied by a substantial difference in the pattern of operations.[82]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not dissuade Secretary Laird. On 7 August he submitted a copy of the current statement, together with his updated draft, to President Nixon. He explained that the revision more accurately reflected presidential guidance as well as what US forces in Southeast Asia were actually doing. In an apparent attempt to meet the JCS concern over loss of credibility, Mr. Laird told the President that the Department of Defense would make no public announcement of the change, treating it instead "in a low-key manner."[83]

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81. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Statement of Mission of U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia," 28 Jul 69, Encl to JCS 2339/306, 29 Jul 69, JMF 911/305 (28 Jul 69). In (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-474-69 to SecDef, 30 Jul 69, Encl to JCS 2339/306-1, 30 Jul 69, same file, the JCS referred to their discussion with SecDef on 28 Jul 69 concerning the mission statement.

82. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-474-69 to SecDef, 30 Jul 69, Encl to JCS 2339/306-1, 30 Jul 69, same file.

83. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Statement of Mission of U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia," 7 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2339/306-2, 8 Aug 69, same file.

After a discussion with the President and Dr. Kissinger, the Secretary of Defense on 15 August directed the use of the following mission statement, which was nearly identical to the draft he had presented to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 28 July:

> The objective is to allow the people of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) to determine their future without outside interference. To that end, and as directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC and COMUSMACV should assist the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) to take over an increasing share of combat operations. The tactical goal of the combat operations is to defeat the subverion and aggression which is intended to deny self-determination to the RVN people. The overall mission encompasses the following undertakings:
>
> (a) Provide maximum assistance in developing, training, and equipping the RVNAF as rapidly as possible.
>
> (b) Continue military support for accelerated pacification, civic action and security programs.
>
> (c) Conduct military operations designed to accelerate improvement in the RVNAF and to continue to provide security for US forces.
>
> (d) Conduct military operations to reduce the flow of materiel and manpower support for enemy forces in SVN.
>
> (e) Maintain plans for a comprehensive air and naval campaign in Vietnam.

In accordance with what he had told the President, the Secretary of Defense said that there would be no public announcement of the revised statement, and he directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to handle the matter "as low-key as possible." Subsequently, on 21 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff relayed the new statement to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. Two weeks later, on 5 September, they issued a change to JSCP-70 to bring it into conformance.[84]

84. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Statement of Mission of United States Forces in Southeast Asia," 15 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2339/306-3, 18 Aug 69; (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 7303 to CINCPAC AND COMUSMACV, 21 Aug 69; JMF 911/305 (28 Jul 69). (TS-GP 3) Dec On JCS 1844/507-1, 5 Sep 69, JMF 510 (7 Dec 68) sec 2.

In restating the mission of US forces, the Administration was seeking only to reflect its revised political goals, not to alter in any way the pattern of combat operations. Nevertheless, the new statement came at a time when other actions were having the effect of lowering the level of US effort in Vietnam. Budget considerations had brought reductions in both B-52 sorties and tactical air squadrons. Additionally, the resources available to the field commanders were further limited with the beginning in July 1969 of the long and carefully planned US troops withdrawals from Vietnam.

Chapter 4

REDUCTION OF UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT

Initial Consideration

The Nixon Administration entered office committed to finding a solution for the vital question of Vietnam. To maintain public support, as well as achieve budgetary savings needed to finance promised domestic programs, it was essential for the new Administration to end or reduce substantially the US involvement in Vietnam. Ideally, President Nixon hoped to achieve a negotiated settlement and the mutual withdrawal of all outside troops from South Vietnam. Failing this, there was the option of orderly, progressive withdrawal, to be accomplished by replacing US forces with South Vietnamese troops. While the new Administration proceeded with efforts toward a negotiated mutual withdrawal,[1] President Nixon and his advisers also began consideration of unilateral US force reductions should the negotiations prove unproductive.

The substitution of RVN forces for US combat troops in Vietnam was not a new idea. When President Johnson launched the RVNAF improvement and modernization program in mid-1968, it was with the intent that the RVNAF would eventually assume all of the combat role in South Vietnam. President Thieu, in a New Year's address on 31 December 1968, had also raised such a prospect, and on 15 January the Republic of Vietnam approached Ambassador Bunker in Saigon concerning early consideration of the RVNAF "relieving" a limited number of US and allied forces during 1969. Two days later General Abrams discussed this matter with President Thieu. If the momentum of pacification continued, and if the planned acceleration of RVNAF improvement took place, it was only logical, the US commander told the South Vietnamese President, to remove some US combat units from South Vietnam.[2]

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1. See Ch. 12.
2. NY Times, 1 Jan 69, 4. (S) Msg, Saigon 845 to State, 15 Jan 69, OCJCS File HARVAN-DOUBLE PLUS. (S-GP 2) Msg, COMUSMACV 766 to CJCS, 17 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

In Washington, the possible replacement of US troops in Vietnam was considered at a meeting of the National Security Council on 25 January. At that meeting President Nixon approved continuation of the US-RVN discussions on such a possibility, but with the stipulation that the talks be on a "strictly close-hold, need-to-know basis." The President and his advisers took up this question again in a February NSC meeting. They agreed that the United States should "envisage" the replacement of US troops with Vietnamese forces as soon as possible. But, confronted at this time with the threat of an enemy offensive similar to the one of the previous year, the new Administration chose to defer action on the actual replacement until after the Secretary of Defense visited Vietnam the following month.[3]

As related in Chapter 1, Secretary Laird traveled to South Vietnam in early March. One of his actions while observing the situation there was to tell both the US military commanders and the officials of the Republic of Vietnam that the new Administration in Washington wanted the RVNAF to assume a greater share of the fighting. Assured by both General Abrams and President Thieu that the RVNAF was, indeed, improving, the Secretary returned home encouraged in the belief that the United States could prepare to replace US combat troops with RVNAF units. Accordingly, he recommended to the President that the United States draw up plans for redeployment of 50,000 to 70,000 troops from South Vietnam in 1969 and develop further plans for continuing replacement of US forces in the following years.[4]

In accord with the Secretary's recommendations, General Abrams set his staff the task of planning a tentative US force reduction of two divisions, or about 50,000 men,

3. (TS) Msgs, CJCS 1081 and 1184 to Actg CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 24 and 28 Jan 69, same file. (U) Background Briefing for the Press by Ron Ziegler and Dr. Henry Kissinger, Laguna Beach, Calif., 9 Jun 69, OCJCS File 337 Midway Conference, Jun 69.

4. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, 5-12 March 1969," 15 Mar 69, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS Trip to SEA, Mar 69. (S) Memo of Conv, SecDef et al., with Pres Nguyen Van Thieu et al., 8 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/463, 8 Apr 69, JMF 911/075 (CY 69).

during the latter half of 1969. General Wheeler approved the field commander's action, telling him on 24 March, "I am delighted that your thinking is proceeding along these lines." Subsequently, General Wheeler established a "small and select" group within the Joint Staff to give detailed consideration to the matter of unilateral US withdrawals. "We would be less than realistic," he told the Director of the Joint Staff, "if we failed to recognize the internal pressures toward withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam, without regard to the progress in the negotiations."[5]

At a 28 March NSC meeting the President and his advisers, including General Wheeler and General Goodpaster, the Deputy COMUSMACV, again considered the question of Vietnam.[6] With regard to the withdrawal of US forces, it was the consensus that there had been sufficient improvement in the RVNAF to justify initiation of planning for the redeployment of some US forces, although the actual decision would be delayed until mid-year. It was in the discussions at this meeting that the term "Vietnamization" was coined to describe the replacement of US troops with RVNAF forces. Four days later, on 1 April 1969, President Nixon promulgated the decisions of the 28 March meeting in National Security Decision Memorandum No. 9. Among other things, he directed the development of a "specific plan timetable" for Vietnamization of the war, adding that an appropriate directive would be forthcoming.[7]

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5. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to GEN Goodpaster (at San Clemente), 231709Z Mar 69; (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 3596 to COMUSMACV, 24 Mar 69; (~~TS~~) CM-4050-69 to DJS, 28 Mar 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 69. (The wording of CM-4050-69 indicates that it was prepared prior to the 28 Mar 69 NSC meeting, where the consensus was reached that planning for withdrawal of US forces should begin.)

6. See Ch. 1, pp. 17-19 for a discussion of the other Vietnam issues reviewed.

7. (~~TS~~) Longhand notes by CJCS taken at 28 Mar 69 NSC Mtg on back of pages of TP for SecDef and CJCS (NSC Mtg 28 Mar), "Revised Summary of Responses to NSSM 1: The Situation in Vietnam," n.d., JMF 077 (21 Mar 69) (NSC Review Group Mtg, 28 Mar 69). (~~TS~~-GP 1) NSDM 9, 1 Apr 70, Att to JCS 2472/459, 2 Apr 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 1.

NSSM 36 Planning

The directive, NSSM 36, was issued on 10 April 1969 by Dr. Henry Kissinger. Under its terms the Secretary of Defense was given responsibility for the overall planning. He would coordinate with the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence. The planning would cover all aspects of US military, paramilitary, and civilian involvement in Vietnam, including combat and combat-support forces, advisory personnel, and all types of equipment. It would be based on the following assumptions: a starting date of 1 July 1969; continuation of current NVN and VC force levels; use of current projections of RVNAF force levels; continuation of the current level of allied military effort, except for de-escalation resulting from phased withdrawals of US and other third-country forces that were not fully compensated for by the South Vietnamese; and assignment of the highest national priorities to equipping and training of the South Vietnamese forces.

Based on these assumptions, the Secretary of Defense was to draw up timetables for the transfer of the US combat role to the Republic of Vietnam and the restriction of the US effort to combat-support and advisory missions, with alternative completion dates of 31 December 1970 (18 months), 30 June 1971 (24 months), 31 December 1971 (30 months), and 31 December 1972 (42 months). Dr. Kissinger requested that each alternative schedule include any possible degradation in combat capability and treat budget and balance-of-payments implications. The President wanted by 1 June 1969 an initial overall report, as well as recommended alternatives for the first six months (1 July-31 December 1969), and a complete report by 1 September 1969. Within the Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff received responsibility for preparation of the plan, and they assigned it to the Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5) of the Joint Staff.[8]

Although there was neither official announcement nor any comment by US Government officials that the United States was considering a troop reduction in Vietnam, there was growing public speculation over such a possibility

8. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NSSM 36, 10 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/467, 11 Apr 69; JCS 2472/467-2, 24 Aug 69; JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 1.

throughout the late winter and spring. In response to a statement by President Thieu that the RVNAF was capable of relieving a "sizable number" of US troops, President Nixon told a press conference on 6 February 1969 that, as his field commanders determined the readiness of South Vietnamese forces to assume "a greater portion of the responsibility for the defense of their own territory," US forces would be brought home. He quickly added that he had no such announcement to make at that time, but that reduction of forces was "high on the agenda of priorities."[9]

By mid-March speculation had become so prevalent that the President apparently felt called upon to dampen it. On 14 March he publicly stated that there was "no prospect for a reduction of American forces in the foreseeable future." He listed three factors that had to be considered and that would have to develop in a way that yielded a more favorable "combination of circumstances" before a decision to reduce the troop commitment could be made--the ability of the South Vietnamese to handle their own defenses, the level of hostilities imposed by the enemy, and the progress of the Paris talks. A month later, at his press conference on 18 April, Mr. Nixon said that he saw "good prospects that American forces can be reduced" when he looked to the future. At the present time, however, "we have no plans to reduce our forces until there is more progress on one or all of the three fronts that I have mentioned."[10]

On 14 May 1969, the President gave the nation his assessment of the Vietnam situation and explained his plans for future US action. While the main thrust of the speech was a call for a "peace program" based on a negotiated settlement and phased mutual withdrawal of both US and NVN forces, the President did indicate that a unilateral reduction of US forces might be feasible. He noted that there had been excellent progress in training the South Vietnamese forces and that, apart from any developments in the Paris negotiations, the time was approaching when the RVNAF might be able "to take over some of the fighting fronts now being manned by Americans."[11]

9. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 67-68.
10. Ibid., pp. 215, 300.
11. Ibid., pp. 369-375.

Meanwhile, the actual planning for Vietnamization progressed. The Secretary of Defense on 21 May furnished additional guidance and clarifications. He understood that there was "some feeling" that the planning for the return of units in 1969 was a separate exercise from NSSM 36 planning. It was not, he stated. An initial overall timetable for Vietnamizing the war as well as specific withdrawal alternatives for the latter half of 1969 must be ready by 1 June. "It is absolutely essential," he said, "that we fulfill the requirements specified by the President." Secretary Laird stressed that the July-December 1969 period must be treated in sufficient detail "for the highest level decisions and for possible implementation." He also directed that the options considered be balanced "slices" of all types of units in Vietnam rather than predominantly combat units. In addition, he wanted the plan to include "out-of-country" forces (those US forces in other areas of Southeast Asia that supported the war) as well as the air effort.[12]

As they did for all Vietnamization planning during 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought inputs from COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the US Embassy in Saigon for the initial report. They also consulted with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Department of State, and the Central Intelligence Agency. The Joint Staff submitted an initial plan on 24 May 1969. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved it and forwarded it, together with their comments, to the Secretary of Defense on 31 May. Dissenting comments by the various coordinating agencies were identified in footnotes.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that, in accordance with his direction, they had considered balanced "slices" and the inclusion of all US forces in Southeast Asia in their review, though these aspects would be treated in more detail in the final report. They observed, however, that balanced slices would be "support-heavy" and would thus remove units essential to the RVNAF as the latter assumed an increasing burden of combat. They commented also that reduction of out-of-country forces would incur serious risks of increased infiltration by the enemy in Laos and northeast Thailand, and would reduce

12. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., "Progress on NSSM 36," 21 May 69, Att to JCS 2472/467-1, 22 May 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 1.

combat support at a time when the RVNAF and remaining allied forces might need more support, rather than less.

The concept of the Vietnamization plan was that the current acceleration of the improvement and modernization of the RVNAF would enable these forces to assume progressively more of the burden of the war. Thus there would be a transfer of the US combat role and, to the maximum extent possible, the US supporting roles to the RVNAF. As the RVNAF took over the combat role, the United States and troop-contributing countries would gradually reorient their mission to encompass only reserve, support, and advisory functions. Possibly, as US forces in South Vietnam were reduced, it might be feasible to cut back "selected" US forces outside of Vietnam.

To implement this concept, the plan included outline timetables to meet the four alternative schedules of 18, 24, 30, and 42 months. All four timetables provided for a cumulative reduction of about 244,000 personnel from the current authorization of 549,500, leaving a US strength of approximately 306,000 in South Vietnam. As pointed out in a footnote, analysts in the Office of the Secretary of Defense considered that a reduction of 325,000 with a residual balance of about 225,000 was attainable.

Recognizing that the success of the program would depend on developments in Vietnam, as well as reaction in the United States, the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw both favorable and unfavorable consequences from Vietnamization. On the negative side, they did not believe that an improved RVNAF, even with US support, would wholly fill the vacuum created by a withdrawal of US combat forces unless there was a substantial reduction in the enemy threat. In addition, they believed the shorter the timetable for the transfer, the greater the risk. On the positive side, the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt that Vietnamization would save US lives, improve the negotiating climate, encourage mutual withdrawals of NVA forces, stimulate the RVNAF to greater effort, and strengthen US public support for the commitment in Vietnam.

For reductions in the last six months of 1969, the plan provided four alternatives:

A. 50,000 - 2 divisions (1 Marine, 1 Army) plus limited support;

B. 50,000 - 1 division (Marine) plus support;

C. 100,000 - 3 divisions (1 Marine, 2 Army) plus limited support;

D. 100,000 - 2 divisions (1 Marine, 1 Army) plus support.

In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested consideration of a fifth alternative--a variation of the 50,000 package that involved withdrawal of 22,000 combat and 28,000 support personnel in order to "thin-out" combat forces countrywide and thus avoid redeployment of a major combat element in the northern area where the enemy threat was greatest. In a dissenting footnote, the OSD staff favored another alternative that called for the withdrawal of a Marine division, two Army brigades, two tactical fighter squadrons, and various support units totaling 82,000 men.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the first of the above alternatives be adopted if any forces were to be withdrawn in 1969. In addition they urged that any reduction in 1969 be in two increments, with a pause between them to assess the results. This procedure of assessment of each increment before a decision on further redeployments the Joint Chiefs of Staff called "cut-and-try," and they were to insist on it throughout 1969. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also favored the reconstitution of the redeployed combat forces as reserves in the Pacific, though they recognized the political pressures for redeployment of these forces to the United States and their partial demobilization. The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed any reduction in 1969 of out-of-country US forces supporting the war, including those conducting B-52 sorties and interdicting land and sea infiltration. But the Office of the Secretary of Defense thought that, if domestic political pressures demanded it, a reduction was possible; four out-of-country redeployment options ranging from 8,770 to 30,300 men were suggested.[13]

The Secretary of Defense forwarded the JCS report and plan for Vietnamizing the war, less the dissenting footnotes, to the President on 2 June 1969. He recommended an initial withdrawal of 20,000-25,000 troops beginning in July with the

13. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-342-69 to SecDef, 31 May 69, Encl to JCS 2472/467-2, 24 May 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 1.

total reduction in 1969 limited to 50,000. The composition of this redeployment, he proposed, would be determined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in coordination with CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, the US Mission in Saigon, and the Republic of Vietnam. Like the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary Laird advocated a cautious approach, with no absolute commitment to proceed beyond the first step.[14]

The President made no immediate decision on these proposals. He took them with him to Midway on 8 June, when he met with President Nguyen Van Thieu to assess the progress of the war.[15]

President Thieu came to the Midway meeting aware of the US plans for Vietnamization. Throughout the spring of 1969, the United States had kept the Republic of Vietnam informed of its thinking on reduction of forces. Secretary Laird had talked with President Thieu on this matter during his visit in March, and Ambassador Bunker had relayed in April President Nixon's conviction that some US reduction should take place before the end of the year. During the preparation of the initial plan for Vietnamization, both Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams had discussed it with President Thieu and his principal advisers, including General Vien, Chief of the RVNAF Joint General Staff.[16]

At Midway, the two Presidents discussed the troop reduction issue in a two-hour private meeting. At the conclusion of this session, Mr. Nixon announced to the press that President Thieu had informed him the RVNAF was ready to begin the process of replacing US forces. Consequently, Mr. Nixon had decided to order "the immediate redeployment from Vietnam of a division equivalent of approximately 25,000 men." The

14. (TS-GP 3) Extract from Memo, SecDef to Pres, 2 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/491-1, 11 Jun 69, JMF 911/374 (9 Jun 69). (TS) Msg, JCS 6730 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 31 May 69, OCJCS File 337 Midway Conference, Jun 69.

15. (U) Background Briefing for the Press by Dr. Henry Kissinger, Laguna Beach, Calif., 9 Jun 69, same file.

16. (S-GP 3) Memo of Conv, SecDef et al., with Pres Nguyen Van Thieu et al., 8 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/463, 8 Apr 69, JMF 911/075 (CY 69). (S) Msg, Saigon 7461 to State, 18 Apr 69, JCS IN 37648. (TS) Msg, Saigon 9723 to State, 19 May 69. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2472/467-2, 24 May 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 1.

redeployment would begin within the next 30 days and would be completed by the end of August. The President added that during August, and periodically thereafter, he would review the question of further US troop replacement on the basis of the improvement of the RVNAF, the level of enemy hostility, and the progress of the Paris talks. He stressed, however, that no action would be taken that might threaten the safety of US or allied troops or endanger the attainment of the US objective--"the right of self-determination for the people of South Vietnam."[17]

President Nixon returned home pleased with the results of the Midway meeting. He had gained President Thieu's approval and support for his program for Vietnam--not only the troop reduction plans but also the peace program he had announced on 14 May.[18] President Nixon told the press that now, after five years during which more and more Americans had been sent to Vietnam, the United States had finally reached the point where it could begin to bring troops home. He hastened to add that this did not mean that the war was over. "There are negotiations still to be undertaken. There is fighting still to be borne until we reach the point that we can have peace."[19]

President Thieu, for his part, termed the conference "useful and successful," though he carefully pointed out to the South Vietnamese people that there was a clear distinction between troop replacement and troop withdrawal. United States forces were being replaced, he said, because the RVNAF was capable of assuming a larger burden of the war.[20]

Phase 1 Redeployment

Once the President had decided the number of troops to be redeployed in the first phase of the US reduction, the only problem remaining was to determine the units to be withdrawn and their relocation sites. General Abrams had suggested leading off with "first-rate" combat units, such as the 3d Marine and 9th Army Divisions, in order to make the

17. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 443-444.
18. See Ch. 12, "Negotiations."
19. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 450-451.
20. (U) Msg, Saigon 5522 to State, 9 Jun 69, JCS IN 45821.

reduction credible both to the enemy and to the US and Vietnamese publics. On 9 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense the following redeployment: one Army brigade to CONUS; a Marine regimental landing team plus elements of the 1st Marine Air Wing to Okinawa/Japan as part of the PACOM reserve; the 9th Division (minus two brigades) to Hawaii as part of the PACOM reserve. They opposed any force inactivations at this stage, except reserve components scheduled for release in 1969.[21]

The Secretary of Defense received this package with "some concern," since it provided for the return of only one Army brigade to CONUS and contained provision for no force inactivations. He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to reconsider the package with a view to redeploying a higher proportion of the troops to CONUS and deactivating some of them, since the psychological benefits that would accrue from these measures were an important consideration.[22]

On 11 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff replied that, while they recognized the importance of returning troops to CONUS, it was essential to reconstitute the PACOM reserve. They stated that their 9 June package addressed only the major combat units and did not include accompanying support elements, some of which could be returned to CONUS. Indentification of particular units in this category, they said, must await the decision on major units. Therefore the Joint Chiefs of Staff repeated their recommendations of 9 June, with the additional provision that the returning Army brigade should be deactivated and various support elements, as yet unidentified, should also be returned to CONUS for deactivation. The Secretary of Defense approved this revised package on 12 June 1969.[23]

A conference at CINCPAC headquarters worked out a movement program and schedule, giving the operation the nickname KEYSTONE EAGLE. The first redeployment of US troops from South Vietnam began on 8 July, when the 802 men of the 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry, departed Tan Son Nhut for McChord

21. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 7021 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 2 Jun 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 69; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-360-69 to SecDef, 9 Jun 69, Encl to JCS 2472/491, 9 Jun 69, JMF 911/374 (9 Jun 69).

22. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Force Planning," 11 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/491-1, 11 Jun 69, same file.

23. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-365-69 to SecDef, 11 Jun 69, Encl to JCS 2472/491-2, 11 Jun 69; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Force Planning (U)," 12 Jun 69, Encl to JCS 2472/491-3, 12 Jun 69; same file.

Air Force Base. By the end of July, 7,507 men, together with 5,202 short tons of equipment, had left South Vietnam.[24]

During the first stages of withdrawal there was some uncertainty over what the authorized US space/strength ceiling for South Vietnam would be at the end of August.[25] When the President announced the 25,000 withdrawal at Midway on 8 June, the US force authorization for South Vietnam was 549,500 spaces, but actual strength stood at approximately 537,000 personnel, and the statement did not specify whether the 25,000 would be subtracted from the first or the second of these figures. Shortly after the Midway announcement, the Secretary of Defense told the press that approximately 25,000 US personnel would be redeployed from South Vietnam based on the in-country strength at the time of the President's announcement, resulting in a new strength "in the neighborhood of 515,000." COMUSMACV and CINCPAC feared that, upon the completion of the redeployment on 31 August, a strict 515,000 ceiling might be imposed, seriously limiting COMUSMACV's flexibility in managing his strength levels and requiring him to operate at less than 515,000 in order to avoid breaching the limit. Consequently, they urged General Wheeler to support a ceiling of 524,000 for both authorized and actual strength.

The Secretary of Defense resolved this matter on 15 July when he approved a new authorization of 524,500 US military spaces in South Vietnam and instructed that this new authorization be used for "budget and program planning." But since he believed that the United States must reduce "the actual number of US personnel in Vietnam approximately 25,000 below the number in the country at the time of the President's announcement," he also directed the maintenance of actual strength in South Vietnam "at about 515,000."[26]

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24. (S-GP 4) DJSM-1017-69 to CJCS, 2 Jul 69; (S-GP 4) DJSM-1081-69 to CJCS, 10 Jul 69; (S-GP 4) DJSM-1190-69 to CJCS, 1 Aug 69; JMF 911/374 (CY 1969). (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Secys of MilDepts et al., "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #7 (U)," 15 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/504, 16 Jul 69, JMF 907/374 (15 Jul 69).

25. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV 7794 to CINCPAC, 181101Z Jun 69; CINCPAC to CJCS, 181110Z Jun 69; (S-GP 4) Draft CM to SecDef, n.d., Att to DJSM-945-69 to CJCS, 20 Jun 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Force Planning), Jun-Jul 69.

26. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Secys of MilDepts et al., "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #7 (U)," 15 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/504, 16 Jul 69, JMF 907/374 (15 Jul 69). (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Secys of MilDepts, "Strength Authorization for South Vietnam (U)," 15 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/491-8, 17 Jul 69, JMF 911/374 (9 Jun 69).

In early August the Secretary of Defense expressed concern over the fact that, while some 7,500 men had been withdrawn, the actual US strength in South Vietnam then stood at 300 more than at the time of the Midway announcement. (Apparently, the number of replacements being sent to South Vietnam had not been scaled down to meet the reduced personnel strength.) The Secretary directed the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Service Secretaries to give this matter "their immediate personal attention" in order to insure that by 31 August 1969 US personnel in South Vietnam had been reduced by 25,000 as announced by President Nixon.[27]

Appropriate measures were taken, and by 28 August, when the last of the first increment left South Vietnam, 25,097 US troops and 15,284 tons of cargo had been moved. Besides the 3d Battalion of the 60th Infantry, already mentioned, major units included in the redeployment were the 9th Marine Regimental Landing Team, moved from I CTZ to Japan/Okinawa, and two brigades of the 9th Division, one going to Hawaii and the other to CONUS. In all, approximately 15,400 Army, 8,400 Marine, and some 1,200 Naval personnel (a 1,000-man Riverine Task Force and 200 men with Marine units) were redeployed from South Vietnam. On 31 August, COMUSMACV reported that US strength in South Vietnam stood at 509,600.[28]

Phase 2 Redeployment

As the United States withdrew the first troops from South Vietnam, the Nixon Administration was considering further

27. (S) Memo, SecDef to Secys of MilDepts and CJCS, "Redeployment of the First Increment from South Vietnam," 5 Aug 69, JMF 911/374 (9 Aug 69).

28. (S) Msgs, JCS 9799 to CINCPAC, 8 Aug 69; COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 10 Aug 69; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 22 Aug 69; OJCS File 091 Vietnam (Force Planning), Aug 69. (C-GP 4) DJSM-1361-69 to CJCS, 2 Sep 69; (S-GP 4) "Background Paper for CJCS for Mtg with SecDef on 11 Aug 69," prepared by Current Ops Br, SASM, n.d.; JMF 911/374 (CY 69). (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Secy of MilDepts et al., 15 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/504, 16 Jul 69, JMF 907/374 (15 Jul 69). (U) Memo, CJCS Staff Gp to CJCS, 2 Sep 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Force Planning), Sep-Oct 69.

force reductions. In the Midway announcement President Nixon had intimated that the next decision would come in August or shortly thereafter.

Some thought that the reduction should come faster. In an article in the summer issue of Foreign Affairs, former Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford proposed that the United States withdraw 100,000 troops from Vietnam by the end of the year and all ground combat troops by the end of 1970. In commenting on this proposal on 19 June, President Nixon stated:

> We have started to withdraw forces. We will withdraw more. Another decision will be made in August.

The President refused to indicate the numbers involved since that depended on the factors he had previously mentioned. But "as far as how many will be withdrawn by the end of this year, or the end of next year," the President hoped that "we could beat Mr. Clifford's timetable." On 2 July, Secretary Laird referred to the President's comment and told General Wheeler that "our goal" in 1969 was to exceed the Clifford figure of 100,000 men.[29]

On the evening of 7 July 1969, Mr. Nixon assembled his principal advisers aboard the presidential yacht for a review of the Vietnam situation. The President heard briefings on military operations, the progress of Vietnamization, and the Paris negotiations. Also he accepted the following with respect to additional troop withdrawals: preparation of an assessment by COMUSMACV of further reductions, together with a detailed troop list on or shortly before 10 August; a presidential announcement around 15 August; and withdrawal of a second increment in September-October.

29. Clifford, "A Vietnam Reappraisal," Foreign Affairs, Jul 69, pp. 601-622. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, p. 472. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Military Strategy in Southeast Asia," 2 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2339/302, 3 Jul 69, JMF 907/520 (2 Jul 69).

In reporting this meeting to the field commanders, General Wheeler said he assumed that the second withdrawal would be 25,000.[30]

In mid-July General Wheeler visited South Vietnam and found encouraging progress. He reported to the Secretary of Defense and the President that the military situation was the best that he had observed during any of his trips over the last five years. He brought back to Washington the following observations on further troop reduction: (1) COMUSMACV believed that an additional increment should be limited to 25,000 since both civilian and military RVN officials were "conditioned" to such a figure and had planned accordingly; (2) President Thieu was "highly" apprehensive that 1969 withdrawals would go beyond the level discussed at Midway (presumably 50,000) and, while he expected additional withdrawals in 1970, he wanted further exchanges with President Nixon on this matter; (3) the Vietnamization program could not be completed by either 31 December 1970 or 30 June 1971. General Wheeler thought that it might be possible to withdraw all ground and naval forces included in current Vietnamization planning by those dates, but that the Air Force withdrawals could not be completed until 1972. Unless North Vietnam withdrew all its forces from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, there remained "the strong probability," General Wheeler said, that the United States would have to maintain a residual support in South Vietnam "for some years to come."[31]

At the end of July President Nixon had an opportunity to view firsthand the Vietnam scene and discuss US troop reductions with both General Abrams and President Thieu. During the course of a trip to the Pacific, to Southeast Asia, and subsequently to Europe, President Nixon made an unscheduled visit to South Vietnam on 30 July 1969. He talked with President Thieu for two hours. The two Presidents reviewed developments since Midway; they noted the continuing improvement of the RVNAF and discussed further US reductions. What conclusions they reached are not

30. (S) Memo, SpecAsst to Pres for NSA to SecState et al., 3 Jul 69; (TS) J-5 PP 10-69 for CJCS, 5 Jul 69; JMF 077 (CY 1969) (NSC Mtg 7 Jul 69). (TS) Msg, CJCS 8357 to C/S PACOM and DepCOMUSMACV, 9 Jul 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69.

31. (TS) CM-4441-69 to SecDef, 21 Jul 69, same file.

indicated in available records, and they made no announcements on the size, composition, or timing of further US redeployments.[32]

In his conversations with President Nixon, General Abrams said that a second withdrawal of 25,000 was feasible, but he firmly opposed any larger figure. Nevertheless, President Nixon returned to Washington believing that the next US reduction should be more than 25,000. He mentioned to the Secretary of Defense the figure of 37,000, suggesting headquarters and support forces as sources for increased redeployments above 25,000.[33]

In compliance with the tentative schedule adopted by President Nixon on 7 July, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC submitted to Washington in early August their assessments of the first phase reductions and their views on future reductions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 12 August 1969 their own views regarding current US force reductions and possible further withdrawals. They offered two general observations: the enemy remained disposed in strength within and adjacent to South Vietnam but had reacted to the initial redeployment with only minor harassment and propaganda; although displaying increased confidence, the RVNAF was beset by "a serious lack of qualified leaders" and remained "critically dependent" on extensive US support.[34]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that, barring a significant change in the enemy situation, a redeployment of approximately 25,000 US troops could begin in late September and be completed about 30 November. They listed the following forces in this second package:

3,604 Army - combat and service support elements

1,688 Navy - Navy elements supporting Marine units and one mobile construction battalion

32. NY Times, 31 Jul 69, 1. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 585-586.

33. (TS) Msg, CJCS 9803 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 8 Aug 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Force Planning), Aug 69.

34. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV 9967 to CINCPAC, 2 Aug 69 (forwarded to CJCS 6 Aug 69); CINCPAC to CJCS, 092200Z Aug 69; same file. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-499-69 to SecDef, 12 Aug 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/517, 9 Aug 69, JMF 911/374 (9 Aug 69).

18,395 Marine - 3d Marine Division plus support and the 1st Marine Air Wing

1,325 Air Force - One tactical fighter squadron and two special operations squadrons

This plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, had been coordinated with the Republic of Vietnam. They advised the Secretary of Defense that they had also examined the possibility of redeploying 30,000 personnel but had found that neither the military situation nor the RVN capabilities justified moving to this higher level. It was evident that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had not felt bound by the President's suggested figure of 37,000.

On the matter of setting the new manpower space authorization for Vietnam following this second redeployment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not adopt COMUSMACV's recommended firgure of 499,500, which resulted from simple subtraction of 25,000 from the existing strength authorization. Actual strength in Vietnam would fall to about 490,000 and, as always, would be subject to constant variation. To the Secretary of Defense the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a manpower floor of 490,000 with acceptance of a two percent excess. Thus the upper limit would be approximately the same as COMUSMACV's figure of 499,500.[35]

Some of Secretary Laird's advisers did not concur with the JCS recommendations, arguing that there were other alternatives. One was a reduction in actual strength from 515,000 to a new ceiling of 490,000. This would entail a reduction of 34,500 spaces from the present authorization of 524,500. This solution, they said, would remove the confusion regarding strength accountability--authorized and actual strength would be effectively the same. In a talking paper for the Chairman's use, the Joint Staff countered that the establishment of a 490,000 hard ceiling would mean that in-country strength would have to vary below it, thus imposing a larger reduction than the JCS recommendation of 25,000. Other possible options seen by the OSD advisers were a 40,000 reduction in actual strength, to a ceiling of 475,000, and certain out-of-country redeployments, including

35. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-499-69 to SecDef, 12 Aug 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/517, 9 Aug 69, same file.

7,200 personnel from Thailand and 2,500 from naval elements offshore.[36]

President Nixon discussed troop reductions with the Secretary of Defense, General Wheeler, and Dr. Kissinger at the San Clemente White House on 14 August. He stated that: since the enemy was increasing the tempo of operations, he would defer any announcement of troop reductions for about ten days; he was unwilling to limit the reduction to 25,000--"it must be more than that"; the next reduction should be an uneven number and stretched out over a longer period than two months. The President was still interested in force reductions in Thailand, recalling that he had discussed the subject with Prime Minister Thanom of that country and had not received an adverse reaction.[37]

In the light of the discussions with the President, Secretary Laird asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider a revised Phase 2 redeployment package reducing COMUSMACV's ceiling to 486,000 and withdrawal of either 7,000 or 10,000 US personnel from Thailand. The Joint Chiefs of Staff replied on 21 August that a reduction of 38,500 US spaces would be required to meet such a ceiling. This was 13,500 beyond what they had considered expedient in their earlier recommendations. If the 486,000 ceiling was adopted, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the approval of a one percent variation from the established ceiling. Otherwise COMUSMAVC would be required to operate at about one percent below the ceiling--or about 482,000.

In response to the Secretary's request for redeployment alternatives for Thailand, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided four packages. Package I was limited to 2,593 spaces already planned for redeployment in FY 1970. Adding Packages II and III to Package I would produce a total of 7,000, and adding Package IV would bring the number to 10,000. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that anything beyond Package I would have serious impact on the air strike capability in Laos; that Packages II and III should not be implemented

36. (TS) TP for CJCS for Mtg of 14 Aug 69, "Phase Two US Redeployments (U)," 14 Aug 69, JMF 077 (CY 69).
37. (TS) CM-4502-69 to CNO, CSA, CSAF, CMC, and DJS, 15 Aug 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Force Planning), Aug 69.

until the military situation in Southeast Asia was reassessed later in the year; and that Package IV should be rejected.[38]

The following day, 22 August 1969, Rear Admiral William Lemos, Director of Policy Plans and NSC Affairs, OASD(ISA), briefed Dr. Kissinger at San Clemete on the JCS views on a reduction to a 486,000 authorization. Dr. Kissinger was not satisfied. He was willing to accept a manpower authorization of 486,000, but with the stipulation of an operating strength of 480,000. After talking with the President by telephone on 23 August, Secretary Laird reported to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the 480,000 figure was not a rigid limit but that the President did desire a reduction in actual strength "of something over 20,000," perhaps 30,000. In any event, the President had decided to withhold the decision and announcement of further reductions until he returned to Washington in early September.[39]

Pending the return of the President, the Secretary of Defense requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider a further revised package of about 40,500, reducing the Vietnam authorization to 484,000 by 15 December 1969. The Joint Chiefs of Staff revised the Phase 2 package to include 40,500 spaces and submitted it to the Secretary of Defense on 30 August. Since 9,500 of the spaces were not filled, the package meant reduction in actual strength of approximately 31,000. By proposing a tentative redeployment of 40,500 in authorized strength, but only 31,000 in actual strength, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would bring the two ceilings into phase. They recommended to the Secretary of Defense that, if the President directed a 484,000 authorization, it should be a single strength figure with COMUSMACV maintaining his personnel strength "as close to that ceiling as practicable."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff warned the Secretary of Defense, however, that to reach the 484,000 authorization by mid-December would mean the acceptance of serious risks. They

38. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JSCM-518-69 to SecDef, 21 Aug 69, Encl to JCS 2472/521, 20 Aug 69, JMF 911/374 (9 Aug 69).
39. (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 10420 to COMUSMACV, 22 Aug 69; (~~S~~) Msg, CJCS 10431 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 23 Aug 69; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 10489 to COMUSMACV, 25 Aug 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Force Planning), Aug 69.

stated that total reductions in 1969 beyond 50,000, without a substantial decline in the enemy threat, would be "clearly without justification on military grounds and beyond the threshold of prudent risk." Such a reduction would require withdrawal of an additional Army brigade, reducing allied flexibility to respond rapidly and forcefully to enemy initiatives. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also objected to a Phase 2 package of the size now contemplated on the ground that it would exceed the "expectations" of the Republic of Vietnam.[40]

Final Vietnamization Plan

While the Joint Chiefs of Staff were reviewing the various redeployment packages, they were also preparing the overall Vietnamization plan, which NSSM 36 had directed be submitted to the President by 1 September. They approved and forwarded the final interagency plan to the Secretary of Defense on 25 August 1969. This completed the planning exercise that had begun with the preparation of the initial plan in May.[41]

As directed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had surveyed all US forces in Southeast Asia for possible redeployment. They reiterated to the Secretary of Defense the view submitted with the initial plan, that out-of-country and offshore forces were essential to counter the interrelated enemy threats in South Vietnam, Laos, and northeast Thailand and to support the RVNAF and remaining allied forces in South Vietnam. Further the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought that withdrawal of out-of-country and offshore forces in conjunction with the withdrawals from South Vietnam could

40. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-540-69 to SecDef, 30 Aug 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/523, 27 Aug 69, JMF 911/374 (9 Aug 69).

41. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-522-69 to SecDef, 25 Aug 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/467-4, 19 Aug 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 4. Materials on which the plan was based included (~~TS~~) MACV/ Embassy Plan, "Vietnamizing the War(C)," 20 Jul 69, Encl to JCS 2472/467-3, 28 Jul 69, same file. A closely held US effort, the planning had not involved coordination with RVN officials, but combined planning had been initiated with the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff on certain practical aspects of future US troop redeployments.

be interpreted as "a general US disengagement from Southeast Asia" rather than Vietnamization, which was the proper subject of the current planning.

The plan also examined, but rejected, the possibility of withdrawing as many as 100,000 US personnel during 1969. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that, without a drastic decline in the enemy threat, further redeployments beyond those being carried out in Phase 1 would involve "significant risks"; as they had stated in discussions on Phase 2 withdrawals, any redeployment greater than 50,000 in 1969 was beyond "the threshold of prudent risk." The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to advocate Vietnamization on a "cut-and-try" approach based on periodic reassessment.

The plan contained the same objective and means to achieve the objective as set forth in the initial plan. In addition, it included the following military guidelines for Vietnamization: (1) in accordance with a "one-war" concept, emphasis would be placed on combined military operations, protection of populated areas, pacification, and improvement of the RVNAF; (2) combined US-RVNAF operations would continue because of military necessity and in order to improve RVNAF operational effectiveness; (3) as feasible, US units would be thinned out or withdrawn from selected areas and replaced by RVNAF units, and, when specific areas became "relatively secure," RVNAF as well as US units would be withdrawn, allowing Regional and Popular Forces and eventually RVN internal security forces to assume responsibility; (4) units of the US residual support force would furnish combat and combat service support to the RVNAF, relieve RVNAF units of pacification and security missions when necessary, and be prepared for emergency reinforcement; (5) as combat tasks were progressively transferred to the RVNAF, US forces not required for the residual support force could be redeployed; (6) current programs to expand South Vietnamese forces would be continued and increased as practicable.

To complete the process of Vietnamization, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented four timetables for planning purposes, with time spans of 18, 24, 30, and 42 months, respectively. Each would involve six troop withdrawals, including Phase 1 as already approved. The overall figures ranged from a 264,400 reduction with a residual strength of 285,000 for the 18-month timetable to a 282,000 reduction and a residual force of 267,000 for the 42-month one. The larger reduction and smaller residual forces under the

42-month plan resulted from the fact that certain US personnel engaged in turning over equipment to the RVNAF or in various construction programs would have completed their work by December 1972, while under the shorter timetables, many would still be required in South Vietnam. If budgetary reasons required a still larger reduction, analysts in the Office of the Secretary of Defense thought that a withdrawal of 319,700 with a resulting residual force of 229,880 could be accomplished. The Joint Chiefs of Staff included estimated budget and balance of payment implications for each withdrawal alternative, though they cautioned that these estimates had limited validity because of the many variables involved.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also reviewed possible reductions in FWMA forces in South Vietnam. They concluded, however, that the future roles of these forces should be determined by the Republic of Vietnam and the other countries involved.

As in the initial plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff listed the same dangers and possible advantages of Vietnamization. Their conclusion was that Vietnamization should proceed on a "cut-and-try" basis, with its pace governed by the results of periodic assessments of the Vietnam situation. Accordingly the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not favor establishing an overall schedule with a set completion date.[42]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense forward the plan to the National Security Council, omitting several dissenting footnotes and alternative concepts that represented the thought of the OSD staff. Secretary Laird accepted this recommendation.[43]

The Secretary of State reviewed the plan and agreed that the effects of US withdrawal must be evaluated during the process. He felt that the United States should preserve the flexibility to adjust both the pace and scope in accordance with events, being prepared to re-examine not only the increments of the timetables but also the size of the residual force. Secretary Rogers found the JCS conclusions regarding

42. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-522-69 to SecDef, 25 Aug 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/467-4, 19 Aug 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 4.
43. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CM-4536-69 to SecDef, 29 Aug 69, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2472/467-4, 2 Sep 69, same file.

the political and military risks of a withdrawal in 1969 in excess of 50,000 "unduly pessimistic." He pointed out to Secretary Laird that the Phase 1 increment of 25,000 had occasioned only "relatively modest concern" in South Vietnam, and he believed the RVN leaders and public were prepared to accept further 1969 withdrawals. In addition, Secretary Rogers favored the initiation of out-of-country withdrawals and stated that the United States should adopt the 18-month timetable as its target, accepting that adjustments might later have to be made.[44]

At the beginning of September, President Nixon had before him both the final plan for Vietnamizing the war and recommendations for Phase 2 redeployment. On 12 September he met with his top political and military advisers, including the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of Central Intelligence, his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and Ambassador Bunker, to review the entire Vietnam situation. At the meeting, the President announced his decision on Phase 2 withdrawals--a decision that he had made several days earlier. The President had accepted the JCS revised Phase 2 package of 30 August, providing for a reduction of 40,500 US spaces and a new authorization of 484,000. President Nixon told the participants of the meeting that he would delay announcement of the withdrawal until 16 September in order to allow time for General Abrams to brief President Thieu on the reduction and to coordinate the announcement with the Republic of Vietnam.[45]

The President made no decision on the final plan for Vietnamizing the war or its accompanying timetables, but he did specify that further decisions on US troop withdrawals would be based on full consideration of the three criteria he had previously set forth--progress of the RVNAF, level of enemy action, and status of the Paris negotiations--and that future decisions on troop withdrawals would be made "on an incremental basis as the situation dictated." By this decision, the President substantially adoped the JCS "cut-and-try" approach. But in approving a 484,000

44. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecState to SecDef, 3 Sep 69, Att to JCS 2472/467-5, 8 Sep 69, same file.
45. NY Times, 13 Sep 69, 3; 15 Sep 69, 1. (TS) NSDM 24, 17 Sep 69, JMF 001 (CY 69) NSDMs.

authorized ceiling, the President accepted a second redeployment of 40,500--one that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had termed "clearly without justification on military grounds and beyond the threshold of prudent risk."[46]

General Abrams returned to Saigon on 14 September and briefed both President Thieu and General Vien on President Nixon's decision and the details of the troop reduction figures. All was now ready for the public announcement by President Nixon on 16 September. But the mischievous Vice President Ky jumped the gun, leaking word of the US withdrawal to the press on 15 September.[47]

In Washington the White House refused to comment on the Ky statement, and on the following evening, 16 September, President Nixon made his planned announcement. He told the US public in a televised speech that, after "careful consideration with my senior civilian and military advisers and in full consultation with the Government of Vietnam," he had decided to reduce the authorized troop ceiling in Vietnam to 484,000 by 15 December. Under the newly authorized ceiling, he said, a minimum of 60,000 troops would be withdrawn by mid-December. The printed version of his statement had a footnote explaining that the total reduction in authorized ceiling strengths amounted to 65,500, but that in practice actual strengths normally were less than the authorized figure by 1 or 2 percent.[48]

In the week following the President's announcement, a conference at PACOM headquarters developed the necessary movement program, which was designated KEYSTONE CARDINAL. The actual redeployment began shortly thereafter.[49]

The Phase 2 withdrawal proceeded without interruption. It comprised approximately 14,000 Army personnel, including the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, which returned to

46. (TS) NSDM 24, 17 Sep 69, same file.
47. NY Times, 15 Sep 69, 1; 16 Sep 69, 1. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 13029 to CJCS, 14 Sep 69; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 12096 to CJCS, 15 Sep 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Force Planning), Sep-Oct 69.
48. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, p. 718.
49. (U) Msg, Admin CINCPAC to COMUSMACV et al., 200409Z Sep 69, JCS IN 50389. (C) Msg, Admin CINCPAC to COMUSMACV et al., 200431Z Sep 69, JCS IN 50406.

CONUS; 18,500 Marines of the 3d Marine Division and the 1st Marine Air Wing, some of whom were moved to Okinawa/Japan, some to WESTPAC, and others to CONUS; about 2,600 Air Force personnel, including a tactical bomber squadron and a special operations squadron, both of which were deactivated; and a total of approximately 5,400 Navy personnel, consisting of support elements with the 3d Marine Division and five mobile construction battalions. By mid-December, US strength stood at 472,442--well below the goal of 484,000.[50]

Although the planning in August for the Phase 2 reduction had considered withdrawal of US forces from Thailand, the President's 16 September announcement made no mention of that country. But in a conversation with the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary Laird stated that President Nixon desired to initiate early discussions with the Royal Thai Government on this subject. The President visualized a reduction of between 5,000 and 7,000 US personnel and wished the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare an appropriate redeployment package.[51]

Accordingly, on 17 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense a proposal for withdrawing about 6,000 men from Thailand. They explained that the package included 2,319 men already scheduled for redeployment in FY 1970. As they had in August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed any redeployments from Thailand in FY 1970 (beyond the 2,319 already scheduled to leave) until the military and political situation in Southeast Asia and the Pacific could be assessed.[52]

Nevertheless, the United States undertook talks with the Royal Thai Government on the reduction of US forces, and on 30 September the two Governments announced that approximately 6,000 US Army and US Air Force personnel would be withdrawn from Thailand. The withdrawal would be as expeditious as was consistent with "operational requirements related to the Vietnam conflict," and would begin in a few weeks, with completion planned by 1 July 1970. Since US

50. (C-GP 4) Memos for SASM, "Operation KEYSTONE CARDINAL," 15 Oct 69, 23 Oct 69, and 15 Dec 69, SASM files.
51. (TS-GO 3) JCS 2353/181, 16 Sep 69, JMF 910/374 (25 Aug 69).
52. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-575-69 to SecDef, 17 Sep 69, Encl A to JCS 2353/181, 16 Sep 69, same file.

forces in Thailand stood at about 48,500, the reduction would lower this figure to approximately 42,500 by mid-1970.[53]

At the request of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 8 October two tentative follow-on packages of approximately 6,000 spaces each, for future redeployments from Thailand above the announced 6,000 reduction. They had been asked to devise proposals that would leave a balanced force in Thailand, able to resume the bombing of North Vietnam or the interdiction of NVA supply efforts if necessary and also to provide support for Thai and Royal Laotian forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the two packages responsive to the Assistant Secretary's request, but they again opposed any further redeployments beyond the 6,000 already directed for FY 1970 prior to a reassessment of the situation. Apparently the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was heeded, for there was no further consideration during 1969 of US reductions in Thailand.[54]

Phase 3 Redeployment

On the evening of 3 November, President Nixon reported to the American people on his efforts to end the Vietnam war. After describing unsuccessful US peace initiatives and noting that 60,000 US forces--20 percent of all US combat forces--would have departed from South Vietnam by mid-December, the President turned to his future program.

> We have adopted a plan which we have worked out in cooperation with the South Vietnamese for the complete withdrawal of all U.S. combat ground forces, and their replacement by South Vietnamese forces on an orderly scheduled timetable. This withdrawal will be made from strength and not from weakness. As South Vietnamese forces become stronger, the rate of American withdrawal can become greater.

53. "Announcement of Agreement between the United States Government and the Royal Thai Government," 30 Sep 69, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, p. 1350.

54. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-620-69 to SecDef, 8 Oct 69, Encl A to JCS 2353/180-3, 7 Oct 69, JMF 910/374 (25 Aug 69).

For the obvious reason that publication of a timetable would remove any incentive for the enemy to negotiate, the President did not announce one. The timing was flexible, he said, and depended on the three factors previously mentioned--progress of the Paris talks, the level of enemy activity in South Vietnam, and the improvement of the RVNAF. The President warned North Vietnam not to misinterpret the US intentions:

> Hanoi could made no greater mistake than to assume that an increase in violence will be to its advantage. If I conclude that increased enemy action jeopardizes our remaining forces in Vietnam, I shall not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with the situation.

President Nixon concluded that the United States had two choices to end the war: immediate precipitate withdrawal of all Americans from Vietnam; or persistence in the search for "a just peace through a negotiated settlement," if possible, and continued implementation of the plan for Vietnamization if necessary. Because of his belief that immediate withdrawal would not bring peace but would rather enhance the danger of wider war, the President had rejected that course in favor of continued efforts along the lines of negotiation and orderly withdrawal.[55]

During November the Joint Chiefs of Staff undertook to review the military situation in Vietnam and consider alternative Phase 3 redeployment packages in preparation for the presidential decision on further US reductions in Vietnam that would come in mid-December. They submitted their conclusions to the Secretary of Defense on 29 November 1969. They reported that the enemy retained the capability of initiating a major offensive on relatively short notice, though he could not sustain such an attack for an extended time. The Joint Chiefs of Staff saw the greatest enemy threats in III CTZ and the northern I CTZ, but added that there was also a "significant threat" in the southwest II CTZ and an increasing enemy presence in IV CTZ. The allied situation was one of "continued progress in pacification and Vietnamization," but one as yet untested by determined enemy action. They found that RVNAF improvement and modernization

55. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 901-909.

programs were generally on or ahead of schedule with qualitative improvements being made at varying rates.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that they had considered two Phase 3 alternatives--a 50,000 reduction by mid-March or April 1970 or a 100,000 reduction by mid-July 1970--but they counseled, "on military grounds," against a decision at that time. They believed that a redeployment during the next several months would risk a shortfall in allied capability to meet the enemy threat. Thus an extra burden would fall on the RVNAF at a time when the prime US objective should be to insure that the RVNAF maintained momentum and suffered no major defeats. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said that their recommendation did not arise from any mistrust of the progress of Vietnamization. It was simply that the weeks through the Tet holiday (7-9 February 1970) would be a period of maximum threat, during which the question of additional troop reductions should be deferred. They noted that, with the recent increase in enemy activity and the continuing lack of progress at Paris, RVNAF improvement was the only one of the President's three criteria offering a credible basis for further reductions. Hence they urged caution in deciding upon additional withdrawals at this time.

Nevertheless the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that "other considerations" might require a redeployment in the near future. If so, a redeployment of 35,000 spaces could be initiated. Even a reduction of this size, they believed, exceeded "prudent military risks" but could be scheduled in such a way so as to reduce the hazard.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff held firm views on the course to follow if the enemy should escalate military operations in South Vietnam. They strongly recommended, in that event, that any announced troop redeployments be cancelled and, if necessary, reversed. In addition, a US air and naval campaign should be initiated promptly against North Vietnam "in order to reduce North Vietnamese military capabilities and to preserve progress being made in the overall Vietnamization program and prevent a setback to the pacification of the country side."[56]

56. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-735-69 to SecDef, 29 Nov 69, Encl to JCS 2472/556, 26 Nov 69, JMF 911/374 (26 Nov 69).

Apparently the "other considerations" that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had mentioned proved compelling in the higher councils of government. On 15 December 1969, President Nixon announced that 50,000 more US troops would be withdrawn from Vietnam by 15 April 1970, bringing the total reduction in force authorization to 115,500. The President acknowledged that enemy infiltration had increased substantially, but he added, in apparent disregard of the JCS opinion, that it had not reached the point where "our military leaders believe the enemy has developed the capability to mount a major offensive." He stated that he was watching the situation closely, and he again cautioned Hanoi against misinterpreting the US action. The President repeated his 3 November warning that he would not hesitate to take strong and effective measures against any increased enemy activity threatening the remaining US forces in Vietnam.[57]

Once the President had announced the withdrawal of the additional 50,000 US troops, the composition of the forces to be redeployed came under question. In planning, COMUSMACV had prepared "Marine-heavy" and "Army-heavy" options. Both he and CINCPAC favored the former, which provided for the withdrawal of 25,000 Army and 18,000 Marine Corps personnel, with the Navy and the Air Force filling out the remainder of the 50,000 package. This option would have withdrawn all major Marine combat elements from South Vietnam, reducing Marine Corps forces to a "low residual level." The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, wanted to retain some combat elements of all the Services in South Vietnam until a transition force level was reached. In addition, there was currently a shortfall in Army personnel strength in units in South Vietnam. While this shortfall would be rectified in any event, the Joint Chiefs of Staff feared that maintenance of the larger Army force level in South Vietnam required by the "Marine-heavy" option would result in "considerably increased personnel turbulence and adverse impact on readiness for Army units worldwide." They were concerned, also, that the Marine Corps would have difficulty in relocating "long term personnel" into other units that were already up to strength. Consequently, they requested COMUSMACV and CINCPAC to consider a "middle

57. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 1025-1028.

position," which would have redeployed 31,600 Army, 10,800 Marine Corps, and 7,600 Navy-Air Force personnel from South Vietnam.[58]

The two commanders reviewed the "middle position," but still preferred the "Marine-heavy" option. Subsequently the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed a modification of the "middle postion" that CINCPAC and COMUSMACV found more acceptable. On 27 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized the execution of this plan, embracing the following elements:

Service	Elements	Approx. Spaces
US Army	Inf div, inf bde & support	29,470
US Navy	support	2,050
US Air Force	3 TFS, 1 TRS & support	5,580
US Marine Corps	1 RLT and support	12,900
Total		50,000[59]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense of their action, stating that a detailed troop list and time phasing of the redeployment would be developed as the planning progressed. They expected to schedule the "major parts" of the withdrawal late in the redeployment period in order to maintain maximum combat strength in South Vietnam during the Tet period. Thus as 1969 drew to an end the major planning to accomplish the withdrawal of 50,000 additional US forces from South Vietnam was complete, with the actual movement yet to occur.[60]

The year 1969 brought a significant change in the US involvement in South Vietnam. Whereas the years 1965 through 1968 had witnessed the deployment of an ever increasing number of US forces to Vietnam, 1969 saw the trend reversed. The President's decision to Vietnamize the war, by

58. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2472/556-1, 17 Dec 69; (TS) J-5 PP 26-69, "Force Planning Options (U)," 24 Dec 69; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 15940 to CINCPAC, 17 Dec 69 (derived from JCS 2472/556-1); JMF 911/374 (26 Nov 69).

59. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2472/556-2, "Force Planning (U)," 27 Dec 69; (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 6983 to CINCPAC, 27 Dec 69 (derived from JCS 2472/556-2); (TS-GP 4) JCSM-777-69 to Sec Def, 27 Dec 69, App A to JCS 2472/556-2, 27 Dec 69, same file.

60. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-777-69 to SecDef, 27 Dec 69, App A to JCS 2472/556-2, 27 Dec 69; same file.

progressively transferring the combat burden from US to South Vietnamese forces, had made it possible to begin reducing the US troop commitment. In considering the Vietnamization plan, US policymakers had reviewed various schedules. The most optimistic and expeditious called for withdrawal of all US combat forces by the end of 1970, while the longest would have spread the withdrawal out to the end of 1972. In the end, President Nixon avoided a firm timetable, choosing instead to key the rate of Vietnamization to the developing situation in Vietnam. Eventually, however, the United States expected to reduce its strength in South Vietnam to a residual force of between 200,000 and 300,000.

By the close of 1969, the United States was firmly committed to the Vietnamization program. It had already withdrawn over 60,000 troops and had announced the redeployment of an additional 50,000 in the early months of 1970, bringing the total projected reduction to at least 115,000. Both US and world opinion expected the reduction to continue, and only a disastrous deterioration of the situation in South Vietnam could now stem, much less reverse, the Vietnamization process.

Chapter 5

MILITARY POLICY AND ACTIONS AUGUST-DECEMBER 1969

During the last five months of 1969, President Nixon continued to seek a negotiated settlement in Vietnam while maintaining military pressure on the enemy in the field. But, since the diplomatic approach produced no success, the President proceeded with his alternative policy of transferring the burden of the combat to the South Vietnamese, still intending to keep the same level of action against the enemy. In the latter months of 1969, however, just as in the earlier part of the year, the Nixon Administration was faced with a number of pressures to reduce US military involvement in the war. Budget restrictions continued to require reductions in military expenditures, and despite careful planning, these cuts affected the war in Vietnam. Some elements of the public, who had grown impatient in the late spring of 1969 with the Nixon Administration's slow progress in ending the conflict, became more strident during the final months of the year. Their agitation culminated in massive demonstrations in October and November, the largest to date in the history of the Vietnam war.

The course of the war itself also increased the demand for a scaling down of US action and a faster withdrawal of US troops. Both fighting and infiltration by the enemy declined in the last months of the year, and many in the United States wanted to respond with a corresponding reduction of US action. As a result there were growing calls from the Congress, the press, and the academic community for a speedier US troop pull-out from Vietnam. Aware of these pressures, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought to avoid further erosion of resources and authorities, the loss of which would restrict the actions of the field commanders in Vietnam.

Further Budget Reductions--Project 703

At the beginning of August 1969, the Military Services again faced budget cuts that would ultimately have an impact on the war in Vietnam. In late July, President Nixon signed the final supplemental appropriations bill for FY 1969, and at that time he announced that the "budget

picture has worsened." Expenditures had risen because of uncontrollable items such as interest on the public debt, Medicare, social security, Civil Service retirement benefits, and the like. In addition, Congress had failed to take various recommended actions to reduce expenditures and raise extra revenue. As a consequence, the President was directing the various Federal departments and agencies to reduce spending by another $3.5 billion in FY 1970 beyond the $4 billion he had announced the previous April.[1] He did not specify where the cuts would be made, adding only that "No Federal program is above scrutiny."

In the end, the Department of Defense bore the largest share of this additional budget retrenchment. The Secretary of Defense called on each of the three Military Departments to reduce FY 1970 expenditures by $1 billion. This $3 billion reduction in the Defense budget for FY 1970 was nicknamed Project 703. It was publicly announced by the Secretary of Defense on 21 August 1969. He stated that every precaution would be taken to alleviate the adverse impact of the cut, but he gave no indication of how the reduction would be apportioned within the Department of Defense.[2]

In the meantime, Service plans to implement Project 703 had been submitted to the Secretary of Defense and were forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for comment. They included a number of provisions that affected the war in Vietnam. The Air Force plan called for: the phase-out of 25 B-52 aircraft; the reduction of monthly B-52 sorties from 1,600 to 1,500 by 1 September; reduction of tactical air strength with a cutback of monthly sorties from 18,000 to 14,000; and a lower rate of utilization of C-130 transports in the Pacific. The Navy projected the inactivation of 131 ships of various types, including the one battleship then in service, two heavy cruisers, two aircraft carriers, 29 destroyers (types DD and DL), five submarines, and various other craft. The remainder of the 3d Marine

1. See Ch. 3, p. 63.
2. (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "The FY 1970 Expenditure Reduction Project," 5 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2458/582, 6 Aug 69, JMF 580 (5 Aug 69) sec 1. News Conference, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, 21 Aug 69, Public Statements of the Secretary of Defense, 1969, Office of the Historian, OSD (hereafter cited as Public Statements, 1969).

Division would be redeployed to Okinawa (in addition to the redeployments already approved), reducing Marine strength in Vietnam from six to four regiments; the 5th Marine Division would be deactivated. To meet its $1 billion cut, the Army planned to inactivate both the 9th Infantry Division, which was currently redeploying from Vietnam, and the 1st Armored Division, and to reduce the strength of the 2d Armored Division.[3]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the Service plans and gave the Secretary of Defense their comments on 16 August 1969. With respect to the war, they pointed out that the proposed action would reduce monthly B-52 sorties an additional 13 percent beyond the July reductions[4] and monthly tactical air sorties by approximately 23 percent. They also expected the Marine tactical air capability to be reduced and noted that naval gunfire support would decrease from an average of eight ships on the gunline to four, with no heavy gunfire support ship available in the Seventh Fleet for about five months out of the year. These restrictions would come at a time when the United States was withdrawing ground combat troops and when air strikes and naval bombardment would play an increasingly important role. In addition, the reductions would result in inadequate PACOM reserve reinforcements for Southeast Asia as well as degraded amphibious shipping and airlift support for operations in Vietnam. Such considerations were especially critical, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, since the enemy had given no indication that he would decrease his activity. Consequently, they recommended that no further reduction be ordered pending a settlement of the war and the resolution of various other national security matters affecting military commitments.[5]

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3. (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "The FY 1970 Expenditure Reduction Project," 5 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2458/582, 6 Aug 69 (Air Force and Navy submissions); (S-GP 3) Memo, DASD(C) to CJCS, same subj, 6 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2458/582-1, 7 Aug 69 (revised Air Force submission); Memo, DASD(C) to CJCS, same subj, 11 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2458/582-2, 11 Aug 69 (Army submission); JMF 580 (5 Aug 69) secs 1 and 2.

4. See Ch. 3, p. 66.

5. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-511-69 to SecDef, 16 Aug 69, Encl to JCS 2458/582-4, 13 Aug 69, same file, sec 2.

Subsequently the Services made minor adjustments in their plans, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff maintained their earlier stand. They believed that the Service cutbacks would seriously harm the US position in Southeast Asia, and they opposed further budget reduction until the war ended.[6]

General Wheeler met with the President and the Secretary of Defense on 26 September to discuss the Project 703 cuts. He was particularly concerned with the proposed reductions in B-52 and tactical air sorties and in naval gunfire support. He believed these reductions, combined with the second phase of US troop withdrawals from Vietnam, would degrade the US ability to respond to enemy initiatives. But General Wheeler was unable to dissuade his superiors, and on his return from the meeting, he alerted COMUSMACV and CINCPAC to expect instructions to reduce air and naval support in the "near future."[7]

General Wheeler's apprehension was well founded, for despite the objections of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense directed implementation of Project 703. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) issued the required Program Change Decision memorandums in the succeeding weeks.[8]

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6. (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "Navy Force Reductions Proposed under Project 703," 3 Sep 69, Att to JCS 2458/598, 5 Sep 69; (S-GP 3) JCSM-559-69 to SecDef, 8 Sep 69, Encl A to JCS 2458/598-1, 8 Sep 69; JMF 580 (5 Sep 69). (S-GP 3) Memo,ASD(C) to CJCS, 4 Sep 69, Att to JCS 2458/597, 4 Sep 69; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-570-69 to SecDef, 12 Sep 69, Encl to JCS 2458/597-1, 10 Sep 69; JMF 580 (4 Sep 69). (S-GP 3) CSAM 222-69, 17 Sep 69, Att to JCS 2458/606, 18 Sep 69; (S-GP 3) JCSM-678-69 to SecDef, 29 Oct 69, Encl to JCS 2458/606-1, 20 Oct 69; JMF 580 (17 Sep 69).

7. (TS) Msg, CJCS 11895 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 26 Sep 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep 69.

8. For Army program reductions, see Program Change Decision (PCD) A-9-301, 10 Sep 69, JMF 580 (17 Sep 69). For Navy program reductions see PCDs N-9-303, 1 Oct 69; N-9-305, 22 Sep 69; N-9-307, 1 Oct 69; N-9-309, 20 Nov 69; all in JMF 580 (5 Sep 69). For Air Force program reductions, see PCDs F-9-304, 2 Oct 69; F-9-305, 19 Sep 69; F-9-306, 28 Oct 69; F-9-307, 24 Oct 69; F-9-309, 8 Nov 69; F-9-310, 23 Oct 69, F-9-311, 21 Nov 69; F-9-312, 23 Oct 69; F-9-314; all in JMF 580 (4 Sep 69).

The decision on air activity levels in Southeast Asia was more immediate. On 26 September, shortly after the despatch of his message alerting the field commanders to expect reductions, General Wheeler gave COMUSMACV and CINCPAC advance notice that the Secretary of Defense had directed a reduction in B-52 and tactical air monthly sortie rates to 1,400 and 14,000 respectively. General Wheeler assured the two commanders that he appreciated the effect of this order, but he thought that careful sortie scheduling could alleviate some of the harmful impact. The field commanders retained authority to exceed monthly sortie levels to meet emergencies so long as they remained within expenditure limits for the fiscal year. This would allow surges during periods of increased combat activity, with retrenchment in "less active periods." Five days later, on 1 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff formally directed the reductions of B-52 and tactical air sorties in Southeast Asia, and the reduced levels went into effect on 2 October.[9]

On 27 September, the day following his notice to the field of the decision on air activity levels, General Wheeler relayed to CINCPAC and CINCSAC a request by the President for the preparation of a plan for a surge of B-52 operations. The plan should provide for stepping up sorties to the maximum within authorized rates, using only B-52 and tanker assets currently in WESTPAC, for a 30-day period. This option would be held for possible execution in the event of continued North Vietnamese intransigence at the Paris talks or increased enemy action in South Vietnam. In a separate message to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, General Wheeler recognized the "seeming inconsistencies" between the budget cuts on the one hand and such contingency planning on the other. "As you may expect," he explained, "we are proceeding down several alternative paths, with decisions to be made ultimately on the basis of developments we cannot yet forecast." Subsequently, CINCPAC and CINCSAC developed and forwarded

9. (S) Msg, CJCS 11896 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 26 Sep 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep 69. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 1243 and 1290 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 1 Oct 69. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecAF to SecDef, "SEAsia Tactical Air Force Programming (U)," 28 Nov 69, Att to JCS 2458/649, 1 Dec 69, JMF 580 (4 Sep 69).

the plan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff; General Wheeler notified the Secretary of Defense that it was ready, but no further action resulted.[10]

On 6 October, Secretary Laird informed the President of the reduction of B-52 sortie levels in Southeast Asia. Noting that recent combat action was significantly lower than the 1967 average, when US B-52s flew only 800 sorties monthly, he considered the current 1,400 rate "more than adequate." He acknowledged the commanders' concern over the reduced sorties but assured the President that he would monitor the military situation closely. If additional air strikes, either tactical or B-52, were required, they could be supplied "on relatively short notice." The President agreed, directing that support facilities for B-52 operations be maintained to allow rapid restoration of higher sortie rates in case the enemy stepped up his combat activity.[11]

The reduced air activity levels brought about by Project 703 continued in force throughout the remainder of 1969. There was no announcement of the reduction. Secretary Laird publicly confirmed in late October that the $3 billion cut in the FY 1970 Defense budget, announced in August, had been made, but he gave no details.[12]

In an assessment on 19 October, COMUSMACV questioned whether the lowered rates for B-52 and tactical air strikes would be adequate in the event of expanded operations. He cited the fact that reductions in effective air strength were occuring precisely at the time when US troops, who had borne most of the combat burden, were being withdrawn.

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10. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1016 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 27 Sep 69; (S) Msg, CJCS 11896 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 26 Sep 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep 69. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 100350Z Oct 69; (TS-GP 3) CM-4661-69 to SecDef, 25 Oct 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69.

11. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "B-52 ARC LIGHT Sorties (U)," 6 Oct 69, Encl to Att to JCS 2472/389-12, 21 Oct 69; (S-GP 4) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, 17 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/389-12, 21 Oct 69; JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68) sec 2.

12. News Conference, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, 20 Oct 69, Public Statements, 1969.

"The budget limitations," he noted, "reduce B-52 and tactical air/strike sorties to September 1969 experience levels, which supported operations against a reduced level of enemy combat activity." In addition, the drawdown in air capabilities had reduced allied ability to respond to multiple contingencies with massed firepower. General Abrams observed that "massed air strikes have in the past been the only real allied reserve."[13]

Project 703 also reduced naval gunfire support in Vietnam. Whereas, in January 1969, there averaged 11 ships on the gunline firing 41,200 rounds, by December the average had fallen to 5.5 ships firing only 23,049 rounds. Moreover, the ships that remained were generally types with guns of shorter range.[14]

Public Opinion

Even as budget restraints were having a direct and measurable effect on the war in Vietnam, the less tangible influence of protest and outspoken public discussion at home came to bear more fully on US policy in Southeast Asia during the latter half of 1969. As Secretary Laird had predicted, the Nixon Administration was the beneficiary of at least a partial suspension of criticism while results from the application of new thought and leadership were awaited. The beginning of actual withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam, coupled with the combat lull that lasted from early June into August, helped extend the respite to the full six months that Mr. Laird had foreseen. But the relative calm could not continue in the face of growing public dissatisfaction with US involvement and the emotional commitment to seeing its end.

In late June a newly organized antiwar group, the Vietnam Moratorium Committee, opened a national office in Washington. Its leaders planned a massive demonstration, or "moratorium," on college campuses throughout the country on 15 October. Their fundamental demand was for a quickly negotiated peace or a "firm public commitment" by the

13. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV 13589 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 19 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69.
14. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. V-181.

President to the "total withdrawal of American troops in a short period of time."[15]

The first unit returning from Vietnam, the 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, arrived in the United States on 9 July 1969 at McChord Air Force Base and was welcomed the next day at a ceremony in nearby Seattle. The troops paraded and Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor extended official greetings, stating that their presence gave "tangible evidence" of the progress being made in Vietnam. But antiwar demonstrators interrupted Secretary Resor's remarks with shouts of: "Bring them all home now!"[16]

In terms of public protest August was uneventful, but September saw more strident criticism of President Nixon and his war policy. With the return of students to the campuses for the fall term the preparations and publicity for the October Moratorium were stepped up. In addition, there was increasing concern in Congress over the war. On 25 September, Republican Senator Charles E. Goodell of New York proposed legislation to require the withdrawal of all US troops from Vietnam by the end of 1970. Reflecting the sentiment of the "dove" group in Congress, Senator Goodell wanted a definite timetable as the means of putting the South Vietnamese Government on notice that it must assume the responsibility for combat and make necessary internal reforms. His purpose, Senator Goodell said, was to help the President and Congress develop a workable plan for ending US participation in the war, since there was "no visible plan of this kind" at present. To assure referral to the Foreign Relations Committee rather than the less sympathetic Armed Services or Appropriations Committees, Senator Goodell introduced his proposal as an amendment to the foreign aid bill. Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and a prominent Senate dove, welcomed the Goodell suggestion, but Secretary of Defense Laird called it "a grave error." He warned that the proposed cutoff of funds for maintaining US personnel in Vietnam after 1 December 1970 would impose a commitment that it might not be possible to meet.[17]

15. NY Times, 1 Jul 69, 14.
16. Ibid., 11 Jul 69, 1.
17. Ibid., 26 Sep 69, 1.

The Goodell proposal was followed in rapid succession by other actions indicative of growing impatience in the Congress. Representatives Donald W. Riegle, Jr., of Michigan and Paul N. McCloskey, Jr., of California offered a resolution to repeal the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution of 1964--the basic authority for US combat action in Southeast Asia. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield suggested a US cease-fire followed by all-Vietnamese elections and a coalition government in Saigon.[18]

Several days later, on 3 October, Republican Senator Charles H. Percy urged President Nixon to respond to the current pause in the fighting by suspending all bombing, shelling, and offensive ground operations in South Vietnam and continuing the suspension as long as the enemy took no advantage of the situation. His proposal, the Illinois Senator said, would leave US troops free to defend themselves while not missing an opportunity to curtail the hostilities; he believed that similar opportunities had been missed in the past. Senator Percy did not agree, however, with the Goodell proposal, stating that it might lead to a hasty pullout that could jeopardize the remaining US forces.[19]

President Nixon was fully aware of the mounting opposition to the war, and the actions of high Administration officials had already taken on the appearance of a concerted countereffort. On 16 September, the President had announced a second US troop withdrawal of 35,000.[20] At a press conference the next day, Secretary Laird suggested that the troop reduction might have "a very significant effect" on Selective Service requirements. Two days later, on 19 September, President Nixon cancelled the draft calls for the months of November and December, totaling 50,000 inductees. Instead, the previously announced quota for October would be spread out over the last three months of the year.[21]

President Nixon held a news conference on 26 September and was asked about a cutoff date for US military action in

18. Ibid., 26 Sep 69, 1; 4 Oct 69, 14; 5 Oct 69, IV 1.
19. Ibid., 4 Oct 69, 14.
20. See Ch. 4, p. 124.
21. News Conference, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, Pentagon, 17 Sep 69, Public Statements, 1969, pp. 2133-2134, Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 731-732.

Vietnam, specifically the Goodell suggestion of the previous day. He replied that he had considered a number of proposals along this line within the Executive Branch, besides noting the suggestions advanced with "the best of intentions" by members of Congress. But to impose an arbitrary limit for the complete withdrawal of US forces would undercut the US negotiating position and insure the continuation of the war until the stipulated deadline. It would thus eliminate the hope that he still entertained (despite the lack of progress in the Paris talks) of ending the war before the close of 1970 or the middle of 1971. "Any incentive for the enemy to negotiate," said the President, "is destroyed if he is told in advance that if he just waits for 18 months we will be out anyway."

A reporter also asked the President about the approaching student moratorium. Mr. Nixon responded that he was aware of the antiwar activity and expected it, but stated "under no circumstances will I be affected whatever by it."[22]

Four days later, on the morning of 30 September, President Nixon met with the Republican leaders of Congress, Senator Hugh Scott and Representative Gerald Ford, to discuss the Vietnam situation. Emerging from the White House meeting, Senator Scott and Congressman Ford criticized both the forthcoming demonstrations and congressional proposals for predetermined deadlines, rebuking those who would settle for less than "a firm peace." They also appealed for a 60-day suspension of war criticism to allow the President time to pursue a negotiated solution.[23]

Following the meeting with the congressional leaders, the President presented a unit citation to the 1st Marine Regiment of the 1st Marine Division, recently returned from Vietnam. In a White House rose garden ceremony, he commended the Marines for their conduct in a difficult war, adding that it was hard for men to fight day after day when the nation appeared divided. Then, in remarks obviously directed at the war critics, he stated:

22. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 748-749, 753.
23. NY Times, 10 Oct 69, p. 1.

> We think we can bring peace. We will bring peace. The peace that we will be able to achieve will be due to the fact that Americans, when it really counted, did not buckle, did not run away, but stood fast so that the enemy knew that it had no choice except to negotiate--negotiate a fair peace . . . .[24]

The calls of the President and the Republican congressional leaders for support of the Administration's Vietnam policy did not allay criticism of the war. A Gallup Poll released on 4 October showed that only a slight majority of 52 percent--a small decline since the previous poll in July--approved the President's handling of the war. Moreover, the latest poll indicated that disillusionment over the war had reached a new high, with six out of ten people considering US involvement in Vietnam a mistake.[25]

On the same day that this poll was released, the Vietnam Moratorium Committee announced that it was joining with the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, a coalition of peace, black, women's, student, welfare, labor, and religious groups, for a fall offensive against the war. Together they pledged massive and continuing demonstrations, including the 15 October moratorium and a march on Washington in mid-November.[26]

On 6 October, a bipartisan group of nine Senators and Congressmen called a news conference at the Capitol to endorse the 15 October moratorium, which they called a "positive, constructive, and nonviolent" demonstration of opposition to the war. Simultaneously, at another press conference at the Rayburn House Office Building, sponsors unveiled a resolution endorsing the President's announced troop withdrawal and encouraging further force reductions. Co-sponsored by 108 Representatives, the resolution was stated broadly enough to attract support from both supporters and critics of the Administration.[27]

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24. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 765-767.
25. NY Times, 5 Oct 69, 9; 31 Jul 69, 11.
26. Ibid., 5 Oct 69, 70.
27. Ibid., 5 Oct 69, 8.

In a further effort to rally support for the Administration, Secretary of Defense Laird publicly confirmed the August change in the mission of US forces in Vietnam.[28] There had been no public announcement of the change at the time it was approved, but at a 9 October press conference, Mr. Laird revealed that revised instructions, issued two months previously, gave the "highest" priority to Vietnamization of the war. While refusing to go into detail, he acknowledged that the new instructions contained no provision for the maintenance of "maximum military pressure" on the enemy. He hastened to add that the old instructions had not done so either; the phrase had been employed by President Johnson.

The Secretary was questioned about the decrease in enemy infiltration and the lower level of enemy action. Mr. Laird replied that he was encouraged by this situation and the resulting drop in US casualties, although the Nixon Administration was unwilling to interpret such developments as a conclusive sign of enemy willingness to wind down the war. "The best place to give signals," he said, "is in Paris."[29]

On the same day, General Wheeler returned from an inspection trip in Vietnam. On his arrival in Saigon several days before, he had predicted a new round of enemy fighting in the near future. During his stay he heard various reports and briefings but made no further public statements. Nor did he have anything to tell reporters on his return, and his assessment for the Secretary of Defense was oral. His conclusion, relayed to the press by Secretary Laird, was that the field commanders had achieved "a real momentum" in Vietnam under their new orders.[30]

Even before his news conference, Secretary Laird had drawn the attention of his advisers, including the Joint

28. See Ch. 3, pp. 97-99.
29. News Conference, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, Pentagon, 9 Oct 69, Public Statements, 1969, pp. 2252-2266.
30. Ibid. NY Times, 5 Oct 69, 1; 10 Oct 69, 1. Interview, Willard J. Webb with Mr. Paul M. Kearney, Admin. Asst. to CJCS, 14 Jun 73. (Mr. Kearney accompanied General Wheeler to Vietnam on this trip.)

Chiefs of Staff, to the drop in the enemy movement of men and materiel into South Vietnam. He asked their views regarding the US response either to a continuation of the current situation or to an upsurge in the rate of enemy infiltration.[31]

On 13 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the matter and approved a reply for the Secretary of Defense, which General Wheeler forwarded the following day. He cautioned the Secretary against any action that did not recognize two facts: such lulls in infiltration had been experienced before; the enemy retained the capacity to resume quickly the movement of men and materiel into South Vietnam. With these points in mind, General Wheeler then discussed the alternative of continued reduced infiltration. Until there was "clear evidence" that North Vietnam intended a positive signal, the United States should continue to apply the level of pressure that had initially produced the decrease. But at the same time, the United States should publicly acknowledge the reduction and, if it continued, should respond with a third troop withdrawal "keyed to the reduced enemy troop movement."

For use in the event the enemy increased the rate of infiltration, General Wheeler presented the Secretary of Defense a whole spectrum of actions ranging from continuation of operations at current levels to launching unlimited air and naval attacks against North Vietnam. He selected the following five as the most practical: continuation of present operations, inflicting the heaviest punishment on the enemy possible within current resources and policy limitations; suspension of present US troop withdrawals with announcement of reasons for such action; publication of the facts regarding increased enemy infiltration, to make clear the enemy responsibility for prolonging the war; use of the Paris talks as a forum to expose enemy bad faith; and increased military pressures on North Vietnam through a range of options already identified by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Wheeler endorsed the first of these choices as the most feasible.[32]

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31. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., "North Vietnamese Infiltration," 8 Oct 69, JMF 912/309 (13 Oct 69).

32. (TS-GP 3) CM-4629-69 to SecDef, 14 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/539, 14 Oct 69, same file. Secretary Laird made no formal reply; presumably he noted the JCS views for possible future use.

Meanwhile, public expectation mounted as the 15 October moratorium neared. To remove one target of student resentment, President Nixon arranged for the retirement of Lieutenant General Lewis B. Hershey from his post as Director of the Selective Service System on 10 October. The 76-year old general had served in that capacity since 1941, and the current generation of students had come to regard him as a symbol of the draft system and the continuing war.[33]

On the following day, 11 October, President Nixon met with the Chairman and the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary Laird, and Dr. Kissinger to hear an oral report of General Wheeler's visit to Vietnam. General Wheeler described the current military situation but did not reveal any startingly new developments in Vietnam. Nor did he make any significant recommendations concerning the war. It is likely, although not apparent from the available record, that the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the approaching moratorium. A White House spokesman merely announced that the meeting took place and lasted nearly three hours, but gave no details of the discussion; the files of the Joint Chiefs of Staff contain no record of the meeting.[34]

On the same day, 11 October, the presidents of 79 private colleges and universities, including five of the prestigious Ivy League schools, denounced the war. Speaking as individuals and not for their institutions, they appealed to President Nixon for a stepped-up withdrawal from the Vietnam conflict, which stood "as a denial of so much that is best in our society."[35]

President Nixon's statement at his 26 September news conference that he would not be affected by the October moratorium had rankled the antiwar critics and brought a loud public outcry. On 13 October, just two days before the

33. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, p. 788. NY Times, 11 Oct 69, 1.

34. NY Times, 12 Oct 69, 3. Interview, Willard J. Webb with Mr. Paul M. Kearney, Admin. Asst. to CJCS, 14 Jun 73. Mr Kearney, who accompanied General Wheeler to Vietnam in October 1969, remembered only the general tenor of General Wheeler's report, which was given orally.

35. NY Times, 12 Oct 69, 1.

demonstration, the President sought to explain his position. He did so through a letter, released to the press, that was in response to one from a Georgetown University student criticizing the 26 September statement. There was a clear distinction, the President pointed out, between public opinion and a public demonstration. To listen to public opinion was one thing, but to be swayed by a public demonstration was another. He recognized that the planned moratorium would indicate a great concern about the war, but he was already aware of and shared that concern. Consequently, the question was whether, in the absence of any new evidence or arguments, he should turn aside from "a carefully considered course." He answered that his current policy resulted from exhaustive study and "our own best judgment." "To abandon that policy merely because of a public demonstration would therefore be an act of gross irresponsibility on my part."[36]

In a further effort to divert attention from the moratorium, White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler announced on 13 October that President Nixon would address the nation on the Vietnam situation on the evening of 3 November. The timing was keyed, Mr. Ziegler said, to the anniversary of announcement of the November 1968 bombing halt over North Vietnam.[37]

The long-promised moratorium of 15 October 1969 was the largest demonstration to date against the Vietnam war. Protests, expressed in noisy street rallies, teach-ins, forums, candlelight processions, and prayer vigils, took place across the country, and what was originally planned as a student activity spilled over to include people of all ages, from various strata of society. Although it was impossible to measure the number of participants, estimates ranged from one to several million. The largest protest occurred in the northeastern United States, where over 100,000 jamed the Boston Common, and in California, where several cities were the scene of spirited rallies. The demonstrations were peaceful for the most part, although occasional violence did occur.[38]

36. Ltr, Pres to Mr. Randy J. Hicks, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 13 Oct 69, Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 798-799.
37. NY Times, 13 Oct 69, 1.
38. Ibid., 15 Oct 69, 1; 16 Oct 69, 1; 19 Oct 69, IV 1.

There were also attempts at counterdemonstrations, though these were less well organized. Veterans' organizations, many fire and police departments, and municipalities across the country flew the flag at full staff, in contrast to the half-staff flags of the moratorium, to indicate support for the President. Opposition to the moratorium was also shown by motorists driving during the day with their headlights on, and estimates placed about 10 percent of the cars on 15 October in that category.[39]

In accordance with his expressed position, President Nixon took no notice of the moratorium. He remained at the White House on 15 October conferring with advisers on Vietnam, working on Latin American policy, and hearing an urban affairs subcommittee report on education. Despite the lack of presidential notice, the organizers expressed satisfaction with the moratorium. Terming it "a good start," they looked forward to the next demonstration planned for 15 November. They were convinced that these "massive" outpourings of opposition to the war would force the President to alter his Vietnam policy.[40]

The President's 3 November Speech

With the moratorium over, attention turned to the announced presidential speech on 3 November. Many anticipated a dramatic announcement concerning the settlement of the war, but they were disappointed. In the speech, President Nixon reaffirmed the Vietnam policy set forth in his 14 May address.[41] The United States would not unilaterally or precipitately withdraw from Vietnam, Mr. Nixon said. Rather, he had put forward comprehensive new peace proposals at the negotiating table and had pursued other initiatives through private channels.

The President also had a plan to end the war regardless of developments in the negotiations. This was Vietnamization--the strengthening of the RVNAF to assume the combat operations and the progressive withdrawal of US troops. Vietnamization had been launched following Secretary Laird's visit to Vietnam the preceding March. "Under the plan," the President said,

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39. Ibid., 16 Oct 69, 1.
40. Ibid., 16 Oct 69, 1; 17 Oct 69, 1 and 20; 19 Oct 69, IV 1.
41. See Ch. 3, pp. 85-86.

"I ordered first a substantial increase in the training and equipment of South Vietnamese forces."

> In July, on my visit to Vietnam, I changed General Abrams' orders to that they were consistent with the objectives of our new policies. Under the new orders, the primary mission of our troops is to enable the South Vietnamese forces to assume the full responsibility for the security of South Vietnam.

The President said that the complete withdrawal of US combat ground forces had been worked out with the South Vietnamese. The withdrawal would be made from strength, not weakness, and would follow an orderly timetable. He did not intend to announce the timetale in advance, and he warned the leaders in Hanoi against seeking advantage through an increase in violence. The President would not hesitate to take "strong and effective measures" to deal with any enemy action that threatened the US forces remaining in Vietnam.

In sum, the President saw only two choices for ending the war: an immediate withdrawal or a continued search for a negotiated settlement while proceeding with Vietnamization. Since he had already rejected the first alternative, President Nixon chose the second and asked public support for that decision.[42]

At a briefing for the press just before the President's broadcast, Dr. Kissinger distributed the text of the address. Indicating the importance that the President attached to this policy statement, Dr. Kissinger told the reporters: "Nothing that we have done since we came into office has been done with as much seriousness, I may say with as much anguish, as this speech." He was asked about the change in orders to COMUSMACV, but he refused elaboration, stating that the President had treated the matter as well as could be.[43]

The reference in the address to modification of General Abrams' orders was not a fresh revelation, since Secretary

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42. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 901-909.

43. (U) Background Briefing by Dr. Kissinger, "President's Vietnam Speech," White House, 8:20 PM, 3 Nov 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov 69 (President's 4 [3?] Nov Speech Folder).

Laird had spoken on the subject nearly a month earlier, but it caught the attention of newsmen. Both the Secretary and General Wheeler were concerned that the President's remarks might be misinterpreted as indicating a reduction in US military action, and General Wheeler alerted CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to this possibility. He suggested that, in any discussions with the press, the two commanders place primary emphasis on the improvement of South Vietnamese combat capabilities through the accelerated provision of equipment and training. In fact, General Wheeler told them, the President's own words constituted "an adequate response to the questions regarding what changes have been made over the past several months."[44]

In a late evening newscast on 4 November, CBS reported that General Abrams would resign because of the change in his orders. The following morning, the Department of Defense denied this report. General Wheeler characterized it as a "rather obvious fishing expedition" and cautioned General Abrams to expect more such efforts. He reiterated that the field commanders should stress the "primacy of the program to modernize and improve the RVNAF."[45]

President Nixon's Vietnam address received a mixed reaction. Administration supporters, both in Congress and across the country, applauded the speech, congressional doves expressed disappointment over the lack of anything new, and the leaders of the approaching 15 November demonstration saw that feature of the address as giving added impetus to their protest. A White House spokesman, however, said the speech had evoked the largest mail response in over 30 years, and a new Gallup poll revealed a 77 percent favorable response.[46]

As the 15 November event drew closer, other citizen groups sought to demonstrate that the student mobilization was not representative of the views of the American people at large. They held meetings throughout the country on 11 November, using the Veterans' Day ceremonies to express support for the President and his Vietnam policy. General of the Army Omar N. Bradley urged a Los Angeles rally to "keep the faith," and Congressman Mendel Rivers, Chairman of the House

44. (TS) Msg, CJCS 13762 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 4 Nov 69, same file.
45. (TS) Msgs, CJCS 13789 and 13830 to COMUSMACV, 5 and 6 Nov 69, same file.
46. NY Times, 4 Nov 69, 1; 5 Nov 69, 1.

Armed Services Committee, spoke in a similar vein to a gathering at the Washington Monument.[47]

President Nixon lunched with congressional leaders at the Capitol on 13 November and visited both houses of Congress. He thanked the House of Representatives for the resolution passed the previous day that supported a "just peace" in Vietnam along the lines of his 3 November speech, and he expressed appreciation to the more than 60 members of the Senate who had signed a letter to Ambassador Lodge in Paris, similarly pledging support for a negotiated settlement. In addition, the President appealed to both chambers for "continued support and understanding."[48]

The Mobilization against the War in Vietnam--"the Mobe"--began with various activities in Washington on 14 November, including a "march against death" from Arlington Cemetery past the White House and a demonstration at the South Vietnamese Embassy, which had to be dispersed with tear gas. But the major events were the march and rally at the Washington Monument the following day, 15 November, where the protestors heard various speakers, including Senators Eugene McCarthy, Charles Goodell, and George McGovern. It was the largest mass demonstration in Washington's history; police estimated that 250,000 persons attended while press reports claimed crowds in excess of 300,000. The "Mobe" was peaceful until the rally broke up at dusk, when radical splinter groups clashed with police and were repelled with tear gas.[49]

President Nixon adhered to his position of not being swayed by demonstrations and took no public notice of the Mobilization. The protest leaders claimed success, but what they had accomplished was not clear, beyond demonstrating again that many in the United States opposed the war. In fact, it appeared that the "Mobe" also rallied public support for the President. A Gallup poll conducted during the Mobilization weekend showed a sharp increase in confidence in the President, with 68 percent of those polled approving President Nixon's handling of his job.[50]

The "Mobe" was the high point of dissent during 1969, and public pressure against the Vietnam war eased during the

47. Ibid., 12 Nov 69, 1.
48. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 930-935.
49. NY Times, 15 Nov 69, 1; 16 Nov 69, 1 and IV 1.
50. Ibid., 23 Nov 69. 1.

remainder of the year. Immediately following the 14-15 November demonstration, the Vietnam Moratorium Committee scheduled three days of protest in December. But these proved to be insignificant affairs, receiving scant public notice.[51] The "Mobe," combined with the 15 October Moratorium, did mark the end of the relative immunity from war criticism that the Nixon Administration had enjoyed during its early months in office. Opponents were no longer reticent in charging that "Johnson's war" had become "Nixon's war," and the President and his advisers, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, would have to give even greater regard to public opinion in their deliberations and decisions on Vietnam.

Atrocities

In 1969 two events came to light that further decreased popular support for the war. One was the so-called "Green Beret Case," in which officers of the 5th Special Forces Group were accused of murdering one of their own Vietnamese agents. The Officers, commanded by Colonel Robert B. Rheault, insisted in their defense that they had been following oral orders given by CIA representatives in Vietnam. Public announcement of the affair was made on 6 August 1969, and formal charges were lodged against the six officers on 18 September. Throughout the investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency denied having ordered the agent's execution. However, with presidential approval, the agency refused to allow any of its personnel to participate in the court-martial proceedings. Without CIA testimony the accused men could not obtain a fair trial, and Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor announced on 29 September that the court-martial would be terminated without a definitive resolution of the charges before it.[52]

The second occurrence had a much larger impact on public opinion. It began to be revealed in March 1969 when Ronald Ridenhour, an ex-soldier who had served with members of Task Force Barker, wrote to high-ranking members of Congress, Administration officials, and military leaders

51. Ibid., 18 Nov 69, 23; 10 Dec 69, 12; 13 Dec 69, 16.

52. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV 9072, 9433, and 10247 to CJCS, CINCPAC, and CSA, 14 and 22 Jul 69 and 8 Aug 69, OCJCS Files 091 Vietnam, Jul and Aug 69. NY Times, 6 Aug 69, 1; 29 Aug 69, 1; 19 Sep 69, 1; 30 Sep 69, 1; 24 Oct 69, 15.

alleging that a massacre had taken place in the village of My Lai He described the slaughter of hundreds of innocent civilians by US troops in the spring of 1968. In April 1969, the Army began an investigation that ultimately charged Lieutenant William L. Calley, Jr., with killing 109 "Oriental human beings, occupants of the village of My Lai 4," on 16 March 1968.53

Despite the large number of people who had knowledge of the incident, the story was not told in the press until November 1969. When the details were revealed, news commentators and other major opinionmakers for the most part expressed shock and moral revulsion. While some spokesmen thought the judgment should be tempered by a greater "realism" about the nature of war, particularly in the unusual circumstances of the Vietnam conflict, the disclosure of morally indefensible action by Americans had a permanent effect on the tone of public discussion.

On 24 November 1969, Secretary Resor and General William C. Westmoreland appointed Lieutenant General Willaim R. Peers to head a panel to examine the investigation of My Lai originally conducted in the Americal Divison. The Peers Commission interviewed almost 400 witnesses from December 1969 to March 1970 and recommended that charges be preferred against 14 officers, including the former Americal Division commander and then West Point commandant, Major General Samuel W. Koster. He was subsequently reduced in grade to Brigadier General for failure to mount an adequate investigation. Ultimately the only officer to face court-martial as a result of the Peers inquiry was Colonel Oran K. Henderson, who was acquitted of all charges in December 1971.54

The trial of Lieutenant William L. Calley had begun more than a year earlier, in November 1970. It proved to be the longest in US military history, with day-by-day press coverage keeping the matter constantly before the public. On 29 March 1971 Lieutenant Calley was found guilty of the premeditated murder of not fewer than 22 Vietnamese civilians. His company commander, Captain Ernest L. Medina,

53. Seymour M. Hersh, My Lai 4 (1971), pp. 104-143.
54. Report of the Department of the Army Review of the Preliminary Investigations into the My Lai Incident, vol. I. NY Times, 18 Dec 71, 1.

was tried and acquitted of all charges in connection with My Lai in September 1971.[55]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not directly participate in the investigations surrounding either the Green Beret case or My Lai, but General Wheeler did assure the Secretary of Defense in December 1969 "that all practical means have been taken to insure that our forces in SVN comply with rules of engagement and the Geneva Conventions with regard to the treatment of non-combatants." In March 1970, in a message that reviewed the findings of the Peers Commission regarding deficiencies in the Army's procedures for reporting war crimes, the Chairman counseled COMUSMACV on possible remedial measures.[56]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff Oppose a Cease-fire

During the latter half of 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, fully aware of the growing public dissatisfaction with US involvement, were mindful of its potential effect on both policy and operations in the Vietnam war. On 29 October 1969, the Chief of Staff, Army, brought to the attention of his colleagues the "very heavy pressure" on the Administration to seek an early cease-fire, unilateral if necessary, in Vietnam. General Westmoreland expected this pressure to be intensified during the next few days, while the President's 3 November speech was reaching final form, and he thought it appropriate for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to furnish the Secretary of Defense their views.[57]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense on 31 October that they opposed any unilateral US cease-fire or a more general one that was "obviously" forced on the Republic of Vietnam. While recognizing that most of the proposals for a cease-fire in Vietnam were well-intentioned, they thought the promoters of such action failed to foresee the probable consequences. "As long as the North

55. Richard Hammer, The Court-Martial of Lt. Calley (1971), pp. 363, 364. NY Times, 23 Sep 71, 1.

56. (S) CM-4778-69 to SecDef, 11 Dec 69; (S) Msg, CJCS 3793 to COMUSMACV, "Peers Report and Reporting Procedures Relating to War Crimes," 18 Mar 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov 69.

57. (TS-GP 3) CSAM 268-69 to JCS, 29 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/546, 29 Oct 69, JMF 911/305 (29 Oct 69).

Vietnamese pursue their objectives by military means and remain intransigent at the negotiating table, there is little to suggest that a cease-fire would lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities and an enemy withdrawal from the Republic of Vietnam and adjacent sanctuaries." The Joint Chiefs of Staff also opposed any cease-fire without the prior concurrence of the Republic of Vietnam. Although the present government in Saigon had made substantial progress in achieving public support, they doubted that it could survive a settlement dictated by Washington. In addition, a cease-fire forced upon the Vietnamese ally could damage the pacification program, RVNAF morale, and US-RVN relations, and could bring into question US resolve to fulfill its commitments throughout the world. They asked the Secretary to forward their views to the President.[58]

Perhaps because he had seen an initial draft of the President's speech and knew that it contained no proposal for an immediate cease-fire, the Secretary of Defense did not submit the JCS views to the White House before the 3 November address. Instead, after a careful review, Secretary Laird forwarded the JCS memorandum to the President on 22 November 1969. He agreed with his military advisers on some points but differed with them in two areas where he believed the JCS position would unduly restrict US flexibility. First, the Secretary considered that it bordered on subordination of US interests to those of the Republic of Vietnam to tie action on a cease-fire to full RVN concurrence. "We must retain the right to make or accept cease-fire proposals on our own," he believed, "although preferably with GVN agreement." In his second point, Mr. Laird suggested that a "unilateral cease-fire by US ground combat units, as distinct from US military personnel attached to, or supporting, RVNAF units," might become both desirable and feasible in the future. It would be a logical step in the Vietnamization process, providing a test of RVNAF ability, South Vietnamese morale, and enemy reaction. At the same time, it would not restrict the freedom of action of US forces to defend themselves.[59]

58. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-690-69 to SecDef, 31 Oct 69, App to JCS 2472/546-1, 30 Oct 69, same file.

59. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Cease-Fire in the Republic of Vietnam," 22 Nov 69; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on a US Cease-fire Initiative (U)," 22 Nov 69; Atts to JCS 2472/546-2, 24 Nov 69, same file.

On 3 December, the Deputy Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review alternative military responses to back up the statement in the President's 3 November address that any increased action threatening US forces in South Vietnam would be met with "strong and effective" measures. The Director of the Joint Staff notified CINCPAC of this requirement on 5 December, reviewing for him some 24 possible options that had already been considered at various levels in Washington. Nineteen of these were some form of attack on North Vietnam, ranging from naval gunfire on a selected port to a full resumption of air and naval operations. The remaining options provided for: increased operations in the lower portion of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), including strike of observed enemy targets, pursuit of attacking enemy forces, and ground operations; air, naval, and artillery strike of targets in the DMZ above the Provisional Military Demarcation Line (PMDL); pursuit of attacking enemy troops into Laos and Cambodia; and strike of targets in Cambodia supporting enemy efforts in South Vietnam. The Director requested CINCPAC to provide comments on these options or furnish suggestions of his own.60

Admiral McCain replied on 7 December:

> Peacemeal application of military power neither reduces the enemy's capability to increase his activity in RVN or his will to continue the conflict. Our experience over the past few years clearly indicates that gradualism only hardens the enemy's will to resist and elicits the same outraged denouncements from certain quarters in the United States and overseas as would follow a professional military effort against the enemy's capability. Since all options have a common political liability, any US response should be designed to accrue both maximum political and military advantages. Therefore, any option that does not meet the President's guidance of "strong and effective action" will not meet the objective of reducing the jeopardy of our forces and should be summarily eliminated from further consideration.

60. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, JCS (DJS) 15289 to C/S PACOM, 5 Dec 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Dec 69.

As his first choice, CINCPAC recommended the resumption of air and naval operations against North Vietnam, "subject to minimum operational restraints." This action should begin without warning and continue for as long as necessary. In conjunction with this campaign, CINCPAC also recommended an increase in monthly B-52 sorties from 1,400 to 1,800; authority for allied ground and air forces to pursue attacking enemy forces into Cambodia, Laos, and the DMZ; the conduct of ground operations in the southern half of the DMZ; and suspension of the planned redeployment of US forces.[61]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 17 December their proposals for responses to increased enemy action. They included most of CINCPAC's recommendations and divided their suggestions into three categories: actions in North Vietnam, responses in South Vietnam, and options outside of Vietnam. Seven possible actions in North Vietnam ranged in increasing scale of severity from naval harassment of shipping to resumption of air and naval operations throughout the country, except for the Hanoi, Haiphong, and Chinese buffer zone areas. Proposed options within South Vietnam provided for: ground operations in the DMZ below the PMDL to counter enemy activity; authorization to pursue the enemy into the DMZ south of the Demarcation Line; increased operations by B-52 and tactical aircraft; revision of COMUSMACV's mission to allow exertion of "maximum pressure" on the enemy in South Vietnam, using all available forces; and deferral of any planned troop withdrawals. For actions elsewhere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested artillery and air strikes on enemy targets in Cambodia, authority to pursue enemy forces into both Cambodia and Laos for limited distances, increased air operations in Laos, and quarantine of Cambodia.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary that it was impossible to select the most desirable option, or combination of options, in advance of the actual situation. They were convinced, however, that the United States must respond to any increased enemy activity with effective action. To do otherwise might set back the Vietnamization program, undermine South Vietnamese confidence, and produce further adverse reaction at home if US casualties increased. The Joint Chiefs of Staff presented the argument CINCPAC had advanced concerning the ineffectiveness of a gradual

61. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 072303Z Dec 69, same file.

or incremental application of military power as the means of achieving a "strong and effective" response. They repeated the recommendation submitted on 29 November[62] in connection with troops withdrawals: any expansion of enemy action in South Vietnam should be met with a cancellation and, if necessary, a reversal of planned US redeployments and the initiation of an air and naval campaign against North Vietnam.[63]

Combat Operations, August-December 1969

In the end, there was no occasion to carry out any of the options suggested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Combat action during the last weeks of December reflected the generally low level of activity that had prevailed for some months. Allied operations in the last five months of 1969 continued in the pattern of the earlier months of the year. United States and RVN forces maintained pressure on the enemy, seeking out main force units and disrupting enemy base areas and infiltration routes. The scale of combat actions dwindled; allied operations consisted primarily of small unit ambushes, reconnaissance in force, and detailed searches, using waterborne and air assets as appropriate. Night ambushes were also employed extensively to detect and prevent enemy movement in the hours of darkness.

The last five months of 1969 also saw the first withdrawal of US combat forces from South Vietnam and expanded participation of the RVNAF in combat. Redeployment of the 3d Marine Division from I CTZ began in July and was completed during the late fall. In all, 18,483 US Marines left the northern provinces of South Vietnam. Their operating area was taken over by the US 101st Airborne Division (Ambl) and the 1st ARVN Division. The latter was considered by US military commanders to be one of the best RVNAF divisions, and it performed well throughout the remainder of the year.[64]

62. See Ch. 4, p. 128.
63. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-764-69 to SecDef, 17 Dec 69, Encl to JCS 2472/559-1, 12 Dec 69, JMF 907/520 (3 Dec 69).
64. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-60 - V-62.

The US 9th Infantry Division redeployed from the Delta, beginning in early July. With the departure of its last troops by the end of August, no US forces remained in IV CTZ except for advisers and air support units. For the rest of 1969, ground operations in IV CTZ consisted of small unit patrols and ambushes. There were a few contacts each day, as ARVN forces supporting pacification sought to disrupt the enemy lines of communication and to penetrate enemy base areas. Apprehension that the RVNAF takeover of the Delta might bring a regression in security proved unfounded. and progress in both security and pacification continued.[65]

Commenting on the US redeployments, General Abrams noted in mid-October that, prior to the beginning of the withdrawals, US maneuver battalions had constituted one-third of the total allied combat force in South Vietnam. In the first six months of 1969, they had accounted for over two-thirds of the enemy's losses in men and materiel. But, he continued, by 15 December, if planned redeployments were carried out, allied maneuver battalions would be reduced to about 82 percent of their pre-July 1969 levels. This reduction, combined with the lowered tactical air and B-52 sorties stemming from recent budget cuts, would significantly restrict allied flexibility to meet enemy initiatives.[66]

Enemy activity in South Vietnam during the latter half of 1969 was at a low level. The pause in enemy action that followed the June high point continued throughout July and into early August and was accompanied by a similar decline in enemy infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam. But the lull ended abruptly on 11-12 August when the enemy launched one of his high points, or countrywide offensives. Another occurred in early September. These two late summer high points followed the pattern of those of May and June. The enemy undertook countrywide shellings of allied military installations and population centers together with limited ground attacks. The enemy effort in the second round of incidents, however, was of lesser intensity. That of August consisted of some 145 attacks-by-fire, including a shelling of the US Naval Support Activities Hospital at Da Nang that

65. Ibid., pp. V-108 - V-112.

66. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV 13589 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 19 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69.

injured 18 US personnel, and of nearly 40 ground assaults. In contrast, only 97 fire attacks and 10 ground assaults were reported for the offensive of 4-6 September 1969.[67]

On 4 September, in the midst of the enemy offensive, Radio Hanoi announced the death of President Ho Chi Minh the previous day. He had served as President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam since its creation, and the North Vietnamese revered him as a great patriot and father image. He enjoyed a tremendous respect throughout all of Vietnam, not only in the north, but in the noncommunist south as well. Vice President Ton Duc Thang succeeded Ho as President, but, at 81, Ton was likely to be only a figurehead until a stronger leader emerged. Ho's death touched off considerable speculation both within the US Government and in the press over who would succeed to the effective leadership of North Vietnam. The principal contenders were thought to be Premier Pham Van Dong, Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap, Party First Secretary Le Duan, and Troung Chinh, a Politburo member and Chairman of the National Assembly. The passage of Ho Chi Minh from the scene, however, brought no change in the enemy conduct of the war.[68]

The enemy did commemorate Ho's death with a cease-fire announced by the Viet Cong on 5 September. This memorial truce was to begin on 8 September and last for three days. United States officials left it to the Republic of Vietnam to decide the response to this enemy initiative. President Thieu declined to accept the cease-fire, citing previous instances when the Communists had failed to honor their own proposed truces. Despite the RVN decision, US military commanders instructed their troops to keep casualties to "an absolute minimum" during the designated cease-fire and to conduct no offensive ground operations except for the protection of forces. The RVNAF continued normal operations, however, and the enemy violated his own truce within an

67. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 187-69, 12 Aug 69; 188-69, 13 Aug 69; 207-69, 5 Sep 69; 208-69, 6 Sep 69; 209-69, 8 Sep 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. II-43, III-187 - III-194.

68. NY Times, 4 Sep 69, 1 and 17; 5 Sep 69, 10; 7 Sep 69, IV 1. (S) CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "North Vietnam after Ho Chi Minh: The Policy and Leadership Implications," 24 Sep 69, OCJCS File 091, Sep 69 (loose).

hour after it began. During the three-day period, US/RVNAF forces reported a total of 52 major and 25 minor enemy attacks and 119 "incidents"; 14 US and 17 ARVN soldiers were killed.[69]

During the late summer and early fall, the United States and the Republic of Vietnam learned of enemy plans for the approaching winter/dry season, set forth in COSVN Resolutions 9 and 14. Resolution 9, which had been issued in July but did not fall into allied hands until early October, was the principal guidance for operations for the coming months. It continued the basic policy adopted earlier in the year. Recognizing that the VC/NVA could not win an immediate military victory, it set forth a strategy designed to bring an eventual military-political victory. Resolution 9 called for a scaling down of operations to conserve manpower and material, while maintaining the objective of inflicting high casualties on US troops to force larger US withdrawals. Other continuing goals included disruption of the pacification program and control of jungle and mountain bases and rural lowlands, particularly in the Mekong Delta. Deployment of main, regional, and guerrilla forces was to be coordinated so that allied units would be tied down in the cities and stretched thin in rural areas; VC/NVA forces would attempt to draw allied troops away from their base areas, engaging them in locations where the enemy advantage would be increased.[70]

Resolution 14 of 14 October 1969 reinforced the policy in Resolution 9. It declared that guerrilla warfare must be intensifed, since this offered a means of coping with a vastly superior enemy, and a strong guerrilla base would be necessary to support future large-scale operations. Resolution 14 defined the organization and mission of guerrilla

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69. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMS 210-69, 9 Sep 69; 211-69, 10 Sep 69; 212-69, 11 Sep 69. (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV 11576, 11685, and 11637 to CJCS, 5, 7, and 6 Sep 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. V-10 - V-12.

70. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, III-127 - III-131.

forces, assigning them the primary task of subverting the pacification program and attacking the local RVN security forces.[71]

In his mid-October assessment of the military situation in Vietnam, which has already been cited, General Abrams reported about 230,000 enemy troops disposed in and about South Vietnam, capable of attempting a major offensive on relatively short notice, with the greatest threat occurring in III CTZ and northern I CTZ. Enemy losses for the first half of 1969, both in number of killed and number of ralliers to the Republic of Vietnam, had been higher than the average monthly losses in earlier years. Nevertheless, COMUSMACV said, the enemy had made no visible response to the US bombing halt begun the previous November or the US troop withdrawals made since July. All current signs indicated that the enemy retained his combat organization and continued to develop infiltration routes and support facilities. In addition, he had maintained and improved field logistics, stockpiling supplies in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Despite heavy losses, the enemy sustained a force structure capable of absorbing replacement personnel rapidly and retained a command and control capability to direct large formations in battle. In summary, General Abrams said, "the 'system' required to achieve another operational high early in 1970 has been retained intact." But COMUSMACV was uncertain what the next move would be, believing that the enemy had two options in South Vietnam: to return to his previous pattern of operations with periods of intensified action followed by periods of relative lull; or to continue his current emphasis on attacks-by-fire, sapper tactics, and terrorism designed to increase allied casualties while reducing his own losses.[72]

As indicated above, the enemy had already chosen the latter option--the policy set forth in Resolution 9. Enemy activity in the last months of 1969 followed that document closely. The decline in the intensity of enemy actions, initiated in the spring with the shift from general offensives to periodic high points, continued and became more pronounced. In the fall of 1969, the enemy abandoned

71. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. III-95 - III-97.
72. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV 13589 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 19 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69.

countrywide high points for a program of corps-wide surges of activity. The first such surge occurred in IV CTZ in early October, followed by another in II CTZ in mid-October.[73]

The surge in IV CTZ reflected a growing enemy presence and interest in the Mekong Delta. The first major NVA unit, Regiment 18B, had been identified there during the summer, and NVA infiltration into VC units increased in the last months of the year. Not only did the enemy want to reassert his influence in the rice-rich Delta, but he apparently hoped to challenge the ARVN now that US ground troops had withdrawn from the area.[74]

United States officials in Washington followed the enemy activity in the Delta with careful attention, and on 10 November 1969, Dr. Kissinger relayed to General Wheeler the President's concern over the situation. President Nixon wanted an estimate of both North Vietnamese and Viet Cong capabilities and intentions to launch major attacks in IV Corps, the possible scale of such operations, and the allied recourses and plans for counteraction. Admiral Moorer, as Acting Chairman, passed this request to COMUSMACV on 11 November, and General Abrams provided complete information the same day. His assessment was endorsed by Admiral McCain, who thought that "the movement of NVA troops into the Delta has long term implications." The Viet Minh effort had begun there, he recalled, and reassertion of enemy strength in that area was an "important threat" to be guarded against. The Republic of Vietnam could not risk reversal of the current favorable trend in the Delta.[75]

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73. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. III-135, III-198 - III-200.

74. Ibid., pp. III-191, V-109 - V-112.

75. (TS) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to CJCS, "Report on Situation in the Delta," 10 Nov 69; (TS) Msg, Actg CJCS 14043 to COMUSMACV 11 Nov 69; (TS) CM-4710-69 to Dr. Kissinger, 11 Nov 69; (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 160456Z Nov 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov 69. The COMUSMACV assessment (Msg, MAC 14613, 11 Nov 69) contains SI material and was not used in preparing the above account.

Despite the enemy buildup in IV CTZ, no major action occurred there during the remainder of 1969. Enemy activity was directed primarily against the successful pacification program, and combat operations in the Delta continued at a low level during the last months of 1969 with the exception of the "surge" early in October and two others in November and December.[76]

The last major battle of 1969 occurred in the highlands of II CTZ around the Bu Prang and Duc Lap CIDG camps. The enemy launched an attack there on 28 October, and the action continued until he withdrew in early December. Two NVA regiments appeared to be testing the local ARVN forces in a pattern of attack resembling the Ben Het campaign earlier in the year. The battle was a prime example of implementation of the Resolution 9 strategy to engage the opponents at locations removed from allied base areas and advantageous to the VC/NVA. Despite the loss of some fire bases at the beginning of the campaign, the ARVN thwarted the enemy attack.[77]

There was a surge of enemy attacks in III and IV CTZs on the night of 2-3 December and a similar one in III CTZ on 7-8 December. Thereafter the volume and intensity of enemy actions dropped substantially throughout the remainder of the month, with enemy initiatives consisting largely of sporadic attacks-by-fire and small-scale ground probes.[78]

In an article appearing in late December 1969, General Vo Nguyen Giap summed up the North Vietnamese position on strategy for the war. He restated some of the principles he had enunciated in his speech of 22 June 1969: reliance on protracted war; careful coordination of forces; use of smaller units to oppose larger ones; and exploitation of allied weaknesses, military and political. But he placed new emphasis on the need for caution in the commitment of forces and on the importance of securing rear areas and bases. "If we succeed in gaining mastery over the rural areas," he said, "the revolution will acquire a firm basis for

76. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. III-203 - III-204, V-109 - V-112.
77. Ibid., pp. III-199 - III-205.
78. Ibid., pp. III-205, V-44.

mobilizing human and material resources in order to develop its forces for protracted combat."[79]

United States and South Vietnamese forces again observed 24-hour cease-fires for both Christmas and New Year's. After considerable debate, the allied refused to extend their cease-fires to match the three-day truces announced by the Viet Cong for both holidays. The two truces were no better observed than earlier ones, and allied forces reported over 100 enemy violations during the Christmas period and a similar number for New Year's the following week. Total US casualties for both truce periods were 6 killed and 17 wounded, considerably lower than the figures for similar cease-fires the previous year.[80]

The Continuing Search for Expanded DMZ Authorities

Despite the decline in enemy action, the field commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff remained concerned about the enemy threat from across the Demilitarized Zone. They had attempted, without success,[81] during the earlier half of the year to secure broader operating authority in the DMZ, and they persisted in these efforts throughout the second half. In July 1969, the first withdrawals of US troops from Vietnam began, and redeployment plans called for the complete removal of the 3d Marine Division from the northern provinces of I CTZ. This prospect caused General Wheeler to question the adequacy of the current rulles of engagement to protect the remaining US and ARVN forces in I CTZ against enemy attack from across the DMZ, and he asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 July to review the DMZ rules in light of the changed situation. He suggested consideration of additions permitting engagement of enemy forces in both halves of the DMZ as well as attack on enemy artillery sites, troops assembly areas, and logistics points in the area five to ten miles north of the DMZ in North Vietnam.[82]

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79. Ibid., p. III-25. NY Times, 4 Jan 70, IV-2.

80. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 300-69, 27 Dec 69; 1-70, 2 Jan 70. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 15358 to CINCPAC, 27 Nov 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. V-12.

81. See Ch. 3, pp. 76-80.

82. (TS-GP 3) CM-4442-69 to DJS, 22 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2084/144, 24 Jul 69, JMF 333 (22 Jul 69).

The Joint Staff drew up a list of possible changes and submitted them to the field for comment. The Joint Staff assumed continuation of the existing provisions to counter enemy fire from within or north of the DMZ with heavy ground or naval gunfire and to destroy SAM and AAA installations firing at US aircraft from across or within the DMZ, both of which were among the authorities granted at the time of the 1 November 1968 bombing halt.[83] The new rules proposed by the Joint Staff provided for: (1) "timely and adequate" counteractions against small enemy ground operations in the DMZ below the Provisional Military Demarcation Line (PMDL) if necessary for the preservation of a force under attack; (2) operations in the DMZ south of the PMDL and employment of artillery, naval gunfire, tactical air, and B-52 aircraft against enemy targets in North Vietnam below 17 degrees 10 minutes north in the event of "a sudden or immediate major attack" seriously endangering friendly forces in northern I CTZ. Both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC strongly endorsed the suggested additions to the rules, but thought that they did not go far enough. The commanders wanted authority to react to enemy threats, as well as to actual attacks.[84]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the rules drafted by the Joint Staff and forwarded them to the Secretary of Defense on 2 August 1969. They did not incorporate the amendment sought by COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, judging that its inclusion might jeopardize the approval of any new rules at all. In arguing in favor of liberalization, the Joint Chiefs of Staff explained to Secretary Laird that the enemy had increased his forces in and immediately above the DMZ. In addition, the cessation of bombing against North Vietnam left these forces secure from allied attack and free to reconstruct lines of communication for the rapid reinforcement of the troops in the DMZ area. These factors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, seriously increased the threat to US forces in I CTZ. Moreover, US forces were

83. See (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, Pt. III, p. 52 -35.

84. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS (J-3) 9356 to C/S PACOM and C/S MACV, 29 Jul 69; Msg, C/S PACOM to JCS, 310338Z Jul 69; Msg, C/S MACV (MAC 9886) to JCS, 31 Jul 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69. (TS-GP 1) Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "JCS 2084/144-1 - Rules of Engagement (U)," 31 Jul 69, JMF 333 (22 Jul 69).

being withdrawn from that area, further compounding the need for strengthened authorities.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also pointed out that, under the current rules, COMUSMACV had to obtain JCS approval for counteractions against substantial or general enemy attack across the DMZ. The resulting delay, in the present circumstances, could have serious consequences. Rather, General Abrams needed authority to react immediately to any major attack near the DMZ in order to protect his forces.[85]

The Secretary of Defense had not responded to this JCS request when COMUSMACV reported on 11 August 1969 that enemy activity in and around the DMZ had markedly increased. Sensors and aerial observation had revealed substantial movement of enemy troops and materiel into the DMZ. General Abrams wanted to disrupt this activity with "a powerful and well integrated and coordinated artillery, tactical air, and B-52 effort." Further, he proposed to send a ground probe of regimental size or less into the southern half of the DMZ.[86]

General Wheeler discussed this request with the President at San Clemente on 14 August. President Nixon did not object to the use of artillery, naval gunfire, tactical air, and B-52s in the southern portion of the DMZ, and he dispensed with the requirement for a 24-hour advance notification to the Joint Chiefs of Staff of B-52 strikes in that area. But, for political reasons, the President withheld authority to use ground forces in the DMZ. He assured General Wheeler, however, that he would reconsider the matter should the situation demand such action. In addition, the President wanted a maximum number of B-52 strikes during the next two to three weeks against worthwhile targets in the southern part of the DMZ and in Cambodia. (The strikes in Cambodia were to be conducted as part of the MENU operation, a secret B-52 bombing campaign in Cambodia that is discussed in Chapter 7.) Although General Wheeler informed

85. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-479-69 to SecDef, 2 Aug 69, Encl to JCS 2084/144-1, 30 Jul 69; (TS-GP 1) Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "JCS 2084/144-1 - Rules of Engagement (U)," 31 Jul 69; JMF 333 (22 Jul 69).

86. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 10435 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 11 Aug 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Aug 69.

COMUSMACV of the President's decision the following day, the revised DMZ authorities were not formally promulgated until 25 August, eleven days after the President's decision.[87]

Meanwhile, on 20 August, the Secretary of Defense replied to the JCS request of 2 August. Before approving any new rules of engagement, he wanted a comprehensive review of the existing rules and the manner in which they operated, together with an appraisal of the risks that would result if no changes were made. He did confirm the President's decision that B-52 strikes in the southern part of the DMZ no longer required approval from Washington.[88]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded their review to the Secretary of Defense on 13 September 1969. They assessed the enemy situation and found that the threat in the DMZ area had remained "relatively constant" since November 1968. The enemy could launch attacks in the area at the time and place of his choosing and could move as many as 13 NVA infantry and four NVA artillery regiments into the DMZ within five days. Therefore the Joint Chiefs of Staff were still convinced of the need for augmented DMZ authorities and again submitted revised rules for the Secretary's approval. The principal additions sought by the Joint Chiefs of Staff were those that had been requested on 2 August but not yet approved: the right of US forces, in response to enemy actions, to operate in the southern half of the DMZ and on occasion to bombard North Vietnam as far north as 17 degrees 15 minutes north.[89]

The Secretary of Defense answered the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 17 October 1969. He found the present rules, with minor modification, adequate to protect friendly forces in northern I CTZ, even with additional redeployment of US forces from that area. He went so far as to authorize US troop operations in the lower half of the DMZ in response to small unit enemy attacks there, but he would not authorize

87. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, CJCS 9975 and 10102 to COMUSMACV, 12 and 15 Aug 69; (S-GP 3) Msg, CJCS 7466 to CINCPAC, 25 Aug 69; same file.

88. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnam Demilitarized Zone," 20 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2084/144-2, 22 Aug 69, JMF 333 (22 Jul 69).

89. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-566-69 to SecDef, 13 Sep 69, Encl to JCS 2084/144-3, 6 Sep 69, same file.

action against NVN territory even in the event of a major enemy offensive. Rather, he retained the current rule, which required JCS approval for counteraction to any major enemy ground attack across the DMZ or enemy air attack requiring action beyond that specified in the existing rules. The Secretary of Defense provided his decision on the revised DMZ rules in the form of a message, consolidating into one document all amended and supplemental DMZ rules of engagement issued since the 1 November 1968 bombing halt, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff dispatched the message to the field on 20 October 1969.[90]

The approach of the Vietnamese dry season in the fall of 1969 and the accompanying possibility of increased military action brought a renewed attempt by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to obtain expanded authorities in the DMZ area. On 30 October 1969, the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Westmoreland, asked the Secretary of Defense for approval of maneuvering overflight authority of North Vietnam and the DMZ when required for effective ordnance delivery on enemy infiltration routes in Laos near North Vietnam and the DMZ. General Westmoreland explained that North Vietnam was expanding the movement of supplies into the Republic of Vietnam through Laos, relying primarily on the natural entry points at Nape, Mu Gia, and Ban Karai Passes and the Route 1036/1039 area in the vicinity of the DMZ. Allied interdiction plans called for the creation of "strategic choke points" in Laos as close to the NVN border as possible. Current air operating instructions, prohibiting overflight of North Vietnam, restriced the maneuverability of aircraft both in attack and in evading NVN aircraft defenses, besides imposing limits on the selection of weapons.[91]

The Secretary of Defense had reservations about this request and asked the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) a number of questions about the risks involved and the possible alternatives to such overflight authority. The Assistant Secretary provided detailed

90. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnam Demilitarized Zone (U)," 17 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2084/144-4, 20 Oct 69; (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2865 to CINCPAC (info COMUSMACV), 20 Oct 69; JMF 333 (22 Jul 69).

91. (S-GP 3) CM-4680-69 to SecDef, 30 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov 69.

answers, whose substance was that the added risk would be minimal for the most part.[92]

Still not convinced, the Secretary of Defense on 12 November 1969 requested JCS views on "the key questions": whether the added effectiveness of allowing aircraft to fly over NVN territory would justify the added risk. In reply, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff assured the Secretary of Defense that the additional political risks would be "negligible" and would be far outweighed by the military benefits. Moreover, he added, the overflight authority would be employed in a manner to hold the chance of ordnance delivery in North Vietnam to a minimum. The Secretary of Defense took no action, but the question of overflight of the DMZ and North Vietnam and of greater freedom to operate in the DMZ continued to be discussed in 1970 (see Chapter 9).[93]

Sensor Operations

United States troops relied increasingly during 1969 on sensors for support in combat operations. Use of sensors as a means of impeding infiltration in the DMZ area began in 1967 and was greatly expanded in 1968 as a result of the valuable tactical intelligence the system provided during the Battle of Khe Sanh. During 1969 there were four major sensor programs in South Vietnam: DUEL BLADE, DUFFEL BAG, IGLOO WHITE and TIGHT JAW.

DUEL BLADE, the anti-infiltration system begun in 1967, was used throughout 1969. It consisted of a strong point obstacle system combined with sensor strings along known enemy routes in Quang Tri Province to check infiltration across the DMZ. Original plans to augment the program with a strong point obstacle system on the eastern coastal plain were abandoned early in the year. Otherwise, there were no

92. (TS) Memo, SecDef to ASD(ISA), "Maneuvering Overflights of North Vietnam," 6 Nov 69; (TS-GP 3) ISA Doc., same subj, n.d.; same file.

93. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Maneuvering Overflight of North Vietnam-Laos Border (8)," 12 Nov 69; (TS) CM-4722-69 to SecDef, 17 Nov 69; same file.

major changes in DUEL BLADE during the year, nor was there any appreciable increase in the number of sensors available.[94]

The DUFFEL BAG program grew out of the successful use of sensors at Khe Sanh. Initiated in mid-1968, DUFFEL BAG employed both attended and unattended sensors in support of tactical operations. Sensors were used for intelligence gathering, battlefield surveillance, direction of air and artillery strikes, ambushes, surveillance of enemy base areas, and many other purposes. The limited number of sensors available at the beginning of the year restricted the DUFFEL BAG program. But the inventory increased steadily, and by the end of 1969 sensors were used both within and along the DMZ and throughout all four CTZs. In assessing the program in May 1969, Genera Abrams stated that "DUFFEL BAG sensor technology may be one of the more important developments to come out of the Vietnam War."[95]

An example of the use of DUFFEL BAG was Operation PURPLE MARTIN in western Quang Tri Province in late February and early March 1969. There sensors provided the initial indication of renewed enemy presence in the area. Making use of that and other intelligence, elements of the 4th Marine Regiment undertook a 15-day battle that killed 250 enemy personnel and detained six. The enemy, of course, quickly adopted measures to counter the sensor operations. For instance, in October 1969, US artillery killed eight water buffalo herded into an area by the enemy to determine the degree of surveillance.[96]

The portion of the overall sensor program administered by the 7th Air Force was designated IGLOO WHITE. It was implemented in December 1967 and consisted of an all-weather, full-time surveillance network of acoustic and seismic sensors to impede vehicular infiltration in the western DMZ and eastern Laos. Throughout 1969, IGLOO WHITE resources were used primarily to support the interdiction campaign in Laos.[97]

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94. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VII-1 - VII-5.
95. Ibid., pp. VII-5 - VII-10.
96. Ibid., pp. V-50, VII-8 - VII-10
97. Ibid., pp. VII-10 - VII-13.

In 1969, the United States began equipping and training the RVNAF with sensors in preparation for the time when US forces would be withdrawn from Vietnam. The Deputy Secretary of Defense directed this program, and COMUSMACV developed the required plan, designating it TIGHT JAW. The plan called for acceleration of sensor introduction into the ARVN and set forth a border surveillance program using the operational concept of the DUEL BLADE system. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the TIGHT JAW plan on 29 July 1969, and training of the ARVN began in August. The first ARVN unit achieved an initial sensor capability in September. By the end of the year, ARVN units in all four CTZs had some degree of sensor training and assets. In I CTZ alone, the ARVN monitored over 200 sensors.[98]

The Situation at the Year's End

Assessing the situation in January 1970, General Abrams drew attention to the declining scope and intensity of enemy activity in the year just past. He attributed the shifting tactics to several difficulties confronting North Vietnam and the Viet Cong. During 1969, approximately 172,000 of the enemy had been killed, and although this figure was lower than in 1968, it was considerably greater than losses for any other previous year. In addition, more than 47,000 enemy personnel rallied to the Republic of Vietnam during 1969. Enemy infiltration into South Vietnam for the latter part of the year seemed to follow the usual cyclic pattern, but there was little evidence of any significant increase of personnel in the pipeline.

Nevertheless, General Abrams reported, the enemy retained approximately 226,000 troops in South Vietnam and adjacent areas of Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam, posing a direct threat to allied forces. He said specifically that the enemy was moving large NVA units toward the Delta--units that might transform the nature of the conflict there. In

98. (S-GP 4) Ltr, MACV to CINCPAC, "Ground Surveillance Plan for ARVN," 11 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/471, 21 Apr 69; (S-GP 4) JCS 2472/471-1, 5 Jun 69; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5553 to CINCPAC, 29 Jul 69; JMF 911/653 (7 Apr 69). (S-GP 4) CM-4663-69 to SecDef, 23 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VII-13 - VII-15.

addition, the enemy was restoring and improving supply areas and infiltration routes in both Cambodia and Laos. The enemy possessed, General Abrams said, the capability to initiate "offensive activity" on relatively short notice, but the US commander doubted that the Communists could sustain such an attack for any extended time.

General Abrams also pointed out that, while overall enemy strength declined during the year, the number of enemy maneuver and combat support battalions had increased by 66. The enemy had also increased the number of sapper and reconnaissance units and these increases, General Abrams believed, reflected growing emphasis on the expansion and improvement of small unit attacks. He added that, even though the number of battalions had increased, manning levels of many of the units was low. He also reported a "decided" shift in the distribution of enemy effort during the last three months of 1969, with the South Vietnamese territorial security forces bearing the brunt of the enemy attacks. This differed from the first half of 1969 when the regular ARVN forces received the largest share of enemy attacks.[99]

At the close of 1969, US officials in Washington also had another, and independent, evaluation of the South Vietnamese situation. Earlier in the fall, President Nixon had asked Sir Robert Thompson, the British expert on counterinsurgency and guerrilla warfare, to visit Vietnam and prepare an assessment. Sir Robert arrived in Saigon in late October and, after a month's stay, submitted an optimistic report to President Nixon. He found both the military and political situations, especially the security in Saigon and in the rural areas, significantly improved. "The position of the GVN," he said, "is undoubtedly more stable and its performance increasingly effective." While the North Vietnamese Army still had the manpower and means of infiltration, there had "unquestionably" been a loss of experienced and dedicated leaders and trained regular forces. "Much of the cream has gone," he reported to the President. In addition, the loss of caches and local support had reduced the enemy's flexibility. The North Vietnamese Army was now much more

99. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 1285 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 28 Jan 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 70.

dependent on outside supply, particularly for ammunition but in some areas even for food. Sir Robert Thompson agreed fully with the policy followed by the United States in Vietnam during 1969, concluding:

> a winning position in the sense of obtaining a just peace (whether negotiated or not) and of maintaining an independent non-Communist South Vietnam, had been achieved but we are not yet through. We are in a psychological period where the greatest need is confidence. A steady application of the "do-it-yourself" concept, with continuing US support in the background will increase the confidence already shown by many GVN leaders.100

In early 1970 the US Intelligence Board issued a Special National Intelligence Estimate addressing North Vietnamese policy at the beginning of the new year. The US intelligence community believed North Vietnam still intended to extend its control over the south. Hanoi still considered it had the will and the basic strength to prevail, and the Special Estimate presented three possible courses available to Hanoi. The first was an all-out military effort, but this involved heavier losses and risks than Hanoi was apt to assume at present. As more US forces departed South Vietnam, and as North Vietnam had more time to repair deficiencies, strong offensive action would become more likely. A second course was a negotiated settlement to hasten the US withdrawal from Vietnam, but to date, Hanoi had apparently found the advantages of such a solution outweighed by the risks. The third and most fesible possibility for North Vietnam in 1970, the estimate continued, was the pursuit of a prolonged war along the lines of that conducted throughout most of 1969. Under this approach, North Vietnam would attempt to inflict setbacks on Vietnamization and pacification, impose casualties on US troops, and keep pressure on the RVNAF. There could be "fairly sharp fighting" in the spring of 1970 or thereafter. Even this option had disadvantages for the enemy, however. It would prolong the strains of war in North Vietnam, and it offered no certain hope of "decisive success" in the future.

100. (S) Report by Sir Robert Thompson to President Nixon, "Visit to Vietnam - October 28-November 25, 1969," n.d. Att to Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, 15 Dec 69, OSD Files.

The Special Estimate concluded that the enemy was "in trouble" in South Vietnam, irrespective of the option selected. His casualties exceeded both infiltration and local recruitment rates, and the quality of his forces was declining. Viet Cong forces depended heavily on NVA support, and the morale of the Communist cadres was low. There were also troublesome supply problems now that large areas of the South Vietnamese countryside were denied the enemy, limiting access to manpower and resources. In addition, the South Vietnamese people, although still politically apathetic, seemed less inclined to cooperate with the Communists. The estimate cautioned, however, that this was a US assessment and "the question is whether the communists see their situation in the same way."101

United States policy in Vietnam at the conclusion of 1969 remained what it had been since late spring of the year. President Nixon had publicly announced this policy in May and reiterated it in his 3 November speech. The United States would seek a negotiated settlement in Vietnam but, in the absence of a dramatic political breakthrough, the United States would continue military operations, transferring an increasing portion of the combat responsibility to the RVNAF and gradually reducing its own forces. No political settlement came in the second half of 1969, and the President began the withdrawal of US troops. This action, he anticipated, would reduce US expenditures and public demands for a settlement in Vietnam. The ultimate success of the policy, however, depended in large part on the ability of the South Vietnamese forces to assume the combat burden as US troops withdrew.

101. (S) SNIE 14.3-70, 5 Feb 70, DIA Files.

Chapter 6

STRENGTHENING THE RVNAF, 1969

The Beginning of the Improvement and Modernization Program

The United States had included the strengthening of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) among its objectives since the beginning of its involvement in South Vietnam, but in the period 1965 through early 1968, major US attention was devoted primarily to the conduct of combat operations. It was only after the 1968 Tet offensive, when President Johnson ruled out a further US troop increase in South Vietnam, that the United States undertook serious preparations for eventual South Vietnamese assumption of the combat effort. In line with this decision, and at the direction of the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff developed in 1968 a two-phased plan to "improve and modernize" the RVNAF. The first phase was designed to increase the ground combat power of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) while US participation in the war continued at the current level (approximately 500,000). Phase II would build a balanced, self-sufficient RVNAF by the end of FY 1974, capable of coping with a residual insurgency after US and other free world forces, as well as the North Vietnamese troops, had withdrawn. But planning in 1968 did not envisage the development of the RVNAF to meet a combined Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army (NVA) force.

The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the Phase I plan on 23 October 1968, providing for an RVNAF force structure of 850,000 by the end of FY 1973.[1] Shortly thereafter, General Abrams recommended that Phase II be accelerated to permit its completion by FY 1972 and that the RVNAF personnel ceiling be raised to 877,090. On 18 December 1968, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul H. Nitze approved the Phase II plan, as amended by General Abrams, with the exception of the Vietnamese Navy (VNN) portion and certain ammunition requirements. The VNN exception would reduce the RVNAF force level to 866,434. He requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to submit detailed proposals for putting the plan into effect.

1. See ~~(TS)~~ The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, Ch. 51.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted an accelerated Phase II plan to the Secretary of Defense on 4 January 1969. They based this plan on a total RVNAF strength of 877,090. All ARVN units would be activated by mid-1970, with the buildup of air and naval forces completed by the end of FY 1972. The costs involved were only slightly more than those of the original Phase II plan, to cover an increase in ARVN logistic units and certain additional naval craft.[2]

When Mr. Nitze approved the Phase II plan on 18 December 1968, he had noted that the proposed force structure stressed conventional combat power. Such a force was appropriate for the current situation in South Vietnam, but he questioned whether it would be the optimum for "an extensive pacification effort following a significant reduction in the level of hostilities." Consequently, he had asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a plan, which he designated Phase III, for a postwar RVNAF force to meet only "an internal insurgency threat from indigenous VC forces."[3]

This third plan was forwarded to the new Secretary of Defense, Melvin R. Laird, on 21 January 1969. The Joint Chiefs of Staff termed it "an appropriate basis for further discussion concerning a postwar RVNAF force structure." What they actually presented to Mr. Laird was two plans--Phase III and Phase IIIA. Both were designed to cope with less intensive degrees of insurgency than had been assumed in earlier planning. The Phase III plan would reduce RVNAF strength to 804,300 personnel, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered adequate to cope with a reduced enemy threat of 84 VC battalions without NVA forces, fillers, or regroupees from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Phase IIIA would build a force of 858,400 to deal with a somewhat more serious threat of as many as 112 VC battalions, with NVA fillers and support. Both plans provided for large paramilitary forces costing appreciably less than regular

2. (S-GP 3) JCSM-6-69 to SecDef, 4 Jan 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/272-28, 31 Dec 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 11.
3. (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to Secys of MilDepts and CJCS, "RVNAF Phase II Force Structure (U)," 18 Dec 68, Att to JCS 2472/272-27, 19 Dec 68, same file, sec 10.

forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not convinced, however, that the security situations on which both the III and IIIA plans were premised would be achieved, and they advised the Secretary of Defense that the "prudent course" was to continue with the accelerated Phase II plan until there was "unequivocal" proof that the "worst security situation" would not ensue from the negotiations.[4]

During February and early March 1969, Secretary Laird and his Deputy, Mr. David Packard, reviewed the RVNAF improvement plans initiated by the previous administration. On 12 February, Deputy Secretary Packard notified General Wheeler and the Secretary of the Navy of his decision on the VNN portion of the Phase II plan, which Deputy Secretary Nitze had deferred in his decision on Phase II on 18 December 1968. Mr. Packard approved a VNN force structure of 28,700 rather than the 30,805 recommended in the accelerated plan, judging the smaller number to be adequate to man the equipment scheduled for the VNN. He deferred the transfer of two destroyer escorts to the VNN, though he subsequently reversed this decision on 30 April 1969, directing that the costs be absorbed within currently available Navy funds. On 10 March 1969, Mr. Packard acted on Phase II ammunition requirements, which Mr. Nitze had also deferred. Mr. Packard saw no need for the increased procurement of artillery ammunition proposed in the plan. Only a few additional weapons were called for, and the necessary ammunition could be provided within currently planned procurement.[5]

4. (S-GP 4) JCSM-40-69 to SecDef, 21 Jan 69, Encl to JCS 2472/272-30, 13 Jan 69, same file, sec 12.
5. (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to SecN and CJCS, "Vietnamese Navy Phase II Plan for Improvement and Modernization (U)," 12 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/272-31, 14 Feb 69; (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to Secys of MilDepts and CJCS, "RVNAF Phase II Force Structure," 10 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/272-34, 12 Mar 69; same file. (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to SecN and CJCS, "Vietnamese Navy Improvement and Modernization," 30 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/272-39, 1 May 69, same file, sec 13.

The Nixon Administration Reviews RVNAF Improvement and Modernization

While the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense were examining the existing plans for the RVNAF, they were also participating in an Administration-wide assessment of the Vietnam war, including the status of the RVNAF. As related in Chapter 1, on the day after Richard Nixon assumed the presidency, he ordered a thorough examination of every aspect of the Vietnam situation, directing a series of questions to the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence. The new President and his advisers were particularly interested in the RVNAF, and four of his questions dealt with the RVNAF and its ability to carry a larger share of the war. What were the differing opinions within the US Government, the President inquired, on the progress in RVNAF improvement, as well as the evidence underlying these views? He asked about the ability of the RVNAF to handle the VC, with or without US support, as well as to cope with sizable NVA forces under varying levels of US support. He also sought views on changes in RVNAF command, organization, equipment, and training and on the time necessary to ready the RVNAF to cope with either the VC alone or a combined VC/NVA force.[6]

The preparation of the replies to the presidential questions on Vietnam has been described in Chapter 1. By late March the replies were complete, and Dr. Kissinger's staff circulated a summary of the various answers to the National Security Council on 22 March 1969. With regard to the RVNAF, the respondents were in general agreement that capabilities and effectiveness had increased during 1968 and that the South Vietnamese forces were larger, better equipped, and better trained than in previous years. But they were also convinced that the RVNAF could not, in the foreseeable future, deal with both VC and NVA forces without US assistance in the form of air, helicopter, artillery, logistic, and major ground support, and they pointed out the severe leadership and morale problems facing the RVNAF. More numerous than the areas of agreement were the disagreements. On the subject of the RVNAF, as on most of the other questions, the participants divided into two groups: Those in the "military community," including COMUSMACV,

6. (S-GP 3) NSSM 1, 21 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2472/413, 22 Jan 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 1.

CINCPAC, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and others comprising the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Department of State, and the Central Intelligence Agency. The military community gave much greater weight to the RVNAF improvement as shown in available statistics. Paradoxically, however, the military judged the RVNAF less capable against the Viet Cong alone than did the other group. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV all believed that the RVNAF could not cope with the indigenous insurgency threat without US combat support until completion of the accelerated Phase II improvement plan in 1972. The Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency, on the other hand, believed that the RVNAF could hold its own against the Viet Cong without US support, although the CIA cautioned that much depended on currently unknown factors such as the effect of a US and NVA withdrawal from South Vietnam. Analysts in the Office of the Secretary of Defense considered that RVNAF capabilities should increase "over time" provided a number of reforms were carried out in addition to the RVNAF improvement program.

With respect to the morale and leadership of the RVNAF, both groups of respondents recognized the weaknesses, but differences arose in assessing the magnitude of these problems and their influence on future developments. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV thought that substantial progress had already been made in correcting the problems, and they expected this progress to continue. But answers from the Office of the Secretary of Defense indicated a belief that the current improvement program was insufficient to make the RVNAF an effective fighting force unless accompanied by major political and military actions--actions that were not being taken at the present time.[7]

While the various departments and agencies were completing and refining answers to the President's Vietnam questions, Secretary Laird traveled to South Vietnam in early March and observed the progress of the RVNAF. As related in Chapter 1, Secretary Laird carried to Vietnam the clear message that the RVNAF must begin to take over the fighting. In his trip report to the President, the Secretary

7. (~~TS~~-GP 3) NSC Staff Memo to SecState et al., "Revised Summary of Responses to NSSM 1: The Situation in Vietnam," 22 Mar 69, (pp. 15-17), Att to JCS 2472/413-8, 24 Mar 69, same file, sec 5.

challenged the basic objectives of the accelerated Phase II RVNAF improvement and modernization plan. The heavy expense of such modernization could not be justified merely as a measure to permit the Republic of Vietnam to deal with local insurgency. The emphasis could and must be shifted, he told the President, to measures to achieve a self-sufficient RVNAF. Accordingly, he recommended that more funds be provided to hasten the modernization program and that ways be sought to improve the effectiveness of the RVNAF. He made it clear that he was supporting additional funds with the understanding that the program would permit the Republic of Vietnam to start replacing US forces with RVNAF regular and paramilitary troops.[8]

After reviewing Secretary Laird's report and the answers to the Vietnam questions, the President met with the National Security Council on 28 March to consider Vietnam policy. As described in Chapter 1, it was the consensus of the meeting that there had been sufficient improvement in the RVNAF to justify initiation of planning to transfer the combat to the South Vietnamese and begin withdrawal of US forces. On 1 April 1969, the President promulgated the decisions of the 28 March meeting, including direction for the development of a plan for Vietnamizing the war. Ten days later, Dr. Kissinger issued more specific instructions. He directed the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence, to draw up a plan to transfer combat operations in South Vietnam to the Republic of Vietnam with the US role restricted to combat support and advisory missions only. The planning should be based on an assumption that the highest national priority would be accorded to equipping and training South Vietnamese forces.[9]

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8. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, March 5-12, 1969," 13 Mar 69, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS Trip to SEA, Mar 69.

9. (TS) Longhand notes by CJCS taken at 28 Mar 69 NSC Mtg on back of pages of TP for SecDef and CJCS (NSC Mtg 28 Mar), "Revised Summary of Responses to NSSM 1: The Situation in Vietnam," n.d., JMF 077 (21 Mar 69) (NSC Review Group Mtg, 28 Mar 69). (TS-GP 1) NSDM 9, 1 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/459, 2 Apr 69; (TS-GP 1) NSSM 36, 10 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/467, 11 Apr 69; JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 1.

The President's decision, together with Dr. Kissinger's implementing directive, reoriented the RVNAF improvement program. Originally, the United States had intended only to prepare the South Vietnamese forces to cope with the Viet Cong; now the Nixon Administration had changed the objective to the creation of forces able to fight both the Viet Cong and the NVA, with US forces reduced to a supporting role.

The Secretary of Defense assigned the Joint Chiefs of Staff responsibility for the Vietnamization plan.[10] Meanwhile, on 28 April 1969, Deputy Secretary Packard approved the accelerated Phase II RVNAF improvement and modernization plan, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted on 4 January. Mr. Packard informed the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretaries of the Military Departments that "Vietnamizing the war should have the highest priority." He approved a total RVNAF force strength of 875,750, authorizing COMUSMACV to make minor adjustments (five percent of each service strength) to RVNAF service ceilings within the total force level. He stressed the importance of providing the RVNAF with all necessary equipment, training, and logistic support.[11]

The Military Departments had already examined the equipment requirements for the accelerated Phase II program. The Secretary of the Navy, John H. Chafee, concluded that the additional equipment could be provided with no adverse impact on the readiness of US naval forces. Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor, however, had misgivings. The Army's capability to resond to crises was already inadequate, he warned, and the transfer of more equipment to the ARVN at that time would delay deliveries to active and reserve units of the US Army.

The US Air Force was responsible for the overall direction of the VNAF improvement and moderization program, but it was the US Army that provided the needed helicopters and

10. For the JCS response, see Ch. 4, pp. 106-108.
11. (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to Secys of MilDepts and CJCS, "RVNAF Phase II Plan for Improvements and Modernization (U)," 28 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/272-38, 29 Apr 69, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 13.

training for the program. On 22 April 1969, the Secretary of the Army sent the Secretary of Defense a plan to train 1,475 VNAF aviators and 1,875 mechanics by FY 1971 to meet the accelerated Phase II helicopter activation schedules. To accomplish this training without adverse impact on US Army requirements, the Army would have to expand its training facilities and personnel, at a total cost of approximately $39 million for the period FY 1969 through FY 1971. In addition, the Army would have to divert more than 500 helicopters currently programmed for Army use. The result would delay the distribution of new helicopters to US commands in Europe and Korea. Nevertheless, the Secretary of Defense approved the Army plan in principle on 18 June 1969, subject to a further review of the requirement for additional personnel and funds.[12]

Expansion of Accelerated Phase II Improvement and Modernization Program

Presidents Nixon and Thieu met at Midway Island on 8 June 1969 to discuss the Vietnam war. During the meeting, they agreed that the RVNAF had progressed far enough to warrant the replacement of some US forces with South Vietnamese troops, and President Nixon announced the withdrawal of 25,000 US forces from Vietnam.[13]

At Midway, President Thieu also presented President Nixon with a plan for further strengthening of the RVNAF. He wanted more manpower, more equipment, and money to provide a better standard of living for his fighting men. Specifically, he wanted to raise the RVNAF strength ceiling by about 170,000, to a total of approximately 1,045,000 by FY 1972, with roughly 120,000 of the new spaces alloted to the territorial forces engaged in the pacification program. The additional equipment that he sought included F-4 fighters, C-130 transports, air defense missiles, and Sheridan tanks. The desired financial support for the RVNAF

12. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, "Improvement and Modernization of the Vietnam Air Force," 22 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/272-37, 24 Apr 69, same file, sec 12. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecA, SecAF, and CJCS. "Improvement and Modernization of the Vietnamese Air Force (U)," 18 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/272-40, 19 Jun 69, same file, sec 13.

13. (U) Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, p. 443. See Ch. 4.

included provision for higher pay and rations, free food allowances, and increased housing allowances. With this new plan, President Thieu hoped to prepare the RVNAF to take over the major combat responsibility, to protect pacification gains, and to deal successfully not only with the existing Communist danger, but with large-scale threats from outside, at least until help from others could be obtained.[14]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the new RVN plan and furnished the Secretary of Defense their comments on 29 July 1969. They were skeptical about the implication in the plan that the RVNAF, through further modernization and expansion, would be able to assume the major fighting responsibility against the current VC/NVA threat. The new RVN plan would provide some additional offensive capability, but it seemed doubtful, in view of RVNAF leadership and morale problems, that this added strength on paper would enable the South Vietnamese to take over major combat responsibility.

Consequently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a smaller RVNAF increase than that requested by the Republic of Vietnam. They proposed an expansion of 117,047 spaces during FY 1970 and 1971 and an enlargement of the National Police by 30,000 over the same period. Specifically, they asked the Secretary to approve a FY 1970 RVNAF strength increase of 77,883 with authority for COMUSMACV to release these spaces on an incremental basis commensurate with qualitative improvements of the RVNAF and with RVN ability to recruit and train the additional personnel. For FY 1971, they recommended 39,164 more spaces for planning purposes. Broken down by service the JCS force recommendations were as follows:

14. (S-GP 1) RVNAF Improvement and Development Plan, n.d. presented to Pres Nixon by Pres Thieu at Midway Conference, 8 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/497, 30 Jun 69; (S-GP 4) JCSM-462-69 to SecDef, 29 Jul 69, Encl to JCS 2472/497-3, 26 Jul 69; JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) secs 1 and 2. (S-GP 4) DJSM-1074-69 to CJCS, 7 Jul 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69.

Service	FY 1970	FY 1971	Total
PF	36,700	24,550	61,250
RF	17,570	5,173	22,743
ARVN	13,703	7,964	21,667
VNMC	3,766		3,766
VNN	2,945	1,477	4,422
VNAF	3,199		3,199
Total	77,883	39,164	117,047
National Police	15,000	15,000	30,000
	92,883	54,164	147,047

The Joint Chiefs of Staff found the RVN request for additional equipment somewhat ambitious in that it exceeded that South Vietnamese technical capability. They considered the current modernization program "adequate" in terms of the present requirements. As the RVNAF capabilities grew, and as their need for more sophisticated weapons developed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would consider provision of suitable equipment. They also submitted to the Secretary an equipment list that they deemed appropriate for FY 1970 (at an estimmated unprogrammed cost of approximately $118 million). In addition, they recommended that two destroyer escorts be loaned to the Republic of Vietnam and that 12 US Coast Guard vessels be turned over outright.[15]

The Secretary of Defense approved the JCS recommendations for both the expanded force structure and equipment transfers on 12 August 1969, directing the Military Departments to deliver the necessary equipment and supplies. The Secretary's action resulted in the approval of a total RVNAF structure of 953,673 by the end of FY 1970 and 992,837 by the close of FY 1971. (See Table V for a detailed breakdown of these structures.) Mr. Laird pointed out that earlier improvement programs had aimed at creating a RVNAF able to deal with insurgency, assuming the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces as well as those of the United States and other allies. Now the object was "to transfer progressively to the Republic of Vietnam greatly increased responsibility for all aspects of the war," under the

15. (S-GP 4) JCSM-462-69 to SecDef, 29 Jul 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/497-3, 26 Jul 69, JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) sec 2.

assumption that enemy forces, both NVA and VC, would remain at their current levels while US forces continued to withdraw. He directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Military Departments to review the current RVNAF improvement program in the light of that objective, requesting a report by 30 September 1969. He wanted them to consider the qualitative and intangible factors necessary for RVNAF improvement, including lower desertion rates, improved leadership, a force structure making better use of existing men and equipment, and the "development of strategy and tactics best matched with RVNAF capabilities."[16]

Review of the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program

The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted their review to Secretary Laird on 27 September 1969. They assured him that COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, the Military Departments, and the Joint Staff were all working together to implement the RVNAF improvement and modernization program. Progress was being made on the basis of the "cut-and-try" principle, considering the RVNAF's ability to activate new units, train personnel, and maintain and operate additional equipment. The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided Mr. Laird detailed information on the measures being taken to improve RVNAF leadership and morale, logistics, and intelligence capabilities. With regard to strategy and tactics, they told the Secretary that the 1970 Campaign Plan, then in preparation, would give the RVNAF greatly increased responsibilities and would be tailored to RVNAF capabilities. In addition, efforts were under way to lower the desertion rate, to encourage the RVNAF to increase the level of combined operations and planning, and to assist the RVNAF in deciding the best methods to use in equipping, training, and organizing their forces.

Despite these efforts, the Joint Chiefs of Staff still did not believe the South Vietnamese forces could be

16. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS and Secys of MilDepts, "Government of Vietnam Proposals Presented at the Midway Conference, 8 June 1969 (U)," 12 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2472/497-5, 13 Aug 69, same file, sec 3. (TS-GP 1) Ann to App to JCSM-593-69 to SecDef, 27 Sep 69, Encl to JCS 2472/497-6, 24 Sep 69, same file.

sufficiently improved to meet the current combined VC/NVA threat without outside support. They advised Mr. Laird that a residual US force would be required to offset RVNAF deficiencies as long as the existing enemy threat remained in South Vietnam. Certain out-of-country and offshore support forces would also be needed, as proposed in the final interagency Vietnamization plan of 29 August 1969 (see Chapter 4).

The size of the US residual force would vary depending on further expansion of the RVNAF and the amount of additional allied support. Therefore the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Republic of Vietnam be approached to determine if it would extend the conscription age bracket from the present 18-38 span to 18-43 and recruit additional women to fill clerical and administrative positions in the RVNAF. They also proposed seeking additional military support from the other countries currently furnishing assistance to South Vietnam. Thailand and South Korea appeared to be the only likely prospects, but there was no certainty, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, that any additional support could be negotiated.[17]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff met with the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense on 6 October 1969 and discussed RVNAF improvement and modernization. At this meeting, Mr. Laird asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop ways to show RVNAF progress and accomplishments in order to counteract public criticism of the program.[18]

Accordingly, on 15 October 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary "displays of representative data" for use before congressional committees. This material demonstrated: the upward trend of RVN force strengths; numbers of units and inventory of modern equipment; the increasing proportion of effort borne by the Republic of Vietnam in certain significant fields; and brief resumes of the progress in various areas of RVNAF improvement. They provided similar unclassified data for release to the news media. The long-term solution, the

17. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-593-69 to SecDef, 27 Sep 69, Encl to JCS 2472/497-6, 24 Sep 69, JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) sec 3.
18. (S-GP 4) JCS 2472/537, 11 Oct 69, JMF 911/535 (11 Oct 69).

Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, lay in better day-to-day press coverage, and they suggested encouragement of more extensive US and free world press treatment of the South Vietnamese forces and their operations. In addition, the television industry could be asked to prepare reports on Vietnamization, with Department of Defense assistance.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also discussed the possible acceleration of RVNAF improvement, but were reluctant to suggest additional measures beyond the extension of the conscription age bracket and greater use of women in the armed forces, as recommended on 27 September. Overall RVNAF effectiveness was more dependent, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, on qualitative improvement than on quantitative increases in existing forces. Despite the US desire for stepped-up RVNAF takeover of the war, they opposed a fixed schedule for the Vietnamization process, urging reliance on the "cut-and-try" principle instead. They also used this occasion to reiterate their view that the Republic of Vietnam could not cope, alone, with a threat of the current proportion.[19]

The Military Departments also prepared reviews of their portions of the improvement and modernization program. On 6 October, the Secretaries of Navy and Air Force both reported continuing progress in the corresponding South Vietnamese services. The Secretary of the Air Force told Secretary Laird that the VNAF 20-squadron force would be expanded to 40 squadrons by mid-1972 and equipped with F-5s, A-37s, UH-1Hs, and AC-47s. The Secretary of Navy was proud of the actions under way to improve VNN leadership and esprit de corps, to increase combined planning and operations, to achieve logistics independence by June 1971, and to build a VNN field intelligence organization. To date, the VNN forces were being expanded ahead of the Accelerated Phase II schedule, and the desertion rate was only 1.5 per 1,000--well below the overall RVNAF rate of 12 per 1,000. Both Secretaries, however, doubted that provision of equipment to the Republic of Vietnam at a faster rate would be

19. (S-GP 4) JCSM-636-69 to SecDef, 15 Oct 69, Encl to JCS 2472/537, 11 Oct 69, same file.

of benefit. The Republic of Vietnam did not have the necessary technicians to use the additional equipment.[20]

The Secretary of the Army, Stanley Resor, presented his assessment to Mr. Laird on 25 October 1969. The strengthening of the ARVN made up the largest portion of the RVNAF improvement and modernization program, and the Army review indicated that the program was improving the ARVN in both numbers and quality. He stressed his Department's wholehearted commitment to the effort. "Vietnamization," he said, "is considered to be the most important program in the Army." Nevertheless, problems continued. The ARVN's logistics were still only marginally adequate and its intelligence capability suffered from a lack of equipment and qualified personnel; progress was being made, however, in the areas of counterintelligence, communications security, and overall intelligence training. Programs were under way to improve the ARVN manpower base through additional training, and personnel policies were being reviewed to alleviate leadership and desertion problems. The US Army was also training the Vietnamese in topographic and field engineering techniques to prepare them to take over additional engineering equipment presently in the hands of US units.

Finally, Secretary Resor noted that in the past US advisers had focused most of their attention on tactics.[21] He felt that their mission should now be changed to emphasize the Vietnamization program. This could be

20. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecAF to SecDef, "Review of RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program (U)," 6 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/497-8, 7 Oct 69; (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecN to SecDef, 6 Oct 69, "Review of the Vietnamese Navy and Vietnamese Marine Corps Improvement and Modernization Program," Att to JCS 2472/497-9, 7 Oct 69; JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) sec 3.

21. During conversations with Secretary Laird at the Pentagon on 2 April 1969, Vice President Ky complained that US advisers tended to take control rather than merely advising and that, as a result, many Vietnamese commanders became "lazy" and did not learn their jobs properly. He found the attitudes of the advisers understandable given the fact that they were in Vietnam only for one-year tours and sought quick solutions to problems. Nevertheless, Vice President Ky felt the approach was wrong and that the advisers should be more patient. (S-GP 4) Memo of Conv, "Courtesy Call by Vice President Ky of the Republic of Vietnam," 4 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2572/464, 10 Apr 69, JMF 911/075 (CY 69).

accomplished by redesignating the 15,462 US Army advisers to ARVN units as "liaison teams" and eliminating those advisory functions no longer needed.[22]

At the 6 October meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Deputy Secretary Packard had evidenced particular interest in the improvement of the RVNAF intelligence capability and asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for further information on this matter. The Acting Chairman, General Westmoreland, provided the information on 30 October 1969, reviewing the intelligence capabilities of each of the RVNAF services and describing plans to enhance and expand them. Mr. Packard replied five days later that he was encouraged by the progress in the expansion of the RVNAF intelligence assets and wished the program to receive continuing emphasis.[23]

Secretary Laird informed General Wheeler on 10 November 1969 that he had reviewed both the JCS and Service evaluations of the RVNAF improvement and modernization program and was "encouraged" by the progress in force expansion and equipment deliveries. Now was the time, he believed, to begin planning for Phase III, the consolidation phase, and to reorient program objectives. Accordingly, he asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a Phase III plan.[24] It should be designed to raise RVNAF effectiveness so that the Republic of Vietnam could maintain "at least current levels of security" as US forces were reduced to a support force by 1 July 1971 and, in continuing steps, to an advisory force two years later. Mr. Laird intended to remain flexible on the subjects of US troop redeployments and residual force levels, but for planning purposes he suggested

22. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, "Review of RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (I&M) Program," 25 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/543, 28 Oct 69, JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) sec 3.

23. (S) DJSM-1579-69 to CJCS, 13 Oct 69; (S-GP 1) CM-4685-69 to DSecDef, 30 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/497-10, 3 Nov 69; (S-GP 1) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "Review of RVNAF Intelligence Capabilities (U)," 4 Nov 69, Att to JCS 2472/551, 7 Nov 69; same file.

24. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had already prepared a Phase III plan (see above, pp. 178-179) at the direction of Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze, but this plan did not meet the revised RVNAF improvement and modernization program objectives of the Nixon Administration.

alternative US support levels of 260,000[25] or 190,000, assuming the current enemy threat. He also asked that the plan include an updated examination of US force redeployments.

In addition, Mr. Laird wanted a comprehensive review of RVNAF missions, force structure and mix, including required changes in RVNAF combat support and combat service support forces, as well as new equipment requirements. Essential to the success of Phase III, Mr. Laird believed, would be the overcoming of deficiencies in less tangible areas such as training, leadership, and morale, and he directed inclusion of programs in the plan to eliminate these weaknesses. He recognized that previous plans had assumed a continuing US support force and that Phase III, therefore, represented "a major change" in the thrust of US efforts to improve the RVNAF. He wanted the plan, together with cost estimates, by 31 January 1970.[26]

Simultaneously, Mr. Laird instructed the Secretaries of the Military Departments to review their RVNAF improvement and modernization efforts to ensure compliance with the new guidance furnished to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He placed special emphasis on training--a function for which the Services had primary responsibility--as well as on such other matters as the identification of problem areas where US technological solutions could enhance RVNAF progress.[27]

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25. This figure was in accordance with presidential planning guidance of 11 October 1969. On that date, the President approved a strategy paper for US general purpose forces, together with general budget guidelines for the next five fiscal years. This budget guidance contained alternative assumptions regarding Vietnam: an end to US involvement after 1 July 1970 or a phase-down of US forces to 260,000 by 30 June 1971 and continuing reduction thereafter with an end to US combat involvement by 30 June 1973. (TS) NSDM 27, 11 Oct 69, JMF 001 (CY 1969) NSDMs.

26. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamization -- RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Aspects and Related Planning," 10 Nov 69, Att to JCS 2472/552, 10 Nov 69, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 1.

27. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Secys of MilDepts et al., "Vietnamization -- RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Aspects and Related Planning," 10 Nov 69, Att to JCS 2472/552, 10 Nov 69, same file.

The development and approval of the Phase III plan is related in Chapter 10. Meanwhile, in late November, the Republic of Vietnam reported that recruitment and training of the additional territorial units approved for FY 1970 would be completed ahead of schedule and requested acceleration into FY 1970 of the RF and PF units approved for FY 1971 planning. General Abrams, the US Embassy in Saigon, and CINCPAC all supported this request, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought Secretary of Defense approval on 19 December 1969. They recommended the early release of 24,550 PF and 5,173 RF spaces along with 2,964 ARVN spaces needed for logistic and command support of the new RF and PF units. This force increase of 32,687 spaces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated, would raise materiel and support costs by $34.9 million in FY 1970 and by $18.6 million per year for the following two fiscal years. If budget constraints made it impossible to furnish new weapons, they added, territorial units could be temporarily supplied with equipment released by the re-equipping of regular RVNAF units.[28]

The Secretary of Defense approved the JCS recommendations on 6 January 1970, raising the RVNAF force level to 986,360 for FY 1970. He was "extremely pleased" with the initiatives of the Republic of Vietnam and the RVNAF in an area "so critical to both pacification and Vietnamization." To support the activation of the new units, he directed maximum use of equipment released by US forces redeploying from Vietnam.[29] (See Table VI for actual RVNAF strengths in 1969.)

At the beginning of December 1969, Secretary Laird gave the President a report on RVNAF improvement and modernization. Progress in weapons programs had been encouraging; most were on schedule and some even ahead of schedule. All ARVN maneuver battalions were armed with the M-16 rifle and RF/PF weapons modernization would be completed during the course of the month. In fact, the weapons programs were 90 percent complete, and Mr. Laird expected no problems in carrying out the remainder. Progress had also been made in training, though much remained to be accomplished. Force

28. (C-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 111730Z Dec 69, JCS IN 13441; (S-GP 4) JCSM-769-69 to SecDef, 19 Dec 69, Encl to JCS 2472/570, 17 Dec 69; JMF 911/535 (11 Dec 69).
29. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Accelerated Activation of Regional Force and Popular Force Units (U)," 6 Jan 70, Att to JCS 2472/570, 8 Jan 70, same file.

expansion had consistently exceeded goals, and for several months in 1969, actual recruit training exceeded plans by about 20 percent.

Despite this success, a number of deficiencies remained. Some actions were behind schedule, Mr. Laird said, particularly those involving specialist training. Raising the quality of training, especially at the junior officer level, was a serious concern. More English language instructors and more trained technicians to man military and civil communications systems were also required. Secretary Laird pointed out the need for a nationwide system of manpower priorities since there simply were not enough qualified persons in the Vietnamese manpower pool to fill all the demands for technical skills.

All in all, Secretary Laird was statisfied with the progress in RVNAF improvement and modernization during 1969. He recognized that, so far, the material and quantifiable aspects of the program had been stressed. Now, he assured the President, greater emphasis would be given the less tangible areas of training, leadership, and morale. He told the President that he had directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a Phase III plan to include comprehensive programs to overcome existing deficiencies, as well as to prepare the RVNAF to maintain security in South Vietnam as US forces withdrew.[30]

RVNAF Effectiveness

Secretary Laird's report to the President on RVNAF progress was based, primarily, on the SEER, the System for Evaluating the Effectiveness of RVNAF. General Westmoreland had established this system at the beginning of 1968 in an attempt to provide a "quantified objective evaluation" of RVNAF development. It consisted of four sub-systems[31]

30. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Vietnamization," 1 Dec 69, Att to JCS 2472/552-3, 2 Dec 69, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 1.

31. These were the ARVN-Marine Forces Evaluation System (AMFES); the Naval Forces Evaluation System (NFES); the Air Forces Evaluation System (AFES); and the Territorial Forces Evaluation System (TFES).

covering the various RVNAF elements. Under SEER, US advisers with RVNAF units submitted monthly statistical reports to MACV, as well as quarterly assessments of operational effectiveness, leadership, training, staff functions, and problem areas. These data were then compiled and tabulated by the MACJ3 and published in quarterly SEER reports.[32]

The SEER procedure was not without deficiencies. The inherent differences in ground, sea, and air forces and the variations in the mission, organization, and equipment of the regular and territorial forces made it difficult to compare levels of performance. In addition, the subjective nature of the SEER questionnaires made it impossible to insure a uniform standard for separate evaluations by several hundred US advisers with varying training and experience. In 1969, COMUSMACV revised the SEER questionnaire in an effort to provide more precise measurement of RVNAF progress, and this change caused some initial confusion in adviser reporting. Both COMUSMACV and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized the weaknesses in SEER, and in August 1969, General Wheeler cautioned the Secretary of Defense about these reports. He noted the shortcomings of the system and advised Mr. Laird that thorough analysis should be made and other staff inputs used before drawing firm conclusions from the SEER data. But, despite its shortcomings, SEER was the best measurement of RVNAF improvement available, and the United States used it throughout 1969, attempting to refine and improve it.[33]

During 1969, SEER reports indicated an overall improvement in RVNAF operational effectiveness. Expansion of the RVNAF proceeded at "the maximum practical rate," though accompanied by a degradation in the effectiveness of some RVNAF regular ground units, which had been drawn on for cadres to form new units. Nevertheless, there was an overall upward trend in the effectiveness of RVN regular land forces in 1969 as compared with the previous year, and

32. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VI-135 - VI-136. (S) MACV SEER Report, 1st Qtr, CY 1970, 1 Jul 70, JMF 911/337 (1 Jan 70).

33. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VI-135. (S-GP 4) USMACV, "RVN Regular Forces Advisory Report," 31 Aug 68, p. 506, JMF 911/337 (1 Jan 68). (U) CM-4512-69 to SecDef, 21 Aug 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Aug 69.

there was encouraging improvement in specific ARVN units, including the 2d, 5th, 8th, 9th, and 23d Divisions. Regular forces took an increasingly aggressive approach to combat operations, engaging the enemy with significantly reduced US reinforcement. Both ARVN and VNMC battalions devoted approximately 50 percent of their time to combat operations as compared with only 25 percent early in 1968. They maintained favorable kill ratios as well as favorable ratios of weapons captured to weapons lost and repeatedly discovered enemy caches in the course of their expanded operations. The overall ARVN/VNMC "operational effectiveness," as reported by SEER, rose from 76.1 in the first quarter of 1969 to 82.8 by the end of the year.[34]

There was a steady increase in the strength of the Regional and Popular Forces during 1969, giving them a greater density and area coverage capability. As a result, they assumed a larger role in pacification, freeing regular units to return to their primary mission of combatting enemy main-force units. The territorial forces increased their rate of day and night operations, expanded their intelligence-gathering activities, and inflicted more casualties on the enemy, in both men and materiel, than they suffered. At the close of the year US advisers reported a 94 percent improvement over 1968 in the use of supporting fire and a slight improvement in rapport between the territorial forces and the civilian population.[35]

The Vietnamese Navy (VNN) continued to expand and assume additional responsibilities in 1969. During the year, the US Navy units and VNN forces conducted coastal and riverine operations, coordinating logistic, intelligence, communications, pacification, and psychological efforts. As the training of VNN forces improved, they gradually assumed more combat responsibility from US Navy personnel. By the close of 1969,

34. (S) MACV SEER Report, 1st Qtr CY 1970, Pt. I, JMF 911/337 (1 Jan 70). (TS-GP 1) OJCS, Combat Analysis Group, J-3, CAG-VSUM 1-70, "A Periodic Summary of Progress toward Vietnamizing the War (U)," Mar 70, pp. C-40 - C-55, JCS Hist Div files (hereinafter cited as CAG-VSUM 1-70.) (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VI-136 - VI-138.

35. (C) USMACV SEER Report, 4th Qtr, CY 1970, 30 Mar 70, Pt. I, J-3 Files. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, pp. C(RF/PF) 1-31.

independent VNN and combined USN/VNN commands controlled most of the naval operations in III and IV CTZs; the VNN had assumed command of 29 of 49 inshore surveillance stations; a VNN/VNMC amphibious task force was operating successfully in the Delta; and plans called for the VNN to take over the bulk of the responsibility for riverine operations by June 1970. The SEER reports indicated that VNN forces had increased their attacks on enemy personnel and craft, had improved their kill ratios, and had searched greater numbers of vessels in 1969. The SEER evaluation also revealed that the majority of VNN forces were conducting their missions aggressively; it rated their performance as equal to, and at times exceeding, that of comparable US Navy units.[36]

In accordance with the RVNAF improvement and modernization program, the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) took over an increased share in all air operations in South Vietnam during 1969, including air mobile assaults, medical evacuation, and logistic missions. Total sorties flown by the VNAF rose from approximately 54,900 in the first quarter of the year to 73,700 during the last three months of 1969. The SEER reviews rated the VNAF squadrons in four readiness categories; at the beginning of 1970, 95 percent of the VNAF was adjudged "operationally ready," the second highest of the four levels.[37]

The VNAF fighter squadrons increased their total number of strikes in South Vietnam during 1969 while those conducted by US and FWMAF forces decreased. During the year, VNAF fighters flew about 19 percent of all strike sorties flown, but for the last quarter, the figure was 30 percent. United States advisers considered many of the older, more experienced VNAF pilots to be aggressive and thoroughly

36. (C) USMACV SEER Report, 4th Qtr, CY 1969, 30 Mar 70, Pt. I, p. 11; Pt. II, p. A-1, J-3 Files. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VI-138. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, pp. (C/VNN) 1, 10, 20. (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecN to SecDef, "Review of the Vietnamese Navy and Vietnamese Marine Corps Improvement and Modernization (U)," 6 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/497-9, 7 Oct 69, JMF 911/535 (8 June 69) sec 3.

37. (C) USMACV SEER Report, 4th Qtr, CY 1969, 30 Mar 70, Pt. II, p. A-1, J-3 Files. (S-GP 4) MACV SEER Report, 1st Qtr, CY 1970, Pt. II, p. 2, JMF 911/337 (1 Jan 70).

capable, and they rated overall VNAF fighter squadron performance as "excellent." They cautioned, however, that performance might decline as experienced cadres were removed from operational squadrons to form new units.[38]

The performance of the VNAF helicopter squadrons was less impressive. The VNAF had only 3.5 percent of all helicopters in South Vietnam at the beginning of 1970, and only about 74 percent of this capability had been in commission during the final months of 1969. This situation resulted from a shortage of trained maintenance personnel, gunships, and command/control helicopters and from a high accident rate--17.4 percent during 1969 as compared to 13.9 percent in 1968. The weakness of the VNAF helicopter squadrons had resulted in inadequate combat support for ARVN forces and caused the cancellation of or degradation of some ground force operations during 1969.[39]

RVNAF Weaknesses

Although improvement of the RVNAF progressed significantly in 1969, many problems remained. The expansion of forces and turnover of equipment proceeded according to plan, but the areas of training, leadership, and morale still needed much attention. These were not new problems, nor were they ones that could be easily or quickly resolved. The conditions that had contributed to the RVNAF's record of low morale, poorly trained leaders, and limited technical knowledge were deeply entrenched. In spite of sustained efforts to eliminate these weaknesses, they persisted throughout 1969.

A key indicator of the low RVNAF morale was the high desertion rate among the land forces. Desertion levels had risen sharply during the 1968 Tet offensive and reached an all-time peak of 17.2 per 1,000 in October of that year. By the beginning of 1969, however, the rate had dropped to 12.6 per 1,000. The rapid expansion of the RVNAF was a major factor in the high desertion rates, and statistics

38. (S) USMACV SEER Report, 4th Qtr, CY 1969, 30 Mar 70, Pt. I, pp. 3, 21, J-3 Files. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, pp. C(VNAF) 18-20.
39. (C) USMACV SEER Report, 4th Qtr, CY 1969, 30 Mar 70, Pt. II, p. 25, J-3 Files.

showed that a large percentage of the deserters were recruits with less than six months service. Inadequate enforcement of anti-desertion laws and periodic amnesties also encouraged desertion. Other causes included: over-exposure to combat; insufficient leave; low pay and benefits; inadequate training; lack of faith in the government; uncertainties concerning the peace negotiations; and the closeness of family ties within the Vietnamese culture.[40]

In 1969 the Republic of Vietnam, with US encouragement and assistance, implemented a number of programs to reduce desertions. Early in the year the Republic of Vietnam undertook a pilot program in II CTZ to provide RVNAF troops with transportation to and from their homes when on leave. Other efforts encompassed: increased commissary and post exchange facilities and dependent housing; a liberalized leave program; establishment of a finger-printing program for easier identification of deserters; formation of permanent desertion control committees; expansion of political warfare activities at the unit level; expanded psychological operations to educate the people regarding the seriousness of the desertion problem; emphasis on the punishment under the law for harboring deserters; recommendations for legislative action to improve veterans' benefits; and increased decorations and awards.[41]

The RVNAF desertions dropped slightly during 1969 to a year-end rate of approximately 11 per 1,000. Desertions in the land forces were always the highest among the RVNAF services. The rates for the ARVN and VNMC, though fluctuating, declined throughout the first three quarters of 1969, but then turned upward during the last three months of the year. In December 1969, the ARVN rate was 15.9 per 1,000,

40. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, pp. C-5 - C-6. (S-GP 4) COMUSMACV 596 to CJCS, 14 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69. (S-GP 4) Encl 2 to CM-4200-69 to SecDef, 24 May 69, same file, May 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VI-73.

41. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 596 to CJCS, 14 Feb 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 69. (TS-GP 4) COMUSMACV 50351 to CINCPAC, 29 Sep 69, JCS IN 16544. (TS-GP 3) Ann E to JCSM-42-70 to SecDef, 29 Jan 70, Encl to JCS 2472/552-9, 24 Jan 70, pp. E-1 - E-7, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 3A. (Various annexes to JCSM-42-70 considered problems confronting the RVNAF; hereinafter these annexes will be cited as the appropriate annex to JCSM-42-70, 29 Jan 70.)

nearly the same as at the beginning of the year. The VNMC rate at the same time was 23.6, nearly 20 per 1,000 lower than at the beginning of the year, but it rose dramatically again in January 1970. Desertions in the RF and PF declined slightly during the year, and desertion in the VNN and VNAF was not a major problem. Whether the small downturn in the desertion rate during 1969 was the result of the efforts taken to alleviate the problem or the natural consequence of the decreasing level of fighting was open to question, but in any case, desertions remained a major concern for the RVNAF.[42]

The RVNAF also suffered throughout 1969 from a lack of trained leaders. There was a shortage of senior commanders and most commanders were usually below the authorized grades. There was also an imbalance between the officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO) grade structures, resulting from the inability of the RVNAF training and promotion systems to keep pace with the rapid expansion of the forces. Other factors contributing to the leadership problem included the lack of personnel qualified for promotion, high casualty rates among lower ranking officers, unrealistic promotion goals, insufficient use of battlefield promotions, and the practice of using military personnel in civilian agencies. During the year, both COMUSMACV and the Joint General Staff emphasized to the senior RVNAF commanders the importance of merit promotions and training. In addition, the Republic of Vietnam adopted a liberal battlefield promotion policy and a rotation program designed to give officers a variety of experience. But these new procedures were not carried out fully. The RVNAF did increase the total number of officers and NCOs during 1969, and more officers were promoted than in any previous year. Yet officer and NCO goals were not met, and at the close of the year, the quality of leadership still hindered the conduct of the war and the effort to build a self-sufficient RVNAF.[43]

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42. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VI-73. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. VII-30.

43. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VI-76 - VI-78. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 50351 to CINCPAC, 2 Sep 69, JCS IN 16544. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Annex F to JCSM-42-70, 29 Jan 70, pp. F-1 - F-4.

Adequately trained personnel were essential for the improvement of leadership, but the RVNAF was traditionally weak in this area. Consequently, the quality of RVNAF training programs was of great importance in 1969. The Central Training Command supervised the major portion of all training for the RVNAF with the assistance of the COMUSMACV Training Directorate, which administered all of the RVNAF's offshore training programs. Each RVNAF component provided training for its forces similar to that provided to US forces, and the training was conducted at service schools, in-country training centers, and offshore FWMAF installations.

Training for RVNAF ground forces was conducted in three Phases: Phase I, individual training; Phase II, unit training; and Phase III, operational readiness training, which gave instruction to units between operations to maintain or improve unit and individual proficiency. Generally, Phases I and II were implemented as programmed during 1969, but a significant number of ground force units failed to conduct Phase III training during the year. The VNN training was complicated by the language barrier and the shortage of experienced personnel to man the growing inventory of vessels but VNN programs were at 100 percent of capacity at the end of 1969.

Personnel of the VNAF underwent approximately 17 to 24 months of training; pilots received English-language instruction in Vietnam and fixed and rotary wing aircraft instruction in the United States. This was followed by combat-crew training and technical language courses. Specialized instruction was also required for VNAF enlisted maintenance and support personnel. When 1970 began 2,756 VNAF pilots were needed. Only 45 percent of these were available, but because of the long lead-time required for VNAF training, the improvement program for the air forces was not scheduled for completion until 1972.[44]

At the end of 1969, the RVNAF still had major training deficiencies. The Central Training Command was not staffed

44. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VI-81 - VI-82. (TS-GP 3) Ann C to JCSM-42-70, 29 Jan 70, pp. C-5 - C-16. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, pp. C(ARVN-VNMC) -45 - (ARVN-VNMC) -48, (VNN) -5, C(VNAF) -9. (S-GP 4) DJSM 565-69 to ASD(SA), 18 Apr 69, JMF 911/535 (CY 1969).

for effective control, nor did it supervise the specialized schools, which remained under the control of the various technical services. Other problem areas included a lack of standardization in programs, inadequate proficiency testing, inexperienced training personnel, and failure to relate combat experience to the training programs. In addition, many training facilities were inadequate and the VNN had no facility to instruct personnel for depot-level maintenance. Clearly, training was an area of RVNAF improvement that required attention in the coming year.[45]

Another problem confronting the RVNAF was the lack of an adequate logistics system. Although the South Vietnamese armed forces had maintained a logistics organization throughout their existence, they had relied on the United States for supply and maintenance assistance. The improvement and modernization program launched in 1968 had included a logistics portion to achieve a self-supporting armed force in a counterinsurgency role. Under the Nixon Administration, however, the decision to create a South Vietnamese armed force to meet the existing Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army threat necessitated the rapid development of a considerably larger RVNAF logistics system.

In 1969, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Joint General Staff, oversaw all RVNAF logistic matters and also served as Commander of the Central Logistics Command, controlling ARVN logistic and technical services. The ARVN, the VNN, and the VNAF each maintained its own logistics organization, but the ARVN supported the VNMC as well and provided common-item and functional logistical support for the other services, the territorial troops, and selected paramilitary forces.

In order to maintain the expanded RVNAF that would result from the 1969 improvement and modernization programs, the RVNAF, with the assistance of COMUSMACV, promulgated the Master Plan for Logistic Self-Sufficiency. It consisted of a series of plans and programs to identify and find solutions to logistics shortfalls. A RVNAF/MACV Combined Logistics Offensive Plan (CLOP) attempted to deal with short-term problems, while the Country Logistics Improvement Plan

45. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VI-104 - VI-105. (TS-GP 3) Ann C to JCSM-42-70, 29 Jan 70, pp. C-2 - C-3.

(CLIP) treated broad, longer-range logistics problems. The CLIP plan identified 73 specific projects to be completed by the end of FY 1972, including such matters as improvement of air and sealift capabilities. Additional features of the Master Plan for Logistic Self-Sufficiency included the conduct of an Administrative and Direct Support Logistical Company Study to identify measures for improvement of the support for the territorial forces and a study of turnover of ports, bases, and other facilities. Additionally, the RVNAF increased on-th-job training in the logistic area during 1969.[46]

A special effort was made in 1969 to improve the logistical support of the Vietnamese Navy. Previously, most of the VNN's logistics support came from the US Navy, with the ARVN supplying common-item support when possible. The original improvement and modernization plan in 1968 had provided for a self-sufficient VNN logistics capability by mid-1972, but in August 1969, the Joint General Staff and COMUSMACV published a joint Accelerated Turnover Logistics Infrastructure (ACTOVLOG) Plan to make the VNN self-sustaining by June 1971. Under this plan, the United States transfered US Navy logistics facilities to the VNN as the latter became increasingly proficient. Original estimates indicated that the VNN would eventually assume command of approximately 30 bases currently under US command or to be constructed. By October 1969, a VNN Logistics Command had been established, and the VNN had assumed command of 13 bases. But the ambitious goals set for the ACTOVLOG Plan were not fulfilled. At the close of 1969, the VNN logistics system could not support the expanding VNN force structure, and there was reason to believe that the system would be inadequate through June 1971 and only marginally adequate through the following year.[47]

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46. (TS-GP 3) App III to JCSM-522-69 to SecDef, 29 Aug 69, Encl A to JCS 2472/467-4, 19 Aug 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 4. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-593-69 to SecDef, 27 Sep 69, Encl to JCS 2472/497-6, 24 Sep 69, JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) sec 3. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, p. C-16. (S-GP 4) DJSM-949-69 to ASD(I&L), 21 Jun 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 69.

47. (TS-GP 4) App to Memo, SecN to SecDef, "Review of the Vietnamese Navy Improvement and Modernization Program (U)," 6 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/497-9, 7 Oct 69, JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) sec 3. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, pp. xi, C(VNN) -6.

United States officials in both Saigon and Washington were aware of the need to develop an adequate logistics base for the South Vietnamese forces. In July 1969, President Nixon asked about this matter. As relayed to Secretary Laird by Dr. Kissinger, the President wanted to know what more the United States could do to improve the inferior RVNAF logistics. The reply, based on a briefing by the CINCPAC J4, went to Dr. Kissinger on 15 July. Secretary Laird explained that the revision of the improvement and modernization program to create a combat force to meet an enemy threat of the current proportions required much greater logistic support than originally planned.

> We are actively reviewing the adequacy of the system to meet increased requirements. We plan both to improve RVNAF logistic capabilities and to augment these capabilities for the short term with US support where necessary. Our preliminary assessment is that we must significantly increase US logistic support to RVNAF over what is now being provided.

Mr. Laird then went on to describe the current efforts to enhance RVNAF logistics capability.[48]

Even though both the Republic of Vietnam and the United States recognized the RVNAF logistics needs and had instituted efforts to fulfill them, the problems were not susceptible to rapid solution. At the beginning of 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that the RVNAF logistics system could provide only "marginally adequate" support to its forces without US in-country support. In addition, the RVNAF had to rely on the United State in the important specialized areas of sea and airlift, naval and aircraft maintenance, and port operations. Obviously, major improvement was still required to bring the RVNAF logistics organization to full effectiveness.

48. (S-GP 4) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, "South Vietnamese Combat Effectiveness," 26 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/492-2, 30 Jun 69; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Dr. Kissinger, "Vietnamization - Logistic Support," 15 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/492-3, 22 Jul 69; JMF 911/355 (12 Jun 69). (S-GP 4) DJSM-1003-69 to CJCS, 27 Jun 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 69.

Despite the remaining weaknesses of the RVNAF, US officials were pleased with its progress during 1969. The proportion of RVNAF time devoted to combat doubled and operational effectiveness steadily improved. The RVNAF, displaying increased confidence in its own abilities, had improved flexibility in combat operations and had expanded support for pacification. As General William B. Rosson, Deputy COMUSMACV, told the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a year-end assessment:

> RVNAF performance has improved and is continuing to do so. GVN forces have been getting into the war at an increasing pace as indicated by their increased casualties which are consistently higher than U.S. Forces. In three of the past five weeks RVNAF has inflicted more casualties on the enemy than have U.S. forces. Much remains to be done to achieve major increases in effectiveness, but results achieved to date are encouraging.[49]

49. (S-GP 4) Msg, DepCOMUSMACV (MAC 183) to Actg CJCS (Moorer), 5 Jan 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 70.

TABLE V

RVNAF Force Structure
As Approved by the Secretary of Defense
on 12 August 1969

Forces	End FY 1970	End FY 1971 (to continue unchanged through end FY 1972)
RVNAF		
ARVN	387,835	395,799
VNN	31,645	33,122
VNAF	35,786	35,786
VNMC	13,070	13,070
Regional Forces	270,497	275,670
Popular Forces	214,840	239,390
Subtotals	953,673	992,837
Paramilitary		
Civil Irregular Defense Group	24,179	---
Revolutionary Development Cadre	47,200	47,200
*Son Thong RD Cadre	7,300	7,300
Province Reconnaissance Units	6,000	6,000
Armed Propaganda Teams	5,550	5,550
Kit Carson Scouts	2,916	2,916
National Police	87,000	102,000
National Police Field Forces	20,200	20,200
Subtotals	200,345	191,166
Grand Totals	1,154,018	1,184,003

*Previously Troung Son Cadre

(PS-GP 1) Ann to App to JCSM-593-69 to SecDef, 27 Sep 69, Encl to JCS 2472/496-6, 24 Sep 69, JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) sec 3.

TABLE VI

1969 RVNAF Strengths

As of 1 January 1969

Service	Authorized	Assigned
ARVN	374,132	380,270
VNN	19,344	18,882
VNAF	32,587	18,625
VNMC	9,304	9,134
RF	252,927	219,762
PF	178,140	172,536
Total RVNAF	866,434	819,209

Assigned Strengths

Service	31 March 1969	31 June 1969	31 September 1969
ARVN	380,625	392,686	401,595
VNN	22,524	24,635	26,401
VNAF	20,583	24,527	29,385
VNMC	8,716	9,314	10,504
RF	237,814	249,553	254,800
PF	174,367	175,118	206,998
Total RVNAF	844,629	875,833	929,683

As of 31 December 1969

Service	Authorized	Assigned
ARVN	374,132	416,278
VNN	28,700	30,143
VNAF	32,587	36,469
VNMC	10,419	11,528
RF	255,167	260,455
PF	182,725	214,383
Total RVNAF	883,730	969,256

(TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VI-2, VI-52.

Chapter 7

THE DECISION TO INVADE CAMBODIA

Cambodia's Role in the War

Since the beginning of its combat involvement in Vietnam, the United States had faced the problem of cutting off North Vietnamese assistance to the insurgency in the south. Not only did this aid come directly across the Demilitarized Zone from North Vietnam, but it also moved through the mountainous border areas of Laos and Cambodia, the Republic of Vietnam's neighbors on the west. Both of these states, with weak governments and large Communist movements, provided ideal infiltration routes and staging areas for enemy forces in South Vietnam. As described in earlier volumes of this history, Laos presented the more immediate and difficult problem but, increasingly, as the war continued, the enemy relied on Cambodia as a channel to feed manpower and supplies into South Vietnam.

Geographically, Cambodia consists of a large central basin of generally low-lying terrain surrounded by mountain areas. On the east Cambodia and South Vietnam share a 763-mile border, extending from near the South Vietnamese village of Dak To south and southwestward to the Gulf of Siam. On the map this border is a ribbon of twists and turns, marked by oddly shaped projections that have gained descriptive nicknames. (See Map I.) The most important of these, militarily speaking, is formed by the tip of the Cambodian province of Svay Rieng, which thrusts some 40 miles into South Vietnam at the juncture of III and IV CTZs. The apex of this intrusion, known as the "Parrot's Beak," approaches within 30 miles of Saigon; on the northern side of this same projection is an irregular formation, the "Angel's Wing," and on the south another, the "Crow's Nest." Farther north in Kompong Cham Province, two smaller salients known as the "Dog's Head" and the "Fishhook" also push into South Vietnam. The Cambodia-South Vietnam boundary is further complicated by the existence of a number of areas where the exact dividing line between the two states has never been resolved.[1]

1. Donald P. Whitaker et al., Area Handbook for the Khmer Republic (Cambodia) (1973), pp. 4, 15. Locations of the picturesquely named places along the border are shown in maps appearing in (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-31 - C-34, C-36.

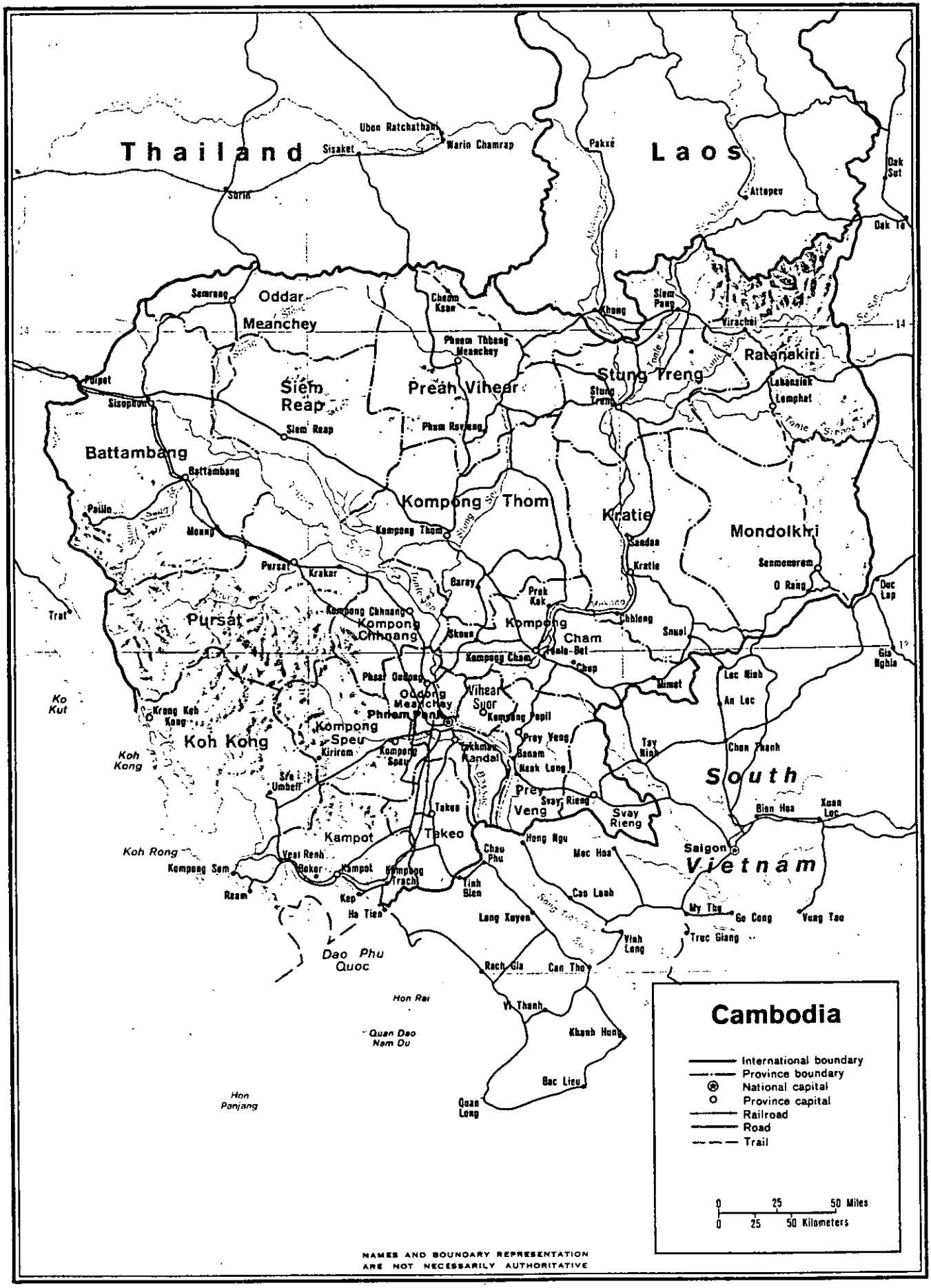
Throughout the 1960s, Cambodia was nominally a kingdom under the rule of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who contented himself with the title of Chief of State. He ruled the Khmers, the inhabitants of Cambodia, with all the accouterments of a modern state, including a constitution and a National Assembly. The constitution specified, however, that all powers emanated from the Chief of State, and the National Assembly, elected by universal suffrage, was only an advisory body until 1970.[2]

Prince Sihanouk viewed the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam in the early 1960s with concern. The Khmers are an ethnically distinct people from their Vietnamese and Thai neighbors, and long-standing animosities existed. The Prince saw in the expanding Vietnamese conflict and the growing US involvement, which had full Thai support, the possibility of Cambodia being caught in a squeeze between its two traditional enemies--Thailand and Vietnam. In an attempt to avoid such an eventuality, he proclaimed a policy of neutrality. As he aptly put it: "When two elephants fight, the wise ant stands to one side to avoid being tromped."[3] But with the adoption of neutrality came a tendency to align with the communist powers; whether from conviction or expediency, or both, Sihanouk began to allow the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces to use Cambodian territory, although he repeatedly denied it in the years 1963 through early 1969.[4]

As Prince Sihanouk assumed his avowedly neutral stance in Southeast Asia, he grew increasingly hostile toward the United States. The first step in the decline in US-Camodian relations occurred in 1962 when the United States angered Sihanouk by refusing his call for an international conference to guarantee Cambodian neutrality. President Kennedy did, however, assure the Prince that the United States would respect Cambodian independence and territorial integrity. In the fall of 1963, Cambodian-US relations deteriorated further as a result of anti-Sihanouk broadcasts

2. Whitacker, Area Handbook (Cambodia), pp. 153-154.
3. Quoted in I.G. Edmonds, The Khmers of Cambodia (1970), p. 148.
4. Donald Kirk, Wider War (1971), pp. 50-61. Edmonds, The Khmers of Cambodia, pp. 148-150.

Map 1


Thailand
Laos
South Vietnam
Cambodia
Oddar Meanchey
Siem Reap
Preah Vihear
Stung Treng
Ratanakiri
Battambang
Kompong Thom
Kratie
Mondolkiri
Pursat
Kompong Chhnang
Kompong Cham
Koh Kong
Kompong Speu
Kampot
Takeo
Prey Veng
Svay Rieng
Saigon
Ubon Ratchathani
Warin Chamrap
Sisaket
Surin
Pakxé
Attopeu
Oak Sut
Oak To
Semrong
Cheom Ksan
Khong
Siem Pang
Virachei
Phnom Thbeng Meanchey
Poipet
Sisophon
Siem Reap
Phum Rovieng
Stung Treng
Lahansiek
Lomphat
Battambang
Paillin
Moung
Kompong Thom
Sandan
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Senmonorom
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Duc Lap
Pursat
Kraker
Baray
Prek Kak
Trat
Kompong Chhnang
Skoun
Chhlong
Snuol
Kompong Cham
Tonle-Bet
Chup
Gia Nghia
Phsar Oudong
Oudong Meanchey
Phnom Penh
Vihear Suor
Kompong Popil
Mimot
Lec Ninh
An Loc
Ko Kut
Krong Koh Kong
Kirirom
Kompong Speu
Takhmau
Kandal
Prey Veng
Banam
Neak Long
Tay Ninh
Chon Thanh
Koh Kong
Sre Umbell
Takeo
Svay Rieng
Bien Hoa
Xuan Loc
Hong Ngu
Mec Hoa
Koh Rong
Kompong Som
Veal Renh
Boker
Kampot
Kompong Trach
Chau Phu
Tinh Bien
Cao Lanh
Ream
Kep
Ha Tien
Long Xuyen
My Tho
Go Cong
Vung Tau
Vinh Long
Truc Giang
Dao Phu Quoc
Rach Gia
Can Tho
Hon Rai
Vi Thanh
Quan Dao Nam Du
Khanh Hung
Bac Lieu
Hon Panjang
Quan Long
International boundary
Province boundary
National capital
Province capital
Railroad
Road
Trail
0 25 50 Miles
0 25 50 Kilometers
NAMES AND BOUNDARY REPRESENTATION ARE NOT NECESSARILY AUTHORITATIVE

from South Vietnam and Thailand that the Prince believed the United States was promoting. He warned the United States that he would seek an accommodation with the Communist bloc and divest himself of Western aid if the propaganda attacks did not cease. Concurrently he launched an economic swing to the left, nationalizing the banks and foreign-controlled import-export companies. In November 1963, he cancelled the US aid program, which had begun in 1955 and amounted to $30 million annually at the time of the termination.[5]

On two occasions in early 1964, South Vietnamese forces shelled Cambodian villages near the SVN border, killing and wounding a number of civilians. The second incident, a ground and air attack on 20 March 1964, included the participation of US advisers. Both South Vietnam and the United States expressed formal regrets, but Prince Sihanouk brought the matter to the attention of the United Nations Security Council, charging repeated acts of aggression against his country. The United States assured the Council of its respect for Cambodian neutrality, but explained that the border was not clearly marked and that there was evidence of Cambodian collusion in providing aid and safe haven to the Viet Cong. The United Nations sent a committee to Cambodia to investigate the "friction" along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border, but this action did not satisfy Prince Sihanouk. Finally, on 3 May 1965, Sihanouk broke diplomatic relations with the United States, citing an unflattering magazine article and other alleged slights to Cambodian "dignity and interests."[6]

While US-Cambodian relations disintegrated, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese activity in Cambodia increased. As early as 1960, an attache report from Saigon had called attention to increased VC strength in southwestern Vietnam resulting from infiltration through Cambodia. By 1964, US officials both in South Vietnam and in Washington began to grow alarmed over the enemy use of Cambodia. Secretary of Defense

5. Jules David, The United States in World Affairs, 1964 (1965), pp. 168-174. For the period 1955-1963, US aid to Cambodia totaled $309.7 million in economic and $83.7 million in direct military assistance.

6. David, The United States in World Affairs, 1964, pp. 169-174. Richard P. Stebbins, The United States in World Affairs, 1965 (1966), pp. 61-62. Dept of State Bulletin, 8 Jun 64, pp. 911-912; 31 May 65, pp. 853-854.

Robert S. McNamara returned from a trip to South Vietnam in March of that year and reported to the President, among other things, that continued US and South Vietnamese respect for Cambodian neutrality was being exploited by the enemy; the Viet Cong was making extensive use of Cambodian territory for sanctuaries and infiltration. On several occasions during 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the removal of restrictions against military action in Cambodia. They wanted authority for both hot pursuit and cross-border operations by the RVNAF in order to pursue and destroy enemy elements fleeing into Cambodia. With the commitment of US ground forces to combat in South Vietnam during 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to press for authorities to deal with the enemy staging and transit areas in Cambodia, but none of their requests was granted.[7]

In 1965, the United States and the Republic of Vietnam initiated MARKET TIME, a maritime blockade of the South Vietnamese coast to prevent sea infiltration, and this blockade became effective during 1966. Then, no longer able to reinforce his troops in III and IV CTZs by sea, the enemy began to move supply shipments through Cambodian ports, principally the town of Kompong Som, which had been renamed Sihanoukville. From there, munitions and other materials were trucked to base areas along the South Vietnam-Cambodia border. This movement across Cambodia occurred with the tacit approval of the Cambodian Government and involved direct cooperation with some individuals in the political hierarchy. The first such shipment through Sihanoukville arrived in October 1966. Within a short time, the new route had become a primary means of supply for enemy forces in the lower half of South Vietnam.[8]

7. See (TS-GP 1) The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, pp. 9-8 - 9-19, 12-43 - 12-46, 24-30 - 24-33.

8. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. C-1.

[redacted]

The movement of major amounts of supplies through Sihanoukville heightened the concern of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and they continued to call for allied action in Cambodia, including psychological and covert operations. In May 1966, the United States undertook to disseminate leaflets from South Vietnam into a limited area of Cambodia along the border, using favorable wind currents. More importantly, in May 1967, the United States initiated a clandestine intelligence collection program in northeastern Cambodia--an action that COMUSMACV and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had urged for nearly a year. This operation, nicknamed DANIEL BOONE, consisted of small teams of indigenous agents led by US Special Forces personnel.[9]

Originally DANIEL BOONE was restricted in area of operation and limited to infiltration on foot, but gradually both the area and scope of the operations expanded. By the end of 1967, DANIEL BOONE was conducted in Cambodia all along the South Vietnam border to a depth of 20 kilometers, helicopter insertion of personnel was permitted, and forward air control (FAC) aircraft were used. After the 1968 Tet offensive, the United States authorized the use of anti-personnel land mines in DANIEL BOONE activities and further enlarged the operating area. In December 1968, a recommendation by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for use of artillery and tactical air in emergency extractions of DANIEL BOONE teams from Cambodia was turned down, but DANIEL BOONE teams were authorized to capture and bring out from Cambodia VC/NVA prisoners. In 1969 the nickname was change to SALEM HOUSE. These operations were still going on at the time of the US invasion of Cambodia; by 30 June 1970, 1,119 DANIEL BOONE-SALEM HOUSE operations had been executed, nearly all of which included US participation.[10]

[redacted]

9. (TS-GP 1) The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, pp. 35-1 - 35-6. (U) DOD Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos, 10 Sep 73, pp. 29-30.

10. (U) DOD Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos, 10 Sep 73, pp. 29-30. (TS-GP 1) CM-3813-68 to DSecDef, 7 Dec 68; (TS-GP 1) Memo, Actg ASD (ISA) to CJCS, "DANIEL BOONE Operations (U)," 24 Dec 68; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia (1 Dec 68-31 Dec 69).

The conduct of these operations did not stem enemy use and transit of the Cambodian border areas. By the end of 1968, US intelligence had identified at least 14 base areas in Cambodia or astride the border, nine of which were adjacent to III CTZ.[11]

In the last months of 1968, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the urging of both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, suggested military action to deal with the threat arising from the enemy base areas in Cambodia. In late September and again in mid-December, they requested authority to pursue enemy forces into specified sections of Cambodia. "The sanctuary afforded the enemy in Cambodia has cost the United States many lives," they told the Secretary of Defense, and has "provided the enemy with the capability of reconstituting his forces after defeat thereby enabling him to continue his offensive campaign almost indefinitely." Before acting on these recommendations, Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford wanted a JCS assessment of the military effects and risks of such operations, and this study had not been finished when the Johnson Administration left office in January 1969.[12]

The Nixon Administration Looks at Cambodia; MENU Operations

Immediately upon assuming office, President Nixon began to consider both military and diplomatic initiatives that might be applied to the Cambodian problem. On the day after his inauguration, 21 January 1969, the President requested an assessment of the "feasibility and utility" of a quarantine of Cambodia to prevent the entry of supplies and

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11. COMUSMACV defined a base area (BA) as "a section of terrain which contained installations, defensive positions, or other facilities used by the enemy to support control elements and to conduct training, staging, logistics, or combat operations. It met the criteria of a small war zone and was similarly organized, but of lesser importance." (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1968, pp. 96-102.

12. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-588-68 to SecDef, 19 Sep 68, Encl to JCS 2366/16, 16 Sep 68, JMF 880/320 (16 Sep 68) sec 1. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-742-68 to SecDef, 13 Dec 68, App to JCS 2472/399, 11 Dec 68; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Operations in Cambodia and Air and Naval Blockage of North Vietnam," 21 Dec 68, Att to JCS 2472/399-1, 23 Dec 68; JMF 880/520 (11 Dec 68) sec 1.

equipment destined for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army troops in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff received the responsibility for this project, and in his direction to the Joint Staff for the study, General Wheeler enlarged on the President's request. In addition to a quarantine, he instructed the Joint Staff to "contemplate" a wide range of actions in Cambodia that could be applied in concert or incrementally, "subject to their usefulness and political acceptability." Such actions should include naval blockage of seaports, blockage of the Mekong River, and other measures to end external support to the enemy operating from Cambodian territory.[13]

The Joint Staff study went through several revisions and was finally approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 February 1969. Based on this study, they recommended to the Secretary of Defense continuation of interdiction operations against enemy LOCs in Laos, attempts to secure Prince Sihanouk's support or acquiescence in allied military actions against enemy sanctuaries and supply lines in and through Cambodia, and "short-term" air and ground raids against clearly identified enemy targets in sparsely populated border areas of Cambodia and in Southern Laos. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not propose an air or sea quarantine at that time; rather they favored retention of this option for possible future use. On 18 March 1969, Secretary Laird notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he had submitted their proposals to the President, but with the recommendation that Mr. Nixon defer any action pending National Security Council consideration.[14]

Meanwhile, the US military commanders in South Vietnam were becoming increasingly alarmed over the enemy buildup

13. The President's directive is referred to in (TS-GP 1) Draft memo for Pres, Att to JCSM-114-69 to SecDef, 27 Feb 69, Encl to JCS 2366/20-4, 24 Feb 69, JMF 880/432 (22 Jan 69) sec 2. (TS-GP 1) CM-3879-69 to DJS, 22 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2366/20, 22 Jan 69, same file, sec 1.

14. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2366/20-1, 3 Feb 69; JCS 2366/20-2, 11 Feb 69; JCS 2366/20-3, 17 Feb 69; JMF 880/432 (22 Jan 69) sec 2. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-114-69 to SecDef, 27 Feb 69, Encl to JCS 2366/20-4, 24 Feb 69, same file. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Quarantine of Cambodia (∅)," 18 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/399-6, 19 Mar 69, JMF 880/520 (11 Dec 68) sec 2.

in the border areas of Cambodia adjacent to South Vietnam. These enemy sanctuaries, the commanders believed, threatened US forces and operations in III and IV CTZs. In early February 1969, intelligence indicated the presence of the principal enemy command and control facility for the lower half of South Vietnam, the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), just across the border in Cambodia, and COMUSMACV asked authority to strike the area with B-52s. The Joint Chiefs of Staff presented this request to the Secretary of Defense and the President on 11 February 1969, and after over a month's consideration the President approved. General Wheeler passed the authority to COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and CINCSAC on 17 March, and the operations began the following day under the code word designation MENU.[15]

In view of Cambodia's official neutrality, and other considerations, President Nixon directed that all information on MENU be closely held. Knowledge of the operation was limited to the individuals essential to its successful execution, and a procedure was carefully devised to conceal the bombing. General Abrams submitted all MENU strike requests, by special security communication channels, through CINCPAC to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who obtained the approval of the Secretary of Defense. Simultaneously, to account for the resources involved, COMUSMACV also presented a routine request for a B-52 strike on a target in South Vietnam as cover for the MENU strike. Both strikes were approved, but normally only the MENU one was carried out. The sorties were conducted at night and directed by ground control radar. All strikes were flown so that the aircraft passed over or near the targets in South Vietnam, but released their bombs on the MENU targets in Cambodia. In preparation for the MENU missions, the B-52 crews were briefed on the South Vietnam targets and received instructions to avoid Cambodia. Only pilots and navigators were specially instructed to react to all directions for bomb release from ground control sites; the remaining crew members

15. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 1782 to CJCS, 9 Feb 69; (TS) Msg, Actg CJCS (McConnell) 1836 to COMUSMACV, 12 Feb 69; (TS-GP 1) Msgs, CJCS 3287 and 3298 to COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and CINCSAC, 16 and 17 Mar 69; OCJCS File Operation BREAKFAST. Hearings, Bombing in Cambodia, S. Com on Armed Services, 93d Cong, 1st sess, pp. 131-132. (U) DOD Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos, 10 Sep 73, pp. 5-18 (hereafter cited as DOD Report on Selected Operations).

were unaware that their aircraft was being guided beyond the designated target in South Vietnam to strike another in Cambodia.[16]

On the return of aircraft, routine reports were filed as though the strikes had been carried out on the Vietnamese targets; separate reports, on a strict "need-to-know" basis, were submitted by special channel for the MENU strikes. As a consequence, the MENU sorties were included in overall Southeast Asia statistical totals, but were not there identified with Cambodia. The precautions to prevent disclosure of MENU proved quite successful. In fact, while the MENU attacks were taking place, only a few US officials were aware of the B-52 operations in Cambodia, and the US public had no knowledge of the attacks at all. It was only in the summer of 1973 that a congressional investigation revealed the existence and the extent of the MENU operation, and the bombings became the subject of public controversy.[17]

During the MENU operation, US B-52s struck six enemy base areas along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border. These areas were named BREAKFAST, DINNER, DESSERT, SNACK, SUPPER, and LUNCH. The MENU strikes continued for fourteen months, through 26 May 1970. A total of 3,875 sorties were flown, expending 180,823 tons of munitions as follows:

Base Area	Sorties	Tons
350 (DESSERT)	706	20,157
351 (SNACK)	885	25,336
352 (DINNER)	817	23,391
353 (BREAKFAST)	228	6,529
609 (LUNCH)	992	26,630
740 (SUPPER)	247	6,780
Totals	3,875	108,823[18]

16. (U) DOD Report on Selected Operations, pp. 5-12. Both former CJCS General Earle G. Wheeler and former SecDef Melvin R. Laird confirmed in the summer of 1973 that President Nixon ordered the treatment of MENU operations "with greatest secrecy." NY Times, 31 Jul 73, 1; 10 Aug 73, 1.

17. (U) DOD Report on Selected Operations, pp. 5-14. For a brief description of the controversy over and the subsequent explanation for MENU in 1973, see the Appendix at the conclusion of this chapter.

18. (U) DOD Report on Selected Operations, pp. 14-15.

Shortly after the beginning of the MENU bombing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff completed and provided the Secretary of Defense on 9 April 1969 an assessment of the advantages and risks associated with military operations against enemy forces in Cambodia. This study responded to Secretary Clifford's request in late December 1968. The Joint Chiefs of Staff repeated their long-held conviction that use of Cambodia gave the enemy a significant advantage in staging and conducting operations in South Vietnam. The enemy was increasing, rather than decreasing, his activities in Cambodia, and they urged consideration of either pursuit or pre-emptive operations against Cambodian sanctuaries. Such operations should reduce the overall threat to friendly forces and could be conducted with "little relative risk" to friendly forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff preferred pre-emptive operations of a week's duration against enemy base areas in Cambodia. In addition, they recommended: standing authority for COMUSMACV to conduct pursuit operations into Cambodia to a depth of 10 kilometers, including the use of B-52 aircraft as approved on a case-by-case basis; "on call" employment of artillery and air strikes against enemy forces in the border areas of Cambodia; and increased intelligence operations in Cambodia, which would involve US reconnaissance patrols and aircraft, plus the use of tactical air and artillery to support emergency extraction of ground reconnaissance teams. They reiterated the stand taken in their Cambodian quarantine study of 27 February 1969, in favor of political initiatives to gain Prince Sihanouk's support or acquiescence in allied military operations in Cambodia.[19]

No action was taken on the JCS recommendations. On 8 April 1969, Dr. Kissinger had notified Secretary Laird that the President had reviewed the JCS February study on Cambodia and desired to hold this matter "in abeyance for the time being." In light of that action, Mr. Laird advised Dr. Kissinger and the President of the existence of the later JCS report on Cambodia but did not forward it. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were prepared, he told Dr. Kissinger, to present their views whenever desired.[20]

19. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-207-69 to SecDef, 9 Apr 69, Encl to JCS 2472/399-7, 27 Mar 69, JMF 880/520 (11 Dec 68) sec 2.

20. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, "Quarantine of Cambodia," 8 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/399-8, 9 Apr 69; (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Cambodia," 15 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/399-9, 18 Apr 69, same file.

Restoration of Diplomatic Relations with Cambodia

When President Nixon asked about military actions in Cambodia on his entry into office, he also directed the Department of State to prepare a study on a possible resumption of diplomatic relations with Cambodia. There had been a number of indications that Prince Sihanouk was growing alarmed at the increasing Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army presence in his country and might welcome renewed diplomatic ties with the United States. In late 1967, the Prince had entertained Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy in Phnom Penh. While Mrs. Kennedy was in Cambodia ostensibly to visit the ruins of Angkor Wat, there was speculation that the US Department of State had encouraged the visit to open a dialogue with Sihanouk. Shortly thereafter, in January 1968, the Prince received the US Ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, to discuss means for easing US-Cambodian tensions. Prince Sihanouk and Ambassador Bowles agreed to seek a strengthening of the international control commission to police Cambodia's borders, and the United States promised to provide the Prince information on Viet Cong and North Vietnamese infiltration of Cambodian territory. In addition, Ambassador Bowles pledged that the United States would not adopt a policy of hot pursuit into Cambodia. But the exchange produced no agreement to restore diplomatic relations, nor did it bring any decline in enemy use of the Cambodian sanctuaries.[21]

Following the Bowles visit to Phnom Penh, signs continued that Sihanouk wanted better relations with the United States. During 1968, he dropped hints of his interest in conversations with French, Australian, Indonesian, and Philippine officials. In addition he released 12 US soldiers held in Cambodia and sent a diplomat to Washington to assist the French Ambassador in his task as custodian of the Cambodian Embassy in the US capital. Moreover, the Prince commented publicly on the usefulness of the US presence in Southeast Asia as a counterbalance to Chinese ambitions, and he was somewhat restrained in his reaction to instances of border violation.[22]

21. (C) Dept of State Memo, Head to Bundy, 28 Jan 69, Att to Encl to JCS 2366/21, 6 Feb 69, JMF 880/540 (31 Jan 69). Kirk, Wider War, pp. 64-65. NY Times, 11 Jan 68, 1; 13 Jan 68, 3.

22. (C) Dept of State Memo, Head to Bundy, 28 Jan 69; Dept of State, Draft Memo for Pres, "Diplomatic Course of Action with Respect to Cambodia," n.d., Att to Encl to JCS 2366/21, 21 Feb 69, JMF 880/540 (31 Jan 69).

The Department of State prepared the requested study and presented it to the Department of Defense for comment before submission to the President. The Department of State believed that the recent signals from Prince Sihanouk, even though interspersed with contrary indications and harsh denunciations, did show a desire for improved relations with the United States. But the Department of State did not interpret the Prince's actions as an indication that he had now decided the United States was going to win in Vietnam. Rather he seemed merely to be hedging his bets. The Department of State also observed that enemy use of Cambodia had increased and that even the fullest resumption of ties would not change the military situation or lessen Sihanouk's complicity in the movement of enemy supplies through Cambodia. In fact, such a resumption might curtail any expansion of US operations along the Cambodian border. Nonetheless, in overall judgement, the Department of State believed that it was to the advantage of the United States to restore relations with Cambodia and recommended that the President proceed gradually toward a renewal of diplomatic ties.[23]

The Director of the Joint Staff, Vice Admiral Nels C. Johnson, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Mr. Paul Warnke, commented jointly on the Department of State study. They argued that a prompt restoration of relations, without significant concessions by Cambodia, could be interpreted as a validation of Sihanouk's policies, which had facilitated the "permissive and uninhibited" enemy use of Cambodian territory. They believed that the course proposed by the Department of State would hinder the "minimal" US operations conducted in Cambodia and might even require reduction of these activities. Admiral Johnson and Mr. Warnke recommended consideration of a full range of actions before making any decision that could impose constraints on the operations designed to protect US forces in South Vietnam. Specifically, they suggested continuation of diplomatic and military initiatives to persuade Cambodia to cease its

23. (TS) Dept of State, Draft Memo for Pres, "Diplomatic Course of Action with Respect to Cambodia," n.d., Att to Encl to JCS 2366/21, 6 Feb 69, same file.

support of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, increased military operations in Cambodia, and establishment of a neutral status for Cambodia.[24]

President Nixon accepted the Department of State position and decided to proceed with gradual resumption of diplomatic relations with Cambodia, stating that this decision could be reversed at any stage. As a first step, President Nixon addressed a letter to Prince Sihanouk on 14 February 1969, assuring the Prince of his desire for "a genuine and lasting improvement" in US-Cambodian relations. The President also expressed belief that every effort must be made to confine the conflict in Southeast Asia to South Vietnam and to find "an honorable peace" there. But, even before peace was restored, the President hoped solutions could be found to the issue dividing Cambodia and the United States. Prince Sihanouk acknowledged President Nixon's letter and promised "whole-hearted" cooperation.[25]

Meantime, Cambodia and the United States proceeded cautiously toward a restoration of diplomatic relations. President Nixon requested and Prince Sihanouk granted on 12 March the release of four US pilots being held in Cambodia. On 28 March, after four years of denials, Prince Sihanouk acknowledged to newsmen that the Viet Cong and

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24. (TS-GP 1) Joint DJS-ASD(ISA) Memo, "Diplomatic Course of Action with Respect to Cambodia," 1 Feb 69, Encl to JCS 2366/21, 6 Feb 69, same file.

25. (S) Msgs, State 24758 and 24759 to Saigon et al., 15 Feb 69, JCS IN 93924 and 94090. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 29566 to London, 26 Feb 69, JCS IN 24075. (This msg relayed the text of the Sihanouk reply to the SecState, who was in Europe.)

Within the Joint Staff there was continuing unease over the decision to seek renewed relations with Cambodia. On 4 March 1969 the Director recommended that General Wheeler express concern to the Secretaries of Defense and State that the President's recent action indicated an insufficient regard for its military implications. General Wheeler apparently did not agree; at any rate, he did not formally bring the matter to Secretary Laird's attention. (TS-GP 3) DJSM-350-69 to CJCS, 4 Mar 69, JMF 880/540 (31 Jan 69). Index sheets in OCJCS indicate that the draft memo attached to DJSM-350-69 was not sent and that the DJSM was returned to the originator.

North Vietnamese were increasingly infiltrating Cambodian territory. In mid-April the United States pledged to recognize and respect Cambodian "sovereignty, independence, neutrality, and territory," and Prince Sihanouk responded that he was ready to begin talks on a restoration of relations.[26]

The talks occurred and produced an agreement. On 10 June, Prince Sihanouk announced that he would reestablish diplomatic relations with the United States, and the Department of State in Washington confirmed the agreement "in principle," pending the resolution of necessary administrative details. Subsequently, on 2 July 1969, Secretary Rogers announced that the two countries would shortly exchange chargés d'affaires. The United States named Lloyd M. Rives as its Chargé d'Affaires ad interim on 21 July, and Mr. Rives arrived in Phnom Penh on 15 August. The Cambodian Chargé, Thay Sok, presented his note of accreditation to Secretary Rogers on 29 August 1969, thereby ending a five-year lapse in diplomatic relations between the United States and Cambodia.[27]

While these events were approaching their culmination, the commanders in the field and the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to complain of enemy activity in Cambodia and to urge action against the Cambodian sanctuaries. On 6 June 1969, General Wheeler requested Secretary Laird's approval of a COMUSMACV proposal to use US-led exploitation forces of platoon size, supported by tactical air and artillery, in the SALEM HOUSE area of Cambodia. Two weeks later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that a 1957 US-Cambodian mapping agreement, which had continued despite the break in relations between the two countries, obligated the United States to provide Cambodia 161 additional maps. The Joint Chiefs of Staff urged that these maps not be released since many of them covered areas of Cambodia occupied by the Communists and release to the Cambodian Government could ultimately put the maps in the hands of the enemy. Neither JCS request was approved; both

26. NY Times, 13 Mar 69, 14; 29 Mar 69, 6; 13 Apr 69, 2; 17 Apr 69, 1.

27. NY Times, 11 Jun 69, 3; 12 Jun 69, 9; 16 Aug 69, 12. Dept of State Bulletin, 21 Jul 69, p. 41; 11 Aug 69, p. 115; 22 Sep 69, p. 261.

the Secretary of Defense and the Department of State found such actions unwise at a time when the United States and Cambodia were on the verge of restoring diplomatic relations.[28]

Several weeks later, on 31 July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again complained of enemy activity in Cambodia as well as Cambodian complicity in this activity. They suggested to the Secretary of Defense that the recently announced renewal of relations with Cambodia be put to "advantageous use" by undertaking diplomatic initiatives designed to reduce or end Cambodian support of the enemy. But, again, no action was taken on the JCS proposal.[29]

On 12 August 1969, Prince Sihanouk appointed a new government to solve growing domestic problems in the country. He named a leading conservative, General Lon Nol, as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense--positions that Lon Nol had held in previous governments. Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak, a cousin and traditional rival of Sihanouk, became Deputy Prime Minister. Prince Sihanouk, however, retained control over foreign affairs.[30]

The most serious problem confronting the new government was the state of Cambodia's economy. Prince Sihanouk's cancellation of US aid in 1963, together with his policy of nationalization, had wrought havoc. Lack of incentive had slowed production and resulted in a gross national product that rose by only ten percent during the years 1963-1968.

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28. (TS-GP 3) CM-4304-69 to SecDef, 6 Jun 69; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Additional Authority for SALEM HOUSE," 9 Jul 69, JMF 880/320 (6 Jun 69). (S-GP 3) JCSM-380-69 to SecDef, 18 Jun 69, Encl A to JCS 2366/24, 10 Jun 69; (S-GP 30 Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "Large-Scale US Topographic Maps of Cambodia," 7 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2366/24-1, 9 Jul 69; JMF 880/265 (10 Jun 69).

29. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-473-69 to SecDef, 31 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2366/25, 5 Aug 69, JMF 880/432 (30 Jul 69). DSecDef informed CJCS on 25 Aug 69 that he wanted to secure DCI's comments on the JCS proposal because of "heavy" intelligence implications; (TS-GP 1) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, 25 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2366/25-1, 26 Aug 69, same file. Available records reveal no further action.

30. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. C-5. Kirk, Wider War, pp. 83-84.

In addition, exports had dropped substantially, severely reducing the foreign exchange earnings that might have financed needed industrial development. The primary factor here was a decline in rice exports. Rice was by far the most important item in Cambodia's export trade, but during the period 1964-1968 rice shipments from Cambodia fell by more than 50 percent. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army presence in Cambodia was largely responsible for this decrease. The Communist forces purchased rice in Cambodia at the world price, well above the price fixed by the Cambodian Government, and it was estimated that Cambodian merchants smuggled at least 100,000 tons of rice a year to the Vietnamese Communist troops. This black market sale of rice robbed the Government of both tax money and profits from international trade and, in turn, hindered Sihanouk's policies of nationalization and socialism.[31]

General Lon Nol and Sirik Matak launched an immediate program of economic reforms and a policy of denationalization. Prince Sihanouk accepted these new policies at first, but began to oppose his new government in October. To the disagreement on economic policy was added a clash over the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese presence in Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk viewed this as a foreign policy matter and hence under his purview; Lon Nol and Sirik Matak considered it a domestic problem and their responsibility. After several unsuccessful maneuvers in late 1969 to remove Lon Nol and Sirki Matak, Prince Sihanouk left Cambodia in early January 1970 for a visit to France.[32]

The Situation in 1970

The Prince's departure brought no lessening of enemy activity in Cambodia. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese continued to use Cambodia in early 1970 to infiltrate men and supplies into III and IV CTZs, and the increasing effectiveness of allied operations in South Vietnam caused the enemy to place even greater reliance on the Cambodian sanctuaries. The enemy base areas grew to be large, permanently garrisoned enclaves over which the Cambodian Government had little or no control. In addition, the Viet Cong

31. Kirk, Wider War, pp. 81-83. NY Times, 8 Aug 69, 10.
32. Kirk, Wider War, pp. 83-88. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-5 - C-6.

and North Vietnamese were directly aiding the indigenous Cambodian Communists, the Khmer Rouges, and the internal insurgency was growing in size and seriousness.[33]

During the first two months of 1970, CINCPAC continued to warn the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the danger emanating from Cambodia. In early January he cited recently captured enemy documents, indicating plans to infiltrate a NVA regiment from Cambodia into IV CTZ, and he recommended a diplomatic protest to the Cambodian Government.[34]

A month later, on 3 February, CINCPAC reported substantial movement of supplies through Sihanoukville destined for the enemy, abetted by Cambodian officials. Since political pressure did not work, and since military operations in Cambodia appeared to be ruled out, Admiral McCain suggested covert operations and provided a plan. Nine days later, on 12 February 1970, he called for a joint review with the Department of State of his suggestion for covert operations, as well as possible overt military and political actions. These actions were in order, he believed, since US policy no longer appeared predicated primarily upon a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. The United States was now relying on Vietnamization to achieve its objectives, but the "present permissive policy" toward Cambodia was seriously endangering Vietnamization. On 4 March 1970, CINCPAC again recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a program of covert actions against the enemy supply system in Cambodia, together with diplomatic efforts to attain Cambodian cooperation in elimination of the enemy sanctuaries.[35]

No action resulted from CINCPAC's proposals. Basing his action on the January request, General Wheeler asked the Secretary of Defense to pursue with the Department of State a diplomatic protest to the Cambodian Government over alleged support of the enemy, but no further action was taken. In February, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, apprised the Director of Central Intelligence of CINCPAC's suggestion for covert

33. (S-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 2439 to CJCS, and CINCPAC, 22 Feb 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70.
34. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 042258Z Jan 70, same file.
35. (S-GP 3) Msgs, CINCPAC to CJCS, 030350Z Feb 70 and 040428Z Mar 70; (TS) Ltr, CINCPAC to CJCS, 12 Feb 70; same file.

actions in Cambodia, but Mr. Helms preferred to await a political, economic, and diplomatic assessment of Cambodia then under way before advocating a new program. Subsequently, a CIA study in early March estimated that no more than half of minimum enemy resupply requirements in southern II and III, and IV CTZs came through Cambodia during 1968 and 1969.[36]

In late February, General Abrams provided the Joint Chiefs of Staff a detailed assessment of the Cambodian situation. Whereas the previous Cambodian policy of complicity was "seemingly" based on the assumption that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese would triumph in Vietnam, General Abrams believed that the Cambodians now saw the situation differently. The Communists were no longer winning and a much longer struggle was in prospect. Additionally, the expansion of Viet Cong and North Vietnam Army control of Cambodian territory, their growing assistance to the Khmer Rouges, and their harassment of the local Cambodian population were all putting pressure on the Cambodian Government to act. Consequently, it appeared that the Government was attempting to restrict enemy activities in its territory. The deciding factor, General Abrams concluded, would be the progress of the war in Vietnam. Continued Allied success might bring the Cambodian Government to a definite break with the Communists.[37]

General Abrams wanted to be prepared if such a change in Cambodian Government policy occurred. In Janury 1970 he had set his staff the task of planning "relatively modest (regimental-size)" ARVN cross-border operations into Cambodia with US support. In February, he removed the size restraints while specifying that the forces involved were to be "predominantly" Vietnamese. This planning remained, however, strictly a US activity with no RVNAF participation.[38]

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36. (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-4816-70 to SecDef, 13 Jan 70; (~~TS~~) CM-4906-70 to DCI, 14 Feb 70; (~~TS~~) Memo, DCI to CNO (in reply to CM-4906), "Cambodian Aid to the VC/NVA," 27 Feb 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70. The March CIA study is not available, but it was briefly summarized in (S) Reg. of Personnel Handling of Classified Doc., 6 Mar 70, Att to (~~S~~) Memo to CNO, 3 Mar 70, same file.

37. (~~S~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 2439 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 22 Feb 70, same file.

38. (~~S~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. C-32.

The Ouster of Prince Sihanouk

Meanwhile, events in Phnom Penh had been building toward a climax. With the departure of Sihanouk for France, Lon Nol and Sirik Matak proceeded with economic reforms. In February they gained approval in the National Assembly for a relaxation of the government's monopoly on import and export of certain goods, permitting greater scope to private enterprise. On 24 February, Lon Nol and Sirik Matak announced a currency reform and recalled all Cambodian riel notes in exchange for new. This move was designed to deprive the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army troops of the use of large sums of both real and counterfeit currency, accumulated to pay for rice and the shipment of supplies to their border sanctuaries.[39]

On 8 March, demonstrations against the large Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces in Cambodia broke out in five towns of the border province of Svay Rieng. The demonstrations spread to Phnom Penh where mobs, with apparent government acquiescence, sacked the embassies of North Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (Viet Cong) on 11 March. The following day, Lon Nol expressed official regrets to the Viet Cong and to North Vietnam in a one-sentence statement. This terse apology was accompanied by cancellation of a trade treaty with the Viet Cong and a demand for the removal of all VC/NVA forces from Cambodia within three days. (This demand was somewhat unrealistic, since it would have been physically impossible for the estimated 40,000 enemy personnel in Cambodia at that time to leave so quickly.)[40]

At the same time, Lon Nol and Sirik Matak wrote to Sihanouk in France, seeking authority to increase the Cambodian armed forces to 100,000 men. Without waiting for a reply, however, the Cambodian National Assembly met in secret session on 18 March and by a vote of 92-0 removed Prince Sihanouk as Chief of State. The Assembly replaced the Prince with its Chairman, Cheng Heng, though he would be a figurehead only. Lon Nol and Sirik Matak took over actual control of the government.[41]

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39. Kirk, Wider War, pp. 88-90.
40. Ibid., pp. 91-94. NY Times, 11 Mar 70, 1; 14 Mar 70, 1. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. C-7.
41. Kirk, Wider War, pp. 93-102. NY Times, 19 Mar 70, 1.

Subsequently, Cambodian army units moved into positions along the South Vietnam border. No significant clashes with the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese occurred, but their governing authorities suspended diplomatic relations with Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk, who was in Moscow at the time of his removal as Chief of State, traveled to Peking. Here, on 23 March, he broadcast a call to arms against Lon Nol, rejecting any thought of reconciliation with the new regime in Phnom Penh. Later, following the US invasion, a specially convened Cambodian tribunal found Sihanouk guilty of treason and corruption on 5 July and sentenced him to death in absentia. On 9 October 1970 the National Assembly by unanimous vote proclaimed Cambodia a republic.[42]

The United States Considers Action in Cambodia

The removal of Prince Sihanouk and the takeover of the Cambodian Government by pro-Western leaders completely changed the US position with respect to that Southeast Asian nation, and US officials began a reassessment of the situation. On 20 March, General Wheeler advised CINCPAC of the many questions being raised in Washington about possible actions in Cambodia and asked for Admiral McCain's views. The Admiral replied the next day that recent events in Cambodia did, indeed, present unique opportunities that might not arise again. He believed that actions should be taken to preclude possible enemy initiatives and recommended an immediate US offer to provide the Cambodian Government with advice, intelligence, and operational support. Specifically, he suggested furnishing tactical intelligence to the Cambodian Armed Forces (Forces Armees Nationales Khmeres, or FANK[43]), coordinating allied operations on the South Vietnam side of the border with FANK operations in Cambodia. Other possibilities for US action included provision of tactical air and artillery support for FANK operations and military assistance to improve the Cambodian forces.[44]

42. Kirk, Wider War, p. 112. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. C-8. William P. Lineberry, The United States in World Affairs, 1970 (1972), p. 142.

43. Until shortly after the removal of Prince Sihanouk, the Cambodian forces were known as the Forces Armees Royales Khmeres (FARK), but they will be referred to throughout this chapter as FANK.

44. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 3958 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 70; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 212342Z Mar 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70.

A week later, on 28 March 1970, CINCPAC elaborated on his ideas regarding Cambodia. Regardless of political developments in Phnom Penh, he believed that the United States should take action against the Cambodian sanctuaries, since they posed a real threat to Vietnamization. He requested greatly expanded authority for COMUSMACV cross-border operations, including immediate pursuit, small spoiling attacks, on-call air and artillery strikes, and expansion of both SALEM HOUSE and leaflet drop operations.[45]

The President, too, was concerned about the situation in Cambodia and requested a plan for ground actions against the enemy sanctuaries along the South Vietnam-Cambodia border. This plan, to be considered for execution in the event the Communists attacked Phnom Penh, would make provision for the employment of either US or RVN troops alone or a combination of both. Secretary Laird assigned this task to the Joint Chiefs of Staff who, in turn, delegated the responsibility for preparation of the plan to COMUSMACV on 25 March.[46]

The MACV staff had already been planning for such eventualities in Cambodia, and General Rosson, Deputy COMUSMACV, submitted the requested plan the next day. He listed five enemy base areas for possible attack: Base Area 704 below the Parrot's Beak near Chau Doc Province in South Vietnam, which was a primary staging area for units entering IV CTZ; Base Area 706 in the Angel's Wing; Base Area 352 in the Fishhook, the suspected location of COSVN as well as a significant enemy staging area for forces operating in Long Binh Province of South Vietnam; Base Area 609 near Kontum Province; and Base Area 351 just above the Fishhook. The MACV plan assumed the removal of current restrictions on the use of B-52 and US tactical air in Cambodia, appropriate changes in the rules of engagement, and coordiantion and cooperation between FANK and US/RVN forces. The plan outlined in broad terms the forces needed under vaying conditions, including the mix between South Vietnamese and

45. (~~TS~~) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 280247Z Mar 70, same file.
46. (~~TS~~) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Ground Strikes Against Base Camps in Cambodia," 25 Mar 70, JMF 880 (25 Mar 70). (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 4182 to COMUSMACV, 25 Mar 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes AGainst Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

US troops, to attack several targets successfully. Reaction time would vay depending on the amount of detailed preplanning, but General Rosson estimated that three to four days would be needed once authority was received for combined planning with the Republic of Vietnam and for coordination with the FANK.[47]

When given this plan on 26 March, the Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for more information on the size of the force to be employed, the cost and budget implications, the extent of US involvement, the duration of the operations, and the amount of combined planning required. He also inquired about the impact on other allied operations in South Vietnam and on the Vietnamization program. On the same day, Dr. Kissinger relayed to the Secretary of Defense President Nixon's direction for the preparation by 3 April of a combined plan for operations against enemy base areas in Cambodia. The President wanted plans for two options: an attack on Base Area 352 in the Fishhook against the COSVN Headquarters as first priority; an attack on Base Areas 704 and 367/706 in the Parrot's Beak, simultaneously or nearly so, as second priority.[48]

General Wheeler transmitted this request to General Abrams, authorizing him to plan for combined forces in both options. General Abrams was to conduct detailed planning with appropriate individuals on the RVNAF Joint General Staff, but on a "close hold" basis. General Wheeler repeated Secretary Laird's questions about the detailed planning, realizing that such information went far beyond that normally required to support recommendations for contingency operations. General Wheeler also directed COMUSMACV to prepare "an estimate of the success we might hope to achieve in relieving the communist pressure on Phnom Penh and a firm recommendation regarding implementation."[49]

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47. (TS) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV (MAC 3999) to CJCS, 26 Mar 70, JMF 880 (25 Mar 70).

48. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Contingency Plan for Attacks on North Vietnamese/VC Cambodian Sanctuaries," 26 Mar 70; (TS) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, "Operation Against Enemy Base Camps in Cambodia, 26 Mar 70; same file.

49. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 4213 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 26 Mar 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

The Department of State was not yet aware of the military planning for possible action in Cambodia, and this situation raised a problem for General Abrams, who worked closely with Ambassador Bunker. On 27 March, General Wheeler authorized General Abrams to take the Ambassador into his confidence after impressing upon him the need for absolute secrecy. "You can assure him," General Wheeler added, "that Secretary Rogers would be informed at an appropriate time before implementation is directed." General Abrams immediately advised the Ambassador of the planning, the combined aspects of which were already under discussion with General Vien.[50]

On 30 March, COMUSMACV submitted his new plan. He used the same assumptions as in the 26 March version. The first option, the attack on Base Area 352, offered potential for destruction of the major enemy command and control headquarters with little danger of non-combatant casualties, but risked high US/RVNAF losses. The second option, in the Parrot's Beak region (Base Areas 367/706), would give greater RVNAF participation and visibility, would be of shorter duration (14 days as compared with 28 days for the first option), and should result in fewer US/RVNAF losses than the first option, though higher non-combatant casualties might occur. General Abrams believed that either operation would be successful, but he recommended the first since it would result in fewer civilian casualties. Execution should be in April, he said, to take advantage of weather conditions.[51]

General Wheeler forwarded the plan immediately to the Secretary of Defense in order that it might be sent at once to the White House. The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the plan and provided Secretary Laird their comments on 3 April. They found the principal risk of the plan to be the possibility that it might provoke enemy counteraction in the form of a large attack in I CTZ or a general but less intense attack against the South Vietnamese population. Nonetheless, the chances of success outweighed the risks, they believed, and justified execution of either option. They supported COMUSMACV's perference for the first option, urging

50. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 4217 to COMUSMACV, 27 Mar 70, same file. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV 4030 to CJCS, 27 Mar 70.
51. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 4159 to CINCPAC, 30 Mar 70, JMF 880 (25 Mar 70).

simultaneous harassing operations at other points in South Vietnam along the Cambodia border. In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended delaying any US redeployments from South Vietnam after 15 April pending developments during the next two and a half months. The President took no immediate action on the COMUSMACV plan or the JCS recommendations, but continued to follow developments in Cambodia closely.[52]

In the weeks following the ouster of Prince Sihanouk, the United States considered various other possible actions in addition to military operations against the border sanctuaries. In late March, a member of the Cambodian National Assembly urgently requested US aid in jamming radio broadcasts from Hanoi and Peking. Subsequently, Cambodia also asked for expanded Voice of America broadcasts. CINCPAC supported both actions, and the matter was taken up in Washington. The Department of State initially opposed the radio jamming because of the "unofficial nature" of the request, but on 18 April the President directed selective jamming of broadcasts to Cambodia from both Hanoi and Peking, as well as increased Voice of America broadcasts to Cambodia. These actions, he hoped, would give the impression of greater US support to the Cambodian Government and people.[53]

Another action under review was expanded leaflet drops in Cambodia. The United States was already conducting limited leaflet dispersion in northern Cambodia under the nickname CAMEL PATH, and on 31 March, both the US Embassy in Saigon and CINCPAC requested extension of the CAMEL PATH area southward along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border. General Wheeler supported this extension, but Secretary Laird disapproved. While favoring exploitation of enemy uncertainty and confusion in response to the new situation in Cambodia, he believed that the possible benefit of increased leaflet drops would be outweighed by the potential adverse effect

52. (TS-GP 1) CM-5002-70 to SecDef, 30 Mar 70; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-149-70 to SecDef 3 Apr 70, same file.

53. (TS) Msg, Phnom Penh 361 to State, 30 Mar 70, JCS IN 14670. (TS) Msgs, CINCPAC to CJCS, 020625Z and 112320Z Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5021 to CINCPAC, 10 Apr 70; (TS) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecState, SecDef, and Dir USIA, 18 Apr 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70.

on "the domestic and international standing of the Lon Nol regime."[54]

Combined RVNAF/Cambodian Operations

The United States was not alone in seeing in the changed situation in Cambodia an opportunity for expanded action. In the days following the removal of Prince Sihanouk as Chief of State in mid-March 1970 there were increasing reports of cooperation between the RVNAF and the FANK in actions along their common border. Officers of the two armed forces met, occasionally with US observers present, to plan and coordinate operations against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces. When COMUSMACV learned of such possible actions, he directed that no US forces would participate and cautioned the RVNAF commanders to avoid civilian Cambodian casualties.[55]

Initially, RVNAF operations were limited to fire attacks on enemy forces along the border, but, increasingly, they responded to Cambodian requests for artillery and air strikes on enemy positions within Cambodia. On several occasions ARVN infantry also attacked across the border. In these instances, US advisers were withdrawn. On 24 March, ARVN units in Kien Tuong Province received fire from Cambodia, and the senior US adviser with those units declared a tactical emergency. Subsequently, USAF aircraft conducted two strikes against enemy weapons positions inside Cambodia. The largest action in Cambodia occurred on 27 March when an ARVN battalion attacked two miles into Cambodia, killing 53 enemy; no US personnel participated in the action.[56]

The RVNAF attack in Cambodia on 27 March caused concern in Washington. A message from the White House advised Ambassador Bunker that such RVNAF/FANK cooperation might be cited by "some quarters" as proof that the United States

54. (TS-GP 1) CM-5035-70 to SecDef, 10 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Request for Overflight Authority," 30 Apr 70, same file, 21 Apr-14 May 70.

55. (TS) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV (MAC 3838) to CINCPAC, 23 Mar 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70.

56. (TS-GP 4) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV (MAC 4002) to CJCS and CINCPAC, 26 Mar 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70. NY Times, 28 Mar 70, 1.

was being drawn into an expanded war. The short-term military benefits of cross-border operations, this message cautioned, could be outweighed by the risk of losing domestic support for the President's Vietnam policy. Accordingly, Secretary of State Rogers instructed Ambassador Bunker to urge President Thieu to halt cross-border operations until this matter could be coordinated "at highest levels" both in the United States and in South Vietnam.[57]

Ambassador Bunker consulted General Rosson and both men talked with appropriate South Vietnamese officials. The Ambassador met with Prime Minister Khien, who promised to suspend further cross-border attacks. General Rosson called on General Vien and urged him to curtail further operations of this type. Although "less than enthusiastic," the South Vietnamese general agreed to await orders from his superiors.[58]

On 30 March, Ambassador Bunker met with President Thieu and again asked for a halt in cross-border operations until the matter could be considered by the two governments. He explained that the US position was flexible and that no decision had been made against such actions. President Thieu replied that he understood the US position and had already instructed General Vien to make no further attacks into Cambodia.[59]

On 1 April, the United States withdrew objections to RVN-Cambodian operations in the border areas. The Secretary of Defense asked that this information be relayed to General Abrams with emphasis on two points: the type and level of effort should be consistent with that prevailing prior to 28-29 March; coordination should be maintained between RVNAF and FANK units.[60]

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57. (S) Msg, State 45730 to Saigon, 28 Mar 70, JCS IN 11355. The White House msg has not been found, but it is summarized in (TS) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV (MAC 4108) to CINCPAC, 28 Mar 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70.

58. (TS) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV (MAC 4108) to CINCPAC, 28 Mar 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70.

59. (TS) Msg, Saigon 4725 to State, 30 Mar 70, retransmitted by (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 4229 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 70, same file.

60. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "South Vietnam/Cambodia Border Operations," 6 Apr 70, same file.

At the request of Cambodian military leaders, the RVNAF sent a task force into the Angel's Wing on 5 April, using two battalions of infantry and an armored regiment with VNAF close air support. In a three-hour attack, the task force killed 56 enemy and captured enemy weapons, ammunition, and documents; US advisers and support were withdrawn prior to the operation.[61]

The scale of this latest attack drew Secretary Laird's attention, and the following day, 6 April, he reminded General Wheeler of the caveats in the 1 April authorization. He had agreed to the removal of objections to border operations by the RVNAF because it appeared essential and failure to do so might have been "detrimental to our own forces and the US goal in SVN," but he feared the South Vietnamese might be going too far. "We must tread a narrow line between the Scylla and Charybdis of permitting the South Vietnamese to do too little along the border areas and of encouraging them to do too much." The Secretary asked General Wheeler and the field commanders to give this matter "their personal attention."[62]

General Abrams responded that he had alerted his commanders to the problem, adding that the South Vietnamese "have handled this carefully and with sensitivity to the political forces involved." Admiral McCain also defended the cooperative RVNAF/FANK efforts, which he said had forestalled enemy operations against III and IV CTZs. The current level of action against the enemy in the Cambodian-South Vietnam border area should continue at this "critical time," in order to divert the enemy's attention from Phnom Penh and force him to focus on the protection of his logistic complexes.[63]

The RVNAF-Cambodian operations thereafter satisfied the Secretary, for on 21 April he advised General Abrams:

> It has been my judgment that joint RVNAF/Cambodian operations, when effected through

61. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 4350 to CJCS, 6 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1 Jan-20 Apr 70.
62. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "South Vietnam/Cambodia Border Operations," 6 Apr 70, same file.
63. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 4587 to CINCPAC and Actg CJCS, 8 Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 090333Z Apr 70; same file.

close cooperation and liaison among responsible officers of these two nations, could serve our purpose well. That judgment, through your encouragement to the RVNAF, has been borne out to date. We must, of course, continue to exercise direction and demand (a) that joint operations have the requisite coordination between the South Vietnamese and the Cambodians and (b) that US participation be restricted to South Vietnamese territory.[64]

Aid for the Cambodian Armed Forces

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese also moved to take advantage of the uncertain situation resulting from the removal of Prince Sihanouk. After some initial hesitation, they staged pro-Sihanouk demonstrations in Phnom Penh and various province towns and moved their forces into threatening positions along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border in the Fishhook, Parrot's Beak, and 704 area. No major clashes occurred during March, but by the first of April the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had launched their campaign. Moving out from their bases, they expanded the areas under their control. By mid-April, they controlled a corridor in Cambodia along the South Vietnam border from the Fishhook in the north to the Gulf of Siam, varying in width from 10 to 15 kilometers. Enemy forces overran all Cambodian border posts and installations in this strip between the Gulf of Siam and the Mekong River, and only Cambodian posts of company size or larger existed north of the Mekong. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had not only secured their base area, but they had also guaranteed freedom of movement along the border.[65]

This deteriorating military situation in Cambodia caused growing concern in Washington, and the President and his advisers began to consider providing military assistance to the FANK. At the time of Sihanouk's deposition, the Cambodian armed forces numbered about 40,000 army personnel organized in 55 infantry and commando battalions and nine

64. (~~TS~~) Msg, SecDef to COMUSMACV thru CJCS, 210150Z Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 21 Apr-14 May 70.
65. (~~S~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-8 - C-9. NY Times, 30 Mar 70, 1.

specialized half-brigades; 1,750 air force personnel in three wings; and a 1,400-man navy composed of coastal and river groups. In addition, there were an estimated 55,000 to 65,000 men in the paramilitary forces, including the Provincial Guard, the part-time volunteer Home Guard, and the National Youth Movement. But despite its paper organization, the FANK was an ill-equipped and untrained force, totally unprepared for combat. It lacked experienced leaders, corruption was prevalent among its officers, and pay was low. The only combat experience had been some action during the 1960s against domestic Communist opponents of Prince Sihanouk; otherwise the FANK had been relegated to menial tasks such as draining swamps and cleaning ditches. In addition, the logistic services for FANK were completely inadequate, and the problem was compounded by the fact that the Cambodian forces had always been dependent on foreign sources for materiel. Hence the equipment was of mixed origin, and much of it was obsolete.[66]

Might not the Cambodian forces be given weapons and ammunition captured from the enemy? Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard suggested this possibility on 11 April to General Wheeler, who relayed the inquiry to General Abrams, requesting information on the number of enemy weapons available as well as the time needed to deliver these weapons to the FANK. General Rosson replied on 13 April that the United States could provide only limited numbers of captured weapons. The RVNAF, however, had an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 AK-47 rifles of Chinese manufacture available, although ammunition would be a limiting factor. General Rosson had consulted Ambassador Bunker who felt that the provision of captured weapons would be a sound move if the United States desired to assist Cambodia militarily; he thought the Republic of Vietnam would approve such a course. On the same day, 13 April, Deputy Secretary Packard authorized COMUSMACV to approach the Republic of Vietnam with regard to the amount of captured ordnance in South Vietnam available for shipment to Cambodia. He also authorized COMUSMACV to

66. (~~TS~~-GP 1) J-5 BP 25-70, "Cambodia (U)," 23 Apr 70, JMF 880 (12 Feb 70). Whitaker, Area Handbook (Cambodia), p. 309.

process this ordnance from storage and ready it for movement should a decision be made to furnish it to Cambodia.[67]

On 15 April, the Cambodian Foreign Minister addressed an appeal to all diplomats in Phnom Penh, including US Chargé Rives, for arms assistance against the Communists. Later that same day, the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), an interdepartmental body that had been established under the National Security Council in May 1969 to deal with crisis planning, decided that Chargé Rives should develop more definite information on FANK requirements for small arms, equipment, and medical supplies. He should also consult with the Cambodian Government on the best method of covert cross-border delivery of weapons and supplies. Meanwhile, COMUSMACV would ready the captured weapons held by the RVNAF for possible shipment, as already directed by the Deputy Secretary of Defense.[68]

General Abrams met with General Vien, who informed him that the ARVN had about 1,500 AK-47s in working order, plus another 4,000 that could be made serviceable, and 75,000 rounds of ammunition. General Abrams also ordered his own forces to begin collecting and preserving captured rifles, machine guns, mortars, and rocket launchers, and he believed he could accumulate "reasonable numbers" in a short time. He informed General Wheeler, however, on 16 April that ground delivery of these weapons to Cambodia was becoming less feasible each day as the enemy consolidated his control of the belt of territory inside the Cambodian border. General Abrams proposed, instead, delivery by air using assets of the MACV Studies and Observation Group (SOG).[69]

Delivery of the captured arms to Cambodia would present certain other difficulties. To avoid the appearance of

67. (TS) Msg, CJCS 5037 to COMUSMACV, 11 Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV (MAC 4838) to CJCS, 13 Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 5160 to COMUSMACV, 15 Apr 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia (Furnishing Arms).

68. NY Times, 16 Apr 70, 3; 17 Apr 70, 1. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5172 to COMUSMACV, 15 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia (Furnishing Arms).

69. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 5037 to CJCS, 16 Apr 70, same file. The Studies and Observation Group was a subordinate MACV command responsible for the conduct of unconventional warfare and special operations in Southeast Asia.

expanding the war, the United States preferred that the Republic of Vietnam transport the weapons. Yet this was a sensitive issue. The Khmers and the Vietnamese were traditional enemies, and after the ouster of Prince Sihanouk, the leaders of the Cambodian Government began to whip up anti-Vietnamese sentiment. This campaign was directed not only against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops operating in Cambodia, but also at the some 600,000 Vietnamese residing in Cambodia. In early April there were growing reports of FANK harassment and atrocities against the resident Vietnamese, climaxing in the discovery on 15 April of the bodies of an estimated 400 massacred Vietnamese floating down the Mekong River. As a result, the Republic of Vietnam was reluctant to provide the Cambodian forces with further arms.[70]

Nonetheless, on 16 April, the Washington Special Actions Group decided that COMUSMACV should begin collecting and preparing for movement to Cambodia 5,500 AK-47s, together with the maximum available ammunition and magazines, contingent upon the agreement of General Vien, whose forces held the weapons. Subsequently, General Abrams talked with President Thieu, who consented to provide VNAF planes for delivery of the weapons to Cambodia. On 21 April, General Abrams informed General Wheeler of a plan to send about 1,500 AK-47s and ammunition to Cambodia that night. He estimated that there would be another 4,000 rifles ready for movement by 27 April. With regard to the actual transport of the weapons, General Abrams again suggested use of MACV SOG assets since reliance on the VNAF presented "very high political risks" to the Republic of Vietnam because of the widely publicized slaying of Vietnamese in and around Phnom Penh.[71]

President Nixon, however, decided that the VNAF should be used to deliver the weapons. This decision would be reconsidered, CINCPAC and COMUSMACV were advised, should President Thieu refuse to carry out delivery or if RVN participation became infeasible for other reasons.[72]

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70. NY Times, 16 Apr 70, 1. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 5302 to CJCS, 21 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia (Furnishing Arms).

71. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 5285 to COMUSMACV, 17 Apr 70; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 5302 to CJCS, 21 Apr 70; same file.

72. (TS-GP 1) Msg, Actg CJCS (Westmoreland) 5486 to CINCPAC (info COMUSMACV), 21 Apr 70, same file.

The first delivery of munitions--1,500 AK-47s with magazines and 100,000 rounds of ammunition--took place as scheduled on the night of 21-22 April. But the fragile state of RVN-Cambodian relations quickly complicated matters. President Thieu stopped further delivery of weapons and ammunition, pending arrangements for the protection of the Vietnamese living in Cambodia.[73]

As an alternative source of weapons for the FANK, General Abrams suggested the provision of 15,000 US M-2 carbines, currently in the United States and destined for the RVN Peoples Self-Defense Forces (PSDF). General Wheeler supported the recommendation, and the Secretary of Defense on 26 April approved the delivery of these US carbines along with 45,000 magazines and a 30-day supply of ammunition to COMUSMACV for possible shipment to the FANK. Meanwhile the Republic of Vietnam, after securing satisfactory assurances from Cambodia, decided to resume supply of the captured AK-47s and the movement of the weapons began on the night of 27-28 April.[74]

By 28 April, over 4,000 AK-47 rifles had reached Phnom Penh. The shortage of ammunition, however, remained a limiting factor, and COMUSMACV recommended that three million rounds of ammunition be made available to Cambodia with deliveries of one million rounds per month to begin in August. General Wheeler supported this recommendation, but since the US Army did not have the amounts of AK-47 ammunition required, he asked the Secretary of Defense to authorize the Army to procure it in the international arms market, at an estimated cost of $219,000. This procurement was subsequently approved, although after the invasion of Cambodia the shortage of AK-47 ammunition was relieved somewhat by the capture of enemy stocks.[75]

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73. (TS-GP 1) J-5 BP 27-70, "Cambodia (U)," 23 Apr 70, JMF 880 (12 Feb 70). (TS) CM-5083-70 to SecDef, 26 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia (Furnishing Arms).

74. (TS-GP 1) CM-5083-70 to SecDef, 26 Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 5723 to CINCPAC, 26 Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) DJSM-603-70 to CJCS, 28 Apr 70; same file.

75. (TS-GP 1) CM-5085-70 to SecDef, 28 Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 7773 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 5 Jun 70; same file.

On 29 April 1970, COMUSMACV sought authority to deliver to Cambodia the 15,000 US M-2 carbines that he had recommended several days earlier. Authorization was immediate, with the Joint Chiefs of Staff informing General Abrams on the same day that he could start shipping the weapons to Phnom Penh, using VNAF planes and coordinating with the US mission there.[76]

In the meantime, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were reviewing more effective means of building up the fighting strength of the FANK. Specifically, they were considering a plan for sending equipment in packages. Each package would equip a 1,000-man force and would contain 800 carbines, 50 pistols, 30 light machine guns, 100 submachine guns, 30 rocket launchers, and 20 light mortars, along with supporting equipment and ammunition. On 29 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the US Defense Attaché in Phnom Penh whether the Cambodian forces could use such assistance and, if so, how many packages--up to a total of ten--would be needed.[77]

The US Attaché in Phnom Penh replied at once that the FANK could use all ten packages. He asked delivery as soon as possible with two packages shipped every other day. Following approval in Washington of the provision of arms packages for FANK, General Wheeler notified CINCPAC on 2 May that the equipment was presently in the Saigon area and that VNAF aircraft would transport the packages to Cambodia. The first shipment was scheduled for 7 May 1970.[78]

The Situation in Cambodia Grows Worse

It was rapidly apparent, even while the United States was considering provision of weapons and equipment to the FANK, that something more than this would be required to contain the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in Cambodia. After having taken over the band of territory in Cambodia along the South Vietnam border, the enemy moved in mid-April to

76. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 5695 to CJCS, 29 Apr 70; (TS-GP1) Msg, JCS 5878 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 29 Apr 70; same file.
77. (TS) Msg, JCS 7385 to Phnom Penh (DATT), 29 Apr 70, same file.
78. (TS-GP 1) Msg, USDAO Phnom Penh 103 to JCS, 29 Apr 70; (TS) Msg, CJCS 6066 to CINCPAC, 2 May 70; same file.

secure major highways leading into his base areas. During the last two weeks of April, Viet Cong and NVA forces cut major roads leading from the border to the interior and overran the provincial towns east and southeast of Phnom Penh. By 19 April, they were within 20 miles of the Cambodian capital and threatened to isolate the city. The Cambodian armed forces appeared unable to hold back the VC/NVA advance, and on 20 April, Lon Nol urgently appealed to the United States to assist his country. Two days later the provincial capital of Saang fell to the Communists, bringing the enemy within 15 miles of Phnom Penh.[79]

In an attempt to restrict the increasing enemy movement in Cambodia, the United States expanded air operations there. Although the MENU bombing, initiated in March 1969, continued, these B-52 strikes were not effective against fleeting targets such as maneuvering enemy personnel. Consequently, on 18 April 1970, COMUSMACV requested special authority to employ US tactical air for a 30-day period in a narrow eight-mile strip of territory in northeastern Cambodia adjacent to the South Vietnam border. General Abrams reported growing enemy force movements in that area, and he considered attack on such targets essential to the prudent conduct of operations. On 20 April, after securing approval at higher levels, General Wheeler granted COMUSMACV the requested authority for a 30-day period, giving the operation the name PATIO. The carrier CORAL SEA was assigned to Task Force 77 in the Gulf of Tonkin for this action. The first PATIO attacks took place on 24 April when US F-100s struck enemy columns in Cambodia, inflicting an estimated 100 casualties. On 25 April, the PATIO authority was extended along the entire Cambodian border to a uniform depth of 18 miles, and air operations in Cambodia were intensified.[80]

As with MENU, all matters relating to PATIO operations were handled on a highly restricted basis. All requests, approvals, and reports were transmitted by special security channel communications. Each PATIO strike had a cover target in Laos and routine reports of attacks on those targets

79. NY Times, 20 Apr 70, 1; 22 Apr 70, 1; 23 Apr 70, 1. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. C-9.

80. (U) DOD Report on Selected Operations, p. 21. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, CJCS 5405 and 5694 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 20 and 25 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Operation MENU/PATIO, 1 Apr 70.

were furnished and recorded in the Department of Defense automated data base. Special communication channel reports of the actual attacks in Cambodia were provided only to those with a need to know. This dual reporting resulted in some confusion, since the first 124 of the total 156 PATIO sorties flown in April and May 1970 were not included in the routine data base.[81]

Stepped Up Military Planning

In light of the growing enemy threat to Phnom Penh, President Nixon was also interested in the readiness of plans for ground attacks in Cambodia. Dr. Kissinger examined COMUSMACV's 30 March plan for US/RVNAF attack on enemy base areas in Cambodia.[82] On 16 April he asked Secretary Laird to have General Abrams develop alternative plans. The existing plan involved "considerable U.S. participation," and Dr. Kissinger wanted operations that could be conducted entirely by South Vietnamese forces.[83]

On 18 April, President Nixon traveled to Honolulu to welcome the Apollo 13 astronauts back to the United States, returning to the Western White House in California the following day. While in Hawaii, the President and Dr. Kissinger met with Admiral McCain and discussed possible cross-border attacks into Cambodia. If such operations were mounted, the President asked, what would be the best mix of US and South Vietnamese forces? Or should only RVNAF troops be used, with the United States furnishing air and artillery support from within South Vietnam? Admiral McCain assured the President that plans were being prepared on an urgent basis and would be submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as quickly as possible. The President told CINCPAC that Lon Nol should be helped to establish communication with Saigon. He added that he had already sanctioned the provision of financial support to the Cambodian Government as well as the supply of captured weapons for the Cambodian

81. (U) DOD Report on Selected Operations, pp. 21-22.
82. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 4159 to CINCPAC, 30 Mar 70, JMF 880 (25 Mar 70). See above, p. 235.
83. (~~TS~~) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, 16 Apr 70; (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 5404 to CINCPAC, 20 Apr 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes in Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

forces. The theme of the meeting, CINCPAC told General Wheeler, was the need for speed in view of the "precarious situation" in Cambodia.[84]

On 20 April, President Nixon addressed the nation on his efforts toward peace in Vietnam, using the occasion to announce the scheduled withdrawal of 150,000 US personnel from Vietnam during the coming twelve months.[85] In connection with the withdrawal, the President advised the leaders of North Vietnam that they would be taking "grave risks" should they attempt to jeopardize the security of the US forces remaining in Vietnam by increased military action in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos. Should they do so, Mr. Nixon warned, as he had done in announcing each previous US troop withdrawal from South Vietnam, he would take "strong and effective measures" to deal with the situation. Other than this general warning, the President gave no indication that possible US action in Cambodia was under consideration.[86]

On the same day, the Secreaty of Defense asked the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Westmoreland, for recommendations to alleviate the situation in Cambodia. Within hours, General Westmoreland provided his response. Noting the growing threat to Phnom Penh, he said it appeared that the enemy intended to overthrow the Cambodian Government and return Prince Sihanouk to power. The time had passed, General Westmoreland believed, when material assistance could arrest the deterioration in Cambodia. "We must move quickly against the vulnerable enemy base areas in Cambodia with RVNAF forces." To relieve the pressure on the Cambodians, he recommended division-size RVNAF attacks on the enemy positions. United States forces should provide artillery and logistics support, without crossing into Cambodia. In addition, General Westmoreland recommended giving the FANK US M-1 rifles and employing the Khmer troops currently in South Vietnamese Irregular Defense Group camps in operations in Cambodia (the latter proposal had been suggested by General Abrams several days earlier).[87]

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84. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 220437Z Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 21 Apr-14 May 70.

85. See Ch. 10.

86. (U) Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 373-377.

87. (TS) CM-5063-70 to SecDef, 21 Apr 70; (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 18 Apr 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 21 Apr-14 May 70.

On the same day, 21 April, General Westmoreland alerted both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to the concern in Washington over the increasing threat to Phnom Penh. The enemy appeared to be overextended, he said, and vulnerable to "timely" attack. He thought that both the threat to Phnom Penh and the present alarm in Washington might be conducive to relaxation of the restrictions against operations in Cambodia, and he wanted to Joint Chiefs of Staff to be in a position to take advantage of this more favorable atmosphere. Accordingly, he requested both field commanders to forward their views on: increased US involvement in detailed RVNAF planning for cross-border operations; preparations to provide US fire and logistic support for RVNAF units in Cambodia; possible use of US troops in the most "productive" base areas; and plans for employment of Khmer CIDG troops.[88]

Both Admiral McCain and General Abrams replied the following day. All his earlier recommendations concerning Cambodia, the Admiral said, had been overtaken by events. The United States must take "immediate and greater action" than previously envisioned to reverse the Viet Cong/NVA tide. For the success of Vietnamization, and for the attainment of US objectives in Southeast Asia, "a neutral Cambodia remains vital to our program." Therefore CINCPAC recommended: RVNAF attacks on enemy base areas with sustained followup actions as required; employment of US forces within South Vietnam so as to support the RVNAF in Cambodia; and expanded SALEM HOUSE and psychological warfare operations to support the above actions. Full tactical air support should be given, using US assets if those of the VNAF were insufficient.[89]

General Abrams found the current planning for cross-border operations and for fire and logistics support for ARVN actions in Cambodia to be adequate. He urged "selective use" of US troops in base area attacks and employment of Khmer CIDG troops. He also favored diversion of small arms and ammunition from the PSDF in South Vietnam to the Cambodian armed forces.[90]

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88. (TS-GP 1) Msg, Actg CJCS (Westmoreland) 5495 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 21 Apr 70, same file.

89. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 220435Z Apr 70, same file.

90. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 5364 to Actg CJCS and CINCPAC, 22 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

On 22 April the National Security Council considered the Cambodian question. As a result of the Council's deliberations, the President authorized RVNAF "shallow" cross-border attacks of division-size against enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia. The United States would provide artillery support and would be prepared to provide tactical air support on "the basis of demonstrated necessity." In addition, the President directed: an immediate step-up of military assistance to Cambodia through third country channels wherever possible; a "maximum" diplomatic effort to enlist assistance by other interested countries; and the air movement of Khmer forces currently in CIDG units in South Vietnam, with their equipment, to Phnom Penh as quickly as possible. Congressional liaison , "when appropriate," the President said, would be handled by his office.[91]

The President had now decided on large RVNAF cross-border attacks into Cambodia, but he had not committed US ground forces to the action. There was still opposition among some of the President's advisers to such US participation, and Admiral Moorer, who had attended the NSC meeting as Acting Chairman, described the situation to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV:

> As you are well aware, there are some strong dissenting opinions in high levels of our government as to the extent of U.S. involvement. However, highest authority feels very strongly that a Communist takeover of Cambodia will place the Vietnamization program in serious jeopardy.

It was imperative, Admiral Moorer instructed the two commanders, that planning proceed as expeditiously as possible.[92]

On 23 April, COMUSMACV submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a plan for RVNAF operations in Cambodia. General Abrams had succeeded in overcoming some initial RVNAF

91. (~~TS~~) Extracts of NSDM 56 to SecState, SecDef, Atty Gen, and DCI, "Actions in Support of the Cambodian Government," 22 Apr 70, Att to Memo, ASD(ISA) to DSecDef et al., 23 Apr 70, JMF 001 (CY 1970) NSDMs.

92. (~~TS~~) Msg, Actg CJCS (Moorer) 5634 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 23 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

reluctance to attack base areas in Cambodia that did not pose a direct threat to South Vietnamese troops, and the plan now had the approval of the Joint General Staff and the RVNAF commanders. It provided for South Vietnamese troops to carry out ground operations in the Parrot's Beak and Crow's Nest areas in Svay Rieng Province (Base Areas 706/367) to destroy enemy bases and defeat enemy forces. United States ground forces would not participate, but the United States would furnish tactical air, artillery, and gunship support, medical evacuation, resupply, and other logistical assistance. In addition, US forces would cover the areas in South Vietnam vacated by the RVNAF units committed to the Cambodian operations, and increased B-52 strikes on the South Vietnamese side of the border would precede the attack. General Abrams recommended that the planned strike be initiated on or about 27 April. He informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that a special eombined JGS/MACV group had been formed to recommend other actions to assist the Cambodians. This group was preparing a plan for attack on Base Areas 352/353 in the Fishhook by a combined RVNAF/US force, even though US participation in such an action had not been authorized.[93]

Planning for the Cambodian operation was now advancing so rapidly that developments did not follow regular procedures. The available record does not reveal any formal recommendation of the plan by either the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the Chairman. In any event, the plan was forwarded to the President, who approved it the same day, 23 April 1970. President Nixon wanted the plan carried out on 27 April or as soon thereafter as operationally feasible. Provision of US tactical air support, if required, was authorized. General Abrams was delegated the authority to decide when and to what extent US support called for in the plan should be introduced. No US advisers must be allowed in Cambodia, except those forward air controllers who would be required if US aircraft were brought into action. Press guidance for the operation, forwarded to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV two days later, provided that publicity of the forthcoming operation should be delayed, if possible, and that everything practicable should be done to discourage or prevent correspondents from accompanying the RVNAF forces into Cambodia.[94]

93. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 5419 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 23 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 15-30 May (Folder - "Base Area 706").

94. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, Actg CJCS (Moorer) 5623 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 23 Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 5691 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 25 Apr 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

On 24 April, Secretary Laird advised General Wheeler that it was "absolutely essential that no US advisers be introduced into Cambodia at any time during the operation." General Abrams' plan, however, implied that US personnel would be on the ground in Cambodia in support and supply roles. The Secretary wanted clarification of the US support envisioned in the plan. General Wheeler, who had returned to his duties after a brief stay in the hospital, relayed the Secretary's concern to General Abrams.[95]

In answer, General Abrams pledged that there would be no US personnel on the ground in the first wave of attack, although US advisers must be in the air over Cambodia from the outset to coordinate US gunship support. There might be some friction with ARVN commanders, he warned, since they wanted US advisers to accompany their forces into Cambodia. Following the first wave, General Abrams intended to insert US ground advisers, if necessary to control gunship support. In addition, US advisers would be embarked in aircraft flying over Cambodia--those used for tactical air support as well as for command and control, medical evacuation, and resupply. There would also be heightened US troop activity in South Vietnam, including US forces blocking the South Vietnamese side of the border in III and IV CTZs, and there might also be increased and reoriented artillery fire. General Abrams' assurances apparently satisfied Secretary Laird, since he pursued the matter no further.[96]

President Nixon was anxious for the planned action in Cambodia to go well. In a conversation with Admiral Moorer he spoke of his own determination that the upcoming RVNAF operation in the Parrot's Beak should succeed. Subsequently, General Wheeler informed General Abrams of the President's concern that, should the operation fail, he would be subjected to strong criticism of the type evoked by the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. "In other words," General Wheeler continued, "he feels very strongly indeed that all

95. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Cambodian Operations," 24 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 15-30 May 70 (Folder-"Base Area 706"). (TS) Msg, CJCS 5660 to COMUSMACV, 24 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

96. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 5508 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 25 Apr 70, same file.

commanders involved, ARVN and US, must have an aggressive frame of mind and a determination to achieve success." General Wheeler did not doubt the resolution of COMUSMACV or his commanders, but he was less sure of the RVNAF. Consequently, he urged the US commanders to help the RVNAF overcome its "somewhat timid and slow reactions" to tactical situations.[97]

President Nixon also had misgivings about possible clashes between RVNAF soldiers and Cambodians once the South Vietnamese troops crossed the border. Because of the FANK mistreatment of some Vietnamese living in Cambodia, the President feared that the RVNAF might attempt to retaliate against the Cambodian population. Accordingly, Secretary Rogers instructed Ambassador Bunker to caution President Thieu that the United States wanted the Cambodian population in the Parrot's Beak protected. The Ambassador responded that he had already approached President Thieu on this matter and received assurances that the RVN forces had strict orders not to mistreat the civilian population in Cambodia. General Wheeler also alerted COMUSMACV on this matter, suggesting that he caution General Vien.[98]

Meanwhile the joint MACV/RVNAF group, which was planning an attack against enemy Base Areas 352/353 in the Fishhook, proceeded with its work. General Abrams wanted the RVNAF to execute such an attack concurrently, or as nearly so as possible, with the strike into the Parrot's Beak. But on 25 April he told General Wheeler that the RVNAF leaders were reluctant to undertake a Fishhook attack without US participation. Although General Abrams was still attempting to get RVNAF agreement for unilateral South Vietnamese action, he suggested the possibility of launching the attack with US forces. "You are in the best position," he told General Wheeler, "to judge whether this should be raised." There is no indication, however, that General Wheeler proposed a strictly US attack to either the Secretary of Defense or the President.[99]

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97. (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 5711 to COMUSMACV, 25 Apr 70, same file.

98. (~~TS~~) Msg, JCS 5689 to COMUSMACV (Rogers to Bunker), 24 Apr 70; (~~TS~~) Msg, Saigon 223 to State, 25 Apr 70; (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 5828 to COMUSMACV, 28 Apr 70; same file.

99. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 5504 to CJCS, 25 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 272223Z Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 21 Apr-14 May 70.

General Abrams was unable to persuade the RVNAF to undertake action against Base Areas 352/353 alone, and on 26 April, he submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a plan for a combined US-RVNAF attack in that area of Cambodia. The US 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) and the ARVN Airborne Division would constitute the attacking force under the "overall coordination" of the Commanding General, 1st Cavalry Division. General Abrams at first designated the planned strike Operation SHOEMAKER; subsequently, at the request of the Republic of Vietnam, the name was changed to TOAN THANG 43.[100]

That same day, 26 April, the National Security Council again discussed Cambodia. Following the meeting, the President authorized attacks on enemy base areas in Cambodia to a depth of 30 kilometers from the South Vietnam border. Primary responsibility for these attacks, whenever possible, would lie with the South Vietnamese with US support as necessary, but the President also authorized combined US/RVNAF operations. The US/RVNAF action against Base Areas 352/353 was approved; any additional combined operations, however, would require presidential approval on a case-by-case basis. The President also approved provision of US tactical, helicopter, and artillery support for operations in Cambodia, up to a depth of 30 kilometers, in all base areas north of and including 352/353. The Washington Special Actions Group was to coordinate these activities.[101]

Now, after much reluctance, the President had decided to commit US ground forces to operations in Cambodia. He apparently believed that success in the Cambodian operations was too important to place sole reliance on the RVNAF. But, in sending US ground forces into action in Cambodia, President Nixon accepted other dangers--greater involvement than he desired and possible adverse public reaction.

Officials in Washington wanted to execute the US/RVNAF attack on Base Areas 352/353 on 30 April, but coordination

100. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 5558 to CJCS, 26 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

101. (TS) NSDM 58 to SecState, SecDef, Atty Gen, and DCI, 28 Apr 70, OCJCS NSDM Book. (NSDM 58 superseded NSDM 57 of 26 Apr 70, but made no substantive changes therein.)

problems forced a 24-hour delay. On 28 April General Wheeler ordered COMUSMACV to execute Operation TOAN THANG 43 "not later than early Friday, 1 May 1970, Saigon Time." In accordance with the President's 26 April decision, he authorized attack on other identified North Vietnamese and Viet Cong base areas in Cambodia, to a depth of 30 kilometers. Primary responsibility for such attacks, wherever possible, should lie with the RVNAF, with US support. Combined US and RVNAF operations were also authorized, but required submission to Washington for approval on a case-by-case basis. General Abrams could employ tactical air, helicopters, and artillery in all base areas north of and including 352/353.[102]

Subsequently, General Wheeler instructed COMUSMACV that, because of the "political sensitivity" of the first open US ground incursion into Cambodia, the RVNAF should be given the lion's share of publicity and credit during the operation. United States participation should be played down and US personnel should encourage the press to focus on the RVNAF. "Higher authority," General Wheeler continued, "has requested that all possible steps be taken to dampen the expected effort of the critics of this type of action and the impact which these efforts would have on the American people."[103]

On 27 April, General Wheeler had notified COMUSMACV that H-hour for the RVNAF attack on the Parrot's Beak area was 0800, 29 April, Saigon time. General Wheeler again stressed the need for success; otherwise the "credibility" of Vietnamization would be seriously compromised. If the RVNAF bogged down and the presence of US advisers became desirable, General Wheeler asked COMUSMACV to let him know "soonest." He had already received assurances that there would be no difficulty in obtaining the necessary permission if it was vital to the success of the operation.[104]

General Abrams replied on the following day, 28 April, that it was vital for US ground advisers to accompany the

102. (TS) Msgs, CJCS 5730 and 5750 to COMUSMACV, 27 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70. (TS) Msg, CJCS 5812 to COMUSMACV, 28 Apr 70, same file, 28 Apr-8 May 70.

103. (TS) Msg, CJCS 5859 to COMUSMACV, 29 Apr 70, same file.

104. (TS) Msg, CJCS 5750 to COMUSMACV, 27 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 Mar-27 Apr 70.

RVNAF units from the beginning of the Parrot's Beak action. Provision of US advisers, he said, would help to insure that the operation did not bog down; would improve coordination, which, even at best, was poor among RVNAF units; and would spur the South Vietnamese to maintain an aggressive attack. The number of US personnel involved would be about 50 ground advisers at the battalion level and 50 air coordinators, also on the ground. The latter, however, were already authorized. General Wheeler immediately sought the approval of the Secretary of Defense, and Mr. Laird granted it the same day, in time for the operation to commence with US advisers.[105]

According to plan, RVNAF units launched their attack into the Parrot's Beak at 0830 on the morning of 29 April. Led by elements of the 9th Armored Cavalry (ARVN), South Vietnamese forces from both III and IV CTZs, accompanied by US ground advisers, crossed into Cambodia. As planned by COMUSMACV and approved by President Nixon, the United States also supplied tactical air support, medical evacuation teams, and some supplies. The RVNAF designated the attack TOAN THANG 42, while COMUSMACV called it ROCKCRUSHER.[106]

Two days later, on the morning of 1 May, a combined US/RVNAF force totaling some 10,000 men invaded Cambodia to attack enemy Base Areas 352/353. Half of this force consisted of US ground troops. The allied force immediately fanned out, attempting to envelop the suspected COSVN headquarters in a pincer.[107]

As US and South Vietnamese troops moved into the Fishhook, it was still the evening of 30 April in Washington, and President Nixon addressed the nation on television to announce the Cambodian operations. He had ordered the

105. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 5675 to CJCS, 28 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 28 Apr-8 May 70. (TS) CM-5084-70 to SecDef, 28 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia (Furnishing Arms). (CM-5084-70 has notation that SecDef approved the recommendation.) (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5807 to COMUSMACV, 28 Apr 70, same file.

106. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-33 - C-35. NY Times, 30 Apr 70, 1.

107. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-35 - C-37.

action, the President said, to protect US soldiers in South Vietnam, to guarantee continued US troop withdrawals, and to insure the success of Vietnamization. He recited the long history of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese violations of Cambodian territory and explained that in the past two weeks, North Vietnam had dropped all pretense of respect for Cambodian neutrality and sovereignty. Thousands of enemy soldiers were invading the country from the border sanctuaries and encircling Phnom Penh. In these circumstances Cambodia had called on the United States and other nations for assistance.

President Nixon recalled that, on 20 April, he had promised to take "strong and effective measures" if the enemy increased activity in Laos, Cambodia, or South Vietnam. This warning, he continued, had been ignored, and as a result the United States now faced three choices: to do nothing; to give massive military assistance to Cambodia; or to go to the "heart of the trouble" by cleaning out the major North Vietnamese and Viet Cong sanctuaries supporting enemy attacks in both Cambodia and South Vietnam. The President had chosen the last option. In cooperation with the Republic of Vietnam, the enemy sanctuaries along the Cambodia-Vietnam border were being cleared out.

The allied operations were not an invasion, the President declared, since the areas attacked were completely occupied and controlled by North Vietnam. The United States did not intend to occupy any areas of Cambodia, Mr. Nixon promised, but would withdraw once the enemy was driven from his Cambodian bases. Until then, he asked for the support and understanding of the American people.[108]

108. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 405-410.

APPENDIX

Revelation and Public Explanation of MENU Bombing in 1973

President Nixon decided in mid-March 1969 to launch the MENU operations, and the B-52 bombing of targets in Cambodia continued thereafter until May 1970. At the President's direction these operations were treated with extreme secrecy, with knowledge of their existence confined to a small number of people in the chain of command. Elaborate cover procedures, described more fully in the chapter above (pp. 220-221), were applied to conceal the MENU attacks. Following each B-52 strike in Cambodia a routine report was filed indicating that the action had been against a designated target in South Vietnam. Thus the MENU sorties were included in the overall Southeast Asia statistical totals, so that the resources expended were accounted for, but without mention of Cambodia. When the Department of Defense later used the routine data base to provide information to the Congress on air activities in Southeast Asia, the MENU sorties were reflected in the figures for South Vietnam.

Public disclosure of the MENU bombing did not occur until 14 July 1973, when a Senate Armed Services Committee investigation of the air war in Southeast Asia brought it to light. In testimony before the committee a former Air Force major stated that he had participated in falsification of records to conceal the B-52 operations in Cambodia, and he described the special hand-delivery channel through which his unit had received the orders for MENU strikes.[1]

Two days later, on 16 July, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger defended the unreported raids as "fully authorized" and necessary for the protection of US forces. The secrecy was required, he said, "because of the sensitive operational and diplomatic situation . . . ." The Department of Defense in September 1973 published a "Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos" that, among other things, provided detailed information on the MENU bombing. In that report, the Department of Defense admitted that information provided to Congress had

1. NY Times, 15 Jul 73, 1.

been incorrect, since it was derived from a data base that had been perverted by the entries made to conceal the sorties in Cambodia.[2]

Following the revelation of the secret Cambodian bombing, both former Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird and the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, initially disavowed knowledge of any falsification of official reports on the attacks, but subsequently recalled otherwise. On 30 July 1973, General Wheeler told the Senate Armed Services Committee that President Nixon personally ordered the MENU bombing under the tightest security measures possible. Mr. Laird stated that the special reporting procedures were known to and approved by the National Security Council.[3]

A spokesman for the Department of State claimed that Prince Sihanouk had been informed of the secret strikes and that he had acquiesced in the bombing. The Department of State spokesman specifically referred to a 1968 conversation between the Prince and the US Ambassador to India, Chester Bowles. In that conversation, Sihanouk reportedly said that he would be "very glad" if the United States solved his problem--the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army presence in his country. The Department of State also cited an exchange between Prince Sihanouk and Senator Mike Mansfield in August 1969, five months after the MENU bombing had begun. Here, the Department of State quoted the Prince as saying "There had not been Cambodian protests when these [US strikes] hit only Viet Cong and not Cambodian villages or population." Senator Mansfield, however, did not recall any mention of bombing in the conversation, and Prince Sihanouk denied that he had authorized or approved any US air strikes in Cambodia during 1969 or 1970.[4]

When the strikes were first revealed in July 1973, a White House spokesman confirmed that the President had authorized both the bombing and the secrecy. On 20 August 1973, in an address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, President Nixon

2. NY Times, 17 Jul 73, 1. (U) DOD Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos, 10 Sep 73, pp. 5-18.
3. NY Times, 19 Jul 73, 1; 31 Jul 73, 1; 10 Aug 73, 1. S. Hrgs, Bombing in Cambodia, pp. 131-189.
4. NY Times, 25 Jul 73, 1; 26 Jul 73, 1.

defended his action. It was required, he said, to protect US troops. He noted that the Cambodian Government had not objected; to the contrary, during the spring of 1969, Prince Sihanouk had invited him to visit Phnom Penh. "This," the President added, was "after the strikes had been going for a long time" and was "a pretty good indication of what he [Sihanouk] thought about what we were doing."[5]

5. NY Times, 19 Jul 73, 1. President Nixon's Speech at National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, New Orleans, 20 Aug 73, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, vol. 9, pp. 1007-1014.

Chapter 8

THE INVASION OF CAMBODIA AND ITS AFTERMATH

The First Days

The initial operation of the Cambodian incursion, TOAN THANG 42, began on 29 April 1970 when South Vietnamese forces with US combat advisers and tactical air support entered the Parrot's Beak area. Three multi-battalion ARVN task forces crossed into Cambodia from III CTZ while four small forces invaded from IV CTZ. During the first day, the RVNAF encountered heavy enemy resistance, and 300 enemy were reported killed by air strikes. Thereafter enemy resistance was light, and on the afternoon of 1 May, the two RVNAF thrusts linked up at the town of Svay Rieng. By that time the RVNAF claimed 463 enemy killed (not including the 300 killed in air actions) and 15 detained. In addition, substantial amounts of enemy weapons and supplies, including 67 tons of rice, had been captured. Friendly casualties were placed at 56 killed and 331 wounded. On 2 May, the RVNAF launched Phase II of Operation TOAN THANG 42, securing Highway No. 1 and driving southward. They also moved west of Svay Rieng to assist Cambodian forces in that area. The United States continued to furnish advisers, medical evacuation, emergency resupply, and artillery support.[1]

Meanwhile, a combined US/RVNAF force entered the Fishhook area on 1 May in Operation TOAN THANG 43. United States tactical and B-52 air strikes early on 1 May signaled the beginning of the attack. Following preparatory air attacks, ground troops entered the Fishhook from three directions in an attempt to encircle the suspected Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the enemy command headquarters for operations in the southern portion of South Vietnam. This invading force of 10,000 consisted of two armored cavalry regiments (the US 11th and the ARVN 1st) and two infantry brigades (3d Brigade of the US 1st Cavalry Division and the ARVN 3d Airborne). Also participating and under the operational control of the US brigade were an armored and a mechanized infantry battalion from the US 25th Infantry Division and the 3d Brigade, US 9th Infantry Division,

1. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-35 - C-57. NY Times, 30 Apr 70, 1; 3 May 70, 2.

respectively. Only scattered resistance was encountered, and by the end of the first day, the allies had advanced some three to five miles inside Cambodia. Enemy casualties for the first day were estimated at 398 killed and 11 detained; friendly losses were four killed and 38 wounded. By 5 May, numerous enemy caches, including weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and food, had been seized, but no significant numbers of enemy troops had been located. Both the light enemy resistance and the failure to find the COSVN gave increasing indication that many enemy troops had fled in advance of the allied arrival.[2]

Public Reaction

In planning and approving the Cambodian invasion, the President and his advisers had realized that this operation might rekindle public agitation against the war in Southeast Asia. This proved the case, and public reaction was immediate. Those who opposed the US role in Vietnam considered the Cambodian action a deliberate expansion of the war and a violation of international law. They rejected any justification based on the long history of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese violation of Cambodian neutrality. The anti-war movement, after declining in vigor during the previous winter, now found a new rallying point. Following the President's 30 April announcement of the incursion, demonstrations and protests broke out on college campuses across the country. Demonstrations on 1 May that began as peaceful protests developed, in a number of instances, into rock-throwing melees that had to be met with tear gas and other police action. In Washington, the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the group that had organized the October and November 1969 moratoriums,[3] announced a demonstration in the capital on 9 May to protest the expansion of the war.[4]

The campus demonstrations did not, however, represent the majority sentiment in the United States, although there was a lack of consensus on the proportion of public support for the President. White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler

2. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-35 - C-37, C-68 - C-70. NY Times, 3 May 70, 1; 4 May 70, 1.
3. See Ch. 5, pp. 147-148, 151.
4. NY Times, 1 May 70, 38; 2 May 70, 1 and 32.

announced that telephone calls following the 30 April speech ran six-to-one in favor of the President's decision, and a Columbia Broadcasting System poll, released on 3 May, showed a margin of two-to-one supporting Mr. Nixon's action in Cambodia. But a Gallup poll with a differently phrased question, "Do you think we should send United States troops to help Cambodia?," found 58 percent answered in the negative. Nevertheless, the Gallup poll indicated that the US public approved the President's handling of the war by about a seven-to-five ratio. In an attempt to rally support, former President Lyndon Johnson on 1 May urged all Americans to support President Nixon in the Southeast Asian crisis, but Mr. Nixon further alienated the college campuses when he publicly referred to the radical students who opposed his Vietnam policies as "bums."[5]

The student opposition to the Cambodian invasion reached new heights following a tragic incident at Kent State University in Ohio. During a demonstration there on 4 May, National Guardsmen fired a volley that killed four students. President Nixon immediately deplored the deaths and called on all opposed to the war to use peaceful dissent rather than violence to express their opinions. But the President's words could not calm the emotions aroused on college campuses, and student protest actions increased. Thirty-seven college and university presidents, including those of Princeton, Columbia, and Johns Hopkins, called on Mr. Nixon to demonstrate "unequivocally" his determination to end promptly US military involvement in Southeast Asia, and students stepped up preparations for the 9 May rally in Washington.[6]

Public reaction to the Cambodian invasion was not restricted to the colleges and universities. In the Congress, too, there was opposition. President Nixon briefed key congressional leaders on the Cambodian decision on the evening of 30 April just before his public broadcast. But on the following day Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, emphatically disagreed with the President's decision to send US troops into Cambodia, and his committee in a unanimous vote requested a conference with the President for a further explanation. Senator Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, who until that time

5. Ibid., 1 May 70, 2; 2 May 70, 1; 4 May 70, 9.
6. Ibid., 4 May 70, 1; 5 May 70, 1; 6 May 70, 1.

had tended to support Mr. Nixon's Southeast Asian policy, also criticized the Cambodian action. After listening with "grave interest" to the President's briefing and broadcast on the situation, he felt that he must "most respectfully disagree" with the campaign into that country. He forecast "serious" Senate consideration of specific legislation to limit how the President spent military funds in Southeast Asia.[7]

President Nixon met with the Senate and House Armed Services Committees as well as the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committees of the two houses on 5 May to explain his Cambodia policy in the hope of countering the growing criticism. He gave the congressional delegation a firm commitment that US troops would be withdrawn from Cambodia within three to seven weeks. Some were already returning to South Vietnam, he added. He also pledged that US forces would not penetrate deeper than 21 miles into Cambodia.[8]

In a further effort to allay opposition before the 9 May Washington demonstration, the President moved on several other fronts. He met with the heads of eight major universities on 7 May and promised that he and his Administration would stop "hostile" comments about students. He also scheduled a meeting with the governors of the 50 states on the Cambodian situation, and at an 8 May news conference, he reported that the action in Cambodia was progressing faster than expected. "The great majority of all American units will be out by the second week of June," he asserted, "and all Americans of all kinds, including advisers, will be out of Cambodia by the end of June."[9]

On 9 May, between 75,000 and 100,000 persons demonstrated in Washington against the Cambodian invasion. In a further gesture of conciliation, President Nixon visited the Lincoln Memorial before dawn of that day and talked with a number of young people who had gathered to protest his war policies. He asked them "to try to understand what we are doing." At 1 P.M. the protesters assembled on the Ellipse opposite the White House and listened to speakers attack the Cambodian operations. Both US Army and National Guard troops had been

7. Ibid., 1 May 70, 1; 2 May 70,1 and 5; 3 May 70, 3.
8. Ibid., 6 May 70, 1.
9. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 413-423.

brought into the city, but they were not needed to control any disturbance. Exceedingly warm weather led to bathing in public fountains and the Reflecting Pool, and some observers considered that the atmosphere of a pleasant outing had pervaded the afternoon. The protest was almost entirely peaceful; the only violence occurred in splinter demonstrations later in the evening when some rocks were thrown and windows broken. These acts were put down by police, who had to use tear gas to disperse a crowd around the Department of Justice.[10]

While the students condemned the Cambodian incursion in their Washington rally, Congress expressed its opposition in the consideration of legislation to cut off funds for future US military activity in Cambodia. On 11 May 1970, Senator John Sherman Cooper, Republican of Kentucky, and Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, introduced an amendment to the Foreign Military Sales Bill to prohibit the President from using any funds appropriated by the Congress for retaining US forces in Cambodia, for providing US military advisers, instructors, or US-sponsored native forces to the Cambodian Government, or for conducting any air combat over Cambodia in support of Cambodian forces. The amendment would not restrict the current operations, but was designed to prevent the President from carrying out future military actions in Cambodia without the approval of the Congress. The amendment was immediately considered by the Foreign Relations Committee and sent to the Senate floor for debate on the same day.[11]

Further Military Planning

Despite the public and congressional opposition, the President and his advisers proceeded with planning for additional military action in Cambodia. Mr. Nixon met with the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 May and outlined US objectives for the forthcoming 30 days. He wanted General Abrams to use the "maximum feasible military strength" against all other important Cambodian base areas that could be attacked with available US and South Vietnamese forces. He called for a bold, aggressive approach, striking the hardest possible blows and destroying

10. NY Times, 10 May 70, 1.
11. Ibid., 12 May 70, 1.

as many enemy sanctuaries as possible. Although he restricted attacks to the strip of Cambodia within 30 kilometers of the South Vietnam border, he promised to consider extension beyond that limit if General Abrams believed it necessary or desirable. The President gave the attacks in Cambodia the highest priority of all US operations in Southeast Asia.[12]

Following the meeting with the President, the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Moorer, instructed General Abrams to submit an outline plan for the attack of an additional base area in Cambodia during the next week. The plan, which Admiral Moorer wanted by the next day, should provide for the use of either a combined US/RVNAF force or a South Vietnamese force. Admiral Moorer also directed COMUSMACV to prepare another plan for operations into additional base areas of the field commander's choice. The latter plan was to cover the next 30 days and provide for as much destruction of enemy facilities and supplies as possible. "Higher authority desires a hard hitting campaign to be carried out with imagination and boldness," Admiral Moorer said, adding that if COMUSMACV needed increased air assets, "let me know immediately." Two days later, on 3 May, General Wheeler informed General Abrams that "higher authority" also wished an outline plan to attack Base Area 704, west of the Parrot's Beak, at the earliest possible time.[13]

On 2 May, General Abrams submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a plan for a combined US/RVNAF attack against Base Area 702. This area was continguous to Kontum Province in II CTZ and was a major enemy logistical and troop staging area for operations in South Vietnam. The operation, with the Commanding General of the US 4th Infantry Division in overall control, would commence not later than 7 May. General Wheeler immediately forwarded the plan to the Secretary of Defense, who approved it for execution. General Abrams subsequently refined the plan, naming the operation

12. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, Actg CJCS (Moorer) 6037 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 1 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 15-30 May 70 (Folder "Base Area 702").

13. Ibid. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, JCS 6090 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 1 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 28 Apr-8 May 1970.

Binh Tay I and scheduling initiation for 5 May. General Wheeler authorized COMUSMACV to execute the plan on 4 May.[14]

On the same day, General Abrams forwarded his plan for a more extended campaign in Cambodia. It included a series of unilateral and combined ground operations and a combined riverine operation on the Mekong. General Abrams proposed combined attacks in Base Area 350, above the Fishhook, on or about 6 May and in Base Areas 354 and 351 (see Map II) on about 8 May. He hoped to mount the riverine operations with both US and RVN forces on 10 May and attack Base Area 704, plus a new and unnumbered base area centered on Nui O Mountain, on 12 May. An attack on Base Area 701 would be carried out as the situation developed and forces became available. The 704, Nui O Mountain, and 701 actions would be conducted by the RVNAF. All operations were planned to run throughout the campaign. The riverine operation would interdict enemy traffic on the Mekong, seize an enemy transshipment point on Highway No. 1, evacuate Vietnamese refugees, safeguard Cambodian shipping, and help keep Highway No. 1 open. The Joint General Staff had concurred in the outline plan, and detailed planning was proceeding on an urgent basis. Weather was a key factor, General Abrams cautioned. Should it deteriorate, as was entirely possible in mid-May, operations might be forced to halt before all the base areas had been attacked.

The ongoing Parrot's Beak (TOAN THANG 42) and Fishhook (TOAN THANG 43) operations would last until optimum destruction had been accomplished, COMUSMACV continued. To carry out the new outline plan and to sustain current operations, large forces would have to be shifted into Cambodia, temporarily degrading security of vacated areas in South Vietnam. "This is an acceptable calculated risk for the short term," General Abrams explained, although there was danger of a possible enemy reaction in South Vietnam with a major drive through I CTZ. Since US redeployments had restricted allied flexibility to reinforce or fill gaps,

14. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msgs, COMUSMACV 5906 and 5982 to CJCS, 2 and 4 May 70; (~~TS~~) CM-5104-70 to SecDef, 2 May 70 (CM-5104-70 has SecDef's handwritten approval of the MACV plan); (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6102 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 4 May 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 15-30 May 70 (Folder "Base Area 702").

such an enemy attack could curtail the planned operations in Cambodia.[15]

In considering additional action in Cambodia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were conscious of the growing public discontent with the Cambodian operations. On 4 May, General Wheeler told COMUSMACV that there was developing concern both in the press and among "opposition groups" that US and RVNAF troops would become bogged down forever in Cambodia. While efforts had been made to get the message across that the Cambodian operations would end with the destruction of enemy installations and supporting facilities, he believed that it would be "very much to our advantage" to be able to announce the end of an exercise or the withdrawal of some forces back to Vietnam as soon as possible. He hastened to add that:

> The number one requirement is to do an effective job on the objectives and I do not wish to imply that we would want you to prematurely terminate an operation or in any way jeopardize it just to gain a press advantage. However, it would be highly desirable for higher authority to be in a position to exploit fully the termination of an operation or withdrawal of at least some of the forces engaged in Cambodia.[16]

General Abrams was reluctant to commit himself to specific withdrawals, pointing out the difficulties involved in such a course. "After the low tempo of friendly offensive operations during the past several months," he said, "it took some doing to get people back into the offensive spirit. We have recaptured it and don't wish to create the impression that we are slowing down by premature announcement of troop withdrawal from Cambodia." Several units would be involved in more than one operation. Some would rest between assignments, but others must move directly from one combat operation into a new one.[17]

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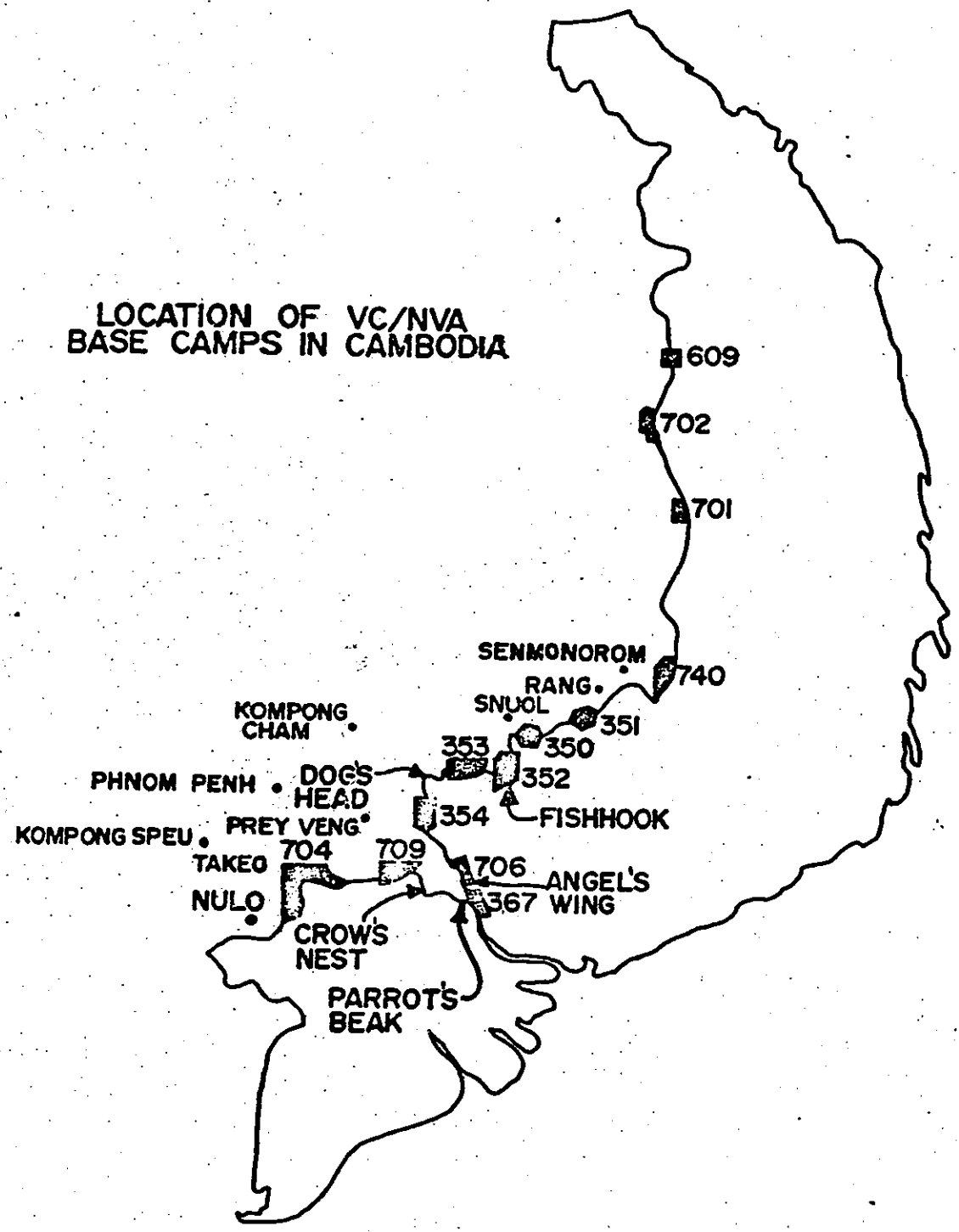
15. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 5996 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 4 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 28 Apr-8 May 70.
16. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6139 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 4 May 70, same file.
17. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 6065 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 5 May 70, same file.

MAP II


LOCATION OF VC/NVA
BASE CAMPS IN CAMBODIA
609
702
701
SENMONOROM
740
RANG
SNUOL
351
KOMPONG
CHAM
353
350
PHNOM PENH
DOG'S
HEAD
352
354
FISHHOOK
KOMPONG SPEU
PREY VENG
TAKEO
704
709
706
ANGEL'S
WING
367
NULO
CROW'S
NEST
PARROT'S
BEAK

On 5 May 1970, General Abrams informed his Washington superiors that he was preparing to attack Base Areas 350, 351, and 354. General Wheeler immediately approved these assaults, but advised General Abrams that his action revealed a misunderstanding of existing authorities. At the 26 April NSC meeting, President Nixon had directed that no combined attacks would be made in Cambodia without specific Washington approval. Thus General Wheeler explained, COMUSMACV's notice of the impending attack "took us by surprise." No doubt General Abrams had seen the submission of his plan for the attack on additional base areas and the subsequent message traffic regarding it as constituting tacit approval to proceed, but for political reasons, "advance approval from higher authority" was required. In order to submit requests for such approval, General Wheeler needed as quickly as possible information about the base areas to be attacked, the schemes of maneuver, and the friendly forces involved. General Wheeler had that day, 5 May, sent to the Secretary of Defense the proposal for operations against Base Area 704 and the riverine operation. "Am I correct," he asked General Abrams, "in assuming that this is the next operation you have in mind?"[18]

Press guidance for the operations that COMUSMACV was about to initiate, General Wheeler instructed, remained unchanged from that issued for the initial Cambodian operations. Higher authority, however, hoped that the attack against Base Area 354 would "blend" into other operations in the Parrot's Beak and that COMUSMACV would not need to make a separate announcement of the new action. General Wheeler continued:

> Of course, with the active press you have in country, you may be forced to do otherwise, and you must act according to your own best judgment. As viewed from here your operations seem to be achieving increasing success. I am praying this favorable course continues, for the carping critics and faint hearts are numerous. As you would expect, the pressures on the highest authority are tremendous.[19]

18. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 6081 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 5 May 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6214 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 5 May 70; (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 6224 to COMUSMACV, 5 May 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 28 Apr-8 May 70.

19. (~~TS~~) Msg, CJCS 6224 to COMUSMACV, 5 May 70, same file.

General Abrams replied that he regretted the surprise he had caused Washington by his announcement of the attacks on Base Areas 350, 351, and 354; he had assumed that the exchange of messages with the Joint Chiefs of Staff amounted to approval for the operations. The next planned operations, he said, would be the one against Base Area 704 and the riverine operations. With respect to the press coverage, he reported that he was continuing to apply the original guidance "of full disclosure and full access without overemphasizing the US role or the extent of the operations." Wherever possible RVNAF participation was being featured, and operations that had already been started were being related to the Parrot's Beak and TOAN THANG 43 actions.[20]

Meanwhile, the enemy was increasing military pressure on the Cambodian forces beyond the area of the US/RVNAF action. On 3 May, US Chargé Rives had reported from Phnom Penh that the FANK were having serious encounters in Prey Vent, Kandal, and Takeo Provinces, deep in Cambodia, and were urgently seeking US air and ground assistance. Mr. Rives recognized the Cambodian predicament, but recommended against any response. "If credence is to be given the President's recent speech, as well as to his overall policy, we must draw a line somewhere." For the United States to move forces beyond Svay Rieng, lifting troops by helicopter to Takeo in support of the Cambodians, would appear to accomplish exactly what the President's critics seemed to fear--involvement of the United States further in a "hopeless morass." There was no guarantee, Mr. Rives said, that these moves would accomplish more than to push the enemy even nearer to Phnom Penh. He was convinced that the United States must stop somewhere in Cambodia, even if the Lon Nol Government was threatened.[21]

Although concerned over the Cambodian situation, Washington authorities accepted Mr. Rives' advice and did not provide the requested air and ground assistance to the Cambodian forces in the Takeo area. They agreed that the best way to help would be to speed up COMUSMACV's planned riverine and Base Area 704 operations. Accordingly, General Wheeler asked COMUSMACV if those two actions,

20. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 6128 to CJCS, 6 May 70, same file.
21. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, JCS 6093 to COMUSMACV, 4 May 70, same file. (This message relayed Mr. Rives' report.)

planned for 12 May, could be moved ahead two or three days. Higher authority, General Wheeler said, would like to begin the operations even earlier if possible. In complicance, General Abrams moved up the scheduled initiation of both the Base Area 704 and riverine attacks to 9 May. Final approval for initiation of the operations, as well as for one against Base Area 709, was granted by General Wheeler on 7 May. As an exception to the 30-kilometer penetration restriction, riverine operations could be conducted up the Mekong to the site of the ferry on Highway No. 1, although support craft should stay within about 30 kilometers of the border.[22]

On 6 May, General Wheeler informed COMUSMACV of another Cambodian request for assistance in the Neak Luong-Banam-Samraoung Thom area along the Mekong River. General Wheeler assumed that the best way of relieving enemy pressure there was to continue with the operations either under way or planned. He advised General Abrams that "the feeling here is that the US should not become involved in combined operations with Cambodian forces." General Abrams replied that the combined riverine operations and ground assault into Base Area 704 on 9 May would be the best response to relieve the situation in question. He concurred with General Wheeler that combined US-Cambodian military action was not desirable, although situations might arise where tactical air support of some Cambodian forces might be useful.[23]

The Mekong riverine operation and the RVNAF ground attacks into Base Areas 704 and 709 were launched according to plan on 9 May. The Mekong action was the last operation with US participation against a new area in Cambodia. Subsequently, attacks were carried out against Base Areas 701

22. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6153 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 4 May 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 6061 to CJCS, 5 May 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6317 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 6 May 70; (~~TS~~) Msg, JCS 6393 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 7 May 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 28 Apr-8 May 70. (JCS 6317 approved execution of the Base Area 704 and riverine operations; JCS 6393 superseded JCS 6317 and authorized attacks in Base Areas 704 and 709 and the riverine operation.)

23. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6320 to COMUSMACV, 6 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 21 Apr-14 May 70. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 6181 to CJCS, 7 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 28 Apr-8 May 70.

and 740 and against the Nui O and western 704 area, but South Vietnamese troops conducted these thrusts.[24]

Meantime, on 7 May, the Secretary of Defense addressed COMUSMACV directly on the Cambodian operations. He referred to an assessment by General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker indicating that the military costs and risks of the action were reasonable and manageable. He pointed out, however, that there were additional factors that he must consider in making recommendations to the President. To give clear credibility to the success of the Cambodian operations, it was essential, Mr. Laird said, to establish certain "key patterns." To that end, he asked General Abrams for his views on the following questions: (1) When would US ground operations, including the provision of advisers, coordinators, and other types of support to RVNAF units be completed in Cambodia? (2) Could the operations in Cambodia be kept primarily South Vietnamese with US support for their duration and what were the plans for doing so? (3) Could the operations in specific base areas be conducted separately and reported as separate operations as each was finished? (4) Could the United States continue to redeploy troops from South Vietnam during May and June? The Secretary also asked about progress of Vietnamization during the Cambodian operations and about plans to reinstitute joint RVNAF/Cambodian border operations after the US withdrawal. He added that all operations in Cambodia involving US support must be essentially complete by 31 May and terminated "in toto" by 15 June.[25]

In reply, General Abrams assured Secretary Laird on 11 May that all planned operations in Cambodia could be supported successfully with the resources on hand, but he cautioned against undue haste in withdrawal from Cambodia. Thorough searches of the base areas had to be made on foot over difficult ground to find cleverly concealed and dispersed enemy caches. Removal of the discovered stores was also time consuming. In the interval between the Secretary's request and General Abrams' answer, the President announced at his 8 May news conference that the majority of US troops would be out of Cambodia by mid-June and completely removed

24. (~~S~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-89 - C-97.

25. (~~TS~~) Msg, OSD 6398 to COMUSMACV (thru CJCS), 7 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 28 Apr-8 May 70.

by 30 June. This was a more lenient timetable than Mr. Laird's deadlines of 31 May and 15 June, and General Abrams preferred the new schedule.

With regard to the Secretary's second question about shifting to South Vietnamese forces the primary responsibility for remaining operations, General Abrams said that all approved ongoing operations could be successfully completed with the present forces assigned. Where operations involved a preponderance of US troops, as in Base Areas 352/353, 354, 351, and 704, it would be unsound, he thought, to shift forces during the area-clearing process, but "the primarily RVN nature of the operations will increase as we go along." He also assured Secretary Laird that all border area operations were conducted and reported separately. With respect to continuing troop withdrawals from South Vietnam, General Abrams believed it "too early" to assess the impact of the Cambodian action on the Vietnamization program or to propose redeployments for May and June 1970. Additionally, it was too soon, he thought, to foresee the character of future RVNAF/Cambodian operations.[26]

The Operations Continue

In accordance with the plans prepared by General Abrams and approved in Washington, the US-RVNAF campaign in Cambodia proceeded. On 5 May, COMUSMACV launched Operation Binh Tay I into Base Area 702, the northernmost attack of the Cambodian invasion. Following initial air attacks, forces of the US 4th Infantry Division and the 40th ARVN Regiment began the combat assault. They encountered light enemy contact until the final days of the operation and concentrated primarily on intensive search and clear operations, discovering large quantities of weapons and munitions, food, and medical supplies. All US maneuver elements withdrew from BINH TAY I on 16 May although the ARVN forces continued the operation for another nine days. Final statistics for the operation showed 276 enemy killed and 18 detained while friendly losses amounted to 46 killed (30 US and 16 ARVN) and 170 wounded.[27]

26. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 6400 to SecDef (info CJCS), 11 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 21 Apr-14 May 70.

27. All information on the ground operations and the riverine attack in Cambodia, unless otherwise stated, is from (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-57 - C-97.

On 6 May, US and RVNAF troops attacked into Base Areas 354, 351, 350. Tactical Air strikes and artillery bombardment preceded the movement of the 1st Brigade of the US 25th Infantry Division into Base Area 354, just above the Parrot's Beak. This attack, designated TOAN THANG 44, met only light and scattered resistance, except in the vicinity of cache sites and enemy base camps. The operation was completed on 14 May when the US brigade redeployed to a new location in Base Area 353 in Operation TOAN THANG 43.

The operations in Base Areas 351 and 350, named TOAN THANG 45 and 46, respectively, were of longer duration. Forces of the US 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) conducted TOAN THANG 45 and found little enemy opposition during the first day of the attack. On the following day, however, they made contact with the enemy and shortly thereafter discovered "a very large" ammunition and storage area, which became known as "Rock Island East." Search operations continued throughout May and into June with cache discoveries coming faster than the troops could remove or destroy them. Consequently, COMUSMACV assigned another battalion of the 1st Cavalry Division to the operations. Forces of the 5th ARVN Division were lifted by US aircraft into Base Area 350 in Operation TOAN THANG 46. There they conducted search operations, finding large stores of weapons, ammunition, and rice. The operation started to phase down on 20 June and all the ARVN troops had left Base Area 350 by 30 June.

United States and South Vietnamese forces began a major land and water attack in Cambodia on 9 May. As noted above, this operation was moved ahead three days from the originally planned execution date of 12 May at the request of Washington officials. Thirty US gunboats joined with 60 South Vietnamese craft in a thrust up the Mekong River, while ARVN troops of the 9th Division invaded Base Area 709 and the eastern part of Base Area 704, territory just to the east of the Mekong River. This was the southernmost operation of the Cambodian invasion and the first attack in the Mekong Delta.

The allied flotilla advanced quickly up the Mekong and South Vietnamese marines seized the strategic ferry crossing at Neak Luong on the Phnom Penh-Saigon highway. The South Vietnamese boats then proceeded to Phnom Penh and began evacuation of South Vietnamese civilians waiting there. This latter part of the operation was conducted by the Vietnamese Navy without consulting the United States, and no US forces

or craft went beyond Neak Luong. The South Vietnamese boats left Phnom Penh on 15 May carrying 9,000 refugees, and the riverine portion of the operation was completed on 18 May. There was no further US participation in this operation, but the ARVN ground operations continued and subsequently expanded into the western part of Base Area 704 and the Nui O area. Here the ARVN troops conducted search operations similar to those being waged in the other base area attacks. The river thrust and the initial ground invasion were called CUU LONG I, with the naval portion labeled TRAN HUNG DAO XI. As the land action expanded in the Mekong Delta, the operation was redesignated CUU LONG II and, finally, CUU LONG III, which was concluded on 30 June.[28]

Two further attacks were launched into enemy base areas during the Cambodian invasion; both operations were conducted by Vietnamese forces with US tactical air support. The first, BINH TAY II, was against Base Area 701 and lasted from 14 through 27 May. The second, BINH TAY III into Base Area 740, was begun by troops of the 8th ARVN Cavalry on 20 May and extended through 27 June. Both followed the pattern of the previous and ongoing base area attacks, consisting of initial air strikes, troops assaults into the target areas, and search operations to locate and evacuate or destroy enemy equipment and supplies.

While these various operations, beginning on and after 5 May, were being launched, the two original operations of the invasion TOAN THANG 42 and 43 continued. In Base Area 367 and 706 in the Parrot's Beak, South Vietnamese forces with US support pressed on with TOAN THANG 42, engaging and overrunning enemy forces. On 9 May, additional RVNAF troops were brought in to prevent enemy reoccupation while the combat task forces moved deeper into Cambodia along Highway No. 1. On 23 May, the South Vietnamese forces began a new phase of the operation, attacking the Chup Rubber Plantation, just to the north of the Parrot's Beak and along Highway No. 7. Heavy contact with the enemy followed, causing increased casualties on both sides.

Meanwhile, Operation TOAN THANG 43 progressed in Base Areas 352 and 353. The 10,000 US and South Vietnamese forces

28. NY Times, 10 May 70, 1; 12 May 70, 1. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 6400 to SecDef (info CJCS), 11 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 21 Apr-14 May 70.

pushed into the Fishhook from three directions, finding many enemy caches, including a major enemy storage site that was dubbed "The City." On 9 May, the 2d Brigade of the US 25th Infantry Division was introduced into the operation and attacked southwest of Mimot Plantation. Enemy resistance, which had been light, stiffened in mid-May, and on 14 May, the 1st Brigade of the US 25th Division, which had just completed Operation TOAN THANG 44 in Base Area 354, relieved the 1st Brigade of the ARVN 1st Cavalry Division. Search and clearing operations continued in the Fishhook throughout the remainder of May and into June, uncovering numerous small weapons and ammunition caches and several large rice stores, but the allied forces never found the COSVN headquarters, which had been a major objective of this particular attack.

Air operations played an important role in the Cambodian invasion and were used in all the actions between 29 April and 30 June. Both US and VNAF tactical air support was employed along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border. The VNAF flew the majority of the sorties in Operations CUU LONG I, II, and III and TOAN THANG 42, while the US Air Force conducted the majority in the other operations; Army organic air was also used extensively. United States aircraft flew 5,189 preplanned and 1,675 immediate airstrike sorties plus 193 gunship and 44 flaredrop missions; the South Vietnamese flew 2,691 tactical sorties and 184 gunship missions.[29]

The United States also employed B-52 strikes in six of the base area attacks in Cambodia. These strikes provided massive firepower for preparatory bombings prior to the initial combat assaults. Follow-on missions were also used against the suspected COSVN headquarters and other enemy locations beyond the 30-kilometer limitation imposed on US ground forces. By far the largest air effort during the Cambodian incursion occurred in Operation TOAN THANG 43 in the Fishhook. There both tactical and B-52 strikes preceded the ground invasion and provided close air support for troops in contact.[30]

In addition to the regularly announced and reported air activities in Cambodia, the United States also continued

29. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. C-128.
30. Ibid., C-128, C-131.

the highly secret B-52 (MENU) and tactical (PATIO) air operations in Cambodia, which had been initiated before the invasion. The MENU bombing dated from March 1969 and continued through 26 May 1970.[31] Secret US tactical air strikes in Cambodia, under the code word PATIO, had begun on 24 April 1970[32] to supplement the MENU bombing; they were restricted to an 18-mile strip in Cambodia along the entire border with South Vietnam. On 11 May 1970 the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with approval of the Secretary of Defense, authorized the employment of PATIO strikes against an enemy truck park and storage area in Cambodia near the Laos border and outside the standard 18-mile zone. The strike was conducted as planned on 14 May with 32 sorties occurring under FAC control. During the Cambodian operation, a total of 156 sorties were flown in Cambodia under the PATIO authority.[33]

Surveillance and MARKET TIME Operations

On 25 April 1970, the United States began air and naval surveillance of the port of Kompong Som (previously called Sihanoukville) to determine whether supplies intended for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces in Cambodia and South Vietnam were passing through the port. Two US Navy destroyers, especially equipped for the task, maintained continuous patrol in international waters off Kompong Som, beyond the 12-nautical mile limit of Cambodian-claimed territorial waters. In addition, US Navy MARKET TIME aircraft provided air surveillance of the approaches to harbor. No RVNAF forces participated in these activities.

During the period 25 April-20 May, 30 ships--16 arrivals and 14 departures--were detected at Kompong Som by the surveillance operations. None of these vessels appeared suspicious, however, and their movements were consistent with normal merchant marine traffic. General Wheeler advised the Secretary of Defense on 25 May 1970 that an evaluation of the reports indicated that all steel-hulled traffic into Kompong Som had been detected. General Wheeler

31. See Ch. 7, pp. 220-221, for the initiation of MENU as well as for statistics for the operation.

32. See Ch. 7, p. 246.

33. (U) DOD Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos, 10 Sep 73, pp. 21-22.

recommended that the surveillance be kept up as long as useful data accrued, noting that there was little risk to the US forces involved and that charges of US interference with shipping to or from Kompong Som could not be substantiated. He also found the activity beneficial in that the presence of US ships off Kompong Som provided visible evidence to interested parties that a quarantine could be enforced at any time.[34]

Besides the air and naval surveillance of Kompong Som, MARKET TIME operations were extended from South Vietnam along the Cambodian coast for a short distance in order to prevent sea infiltration of men and supplies into Cambodia. During the initial days of the invasion, Secretary of State William P. Rogers wondered if it might not be to the advantage of both the United States and the Government of Cambodia to conduct MARKET TIME in Cambodian waters to reduce the chance of enemy resupply by sea. He noted evidence of considerable sampan and junk activity, as well as an enemy attack against Cambodian forces at the coast town of Kep. Accordingly, he proposed to expand MARKET TIME operations to 104 degrees East, just beyond the Cambodian coastal town of Kampot, and he requested US Chargé Rives in Phnom Penh to solicit the views of the Cambodian Government on this matter. The Government of Cambodia concurred in the extension, and on 8 May, the Secretary of State informed Chargé Rives that the operation would be initiated without any announcement in either Saigon or Washington. The Secretary hoped that the "press can be denied knowledge of the operation for as long as possible."[35]

On the same day, 8 May 1970, General Wheeler instructed CINCPAC to prepare a contingency plan for the expansion of MARKET TIME operations into Cambodian waters, emphasizing the use of South Vietnamese forces and minimum US participation. The area for the enlarged operations would extend from the present MARKET TIME boundary at the South Vietnam-Cambodia border to a point on the Cambodian coastline at 104 degrees East and "thence south along 104 degrees East to the present MARKET TIME boundary at the median point

34. (TS-GP 1) CM-5219-70 to SecDef, 25 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia (MARKET TIME OPNS).
35. (TS) Msgs, State 68509 and 69970 to Phnom Penh, 5 and 8 May 70, JCS IN 84252 and 88196.

between Cambodia and Phu Quoc." The following rules of engagement would apply: small craft should be stopped and searched only if they gave strong indication that they were attempting to infiltrate supplies into Cambodia; vessels that were clearly identified as supplying enemy forces could be destroyed if they were of North Vietnamese origin. General Wheeler directed CINCPAC to take special precautions, however, to prevent interference with any shipping, even Communist, carrying on normal commerce with Cambodia. If Soviet or Chinese Communist vessels were found engaging in resupply, MARKET TIME forces should take no action, but should report to higher authority for "appropriate instruction." General Wheeler wanted the widened MARKET TIME to begin at the same time as the attack into Base Area 704 and the Mekong riverine operation or as soon thereafter as possible.[36]

But before the requested plan could be prepared, the Republic of Vietnam unilaterally expanded inner barrier MARKET TIME patrols into Cambodian waters without waiting for US approval or guidance. The Chief of Naval Operations of the Vietnamese Navy, with the approval of the Joint General Staff, ordered the first MARKET TIME operation in Cambodian coastal waters on 9 May 1970. No US vessels participated, but the action occurred on such short notice that US advisers could not be withdrawn from the three South Vietnamese craft conducting the initial patrol. Later investigation revealed, however, that only one of the Vietnamese vessels with a single US adviser actually entered Cambodian waters.[37]

General Abrams prepared the requested MARKET TIME plan and CINCPAC submitted it, with his endorsement, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 11 May. But they postponed action pending receipt of the Vietnamese Navy's rules of engagement for action in Cambodian waters. Shortly thereafter, the Vietnamese Chief of Naval Operations agreed to abide by the rules specified by General Wheeler on 8 May, and the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Moorer,

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36. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6477 to CINCPAC, 8 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia (MARKET TIME OPNS).

37. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 092225Z May 70; (~~TS~~-GP 3) CM-5170-70 to SecDef, 15 May 70; same file.

requested Secretary of Defense approval of MARKET TIME operations in Cambodian waters in accordance with the COMUSMACV plans.[38]

Secretary Laird approved the expansion of MARKET TIME into Cambodian waters on 13 May 1970 with the understanding that the South Vietnamese would follow the US rules of engagement. At the same time, he made clear his displeasure on learning that MARKET TIME operations had already begun off Cambodia without his knowledge. He was shocked to find that an operation with US advisers had been undertaken without his approval, and he requested an explanation.[39]

Two days later, on 15 May, Admiral Moorer explained to Mr. Laird how the South Vietnamese had, without US consent or consultation, initiated MARKET TIME in Cambodian waters and how US advisers had inadvertently participated in the initial patrol. He assured the Secretary that both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV had been cautioned to keep Washington fully informed of new independent RVNAF operations involving US advisers so that proper authority for US participation could be secured before the operations were launched. Both the vessel commander and the accompanying US adviser must make parallel requests to their respective superiors before any action could be taken in the extended MARKET TIME area. Admiral Moorer went on to report that, currently, five VNN vessels were employed in Cambodian coastal waters in MARKET TIME patrols.[40]

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38. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 6366 to CINCPAC, 11 May 70; Msg, CINCPAC to Actg CJCS, 120503Z May 70; Msg, COMUSMACV 6474 to CJCS, 12 May 70; Msg, CJCS 6587 to CINCPAC, 12 May 70; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS "Market Time Operations - Cambodia," 13 May 70; same file.

39. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Market Time Operations - Cambodia," 13 May 70, same file.

40. (TS-GP 1) Msg, Actg CJCS (Moorer) 6695 to CINCPAC, 13 May 70 (by this msg the CJCS also authorized CINCPAC to conduct MARKET TIME operations in the Cambodian area in accordance with the COMUSMACV plan); (TS-GP 3) CM-5170-70 to SecDef, 15 May 70; same file.

The MARKET TIME operations off Cambodia proceeded without further incident. By 25 May, the RVNAF had 210 personnel embarked in 25 VNN craft engaged in MARKET TIME activities related to Cambodia, but only five VNN vessels actually manned stations in Cambodian waters. United States involvement consisted of 21 US Navy advisers aboard the VNN craft patrolling the MARKET TIME inner barrier, and US ships in South Vietnamese waters gave logistic support to the VNN. In addition, US ships extended the MARKET TIME middle barrier off the Cambodian coast, but remained in international waters, and US aircraft provided air surveillance of the approaches to Kompong Som.

The expanded MARKET TIME activities did not prove particularly fruitful. Of 17 sampans and junks detected and searched by 25 May, none was detained or found to contain contraband. Nevertheless, the presence of these naval units had reduced the junk/sampan traffic to "near zero," General Wheeler told the Secretary of Defense, indicating that no enemy infiltration was occurring. General Wheeler advised Secretary Laird on 25 May 1970 that the expanded MARKET TIME patrols off Cambodia were well worth the extra expense, which could be absorbed under regular operating costs. There was some slight risk of involving third country shipping, but CINCPAC had assured General Wheeler that operating rules were being strictly enforced to avoid such risks. There was some possibility, General Wheeler continued, that the South Vietnamese might unilaterally extend the patrols farther westward, but should that happen, US advisers would be withdrawn. In any event, it was planned that all US Navy personnel and craft engaged in Cambodian waters would return to the regular MARKET TIME patrol areas by 30 June 1970.[41]

General Wheeler's warning of possible South Vietnamese expansion of patrols in Cambodian waters proved prophetic. On 26 May the Vietnamese Navy announced a unilateral extension of MARKET TIME westward into Cambodian waters to 103 degrees 47 minutes East, to include the harbor and approaches to Kompong Som. United States advisers were immediately withdrawn from the VNN vessels, and no US personnel participated in the expanded MARKET TIME patrols. The Vietnamese continued to follow the rules of engagement laid down by the United States on 8 May.[42]

41. (TS-GP 1) CM-5219-70 to SecDef, 25 May 70, same file. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. F-12 - F-13.

42. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 260359Z May 70, JCS IN 25959; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 090256Z Jun 70, JCS IN 49036.

Planning for the Post-30 June Period

While the Cambodian operations were in progress, the President and his advisers sought to determine a course of action to be followed after US forces withdrew from Cambodia. The primary US objective in the Cambodian invasion was to destroy the enemy base areas that supported operations in South Vietnam, but a secondary aim was to relieve Viet Cong and North Vietnamese pressure on the Cambodian armed forces and thereby indirectly support the Cambodian Government. Once US forces returned to South Vietnam, enemy pressure on the Cambodian Government was likely to increase, and further support would appear desirable. Yet, the policymakers in Washington were reluctant to expand US assistance to Cambodia. They wanted to avoid deeper involvement and undue identification with the Lon Nol Government.

Guidance to this effect had been relayed by the Department of State to US Chargé Rives in Phnom Penh as early as 15 April 1970 and repeated on 9 May. At that time, Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson wrote that the United States was attempting to provide enough support and reassurance to the Government of Cambodia so that it would have the determination and capability to cope with the enemy, but to avoid giving the Cambodians any false expectations regarding the extent of US assistance. Mr. Johnson referred to the furnishing of captured arms and munitions to the FANK and said: "We want carefully to avoid getting ourselves in an 'advisory' role vis-a-vis the FANK or the GOC with the responsibility that would flow there from." The US mission in Phnom Penh must be kept small to avoid any impression that the United States was taking over, thus committing US prestige in Cambodia in a "major way."[43]

The Secretary of Defense, in his thinking about Cambodia and further actions both there and in South Vietnam, was concerned about maintaining support at home for the President's Southeast Asia policy. On 15 May 1970, he advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that it was time to consider plans for concluding the operations in Cambodia, for conducting "effective" operations in Southeast Asia after 1 July 1970, and for "transitioning from our current operations to the

43. (TS) Msgs, State 55340 and 07081 to Phnom Penh, 14 Apr and 9 May 70.

longer range program." He reminded the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the decision to invade Cambodia had been based on both tactical and strategic objectives. The former were to disrupt the enemy's base areas and to deny him major amounts of military supplies and ammunition; the latter included facilitation of Vietnamization, continued and possibly accelerated US troop withdrawal from South Vietnam, and promotion of "meaningful" negotiations to end the war. Field reports indicated that the tactical objectives were in sight, but the Secretary now considered the longer-term strategic outcome of the Cambodian operations even more important. "If our military activities are not successful in these terms, no amount of highlighting immediate tactical results will suffice to satisfy the American people."

Secretary Laird told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the President's supporters in Congress had accepted a four to six week duration for the US sanctuary operations in Cambodia. They would continue to support the President as long as his promises were kept and the strategic objectives were achieved. For this reason, it was "absolutely mandatory" that all US ground units, advisers, controllers, and other support personnel be out of Cambodia by 30 June. General Abrams had indicated that he could comply with this schedule, but care must be taken to allow for adverse weather, enemy attacks, or other unforeseen circumstances. The scheduling should err on the side of withdrawing "a bit early," the Secretary said, to avoid being caught in Cambodia after 30 June.

The Secretary asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a plan covering a number of aspects of the Cambodian campaign. He wanted to see the projected termination date for each separate Cambodian operation and details of the phasedown of US elements in Cambodia through 30 June. The program for removing or destroying enemy material captured in Cambodia should also be set out. In addition, he directed that the plan provide for the employment of US air operations, both tactical and B-52, at a level deemed "militarily useful" in Cambodia or along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border. If new or extended authorities were required, a request should accompany the plan. Further, he directed inclusion of planning for the reversion of naval operations to the level considered necessary to fulfill US objectives in Southeast Asia and the return of RVNAF units to "productive cross-border operations" similar to those in progress before the US entry into Cambodia. He also wanted "the initiation of

even more aggressive and positive military programs by the South Vietnamese" to accelerate pacification and security within South Vietnam.

Secretary Laird recognized that his request was "a tall order," but he was certain the Joint Chiefs of Staff realized "how much rides in the balance." Not only must the time limit for termination of US ground operations in Cambodia be met; the longer-term stratetic value of the Cambodian operations must be made manifest by sustained progress within South Vietnam.[44]

As an initial response, General Wheeler on 22 May submitted a plan for US air interdiction in eastern Cambodia to follow the withdrawal of US troops. The plan provided for both tactical air and B-52 operations under forward air control in that part of Cambodia bounded by the Laos border on the north, the South Vietnam border on the east, Route 13 on the south, and a line 200 meters west of the Mekong River on the west. Reconnaissance operations would also be conducted to provide surveillance of enemy activity, to locate military facilities and logistics areas, and to furnish target damage assessment. Sortie levels for the plan would be determined by "the relative priorities of other air operations and the approved sorties level for Southeast Asia."[45]

Although President Nixon had publicly promised the withdrawal of all US forces from Cambodia by 30 June 1970, this commitment did not apply to South Vietnamese troops, and the United States anticipated that RVNAF operations in Cambodia would continue after that date. The nature and extent of such South Vientamese operations was a sensitive question, however, and was considered by both the Departments of State and Defense in Washington. The result was guidance in the form of a joint State/Defense message dispatched by Secretary Rogers on 21 May to US officials in Saigon and Phnom Penh and to CINCPAC. The United States, the message said, would encourage the Republic of Vietnam to maintain a "flexible posture" on future Cambodian operations,

44. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS "Southeast Asia Planning," 15 May 70, Att to JCS 2472/621, 16 May 70, JMF 907/501 (15 May 70).
45. (~~TS~~) CM-5203-70 to SecDef, 22 May 70, JMF 880/323 (22 Jun 70).

principally to deter enemy occupation of border sanctuaries and moves against Phnom Penh or ports in southern Cambodia. "We want to make clear that restrictions which apply to U.S. forces after 30 June do not apply to SVN forces." South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia must be consistent with the objectives of Vietnamization and should, therefore, be limited to enemy-occupied areas where the enemy presence threatened forces and operations in South Vietnam.

Consequently, the United States favored brief RVNAF attacks in Cambodian border areas to protect friendly forces across the border. If the enemy realized that South Vietnamese forces could enter Cambodia at will, the Joint State/Defense message advised, he would be deterred from a buildup in the border areas. The United States would furnish logistic and artillery support, as necessary, from South Vietnam to back up RVNAF operations in Cambodia. "We would prefer air support be provided by the GVN," the joint message read, "but would not preclude U.S. air support if essential."

Although favoring South Vietnamese operations in the border areas of Cambodia, the United States wanted the Republic of Vietnam to use caution, avoiding "wide ranging" actions designed to support the Cambodian Government. United States policymakers in Washington did not want to give the enemy pretext for attacking Phnom Penh or seizing all of Cambodia. The joint State/Defense message stressed the desire that the Republic of Vietnam consult the United States fully on all operations in Cambodia and coordinate closely with the Cambodian Government.[46]

Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams called on President Thieu on 26 May 1970 to explain US policy toward Cambodia and to discuss further operations there. President Thieu was fully satisified with the US position. He reiterated that it was not his purpose to remain permanently in Cambodia, to take over the Cambodian battle, or to seize any Cambodian territory. His objective in fighting there, he said, was to assist and accelerate Vietnamization, to clean out the remaining Viet Cong strongholds, and to destroy enemy forces within the country. He anticipated at that time that all South Vietnamese forces would leave Cambodia

46. (TS) Msg, Joint State/Def (State 77899) to Saigon and Phnom Penh, MACV, and CINCPAC 21 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 9-31 May 70.

by 30 June, but he hoped to work out arrangements with the Cambodian Government to allow limited cross-border operations to stop the enemy from rebuilding border bases. President Thieu planned to meet with his corps commanders the following day to review the whole Cambodian operation. He believed that there should be a plan governing operations in Cambodia for the next three months.[47]

General Abrams relayed a report of the meeting with President Thieu to General Wheeler, who found it "very interesting." The same subject, he told General Abrams in reply, had been discussed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense that same day. "We believe," General Wheeler told COMUSMACV, "that we should encourage the South Vietnamese to plan for incursions or raids in force subsequent to 30 June on a selective basis in areas to which the enemy returns and which pose a threat to Free World Military forces." The one problem that General Wheeler foresaw in the guidance received to date was that the United States would not provide logistic or air support to such operations in Cambodia nor could any US forces be involved. The prohibitions would not extend to air interdiction in the northeastern part of Cambodia if targets and patterns of enemy operations indicated that such a campaign would be remunerative. But Secretary Laird was "quite specific," General Wheeler added, that "we could not be placed in a position of supporting ARVN operations in Cambodia after 30 June with close air support sorties and logistic support." The Secretary had asked if General Abrams had started planning with the Joint General Staff for post-30 June operations in Cambodia, and General Wheeler asked General Abrams to forward this information.[48]

On 28 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to Secretary Larid's 15 May request regarding the termination of the Cambodian action and future planning. They sent him a summary of the plans for the culmination of US operations in Cambodia and a plan for operations in South Vietnam after 1 July 1970,[49] together with an assessment of the Cambodian

47. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 7175 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 26 May 70, same file.
48. (TS) Msg, CJCS 7308 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 26 May 70, same file.
49. The plan for operations in South Vietnam after 1 July is covered in Ch. 9 below, pp. 323-324.

invasion to date. They believed that the allied action in Cambodia had reduced the threat of a major enemy effort in III and IV CTZs as well as in southern II CTZ, estimating that the enemy would need six to nine months to replenish stockpiles and be ready to resume sustained operations along the Cambodian border. Although driven from the border areas, the enemy had seized more positive control of most of Cambodia east of the Mekong River and north of Highway No. 7 and would, no doubt, try to consolidate positions in this area. In addition, once allied forces left Cambodia, the enemy would certainly attempt to rebuild base areas and supply lines, carry out attacks against South Vietnam from Cambodia, and keep up pressure on Phnom Penh, hoping to cause the overthrow of Lon Nol. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also observed that the operations in Cambodia had resulted in only "minimal effect" on enemy capabilities in I and northern II CTZs in South Vietnam and warned that recent evidence indicated the possibility of major enemy attacks in those areas within the "next month or so."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then summarized for the Secretary the plans for ending US action in Cambodia, cautioning that there were important variables, such as the extent of further RVN operations inside Cambodia and the stability of the Lon Nol Government, that could not be forecast with confidence at that time. All ongoing US attacks in Cambodia were being terminated as rapidly as possible and all US personnel would be withdrawn to meet the 30 June deadline. Precise termination dates and specific numerical phasedowns could not be determined in advance because of the uncertainties of enemy reaction and weather, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff did provide the Secretary a table presenting their best estimate of those dates and troop withdrawals for each base area operation in Cambodia. Captured enemy material and equipment that could be moved was being evacuated to forward supply points in South Vietnam to await further disposition; removal of several major caches had already been completed. Remaining captured supplies that could not be safely or feasibly transported were being destroyed in place.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also reviewed their plan for air interdiction in Cambodia after 1 July 1970, which had been submitted to the Secretary on 22 May 70.[50] United

50. See above, p. 288.

States naval operations in and around South Vietnam after 1 July would revert to the type and level conducted prior to the Cambodian incursion, including: SEA LORDS riverine interdiction and waterway control; MARKET TIME coastal surveillance and interdiction along the South Vietnamese coast; tactical air support from TF-77 carriers on YANKEE STATION; and naval gunfire support along the South Vietnamese coast. In addition, two Amphibious Ready Groups/Special Landing Forces would be kept in ready status in the Western Pacific for possible commitment in South Vietnam. The MARKET TIME patrol of the Cambodian coast would continue, but only South Vietnamese craft would operate in Cambodian waters, and contingency plans would be developed and maintained for the quarantine of Kompong Som.

In his 15 May request, the Secretary of Defense had directed that plans be made to return RVNAF units to cross-border operations similar to those conducted prior to 28 April 1970, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff assured Mr. Laird that COMUSMACV would continue efforts to control the magnitude and nature of RVNAF attacks into Cambodia. The approaching monsoon season as well as internal security requirements within South Vietnam would limit RVNAF action in Cambodia. In addition, COMUSMACV would carefully monitor all RVNAF actions in Cambodia, providing US support only for those that were consistent with US concepts and objectives.[51]

Meanwhile, on 27 May, General Abrams had replied to General Wheeler's inquiry concerning the initiation of planning with the Joint General Staff. He had not begun such planning because his instructions on this matter appeared contradictory. He interpreted the joint State/Defense message of 21 May as permitting US close air support for RVNAF operations "if essential"; yet the guidance of the Secretary of Defense, relayed by General Wheeler on the previous day, indicated that the United States would not provide close air support for RVNAF actions in Cambodia. Because of this discrepancy, General Abrams had suspended any work with the Joint General Staff on post-30 June planning until he received further instructions.[52]

51. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-261-70 to SecDef, 28 May 70, Encl to JCS 2472/612-1, 25 May 70, JMF 907/501 (15 May 70).

52. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV 7183 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 27 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 9-31 May 70.

This guidance was not long in coming. On the afternoon of 30 May, President Nixon gathered his top advisers, including Generals Wheeler and Abrams, at the Western White House at San Clemente to review the situation in Cambodia. Among the subjects discussed was policy for post-30 June operations, and the President resolved the question of US close air support in Cambodia. He approved US air interdiction missions in Cambodia, but not US close air support of South Vietnamese forces operating there. He granted General Abrams authority to employ US tactical air outside of the specified interdiction area when required to enhance the "security and safety of US forces in South Vietnam," but the term "close air support" was not to be used in describing such operations. After General Abrams had returned to Saigon, General Wheeler informed him that "In view of our meeting with the President . . . , I believe that you have adequate guidance with which to conduct post-1 July planning with the JGS."[53]

Presidential Progress Report

President Nixon on 3 June reported to the American people on the progress of the Cambodian invasion. He had recently met with General Abrams, he revealed, and based on the General's assessment, he could "now state that this has been the most successful operation of this long and very difficult war." In Cambodia during the month of May, the President said, US and South Vietnamese troops had captured a total amount of enemy arms, equipment, ammunition, and food nearly equal to what had been captured in all of Vietnam in all of the previous year. He reviewed his reasons for ordering the action and listed the following "long-range" impacts of the Cambodian operation: (1) elimination of an immediate danger to the security of US forces remaining in Vietnam; (2) additional "precious time" for the South Vietnamese to train and prepare themselves for their own defense so that US forces could be withdrawn; (3) insurance for continued success of the US troop withdrawal program in South Vietnam.

53. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 7710 to CJCS, 7 Jun 70; (TS) Msg, CJCS 7490 to COMUSMACV, 1 Jun 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 1-30 Jun 70.

The success of the operations to date, the President continued, guaranteed the withdrawal of all US forces from Cambodia by 30 June. In fact, 17,000 of the 31,000 American troops who had entered Cambodia had already returned to Vietnam. The remainder, he promised, including all air support, logistics, and military advisory personnel, would be out of Cambodia by the end of the month. The only remaining US activity in Cambodia after 1 July, Mr. Nixon announced, would be air missions to interdict enemy troop and material movements when he considered it necessary to "protect the lives and security of our men in South Vietnam."

The President concluded his speech with an appeal for support. He assured the dissenters that he understood the deep divisions in the country over the war and realized that many American were deeply troubled. "But I also have a solumn obligation to make the hard decisions which I find are necessary to protect the lives of 400,000 American men remaining in Vietnam."[54]

With the matter of US air support for South Vietnamese cross-border actions in Cambodia resolved, General Abrams on his return to Vietnam proceeded to discuss future RVNAF operations in Cambodia with General Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff. He explained to the South Vietnamese General what the United States would like his force to accomplish and the extent of US support. General Abrams found the RVNAF willing to continue operations in Cambodia and, despite traditional enmities and some current difficulties with the Cambodians, anxious to assist their neighbor. General Vien told COMUSMACV that his forces were doing all they could to place pressure on the enemy in Cambodia. He noted that his troops had been fighting without letup for over a month and that the need for relief of troops and maintenance of equipment was evident. Consequently, General Abrams reported to General Wheeler on 7 June that the South Vietnamese forces were doing "all that reasonably can be expected at this time."[55]

54. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 476-480.

55. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 7438 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 2 Jun 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 7708 to CJCS, 7 Jun 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 1-30 Jun 70.

Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams called on President Thieu again on 8 June to convey a personal message from President Nixon praising the recent performance of the RVNAF and to inform the RVN President of the decision made at the San Clemente meeting concerning US air support in Cambodia. President Thieu told them that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were moving west of the Mekong River to get beyond the reach of allied attacks. He felt that very soon the United States and the Republic of Vietnam should try to help the Cambodians by giving them air support, crew-served weapons, and training for their military leaders. He suggested that both non-commissioned officers and officers might be trained in South Vietnam.[56]

In Washington, meantime, attention focused on the withdrawal of US forces from Cambodia. Both Congress and the public were watching closely to see if the President fulfilled his promise to have all US troops out of Cambodia by 30 June. "I am sure you are aware," the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Moorer, reminded COMUSMACV on 12 June, "there is considerable attention being given to the rate of withdrawal of US troops now in Cambodia." He asked General Abrams for an estimate of the timing of the withdrawal based on his overall plan as well as his idea of how the situation might develop in the base areas over the next two weeks. Admiral Moorer realized, of course, that COMUSMACV wanted to get the best possible results out of the remaining time to insure the maximum impact on the enemy.[57]

General Abrams replied that a "meaningful withdrawal schedule" could not be provided at that time because of the numerous variables involved. Admiral Moorer relayed this information to Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard, explaining that the variables included such factors as weather, terrain, and enemy actions, none of which could be forecast with any accuracy. Admiral Moorer also reported

56. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV 7753 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 8 Jun 70, same file.

57. (~~TS~~) Msg, Actg CJCS 8376 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 12 Jun 70, same file. During June 1970, Admiral Moorer was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Designate, scheduled to replace General Wheeler on 1 Jul 70, and he frequently served as Acting Chairman in the absence of General Wheeler.

that a total of 857 individual enemy caches had been uncovered to date, with the number still increasing. Eighty-seven remained to be removed or destroyed, and each field commander was pressing the search of his assigned area to find as many enemy munitions, weapons, and other supplies as possible within the time limit. Admiral Moorer pledged to the Deputy Secretary that the withdrawal deadline would be met; General Abrams had given the same assurance and was taking steps to insure that the withdrawal would be complete and orderly.[58]

Further Post-30 June Planning

President Nixon met with the Washington Special Actions Group on 15 June and set forth his latest views on future US courses of action in Cambodia. He placed greatest emphasis on keeping Cambodia free of Communist control. The key question was whether the United States could, by providing aid and equipment, prevent the enemy from seizing Cambodia. This question then raised the further one of what measures the United States was justified in taking to achieve its purpose. He noted that the cross-border and other actions had stemmed enemy progress within Cambodia and against South Vietnam, probably removing the threat at least until the end of the unfavorable monsoon in October.

Even though the United States had not participated in the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk, President Nixon continued, it was now associated with the anticommunist government of Lon Nol. If he should fall, international opinion would blame the United States regardless of whether or not it gave maximum assistance. For this reason, and because of the importance of a free Cambodia to the war in South Vietnam, the President believed that the United States must be willing to take some risks to keep Cambodia from Communist control.

Actions that the United States must take, the President said, included provision of as many weapons and items of equipment as the Cambodians could profitably use. He stressed the need for better intelligence from Cambodia and

58. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 8069 to Actg CJCS, 15 Jun 70; (TS) CM-5991-70 to DSecDef, 15 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 1-30 Jun 70.

said that the Republic of Vietnam must be kept "loose," so that the threat of RVNAF action in Cambodia would remain hanging over the enemy's head. In addition, he wanted more effective use of air, both US and South Vietnamese, in Cambodia. "We will continue our air interdiction after 1 July," he said, "but a broad interpretation of the word interdiction is desired."[59]

As a result of the presidential guidance received at the WSAG meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent General Abrams further instructions regarding the use of the RVNAF in Cambodia. "We believe that the employment of the RVNAF in Cambodia can have a major impact on the situation there over the next several weeks," they informed the field commander on 17 June. General Abrams should encourage the Joint General Staff to be "positive" toward operations in Cambodia and should assist in planning these operations as much as possible. It was important that the RVNAF increase efforts to remove enemy interdiction points and keep major highways in Cambodia open.

An important consideration, the Joint Chiefs of Staff added, was that the withdrawal of US forces from Cambodia could cause a psychological letdown on the part of the Cambodians. Therefore, although scheduled reductions in US troops in South Vietnam would soon place additional in-country responsibilities on the RVNAF, actions should be conducted by the South Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. It was particularly important, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, to launch such operations during the next few weeks, to the extent permitted by RVNAF capabilities, to prevent the loss of major objectives to the enemy.[60]

On 20 June 1970, Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard acted on the plans for terminating US operations in Cambodia, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sent to the Secretary of Defense on 28 May. Mr. Packard approved continued air reconnaissance over all of Cambodia, requesting that tactical reconnaissance over populated areas be held to the minimum consistent with adequate intelligence collection. For planning of further operations in Cambodia, the Deputy Secretary

59. (TS-GP 1) Msg, Actg CJCS (Moorer) 8495 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 15 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1-15 Jun 70.
60. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2385 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 17 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 16-23 Jun 70.

provided the following guidance: (1) the permanent withdrawal of US forces from Cambodia by 30 June applied to all US forces, except those performing authorized overflight, and included SALEM HOUSE team leaders and US advisers to all RVNAF units; (2) the "main focus" of allied military efforts must be in South Vietnam, with the increased RVNAF confidence gained in the Cambodian operations translated into actions to accelerate Vietnamization and pacification; (3) RVNAF ground incursions into Cambodian sanctuaries must be limited by specific ground rules, controlling depth of penetration, size of forces, and frequency of attack. Mr. Packard strongly urged a careful monitoring of RVNAF plans and operations so that US support was given only to those cross-border operations that met US objectives. He also asked about the degree to which General Abrams could exercise approval of and control over RVNAF cross-border operations after 30 June. He wanted to know, too, about the number of RVNAF troops that would remain in Cambodia after the US withdrawal and the nature of subsequent operations in Cambodia.[61]

In reply, Admiral Moorer emphasized that the United States could not completely control South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia after 30 June. General Abrams did not hold approval authority for RVNAF cross-border operations in Cambodia. Such authority was exercised by President Thieu through the Joint General Staff to the RVNAF corps commanders. United States commanders could influence the RVNAF operations in Cambodia in two ways, Admiral Moorer continued. First, the regular discussions by General Abrams and his senior commanders with General Vien and his commanders provided a means for presenting the US viewpoint. Second, the United States could influence RVNAF action by the amount of support provided. Curtailment of US support after 30 June would have a very real effect on the RVNAF capability for cross-border operations.

The Republic of Vietnam had set rules for operations in Cambodia after the US withdrawal, the Admiral stated. It

61. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Planning," 20 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/621-2, 22 Jun 70, JMF 907/501 (15 May 70). DSecDef also gave his decision on the JCS plan for operations in South Vietnam after 1 Jul 70, which had accompanied the Cambodian plans on 28 May 70, but this action is covered in Ch. 9, below.

had agreed with the Government of Cambodia on a 16-kilometer strip on either side of the border in which forces of either nation could operate to prevent the re-establishment of enemy sanctuaries. In addition, President Thieu had authorized an area 40 to 60 kilometers deep inside Cambodia within which his corps commanders could respond to requests for assistance from FANK commanders; beyond that limit, President Thieu would approve any RVNAF assistance on a case-by-case basis.

With respect to the number of South Vietnamese troops remaining in Cambodia and the nature of their operations, Admiral Moorer could not answer directly. Since COMUSMACV did not have operational control of the RVNAF, it was impossible to predict accurately the intentions or reactions of the South Vietnamese forces. "The number of RVNAF troops involved in Cambodia," concluded the Admiral, "will be directly related to RVN politics, military capabilities, and their evaluation priorities at any given time."[62]

By the end of June, it was apparent that the South Vietnamese were going to continue to be involved in Cambodia in the coming months to a fairly substantial degree, but US military officials both in South Vietnam and in Washington were confident that these actions would meet US objectives. Admiral Moorer spelled out for Dr. Kissinger on 28 June the probable nature of future South Vietnamese action in Cambodia. The Admiral expected the Republic of Vietnam to turn its efforts after 30 June against the enemy in South Vietnam, but at the same time to carry out specific operations in Cambodia. These latter actions included: maintenance of a forward base at Neak Luong to keep Highway No. 1 open and to respond to Cambodian requests for assistance against enemy high pressure points in the vicinity; cross-border attacks against "hard intelligence targets" as the enemy attempted to rebuild his bases; riverine actions to support the forward base at Neak Luong as well as to keep the Mekong open to Phnom Penh; naval anti-infiltration patrols along the south cost of Cambodia; special operations, on a case-by-case basis when requested by the highest Cambodian authorities; and VNAF air strikes and helicopter lift as necessary. Further, Admiral Moorer stated, cooperation between the military headquarters in Saigon and

62. (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-5339-70 to SecDef, 25 Jun 70, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2472/621-2, 1 Jul 70, same file.

Phnom Penh was good, as was the rapport between mutually supporting units of the FANK and RVNAF. Observation by the Director of the Joint Staff, Lieutenant General John W. Vogt, during a recent visit had confirmed the good Cambodian-South Vietnamese working relationship.[63]

Meantime, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had refined the plan for US air operations in Cambodia after 30 June. General Wheeler had submitted an initial plan to the Secretary of Defense on 22 May,[64] but since then both the President and the Deputy Secretary of Defense had given additional guidance on the extent of US involvement in Cambodia following the withdrawal of US forces. Admiral Moorer forwarded the revised plan to the Secretary of Defense on 23 June. It provided for operations designed to destroy enemy forces and bases threatening US troops in South Vietnam, to disrupt enemy operations and destroy supplies, and to deny the enemy freedom to use his established base areas and lines of communication. The plan delineated an operating area in northeast Cambodia similar to the earlier plan; the north, west, and east boundaries (the Laos border, a line 200 meters west of the Mekong River, and the South Vietnam border, respectively) remained unchanged, but whereas the southern boundary in the earlier version had been Route 13, the new plan moved the boundary further south to a line "200 meters south of Route 7 from 200 meters west of the Mekong to the intersection with Route 78 and then southeast along that route to the South Vietnamese border." Admiral Moorer requested authority to conduct air interdiction in Cambodia until 1 November 1970 in accordance with this plan. On 20 June, Deputy Secretary Packard had, among other things, authorized US air reconnaissance over all of Cambodia. Admiral Moorer asked modification of that authority to permit armed escort and flak suppression for reconnaissance missions in the interdiction area.[65]

On 29 June, Secretary Laird advised the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the "most prudent approach" to air interdiction in Cambodia would be a limited effort.

63. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, Actg CJCS (Moorer) 9228 to Dr. Kissinger at San Clemente, 28 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 24 Jun - 2 Jul 70.

64. See above, p. 288.

65. (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-5320-70 to SecDef, 23 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2366/29, 30 Jun 70, JMF 880/323 (22 Jun 70).

United States air operations in Cambodia should concentrate on enemy troop buildup and supply caches, avoiding populated areas as much as possible and limiting US involvement as much as practicable. Accordingly, he felt that air operations should be confined to the area above Route 13, thereby avoiding the concentrations of population along the Mekong. He approved tactical and B-52 interdiction against troop and supply buildups in the area bounded by Route 13 on the south, the Laos border on the north, the South Vietnam border on the east, and a line 200 meters beyond the Mekong on the west, avoiding populated areas. He also approved "selective" tactical and B-52 interdiction in the area between Route 13 and the Route7-Route 78 line as proposed in the JCS plan and bounded on the east and west by the same boundaries as the above interdiction zone. Operations in this latter area were to be against "identified, highly lucrative" targets posing a "substantial" threat to allied forces. Mr. Laird confirmed the authority for air reconnaissance over all of Cambodia, approved armed escort and flak suppression for reconnaissance in the first interdiction area defined above, and authorized search and rescue operations over all of Cambodia. These authorities, he specified, were effective from 30 June until 1 November 1970.[66]

During the Cambodian invasion, US officials had considered and planned various other activities in Cambodia for the period following the withdrawal of US troops. One such activity was SALEM HOUSE Operations, the program of clandestine intelligence collection in Cambodia relying on South Vietnamese personnel led by US Special Forces. On 20 May the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Moorer, proposed to the Secretary of Defense a plan to continue SALEM HOUSE in Cambodia after 30 June. Secretary Laird concurred, but with the stipulation that the operations, including air transport and support, be manned entirely by South Vietnamese.[67]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were concerned that the elimination of US participation from SALEM HOUSE operations would

66. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "US Air Interdiction in Cambodia subsequent to 30 June 1970," 29 Jun 70, same file.

67. (TS-GP 1) CM-5199-70 to SecDef, 20 May 70; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Outline Plan for SALEM HOUSE Operations (C)," 21 May 70; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 15-30 May 70.

greatly reduce the effectiveness of the program, and Admiral Moorer again raised the issue with the Secretary of Defense on 16 June. The South Vietnamese, he said, did not currently have the capability to assume the program. Admiral Moorer recognized the political implications involved, but believed that careful targeting of operations against areas of high enemy density and low civilian Cambodian population could avoid press or diplomatic repercussions. Therefore, he strongly recommended continued use of US personnel and air assets in SALEM HOUSE operations after 30 June.[68]

Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard, however, disapproved Admiral Moorer's request. In providing planning guidance on 20 June, he stated that the permanent withdrawal of all US forces from Cambodia by 30 June included SALEM HOUSE team leaders. Admiral Moorer was reluctant to accept this decision and again appealed to the Secretary of Defense on 25 June. He recognized the domestic and foreign political aspects of the situation, but wanted it clearly understood that removal of US personnel and air support from the SALEM HOUSE program would degrade both the quantity and quality of intelligence collection in Cambodia. He requested continued employment of US-led teams and US troop-lift helicopter gunships throughout the entire SALEM HOUSE area of operations. As an absolute minimum, Admiral Moorer said, use of helicopters was required to have an effective program.[69]

Secretary Laird replied on 29 June that, although he shared the concern over the possible effect on intelligence gathering, he could not concur in the use of US personnel in SALEM HOUSE after 30 June. "Any hedging of the US withdrawal from Cambodia as stated by the President," he said, "will surely be revealed." He did authorize US tactical air and helicopter support of SALEM HOUSE operations when such support was "clearly" beyond the South Vietnamese capability. In addition, he asked to be advised if the operations conducted under these limitations did result in a serious degradation of intelligence capabilities.[70]

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68. (TS-GP 1) CM-5266-70 to SecDef, 16 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 16-23 Jun 70.

69. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Planning," 20 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/621-2, 22 Jun 70, JMF 907/501 (15 May 70). (TS-GP 1) CM-5347-70 to SecDef, 25 Jun 70, JMF 880/320 (6 Jun 69).

70. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "SALEM HOUSE Operations," 29 Jun 70, same file.

The resumption of psychological warfare activities in Cambodia following the departure of US forces on 30 June also received attention. The United States had carried out a program of leaflet drops in Cambodia for several years, under the nickname CAMEL PATH,[71] but these operations were suspended when US troops entered Cambodia on 1 May 1970. With the approach of the deadline for the removal of US troops, Deputy Ambassador Samuel D. Berger in Saigon recommended the reinstitution of psychological operations. He proposed a program of leaflet drops and loudspeaker operations throughout Cambodia. The program would be developed jointly by the US Embassy in Saigon and COMUSMACV and carried out by COMUSMACV after coordination with the US Chargé in Phnom Penh.[72]

Ambassador Berger's proposal was reviewed in Washington and approved. On 27 June, a joint State/Defense/USIA message to Saigon, Phnom Penh, and CINCPAC authorized aerial psychological missions in all of eastern Cambodia from the Laos border to the Gulf of Thailand. Requests for operations beyond the approved area would be considered in Washington on an individual basis.[73]

To aid Cambodia after the withdrawal of US troops, the United States also decided to furnish radio broadcast assistance. The Washington Special Actions Group approved this assistance on 17 June 1970, directing aerial rebroadcast of taped Radio Cambodia programs using US Navy EC-121 (PROJECT JENNY) aircraft. In accord with the WSAG decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Chief of Naval Operations on 23 June to deploy the required planes for the broadcast operations.[74]

Possible Use of Thai Forces in Cambodia

During the course of the Cambodian invasion, the United States considered the use of Thai forces in Cambodia both to assist the allied base area attacks and to aid the

71. See Ch. 7, p. 236.
72. (TS) Msg, Saigon 9843 to State, 22 Jun 70, JCS IN 71609, JMF 880/321 (7 Apr 70).
73. (TS-GP 1) Msg, Joint State/Def/USIA to Phnom Penh, Saigon, and CINCPAC, 27 Jun 70, JCS IN 81856.
74. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3221 to CNO, 23 Jun 70 (derived from JCS 2344/67), JMF 880/632 (19 Jun 70). (S-GP 3) Revised Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "JCS 2366/41 - Aerial Rebroadcast Assistance to Radio Cambodia (U)," 23 Nov 70, JMF 880/312 (5 Jul 70).

Government of Cambodia. Such action had two potential advantages. The employment of Thai troops to assist the Cambodians could be presented as fulfilling President Nixon's doctrine that US allies in endangered areas should increasingly supply the manpower for their own defense. Moreover, Thai operations in Cambodia would reduce direct US military expenditures there. Such a reduction might make it unnecessary to seek additional defense appropriations from the Congress, where strong resistance to further expenditures for the Cambodian operations could be expected. Ultimately, the United States would pay for the Thai troops in Cambodia, but the funding would be through the Military Assistance Program for Thailand rather than direct appropriations for the Cambodian attacks.

During June, two proposals for sending Thai forces into Cambodia were under study in Washington. The first called for the deployment of two Thai Khmer regiments, totaling approximately 4,000 men, to western Cambodia. These Thai troops would be charged with securing rail and road routes leading to Phnom Penh and providing area security in the western provinces. The second proposal envisioned sending a Black Panther division to the sanctuaries along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border to carry out operations similar to the RVNAF actions in those areas.[75]

The US Ambassador in Thailand, Mr. Leonard Unger, favored the proposals, believing it "very important politically" to have a Thai military presence in Cambodia. General Abrams, however, was opposed. The formal agreement between the United States and Thailand governing US support for Thai forces in Vietnam, he pointed out, would require provision of combat and service support, as well as medical evacuation, for the Thai troops in Cambodia. To provide such support after 30 June, he believed, would be contrary to the instructions already set forth by the President. Ambassador Bunker supported General Abrams' position, stating that they both had serious reservations concerning the "feasibility" of achieving effective use of Thai forces in Cambodia.[76]

75. (TS) Msg, Actg CJCS (Moorer) 8150 to CINCPAC, 10 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1-15 Jun 70.

76. (S-GP 1) Msg, Bangkok 700 to State, 6 Jun 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 7582 to CJCS, 4 Jun 70; (S-GP 1) Msg, Saigon 033 to State, 5 Jun 70; same file.

Consideration of the proposals continued in Washington throughout June, but no agreement was reached within the US Government or between the United States and Thailand. The principal obstacle was the inability of the two governments to agree on the amount of assistance that the United States would furnish Thailand to cover the cost of sending the force into Cambodia. Consequently, Thailand sent no personnel to Cambodia although it did give limited material assistance, consisting of eating utensils, clothing, and medical supplies. As discussed below,[77] Thailand also conducted some air strikes in Cambodia after the withdrawal of US forces.[78]

Another proposal considered by US officials in Washington during June was the positioning of Thai and Republic of Korea troops already in South Vietnam along the border to assist the RVNAF in cross-border attacks into Cambodia after 30 June. General Abrams opposed this proposal also; he believed that both contingents could contribute more effectively by their participation in ongoing operations in South Vietnam, thereby relieving RVNAF units for deployment to the border areas. In addition, he doubted that either force could undertake cross-border operations without substantial US helicopter and tactical close air support, which he could not provide. Admiral McCain concurred with General Abrams and there was no further action on the proposal.[79]

The End of the Invasion

Even as the US policymakers in Washington planned for the termination of the Cambodian invasion and for the period immediately thereafter, US and RVNAF operations in Cambodia drew to a close. (See Table VII) The US attack on Base Area 354 (TOAN THANG 44) and the combined US-South Vietnamese action

77. See below, pp. 309-310.

78. (TS-GP 4) Msg, Actg CJCS (Moorer) 9207 to CINCPAC, 26 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 24 Jun- 2 Jul 70. (TS) Msg, JCS 9732 to CINCPAC, 10 Jul 70, same file, Jul 70. (S) Memo, ASD(ISA) to DSecDef, "Thai Forces in Western Cambodia," 20 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 24 Jun-2 Jul 70. (S-GP 1) Rpt to Thai Cabinet by Thai Mission to Cambodia, 4 Jun 70, Att to Memo, DDir for Plans, CIA to Dr. Kissinger et al., 5 Jun 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1-15 Jun 70.

79. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 7906 to Actg CJCS, 12 Jun 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC 130435Z Jun 70 to Actg CJCS; OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, 1-15 Jun 70.

against Base Area 702 (BINH TAY I) were both completed by the end of May, and major fighting in Cambodia was over in early June. Thereafter US units began a gradual return to South Vietnam while remaining forces concentrated on finding and removing enemy caches. The US withdrawal from Base Areas 352 and 353 (Operation TOAN THANG 43, the initial US thrust into Cambodia) started on 10 June and was finished by 19 June; the RVNAF exit from those areas was complete by 25 June. Both tactical and B-52 strikes continued in an intensive effort to destroy enemy personnel, facilities, and supplies remaining in the area.

In Operation TOAN THANG 45, the US attack into Base Area 351, the evacuation began on 20 June and was finished nine days later. On 29 June, all US advisers and other US support personnel were removed from Operation TOAN THANG 42 in the Parrot's Beak area, although the RVNAF continued the operation until 22 July. Since no US ground troops had participated in Operation TOAN THANG 42, the removal of these US advisers completed the US withdrawal from Cambodia, and President Nixon's commitment to be out by the end of June was fulfilled with one day to spare. United States casualties for the entire operation amounted to 284 killed, 2,339 wounded, 29 captured, and 13 missing.[80]

As the fighting subsided in Cambodia, so did the public outcry in the United States against the incursion. The protest against the invasion reached the high point in the Washington demonstration on 9 May and gradually dwindled thereafter. Public attention turned in the meantime to the Senate debate on the Cooper-Church amendment[81] to prohibit the President from using congressionally approved funds for military operations in Cambodia. The Administration opposed the amendment, viewing it as an unconstitutional restraint on the powers of the President as Commander in Chief. In an effort at compromise, Senators Cooper and Church offered a revision to the amendment making explicit that no funds would be cut off until 1 July 1970, the date by which the President had pledged that all US forces would be out of Cambodia. The debate continued, however, and it was not until 30 June,

80. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. C-51, C-57 - C-97.
81. See above, p. 267.

after all US forces had departed Cambodia, that the Senate adopted the Cooper-Church amendment by a vote of 58-37.[82]

On the same day, President Nixon announced the successful completion of the Cambodian operation and the withdrawal of all US forces from that country. In a televised address, he told the American people that the US and South Vietnamese sweeps into the border areas of Cambodia had destroyed enemy bases, thereby saving allied lives in the future, assuring continued US troop withdrawals from South Vietnam, and ensuring continued progress in the Vietnamization program. Thirty-two thousand US and 48,000 South Vietnamese forces, he reported, had participated in major operations against the "most significant" enemy base areas in Cambodia, but now all US forces, including logistics personnel and advisers, as well as a majority of the South Vietnamese troops, had returned to South Vietnam. He stressed the limited nature of the Cambodian action. United States ground forces had "scrupulously" avoided penetrating beyond a 21-mile limit, even though this self-imposed restriction "may have cost us some military advantages."

In highlighting the results of the operations, the President reported the capture of: 22,892 individual weapons and 2,509 "big crew-served" weapons; more than 15 million rounds of ammunition, or about what the enemy had fired in South Vietnam during the previous year; 14 million pounds of rice, sufficient to feed all the enemy combat battalions estimated to be in South Vietnam for about four months; 143,000 rounds of rocket, mortar, and recoilless rifle ammunition, equivalent to the amount used by the enemy in South Vietnam during a 14-month period; and 199,522 anti-aircraft rounds, 5,482 mines, 62,022 grenades, and 83,000 rounds of explosives. In addition, the US and South Vietnamese forces had captured 435 vehicles and destroyed over 11,688 bunkers and other military structures.

President Nixon then discussed the prospects for future US and allied action in Cambodia. There would be no US ground personnel in Cambodia, except for those regularly assigned to the US Embassy in Phnom Penh, nor would there be any US advisers with Cambodian units. The United States would, however, turn over material captured in the base area

82. NY Times, 12 May 70, 1; 16 May 70, 1; 27 May 70, 1; 4 June 70, 1; 12 Jun 70, 1; 27 Jun 70, 4; 1 Jul 70, 1.

attacks to the Cambodian Government, provide military assistance to Cambodia in the form of small arms and other relatively unsophisticated equipment, and conduct air interdiction missions against enemy troop and supply buildups in Cambodia that threatened forces in South Vietnam. Such air operations would proceed with the approval of the Cambodian Government. In addition, the United States would encourage other countries of the region to give both diplomatic and military support for the maintenance of Cambodian independence and neutrality. The Republic of Vietnam also planned to help, the President said. The RVNAF remained ready to prevent the rebuilding of enemy base areas in Cambodia along the South Vietnamese border. Such operations would be launched from South Vietnam, but there would be no US logistic or air support and no US advisers in these operations. President Nixon assured the US public that the Saigon government's primary objective remained Vietnamization. Consequently, the majority of the South Vietnamese forces would leave Cambodia and any future RVNAF operations there would be consistent with the goal of a successful Vietnamization program.[83]

In an interview the following day with representatives of the three major television networks, President Nixon reiterated that he had no intention of sending US ground forces or advisers back into Cambodia. "We have plans," he said, "only to maintain the rather limited diplomatic establishment that we have in Phnom Penh and I see nothing that will change that at this time." In response to a question about the extent of US commitment to preserving the current government in Cambodia, Mr. Nixon answered that the only commitment was the traditional US policy "that a country that chooses to be neutral should have its neutrality respected." To that end, the United States was furnishing the Cambodians small arms for their own defense and giving them moral support.[84]

United States Actions and Policy After the Invasion

. President Nixon had announced in his 3 June speech and reaffirmed in his 30 June report that the United States would

83. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 529-541.
84. Ibid., pp. 543-559.

continue air operations in Cambodia after 1 July 1970 against targets threatening operations and troops in South Vietnam. A plan had been approved by the Secretary of Defense on 29 June,[85] and the operations began on 1 July. The Secretary had delineated an area for US air interdiction in Cambodia enclosed generally by the Laos border on the north, Route 13 on the south, the Mekong River on the west, and the South Vietnam border on the east. He also approved "selective" tactical and B-52 interdiction in a strip south of this area to a line following Routes 7 and 78 from the Mekong River to the South Vietnam border. Operations in the first area were designated FREEDOM DEAL while those in the lower area were called FREEDOM DEAL EXTENSION. In addition, the United States after 1 July conducted reconnaissance over all of Cambodia as well as search and rescue operations to recover downed US air crews. The United States also carried out search and rescue for Vietnamese air crews downed in Cambodia when such operations were considered beyond VNAF capabilities.[86]

On 30 July 1970, COMUSMACV reported significant enemy buildup, consisting of both troop concentrations and supply caches, in Cambodia below the FREEDOM DEAL EXTENSION area. He requested, and Washington approved on 1 August, an expansion of the FREEDOM DEAL EXTENSION 50 miles southward. (The added FREEDOM DEAL EXTENTION territory included the area bounded by Route 7 on the north, the South Vietnam border on the east, Routes 75, 155, 1543, and the Prek Kampong Spean River on the west, and then south to the Vietnam border.) On 25 August 1970, the FREEDOM DEAL area was extended approximately 74 miles to the west to allow attack on additional enemy troop and supply targets beyond the Mekong River; CINCPAC designated this western extension FREEDOM DEAL ALPHA. United States air operations in all three FREEDOM DEAL areas continued throughout the remainder of 1970 and into 1971.[87]

In addition to the US air activity in Cambodia, Thailand also conducted limited tactical air operations there during

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85. See above, pp. 300-301.

86. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1970, II, p. 179.

87. Ibid., II, pp. 179-180. (S-GP 3) DJSM-1294-70 to CJCS, 4 Sep 70, JMF 880/323 (22 Jun 70). (U) DOD Report on Selected Air and Ground Operations in Cambodia and Laos, 10 Sep 73, p. 23.

the latter half of 1970. At the request of the Cambodian Government, the Royal Thai Air Force began these strikes on 4 July 1970 and flew a total of 353 sorties in Cambodia during the remainder of the year. The United States encouraged and supported these Thai operations by selling Thailand air munitions on a cash basis through the Foreign Military Sales Program, offsetting the Thai foreign exchange costs by an increase in economic assistance.[88]

To guide future US decisions and actions regarding Cambodia, President Nixon directed two interdepartmental studies. In early June, he established an ad hoc group, composed of representatives of the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence, to assess short-term US policy alternatives in Indochina "with particular emphasis on the implications of the Cambodian situation." The study group report, circulated by the NSC staff on 6 July, assumed that the North Vietnamese intention in Cambodia was to test the viability of the Lon Nol Government. It assessed a number of policy issues and alternatives, including US military actions in Cambodia after 30 June and levels of US military and economic assistance for Cambodia. The study did not, however, present any conclusions or recommended courses of action. In distributing the report, the Director of the NSC Secretariat said that it would be discussed by the Special Review Group "at a time to be determined," but available records do not reveal any evidence of further action on the report.[89]

Six weeks later, on 17 August 1970, the President directed the preparation of alternative short-range military strategies for Cambodia. Consideration of these strategies was to be the initial step of a comprehensive review of policy for Southeast Asia covering the next five years. The entire study would be conducted by the NSC Special Review Group for Southeast Asia, with specialized panels dealing with diplomatic and military strategy options, special interests, and

88. (TS-GP 3) USMACTHAI/JUSMACTHAI Command History Supplement, 1970, p. 1.

89. (TS-GP 3) NSSM 95 to SecState, SecDef, and DCI, 6 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2339/322-1, 11 Jun 70, JMF 907/530 (25 May 70) sec 1. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Dir, NSC Secretariat to DSecDef, USecState, CJCS, and DCI, "U.S. Policy Objectives in Indochina: NSSM 95," 6 Jul 70, Att to JCS 2339/322-4, 8 Jul 70, same file, sec 2.

military and economic assistance. Each panel included representatives from the appropriate departments and agencies, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[90]

On 27 August the Secretary of Defense provided guidance for the DOD participants in the interdepartmental study. With respect to Cambodia, he directed that the strategic objectives of any operations there should "facilitate and speed up" Vietnamization, allow accelerated US troop redeployment from South Vietnam, and reduce US combat casualties. Any plans for US support to Cambodia or attempts to influence strategy there, the Secretary said, should limit direct US military assistance to existing authorities and exclude any US ground operations. In addition, such plans should enhance the survival of the Government of Cambodia, concentrate on controlling essential territory, and emphasize political-military activities that would limit the level of violence and help retain the support of the population for the Cambodian Government. The purpose of US air activity in Cambodia, the Secretary added, was to protect US forces in South Vietnam and to interdict the resupply of enemy troops threatening US units in Vietnam. Concerning South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia, Mr. Laird reaffirmed earlier guidance: RVNAF actions must be governed by specific ground rules limiting depth of penetration, size of force, and frequency of attack, and should not risk a serious ARVN defeat; US support would be provided only for those operations consistent with US objectives; and RVNAF attacks must be consistent with the goals of Vietnamization.[91]

The interdepartmental planners proceeded with their Cambodian review and presented their final report to the NSC Senior Review Group on 16 October 1970. They listed three alternatives: a minimum resources strategy, with restricted US assistance and with RVNAF action limited generally to cross-border operations to pre-empt enemy attacks in South Vietnam; a limited resources strategy, with increasing US assistance to improve the capabilities of the Cambodian

90. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NSSM 99 to SecState, SecDef, and DCI, 17 Aug 70, Att to JCS 2339/327, 18 Aug 70, JMF 907/520 (17 Aug 70) sec 1.

91. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to ASD(ISA), "Southeast Asian Strategy Alternatives," 27 Aug 70, Encl to Att to JCS 2339/327-1, 2 Sep 70, same file.

Government and its forces and with RVNAF operations providing occasional support to the FANK; and a strategy for a more determined effort to sustain the Cambodian Government and improve its forces through increased US aid, coupled with stronger emphasis in RVNAF operations on assisting the FANK in holding Cambodian territory against the enemy. The third strategy had three variants with respect to the amount of territory to be protected, ranging from roughly one-fifth of Cambodia under the first and least costly to one-half of the country (the area currently controlled by the Cambodia Government) for the third and most expensive. President Nixon approved on 26 October the third variant. Consequently, the United States would provide military and economic assistance to the Government of Cambodia and encourage RVNAF action in Cambodia, both to assist the FANK and to protect US and RVNAF units in South Vietnam, but no US forces would be employed in Cambodia.[92]

In reality, the President's decision merely made formal the existing situation, for the United States had already been giving Cambodia limited military aid even though it had no regular military assistance program for that country. In late April 1970, just before the invasion, the United States had supplied the Cambodian forces with captured enemy weapons and munitions from stock accumulated in South Vietnam[93]; in May and June the United States provided emergency aid to the Cambodian Government in the form of small arms, ammunition, uniforms, medical supplies, and radios, totaling $8.9 million in value. Funds for this assistance were diverted from other country programs in the FY 1970 MAP. July brought a marked increase in US military assistance for Cambodia when $40 million was allocated for that purpose on 23 July. Most of this aid consisted of small arms and ammunition, trucks and jeeps, and other basic items. The Republic of Vietnam supplemented the US program with a series of eight-week

92. (TS-GP 1) NSC Report, "US Strategy Options for Cambodia," 15 Oct 70, Att to JCS 2339/327-6, 16 Oct 70, same file, sec 3. (TS-GP 1) TP for DSecDef and CJCS, "NSSM 99--US Strategy for Southeast Asia (U)," 14 Dec 70, Att to JCS 2339/327-8, 16 Dec 70, same file, sec 4. (TS) Extracts of NSDM 89 to SecState, SecDef, et al., 26 Oct 70, JMF 001 (CY 1970) NSDM, sec 3.

93. See Ch. 7, pp. 241-245.

training courses for new Cambodian troops, and VNAF C-119 flying boxcars made daily deliveries of ammunition and other equipment to Cambodia. These shipments included some 10,000 Chinese-made AK-47 rifles captured during the allied invasion. The United States did not give Cambodia any of its own M-16 rifles since the AK-47 was the basic weapon of the Cambodian army. In accord with President Nixon's desire for other Southeast Asian nations to help Cambodia, Thailand also initiated training programs for 20 Cambdian light infantry companies and a dozen Cambodian pilots. This training began in September 1970 and was conducted at no cost to the United States.[94]

On 23 October 1970, President Nixon approved another $50 million to assist the Cambodian forces. There was still, however, no congressionally-approved military assistance program for Cambodia, and the $90 million provided that country since July was diverted from other areas within the overall FY 1971 MAP. At the time of the October allocation, the Departments of State and Defense had recommended a figure of $60 million, but the President approved only $50 million. He did not want to exceed a total of $100 million, the overall limitation on military assistance to countries for which no specific program had been presented to Congress.[95]

On 18 November, President Nixon presented Congress a request for supplemental foreign assistance funds for FY 1971, including $255 million for Cambodia to cover the increased assistance for that country implicit in his 26 October policy decision. He explained that he had already transferred $100 million from other vital programs, such as those for Greece, Turkey, and Taiwan, in order to give military assistance to

94. NY Times, 8 Jul 70, 1. Dept of State Bulletin, 28 Sep 70, pp. 356-360. Kirk, Wider War, p. 130. (S-GP 3) COMUSMACTHAI Command History, 1970, p. 132.

95. NY Times, 19 Nov 70, 11. (S-GP 3) Memo, Actg SecState (U. Alexis Johnson) to Pres, "Determination and Authorization to Furnish an Additional $50 Million of Military Assistance to Cambodia," 21 Oct 70, Encl to Att to JCS 2366/40, 2 Nov 70; (S-GP 3) Presidential Determination No. 71-5, 23 Oct 70, Att to JCS 2366/40, 2 Nov 70; (S-GP 3)Memo, Spiers to Sec-State, "Presidential Determination on Military Assistance to Cambodia," n.d. (Att to Presidential Determination No. 71-7, 11 Feb 71), Encl to Att to JCS 2366/47, 22 Feb 71; JMF 880/497 (21 Oct 70).

Cambodia, and he wanted to restore these funds to their original programs.[96] He also asked for $155 million in new funds for Cambodia. Of this figure, $70 million would be for economic support and $85 million for military assistance. Seventy percent of the military aid would be used for ammunition. To justify his request, the President cited the growth of the Cambodian forces from some 40,000 men in April 1970 to the current 150,000. It was essential, he told the Congress, to supplement Cambodia's own efforts by providing the resources needed to allow that country to defend itself. Additionally, this assistance to Cambodia would promote continued success of the Vietnamization program in South Vietnam. Congress approved the President's supplemental request, including the $255 million for Cambodia, on 22 December 1970, but with a restriction prohibiting the President from using any of the funds to introduce ground combat troops or military advisers into Cambodia. There was also a stipulation that the military aid program did not constitute a defense commitment to the Cambodian Government.[97]

The growing US military assistance to Cambodia necessitated an expanded organization to administer the program. On 25 July 1970 CINCPAC had requested the establishment of a military equipment delivery team in Phnom Penh composed of four US military officers and three enlisted men. The team would oversee the US military assistance program for Cambodia, providing "expeditious and orderly" distribution of assets and determination of requirements. Admiral Moorer endorsed the CINCPAC request, recommending that the Secretary of Defense secure Department of State concurrence, but on 4 August, Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard turned down the proposal. As an alternative, he approved the immediate augmentation of the US Defense Attaché Office in Phnom Penh with one officer and one enlisted man for military assistance duties.[98]

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96. In subsequent congressional testimony the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Marshall Green, explained that, of this $100 million, $90 million had already been transferred and $10 million was "likely to be transferred."

97. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 1074-1079. Dept of State Bulletin, 21 Dec 70, pp. 756-762. NY Times, 23 Dec 70, 1.

98. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250300Z Jul 70, JCS IN 33284; (TS-GP 1) CM-77-70 to SecDef, 25 Jul 70; (TS-GP 1) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "Cambodia MAP," 4 Aug 70; JMF 880/495 (25 Jul 70) sec 1.

This disposition of the matter occurred during the same month, August 1970, in which the United States and Cambodia raised their diplomatic representatives to the ambassadorial level.[99] For several months thereafter the Political/Military Counselor of the US Embassy in Phnom Penh handled military assistance matters as a special representative of CINCPAC, but under the control of the Ambassador. The Counselor was assisted by six military personnel and by other Embassy staff members as needed. In addition, about 50 US military personnel in South Vietnam supported the Cambodian military assistance program.[100]

The increase in military assistance for Cambodia during the fall of 1970, as well as the President's request to Congress in November 1970 for still further military aid increases, made it essential, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, to provide a military element in Cambodia to supervise the delivery of military supplies. They informed the Secretary of Defense of their concern on 23 December 1970. They were aware that the US Ambassador in Phnom Penh felt that "only a few additional people" were needed and they understood the desirability of a low US profile in Cambodia. Nonetheless they considered that the "magnitude" of the program and the statutory responsibilities of the Secretary of Defense in administering military assistance required a larger establishment to insure adequate supervision. Accordingly, they recommended the immediate creation of a US Military Equipment Delivery Team (MEDT) for Cambodia of 110 personnel to manage, control, and coordinate military assistance. Such a team would be headed by a US Army brigadier general, under the military command of CINCPAC. Initial location of the team, with the exception of those personnel already in Cambodia, would be in South Vietnam. Deployment of essential portions of the team to Cambodia would be coordinated with the Department of State and conducted as quickly as possible.[101]

99. (U) Interv, Willard J. Webb with Mr. Andrew Antippus, Cambodia Desk, Dept of State, 23 Oct 73.

100. (~~TS~~-GP 3) App A to JCSM-579-70 to SecDef, 23 Dec 70, Encl A to JCS 2366/44, 11 Dec 70; (~~S~~) Msg, Joint State/Def (State 166459) to Phnom Penh and CINCPAC, 8 Oct 70, JCS IN 67684; JMF 880/495 (25 Jul 70) sec 1.

101. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-579-70 to SecDef, 23 Dec 70, Encl A to JCS 2366/44, 11 Dec 70, same file.

Secretary Laird approved on 28 December a Military Equipment Delivery Team for Cambodia, but with a strength of not more than 60 US personnel. He conceded that experience might demonstrate the need for further personnel, but he had set the manning level at 60, rather than the 110 recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in order to conform with the President's desire for a low US profile in Cambodia. The Secretary further specified that no more than ten of the 60 personnel might be initially assigned in Cambodia, but he did authorize temporary duty travel to Cambodia for those assigned in South Vietnam as required, subject to coordination with the Chief of the US Diplomatic Mission to Cambodia.[102]

The Situation at the Year's End

The situation in Cambodia and the relation of the country to the war in South Vietnam were uncertain at the close of 1970. President Nixon considered the allied invasion of Cambodia during May and June a success, and so it was in the near term. The allied forces had destroyed the enemy's Cambodian sanctuaries, which had supported the war across the border in the lower half of South Vietnam, and had captured extensive quantities of enemy weapons, ammunition, and food. The Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated that it would take the enemy at least six to nine months to rebuild bases and lines of communication and to replenish stockpiles. Thus the Cambodian incursion brought reduced enemy action in South Vietnam during the latter half of 1970. This decrease, in turn, resulted in lower US and South Vietnamese casualties and allowed further time for the RVNAF to prepare for the combat role in South Vietnam and the departure of US forces.

But the longer term results of the Cambodian invasion were more questionable. When the US and RVN forces invaded the Cambodian border areas, the enemy avoided contact, falling back deeper into Cambodia and occupying areas theretofore free of enemy control. At the end of May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had told the Secretary of Defense that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had established control of "most of Cambodia east of the Mekong River and north of Highway 7"; at the conclusion of the invasion on 30 June,

102. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Cambodian Military Equipment Delivery Team (MEDT)," 28 Dec 70, Att to JCS 2366/44-1, 30 Dec 70, same file.

COMUSMACV estimated that the enemy controlled a third of the country. The expansion in enemy occupation of Cambodian territory not only increased the danger to the already fragile Government of Cambodia, but it also permitted the enemy added room for maneuver that favored his efforts to restore infiltration routes and rebuild stocks of supplies.[103]

The allied invasion of Cambodia and the accompanying spread of enemy control also wrecked the Cambodian economy. In early 1970, Cambodian officials had predicted a record rice harvest for the year and the export of 450,000 metric tons, giving Cambodia an overall favorable trade balance for the first time since 1965. Rubber production was expected to increase, adding to the favorable balance. But the invasion and spreading enemy occupation led to a precipitous drop in rice production, besides cutting off Phnom Penh from the main rice growing areas. It was doubtful as 1970 closed that Cambodia could feed itself in the coming year without importing rice. Rubber production fell sharply, too, as the plantations and processing plants were overrun and destroyed by both enemy and allied troops during the invasion. Whereas Cambodia exported 14,128 metric tons of rubber in the first four months of 1970, total rubber exports for the entire year amounted to only 18,426 metric tons. Inflation rates soared in Cambodia. The country verged on both economic and military collapse, and the Lon Nol Government became increasingly dependent on foreign assistance for its survival.[104]

The enemy had two objectives in Cambodia during the second half of 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed. The first was to reestablish and retain lines of communication and base areas in order to mount and support operations both in South Vietnam and in the rest of Cambodia; the second was to apply sufficient military and psychological pressure against the Cambodian population to cause the downfall of the current government and replace it with a Communist regime or one more amenable to the Communist policy in Southeast Asia. To carry out these aims, the

103. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-261-70 to SecDef, 28 May 70, Encl to JCS 2472/621-1, 25 May 70, JMF 907/511 (15 May 70) sec 1. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. C-25.
104. Kirk, Wider War, p. 131.

enemy had in Cambodia at the end of 1970 a force estimated at between 50,000 and 60,000 men, of whom 20,000 to 25,000 were combat personnel. Additionally, there were about 5,000 to 10,000 Khmer Rouge troops cooperating with the enemy.[105]

How effective these forces would be in attaining the enemy objectives remained to be seen. United States officials in Washington did not believe that there was an immediate danger to the Lon Nol Government, but neither did they see a quick resolution of the situation in Cambodia. In the course of the strategy review for Cambodia during September and October 1970, the panel dealing with diplomatic options had concluded that there was little likelihood of a permanent solution in Cambodia in the absence of a basic settlement in Vietnam. Both the United States and North Vietnam would continue to be concerned about Cambodia, the panel said, primarily as it related to the war in South Vietnam. In any event, the United States planned to assist the Lon Nol Government in 1971 through continued air interdiction in the northeastern part of the country and with the provision of both economic and military assistance.[106]

105. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-420-70 to SecDef, 27 Aug 70, App to JCS 2366/38-1, 26 Aug 70, JMF 880 (25 Aug 70). (TS) Assessment of Cambodian Military Situation, Att to DJSM-1866-70 to CJCS, 15 Dec 70, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Dec 70.

106. (S) Paper Prepared by Diplomatic Options Panel, "Political Considerations Involved in Short Range Military Strategies for Cambodia," 3 Sep 70, JMF 907/420 (17 Aug 70) sec 1. (TS) Extracts of NSDM 89 to SecState, SecDef, et al., 26 Oct 70, JMF 001 (CY 1970) NSDMs, sec 3.

TABLE VII

Cambodian Base Area Operations
29 April-30 June 1970

Operation	Date Initiated - Terminated	Area of Operation
TOAN THANG 42	24 Apr-22 Jul (US advisers and supporting forces withdrawn 29 Jun)	Parrot's Beak, Base Areas 367/406
TOAN THANG 43	1 May-19 Jun	Fishhook, Base Areas 352/353
TOAN THANG 44	6-14 May	Base Area 354
TOAN THANG 45	6 May-29 Jun	Base Area 351
TOAN THANG 46	6 May-30 Jun	Base Area 350
BINH TAY I	5-25 May	Base Area 702
BINH TAY II	14-27 May	Base Area 701
BINH TAY III	20 May-27 Jun	Base Area 740
CUU LONG I	9 May- 1 Jul	Mekong River, Base Area 704/709
CUU LONG II	17-24 May	Mekong Area
CUU LONG III	24-30 May	Mekong Area

Chapter 9

THE WAR IN VIETNAM, 1970

The expansion of US and RVNAF ground operations into the border areas of Cambodia in May and June was the most dramatic action of 1970. Despite that high point of activity, however, the year as a whole saw a marked decline in US combat operations in South Vietnam. President Nixon continued to seek an end to US involvement in Vietnam, either through negotiations or by transferring the burden of combat to the South Vietnamese. Since negotiations brought no success, the United States proceeded with Vietnamization--strengthening the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces while simultaneously withdrawing US forces. In addition, there was continued pressure for reduction of US casualties, accompanied by strict limitation of US funds available for Vietnam. It was within these parameters that COMUSMACV conducted operations in Vietnam during 1970.

In accordance with the President's wishes, General Abrams concentrated in 1970 on making Vietnamization succeed. United States combat operations were reduced while RVNAF actions expanded. As US ground units redeployed during the year, more reliance was placed on US reconnaissance, artillery, tactical air, and B-52 resources. Remaining US forces increasingly shifted their effort to support of the RVNAF, equipping and training the RVNAF, providing territorial security, and assisting in pacification.

Enemy operations also declined in 1970. After the large-scale actions of 1968 and early 1969, North Vietnam had placed increased emphasis on guerrilla warfare and had resorted to economy-of-force tactics in the latter part of 1969. These tactics were continued in 1970. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army concentrated on rebuilding base areas and on efforts to strengthen their guerrilla and political structures. North Vietnam's chief objective was to bring about the failure of the RVN pacification program, and Regional and Popular Force outposts and positions were the main enemy targets.

The Search for a Strategy

President Nixon established the broad strategy for Vietnam for 1970 in February in his report to the Congress on foreign

policy. He reiterated that the US goal in Vietnam had been and remained "a just peace." To achieve this end, he was pursuing "two distinct but mutually supporting courses of action"--negotiations and Vietnamization. After reviewing the lack of progress in the first of these courses, he turned to the second. "Our task is to coninue to proceed carefully in the policy of Vietnamization, and to find the means which will best support our purpose of helping the South Vietnamese to strengthen themselves." He said that US forces would continue to be withdrawn in accordance with an orderly schedule based on three criteria: level of enemy activity, progress in the negotiations, and the increasing ability of the Republic of Vietnam to defend itself.[1]

United States military strategy in South Vietnam in 1970 remained unchanged from what it had been in the latter half of the preceding year, and COMUSMACV continued to operate under the statement of mission issued by the Secretary of Defense on 15 August 1969.[2] But, in 1970, General Abrams and his commanders had to accomplish their tasks with reduced resources.[3]

Not only was the withdrawal of US forces continuing, but funds for the war in Southeast Asia came under unyielding limitations. President Nixon had reduced the US defense budget, and all military programs, including funds for the Vietnam war, felt the pinch. Throughout 1970 both public and congressional opinion opposed any increase in expenditures for Vietnam. In approving Phase III of the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program on 13 March 1970, the Secretary of Defense told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that it was "most unlikely" that Congress would appropriate added FY 1970 or 1971 funds for the Vietnam war. All funding for Vietnam, the Secretary directed, must be met from within existing and foreseeable DOD budget ceilings. When recommended levels of activity could not be met within the approved fiscal guidance and budget decisions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to identify appropriate trade offs.

1. Presidential Message to Congress, "United States Foreign Policy for the 1970's: A New Strategy for Peace," 18 Feb 70, Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 115-190.
2. See Ch. 3.
3. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Statement of Mission of United States Forces in Southeast Asia," 15 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2339/306-3, 18 Aug 69, JMF 911/305 (28 Jul 69).

Later in March the Secretary issued fiscal and logistic planning guidance for Southeast Asia for FY 1972-1976, which confirmed the strict budget limitations.[4]

As described earlier, the US-RVNAF invasion of Cambodia, launched on 1 May 1970, aroused an immediate public outcry in the United States. On 15 May the Secretary of Defense instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to submit plans for ending US operations in Cambodia by 30 June 1970. He stressed that the period after termination of that campaign would be a "critical time in which the strategic value of the Cambodian operations must be demonstrated." The clearest evidence would be provided by marked progress in pacification and security within South Vietnam, accompanied by uninterrupted withdrawal of US forces. The Secretary directed the preparation of plans designed to accomplish these results in the post-Cambodian period, with particular attention to eliciting "more positive and progressive field operations" by the RVNAF within South Vietnam.[5]

On 28 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense their plans for concluding the action in Cambodia and for the conduct of operations after 1 July 1970.[6] The post-July plan turned less on new measures and programs than on intensification of effort in existing ones. It called for acceleration of Vietnamization and pacification, military operations to reduce the enemy infiltration of men and supplies, and opposition to the enemy's effort to

4. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamization--Consolidated Improvement and Modernization (I&M) Program and Related US Planning (U)," 13 Mar 70, Att to JCS 2472/522-15, 14 Mar 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 4. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DSecDef to Secys of Mil Depts, CJCS, and Dirs of DOD Agencies, "FY 72-76 Fiscal and Logistic Guidance--Planning Assumptions for the War in Southeast Asia," 24 Mar 70, Att to JCS 2458/677-19, 27 Mar 70, JMF 555 (15 Jan 70) sec 3.

5. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Planning," 15 May 70, Att to JCS 2472/621, 16 May 70, JMF 907/501 (15 May 70).

6. The planning for termination of operations and withdrawal from Cambodia has been treated in Ch. 8.

maintain a threatening military capability in Cambodia. The plan provided for allied operations to exploit the tactical success of the Cambodian operation by: thwarting enemy efforts to increase his influence in South Vietnam from Cambodia; redistributing forces to enhance pacification and development; reducing--particularly in I and II CTZ--the flow of materiel and manpower support for enemy forces; and capitalizing on the growing RVNAF professional confidence.

In accordance with the Secretary's direction, the plan assigned an increased combat role to the RVNAF. The United States would intensify support for pacification programs and continue support for RVNAF improvement and modernization; US combat operations would be designed to accelerate the attainment of RVNAF combat effectiveness and to support pacification. The US efforts would include: tactical air and B-52 operations; continued naval operations; operations to free ARVN units for employment in border areas and clearing zones; operations, in conjunction with the ARVN, to counter and remove the enemy presence and threat to I and II CTZ; continued SALEM HOUSE/PRAIRIE FIRE operations under current authorities; logistical support within Vietnam for RVNAF cross-border operations into Cambodia after 30 June 1970; and expanded and intensified psychological operations in support of US objectives.[7]

On 20 June 1970, the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the JCS plan for operations after 1 July 1970. He also affirmed that the 15 August 1969 mission statement for US forces in Vietnam remained applicable for current Southeast Asia planning. As related in the previous chapter, the Administration was particularly sensitive to criticism of the Cambodian invasion, and Mr. Packard gave specific instructions concerning the withdrawal of all US forces from Cambodia and limitations on RVNAF ground incursions into the Cambodian sanctuaries. In addition, he emphasized to General Wheeler that the main focus of allied effort after 1 July must be in South Vietnam.[8]

7. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-261-70 to SecDef, 28 May 70, Encl to JCS 2472/621-1, 25 May 70, same file.
8. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Planning," 20 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/621-2, 20 Jan 70, same file.

Meantime, Secretary Laird had again raised the matter of military strategy for Southeast Asia with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a memorandum for the Chairman on 5 June, he noted that there had been a number of significant events and trends since the Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed strategy in 1969. He listed, among others: the 115,500 reduction in authorized US troop strength; the August 1969 modification of COMUSMACV's mission statement; the substantial improvement in RVNAF quality, as well as the increase in RVNAF force levels; the decline in NVA/VC troop strength in South Vietnam; the reduction in some phases of combat intensity with concomitant reductions in US casualties; shifts in the NVN leadership, particularly those occasioned by the death of Ho Chi Minh; the US and RVNAF incursions into the Cambodian sanctuaries; and the increasing economic pressures in both the United States and South Vietnam. He thought the changes resulting from these trends and events necessitated a reassessment of military strategy. The Secretary also asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider various means of interdicting the enemy's supply line, running through sea routes in the Gulf of Siam and then through either South Vietnam or Cambodia.[9]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared and presented their assessment of military strategy for Southeast Asia to the Secretary of Defense on 24 July 1970. They premised their study on the assumption that the US purpose in Vietnam and Southeast Asia remained what it had been--"a peace in which the peoples of the region can devote themselves to development of their own societies . . . [and] determine their own political future without outside interference." The Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed three alternative strategies that they considered both feasible and within the bounds of current policy. Alternative One was a minimum strategy to ensure a viable Republic of Vietnam, with little US effort in other areas of Southeast Asia. Alternative Two would add active programs to ensure the independence of Thailand and Cambodia while continuing current air and covert activities in Laos. Alternative Three further broadened the range of action by including overt major ground and air operations

9. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Military Strategy in Southeast Asia," 5 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2339/321, 8 Jun 70, JMF 907/520 (5 Jun 70) sec 1. (For the JCS strategy review in 1969, see Ch. 3.)

to cut LOCs in Laos. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the immediate adoption of Alternative Two for FY 1971. They considered that funds and resources they had recently recommended in connection with the presidentially announced US force reduction of 150,000 in Vietnam[10] would be adequate for support of this strategy if supplemental MAP funds were provided. Even if lesser funds were allowed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the Alternative Two strategy should be adopted, though its execution would involve greater levels of risk depending upon the magnitude of the shortfalls.

Accomplishment of the Alternative Two strategy would require the following: continuing military, naval, and air operations by US, RVN, and FW forces within and immediately adjacent to the Republic of Vietnam; continuing US air interdiction in Laos; ground operations in southern Laos against enemy supply lines, to be conducted by RVN and Thai forces; and expansion of unconventional operations in Laos. The strategy was designed to encourage and support efforts of the Republic of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand in collective actions in defense of their security and independence. The United States would continue to provide materiel, training, and advisory assistance and would encourage third countries of the region to provide forces and other assistance, as appropriate. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that their recommended strategy would exploit allied initiative, put pressure on the enemy "across a broad front," and disrupt enemy bases and lines of communication. Disadvantages of the Alternative Two strategy included increased costs, particularly for the support of allies, and a possible arousing of "elements in the United States who oppose actual or apparent enlargement of the conflict in Southeast Asia."[11]

On 17 August 1970, the Secretary of Defense commended the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their "comprehensive and objective" reassessment. He was concerned, however, about the risks of their recommended strategy when pursued without a supplemental budget appropriation, which he indicated was out of the question. He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to restate

10. See Ch. 10.
11. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-357-70 to SecDef, 24 Jul 70, Encl A to JCS 2339/321-1, 15 Jul 70, JMF 907/520 (5 Jun 70) sec 1.

their strategy, with a stronger focus on programs within South Vietnam. In revising the strategy the Joint Chiefs of Staff should give "full consideration" to the funds realistically expected in FY 1971 and subsequent years. The Secretary was aware that US policies relating to objectives in Vietnam had changed markedly over the past 18 months. He emphasized that US military strategy should strive for successful Vietnamization and continued US troop withdrawals, reduction of US casualties and costs, and stimulation of meaningful negotiations.

Secretary Laird noted that the JCS strategy assessment of 24 July as well as his own comments addressed primarily "short-range" matters without looking to the longer range strategic concepts. Accordingly, he requested the development of alternative strategies to provide "a wider range of military options" in a longer time frame--extending well beyond the FY 1973 period. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff must ensure the retention of sufficient flexibility to meet enemy initiatives.[12]

On 18 September 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a revised short-range US military strategy for Southeast Asia in FY 1971 together with an overall strategic concept for the 1970-1975 period. The short-range strategy was essentially a restatement of the one they had recommended on 24 July, except that certain proposed actions were now relegated to the category of "options" in order to stay within the Secretary's guidelines. These actions were: waterborne raids along the Mekong in Cambodia; operations by Thai troops in Laos or by ARVN forces in Laos or Cambodia; and expanded unconventional warfare in Laos. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that these options were militarily advantageous and would enhance prospects for achievement of US objectives. The basic restated strategy could be executed within the FY 1971 Service budgets. The options, of course, would increase costs, but the increases could be absorbed by trade offs and reprogramming. The only exception was the action involving Thai operations, which would require offset funds for the Royal Thai Government.

12. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Military Strategy in Southeast Asia," 17 Aug 70, Att to JCS 2339/321-3, 20 Aug 70, same file.

The overall strategic concept for Southeast Asia for 1970-1975 was designed to support the Nixon Doctrine. Briefly, it provided that the United States would honor its treaty commitments and continue to provide advice and assistance to its allies, but would rely primarily on these Asian nations, either individually or through regional efforts, to furnish the manpower to maintain internal security and protection from outside attack.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended adoption of this long-range strategic concept. For the shorter range, they still preferred the strategy they had recommended on 24 July; however, if it could not be approved, they favored their revised version plus as many of the optional military actions as conditions warranted. They also recommended supplemental funding for FY 1971 to support the military capabilities of the Government of Cambodia.[13]

The Secretary of Defense took no action on either the restated short-range strategy or the overall concept, probably because, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted, their current response now appeared no more than a preliminary step in the accomplishment of a larger task recently set by the President. Mr. Nixon had directed a comprehensive review of strategy alternatives for Southeast Asia for the period 1970-1975. The presidential directive, set forth in NSSM 99 of 17 August 1970 to the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence, called for development of strategy alternatives, together with appraisals of costs and of political consequences. As an initial step, the President wanted alternative short-range military strategies for Cambodia. By a separate action, the President had also established a Special Review Group for Southeast Asia within the NSC system. This Group, comprising the Under Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and chaired by Dr. Kissinger, was charged with coordination of planning for Southeast Asia and with development of "a comprehensive long-range political, military and economic policy document."[14]

13. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-447-70 to SecDef, 18 Sep 70, Encl to JCS 2339/321-4, 14 Sep 70, JMF 907/520 (5 Jun 70) sec 2.
14. (TS-GP 1) NSSM 99, 17 Aug 70, Att to JCS 2339/327, 18 Aug 70, JMF 907/520 (17 Aug 70) sec 1. (S) Extracts from NSDM 79, 13 Aug 70, JCS 001 (CY 1970) NSDMs, sec 2.

In providing supplementary guidance for Defense participation in the NSSM 99 study, the Secretary of Defense directed that the FY 1971 budget guidance and the tentative guidance for the FY 1972-1976 period be followed. Other guidelines laid down by the Secretary were that US combat operations were to be steadily decreased, commensurate with capabilities of indigenous forces, and that US longer-range alternative strategies must provide a wider scope of military options to ensure flexibility.[15]

The NSSM 99 study was carried out by interdepartmental panels under the direction of the new Special Review Group for Southeast Asia. Individual panels dealt with the subjects of military strategy, diplomatic options, and military and economic assistance. Officers of the Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5), Joint Staff, participated in preparation of the study. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not review the various resulting drafts, but the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, as a member of the Senior Review Group, had a voice in the final decisions. By late October, alternative strategies for Cambodia had been developed, and the President approved one for FY 1971 that called for strengthening the Cambodian armed forces with a view to securing effective control of the Cambodian countryside. This strategy did not envision the use of US forces, but it did provide for the employment of the RVNAF in Cambodia in areas near the South Vietnamese border.[16]

Attention then turned to the long-range strategies for Southeast Asia as a whole. By mid-December, four alternatives, labeled "strategic thrusts," had been prepared. The first would attempt to induce Hanoi, principally by military means, to terminate rapidly its military effort; the second, using a combination of political and military measures, would seek to erode North Vietnam's determination and ability to dominate Indochina; the third called for a gradual shift to the political arena, primarily by reducing the level of violence and continuing US troop redeployments while developing a framework for mutual accommodation; and

15. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to ASD(ISA), "Southeast Asian Strategy Alternatives," 27 Aug 70, Encl to Att to JCS 2339/327-1, 2 Sep 70, JMF 907/520 (17 Aug 70) sec 1.

16. (TS) Extracts from NSDM 89, 26 Oct 70, JMF 001 (CY 1970) sec 3.

the fourth would try to extricate all US military power from South Vietnam as rapidly as possible while attempting to maintain US credibility with respect to keeping commitments. The Senior Review Group considered these alternatives on 14 December, but Dr. Kissinger adjourned the meeting in order to permit further review by all the participants. Consequently, by the end of 1970, there had been no decision on long-range strategy.[17]

The Contending Forces--The Enemy

While US officials in Washington attempted to define the US strategy for Southeast Asia, the combat continued in South Vietnam. The enemy showed no willingness in 1970 to end the hostilities, but neither did he attempt to expand his action in South Vietnam.

In January, the enemy strength in South Vietnam was estimated at approximately 151,560 Viet Cong and 84,370 NVA. This total of 235,930 compared with an estimated 259,000 a year previously. These forces comprised 281 maneuver battalions, 135 VC and 146 NVA. They were deployed as follows: 96 in I CTZ; 48 in II CTZ; 91 in III CTZ; and 46 in IC CTZ.[18]

17. (TS) Report prepared by VSSG Working Group, "NSSM 99, Part II, US Strategy for SEA," n.d., J-5 files. (TS-GP 1) TP for DSecDef and CJCS for SRG meeting on 14 Dec 70, "NSSM 99--US Strategy for SEA (U)," Att to JCS 2339/327-8, 16 Dec 70; (TS-GP 1) J-5 Memo for Record, "Meeting of NSC Senior Review Group on a Progress Report on NSSM 99 (Phase II) (U)," 15 Dec 70, Encl to Att to JCS 2339/327-10, 21 Dec 70; JMF 907/520 (17 Aug 70) sec 4. (The strategy study continued in 1971, but the focus shifted sharply to an analysis of near-term considerations regarding force development in Thailand, Cambodia, and the Republic of Vietnam; the allocation of air effort; possible enemy plans for action for 1972; and an economic assessment of South Vietnam.)

18. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. III-91 - III-93.

The VC/NVA troops were controlled by Hanoi through five regional headquarters: the B-5 front, corresponding to the DMZ; Military Region Tri Thien Hue (MRTTH), the area from the DMZ southward almost to Da Nang; MR 5, the central coastal region; the B-3 front, the central inland region; and the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN). The last of these five included most of the lower part of South Vietnam and was the most important of these headquarters. The COSVN received orders directly from the NVN Politburo and High Command and was the Central Office of the Peoples' Revolutionary Party (PRP) in South Vietnam. It played a key role in coordinating the policy directed by Hanoi throughout South Vietnam.[19]

In 1970, the enemy followed the strategy adopted in the late spring of the previous year. At that time, apparently because of the failure of his general offensives in 1968 and early 1969, the enemy had shifted to a strategy geared to a protracted conflict, limiting his offensive efforts to "surges" of activity confined to a particular CTZ. As expressed in COSVN Resolutions 9 of July 1969 and 14 of October 1969, the new strategy stressed conservation of forces, rebuilding of base areas, and guerrilla tactics with the objectives of inflicting high US casualties and defeating the pacification effort while lowering the enemy's own manpower and materiel costs.[20]

Enemy operations during 1970 continued to be guided by Resolutions 9 and 14, which were supplemented in February by Resolution 136. This latest resolution assessed both the allied and Communist situations in South Vietnam, finding the allies destined to failure and the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese on the way to eventual success. Resolution 136 also set forth guidelines and missions for future operations in South Vietnam, repeating the call for defeat of the pacification program and a rebuilding of Viet Cong strength through the familiar economy-of-force tactics. It listed as main targets US forces and local RVN officials, with especial attention focused on rural development cadre and

19. Ibid., III-89, Fig III-1.
20. See Ch. 3 and 5.

support troops, police, Chieu Hoi and armed propaganda officials, and ralliers.[21]

Communist Party First Secretary Le Duan publicly confirmed North Vietnam's decision to persevere in a protracted war on 2 February 1970. In a speech commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the party, he declared that his country was prepared to fight for "many years more" to force withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam. He called for a "two track" policy of building socialism in the north while simultaneously continuing the war in the south. This policy was reaffirmed by Premier Pham Van Dong in September, and its implementation could readily be discerned in the level and nature of NVN activity.[22]

The enemy moved steadily away from large-scale military operations during 1970, and there were no repetitions of the Tet offensive of 1968 or the post-Tet attacks of 1969. Instead, the enemy relied primarily on guerrilla warfare and increased sapper tactics, using these specially trained, highly motivated assault troops in small groups to attack allied installations. During the year, the enemy initiated sporadic surges in each of the four Corps Tactical Zones. On the night of 31 March 1970, a series of coordinated attacks occurred in all four CTZs. The allies at first took this to be the beginning of a spring offensive, but after two days of intensified activity, enemy actions fell back to their previous low level.[23]

During the year, the enemy expanded the movement of supplies and materials into South Vietnam and concentrated on establishing and strengthening staging areas. Enemy supply and base area activity was particularly great in the RVN/Cambodian border area of III CTZ and deeper in Cambodia opposite III CTZ. It was to destroy these supply caches and sanctuaries that US and RVNAF forces launched the Cambodian invasion in May 1970. That operation significantly reduced the threat to III and IV CTZ, although some enemy activity continued along the border. Elements of three VC/NVA divisions operated there in the latter part of 1970, concentrating on the restoration of supply lines, base areas,

21. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, III-98 - III-99.
22. Ibid., III-2. NY Times, 3 Feb 70, 3.
23. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. III-94 - III-113.

and command and control facilities disrupted by the Cambodian operation. The allied invasion of Cambodia also caused some relocation of enemy forces in the Delta. At the end of 1969, General Abrams had warned of increasing NVA strength in that region, and by early 1970 it appeared definite that five regiments and a division headquarters had moved into the area. The Cambodian incursion, however, diverted some of these forces away from the population centers of the Delta.[24]

Although the Cambodian operations reduced the Communist capabilities in the southern half of South Vietnam, the enemy threat to the northern part of the country increased during 1970. This was most pronounced in I CTZ, where the enemy remained capable of launching large-scale attacks. The VC/NVA had 20 battalions deployed in or near the Demilitarized Zone. In addition, the enemy built up a new logistical base in the Laos-Cambodia-South Vietnam "tri-border" area of II CTZ. He used the favorable terrain and lack of population in that region to hide larger units and move them toward the coastal plains and urban areas.[25]

The Allies

Opposing the enemy were the RVNAF, growing larger and (it was hoped) stronger, a dwindling US force, and approximately 70,000 troops from other countries. United States strength in South Vietnam at the beginning of 1970 stood at 474,819--a reduction of some 60,000 compared with a year earlier. These US forces included a total of 93 maneuver battalions (81 Army and 12 Marine), deployed as follows: 37 in I CTZ, 17 in II CTZ, and 39 in III CTZ. All US combat troops had been withdrawn from IV CTZ in 1969. (On 1 July 1970, the four Corps Tactical Zones were redesignated Military Regions (MRs), although the territory of each remained unchanged.) The RVNAF strength at the opening of 1970 was 969,256, an increase of approximately 110,000 since January 1969.[26]

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24. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. III-155 - III-192.
25. Ibid., III-50, III-103 - III-104, III-131.
26. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. IV-7, IV-9. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VI-13. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 303-69, 31 Dec 69, p. 8.

As 1970 began, seven other countries besides the United States had a total of 68,889 men in Vietnam, most of them coming from the Republic of Korea (ROK), Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand. With the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam, there were internal pressures in several of these countries to reduce their own troop commitments. In the fall of 1970, Australia withdrew the 900-man 8th Australian Regiment, and New Zealand called home an infantry company of 144 men. The Philippine Civic Action Group (PHILCAGV) had begun its withdrawal in 1969 and completed it by 15 February 1970; the remaining force was redesignated the Philippine Contingent, Vietnam (PHILCOVN). The ROK force, by far the largest,was overstrength at the beginning of 1970. During the year it was reduced to authorized strength, but was not otherwise affected. The net result of these and other changes was to reduce the "third country" forces to 67,444 men by the end of 1970.[27] (See Table VIII, at the end of this chapter.)

All the allied forces in South Vietnam operated under the Combined Campaign Plan 1970. Like the 1969 plan, the one for 1970 was prepared jointly by the RVNAF Joint General Staff and the Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF). The 1970 plan, however, included two assumptions reflecting the adoption of the Vietnamization policy during 1969: reduction of the FWMAF consistent with the development of the RVNAF, progress in pacification, and the level of enemy activity; and continuation of the accelerated program for improvement and modernization of the RVNAF. The Combined Plan for 1970 also provided for the transition from the 1969 security system, where emphasis had been on critical areas, to one that ultimately would require less participation by combat forces of the FWMAF. Another change was to give a more important role to the territorial forces, consisting of the Regional and Popular Forces, supported by the National Police and the People's Self Defense Force (PSDF). In addition to supporting pacification, these forces would now carry out operations to prevent enemy infiltration, attacks, and harassment of populated areas.

With respect to the Pacification and Development Program, the Combined Campaign Plan 1970 made a significant innovation.

27. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. IV-31 - IV-38.

Whereas the 1969 plan called for the RVNAF and the FWMAF to support pacification, the new plan directed them to participate in it. Pacification was given importance equal to the defeat of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces. The Combined Campaign Plan 1970 complemented the 1970 Pacification and Development Plan. The latter, solely a South Vietnamese document, provided the direction, together with assignment of responsibility within the Republic of Vietnam, for the Pacification and Development program in 1970.[28]

Ground Operations

Allied operations in 1970 were chiefly concerned with locating and destroying enemy units, base camps, and cache sites, as well as supporting the RVNAF in providing security for the population and destroying the VC infrastructure. In 1970, the ground operations were characterized by decreased and smaller scale contacts with the enemy, increased RVNAF operations, intensified support for pacification, and significant cross-border operations in Cambodia.

During the year, MR 1 had the highest enemy threat. The VC/NVA strengthened their tactical position in the mountainous regions of northern MR 1 and along the central DMZ and retained the ability to launch large-scale attacks in this area. They consolidated their bases in the mountains and during the early part of the year established new bases along the Vietnamese-Laotian border in Quang Tri province and the A Shau valley. The enemy attempted to push eastward using regiment-sized units, thus increasing the threat to Quang Tri city. He defended cache sites, harassed allied operations, and conducted attacks on the populous lowland south of the DMA.

Military Region 1 also had the largest concentration of US combat troops. Friendly forces conducted 18 major operations there during 1970. In the mountainous western area, the principal object was to destroy the enemy's LOCs, especially in the A Shau valley. Along the DMZ the efforts were primarily reconnaissance-in-force and saturation ambush to

28. (S) RVNAF JGS and FWMAF, Combined Campaign Plan 1970, 31 Oct 69, JMF 911/350 (31 Oct 69) sec 1A. (C) RVN Plan, "Pacification and Development Program," n.d. (received in OCJCS on 13 Nov 69), JMF 911/319 (26 Jun 69) sec 2.

interdict infiltration into the populated lowlands. During November and December, operations to the eastern portion of the MR 1 were restricted owing to the monsoon rains and tropical storms, but ARVN forces continued to operate in the west and assumed increasing responsibility throughout the year. The RF/PF secured the populated area of the coastline, thus freeing the regular ARVN forces to operate against the enemy in the western portion of MR 1.[29]

In late June 1970 the Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the rules of engagement governing US and RVNAF forces in MR 1 operating in or near the DMZ. Recognizing that the Cambodian operation had seriously disrupted the enemy's base areas along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border and had significantly reduced the VC/NVA threat in that area, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that certain amendments to the existing rules were required to maintain pressure on the enemy and pre-empt his activities from across or within the DMZ. Accordingly they requested permission on 26 June 1970 for ground operations in the DMZ south of the PMDL to prevent an enemy buildup there. Additionally, they recommended authority to employ tactical air, as well as artillery and naval gunfire, in the DMZ north of the PMDL and to conduct observation overflights of that same area.[30]

After a two-month consideration, the Secretary of Defense turned down the JCS request. The present rules, he told the Chairman on 26 August 1970, were adequate for the defense of US forces, "particularly if commanders prudently exercised their inherent right to defend their forces." The Secretary added that the best intelligence available to him showed no significant changes in levels or types of military or logistical activity within the DMZ during the past weeks. Moreover, since infiltration rates into the DMZ remained well below those of the past two years, he believed that an increase of allied operations in the DMZ would be interpreted by Hanoi as evidence of a US intention to prolong the war. Such a development could have an undesirable effect on the Paris talks.[31]

29. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. III-103 - III-140, V-7, E-3.
30. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-318-70 to SecDef, 26 Jun 70, Encl to JCS 2472/639, 26 Jun 70, JMF 911/321 (26 Jun 70).
31. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnam Demilitarized Zone (U)," 26 Aug 70, Att to JCS 2472/639-1, 27 Aug 70, same file.

The danger in MR 2 was second only to that in MR 1. Several enemy regiments cperated in the tri-border area and in central Binh Dinh province, but in the remainder of the Region, enemy forces were widely dispersed and understrength and did not pose a serious threat. Enemy activity was relatively light during the first part of the year. It was characterized by sporadic attacks-by-fire, light ground probes, sapper attacks, interdiction of LOCs and terrorism. On the night of 31 March-1 April the enemy conducted 53 attacks-by-fire and eight ground attacks. During April and May the area in the Dak Seang-Ben Het-Dak To triangle in northwestern Kontum Province was subjected to attacks-by-fire, ground assaults, and sniper fire. Except for a few attacks on RF/PF and ARVN installations and short upsurges at the end of August and November, enemy activity was at a low level for the rest of the year.

There were 40 major allied operations in MR 2 during 1970. Along the coastal region the allied military forces concentrated on community defense and development, and the maintenance of the roads to and from the region, especially Route 19. In the sparsely populated central highlands friendly forces maintained government control.

The ARVN forces primarily carried out pacification missions and security operations. In mid-March the 47th Regiment, 22d ARVN Division, replaced the US 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, in Pleiku Province. On 15 April this ARVN division received the responsibility for the entire highland area. For the rest of the year US forces confined their activities to the coastal lowlands.[32]

The stronghold of the enemy in MR 3 remained in northern Phuoc Long and Tay Ninh Provinces along the RVN/Cambodian border, where there were several VC/NVA regiments. Enemy activity, however, was characterized by small unit operations aimed at allied pacification efforts, low-intensity attacks-by-fire, and sapper attacks against RF/PF and the People's Self-Defense Force outposts. During the first six months of 1970, enemy activity was moderate. The Cambodian operation greatly reduced the enemy threat in MR 3, and thereafter enemy activity fell to a low level and continued so through the end of the year.

32. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. III-131, V,-8, E-42.

Allied operations in MR 3 in early 1970 concentrated on locating and destroying enemy forces, interdicting infiltration routes, and denying base camp areas to the enemy. The major operation in MR 3 during 1970 was the pursuit of enemy forces into Cambodia. United States and South Vietnamese forces entered Cambodia on 1 May and withdrawal of US forces was completed on 29 June. Operations for the remainder of the year were of battalion or smaller size and directed toward strengthening RVN control of the countryside. Throughout the year, US forces supported pacification and assisted in upgrading the ARVN/RF/PF through improvements and modernization. The Australian Task Force continued to operate in Phuoc Tuy Province during the year, and the Royal Thai Army Volunteers operated against the enemy elements in central Bien Hoa Province.[33]

The RVNAF had assumed major responsibility for the war in MR 4 in August 1969, when the last US combat forces were withdrawn. Consequently, there were no US combat operations in that region during 1970, although US helicopter and support elements assisted the RVNAF. During the year, the RVNAF successfully attacked enemy strongholds and carried out reconnaissance-in-force and waterway patrols.[34]

As in preceding years, the United States and South Vietnam marked Tet, Buddha's birthday, Christmas, and New Year's with brief cease-fires. The allies limited each of these holiday cease-fires to 24 hours rather than matching the three-day periods announced by the enemy, since previous experience had taught that the enemy never respected his own proclaimed truces. During these 24-hour periods, US and RVNAF troops suspended all air and artillery operations as well as offensive ground actions in South Vietnam, though they remained on alert and patrolled their base areas. The allied Tet truce began at 051800 (Saigon time) February 1970 with normal operations resuming at 1800 the following day. Buddha's birthday came in the midst of the Cambodian invasion. The allies suspended action in South Vietnam for 24 hours beginning 181100 May 1970, but there was no cessation of operations in Cambodia. The Christmas truce extended from 1800 Christmas Eve until 1800 Christmas day, and the New Year's truce covered the same period on New Year's Eve and Day. As had been the case in all previous holiday truces,

33. Ibid., pp. III-155, V-8 - V-9, E-83.
34. Ibid., pp. V-9 - V-10.

enemy violations marred all four of the 1970 cease-fires, although the number of both violations and casualties was lower than for the corresponding holidays in 1969. For example, there were 98 clashes during the 1970 Christmas truce as compared with 115 in the previous year.[35] (See Table X for specific data on violations and casualties for each of the four truces.)

In July 1970, there was an additional allied cease-fire in the DMZ area to allow the Republic of Vietnam to repatriate seriously ill and wounded North Vietnamese prisoners of war. The Republic of Vietnam announced on 11 June 1970 at the Paris peace talks that it would return these prisoners by sea with Red Cross escorts on 11 July. To facilitate the repatriation, COMUSMACV suspended all offensive operations off the seaward extension of the DMZ during the period 110600 and 112100 (Saigon Time) July 1970. The operation went as planned; RVN naval units delivered 62 war prisoners and 24 captured North Vietnamese fishermen to a point off the coast of North Vietnam, from which they reached shore in boats.[36]

Naval Operations

Naval operations in and around South Vietnam in 1970, as in earlier years, were aimed at prevention of waterborne infiltration into that country. The US Navy and the Vietnamese Navy (VNN) patrolled over 1,000 miles of South Vietnamese coast as well as inland waterways and canals. During the Cambodian operation, naval units provided waterborne blocking forces for ARVN and US Army sweeps into the Parrot's Beak and Fishhook regions of Cambodia, resulting in effective RVN control of the Mekong River from the South China Sea to Phnom Penh. The disruption of his supply system in Cambodia forced the enemy to increase attempted seaborne infiltration,

35. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 300-69, 27 Dec 69; 32-70, 7 Feb 70; 117-70, 19 May 70; 300-70, 28 Dec 70; 1-71, 4 Jan 71. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. V-13 - V-18. NY Times, 24 Dec 70, 1; 26 Dec 70, 1; 2 Jan 71, 1.

36. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. X-53 - X-55.

but allied naval operations effectively countered those attempts. During 1970, US Navy forces accelerated the transfer of operations to the VNN, and by the close of the year the only US naval combat forces remaining in Vietnam were nine Seal platoons. The other US naval elements in the country were engaged in providing advice and logistics support to the VNN.[37]

The two major naval operations during 1970 were MARKET TIME and Southeast Asia Lake-Ocean-River-Delta Strategy (SEA LORDS). The former had been initiated in 1965 as a defense against seaborne infiltration of men and supplies into the Republic of Vietnam. It consisted of an inner barrier, an outer ship control area, and air barriers. As described in Chapter 8, MARKET TIME operations were extended along the Cambodian coast in May 1970, and after an agreement had been reached with Cambodian authorities in June, VNN vessels patrolled Cambodian waters as far as Phu Dü Island. By the end of June, all MARKET TIME operations in Cambodian waters were carried out by the VNN. In September 1970, the VNN assumed responsibility for the MARKET TIME inner barrier, and the operation was redesignated TRAN HUNG DAO XV. On 1 December the last 14 US Patrol Craft Inshore (PCF), or "swift boats," used for MARKET TIME inner barrier patrols, were transferred to the VNN. At the year's end only the MARKET TIME outer and air barriers remained under US command.[38]

Operation SEA LORDS had been instituted in late 1968 to interdict inland water infiltration in IV CTZ and the southern part of III CTZ. In addition, the operation attempted to maintain a patrol presence on the Cambodian border waterways, pacify key trans-Delta waterways and Bassac Island complexes, harass the enemy by river raids into areas theretofore immune to attack from waterways, and ascertain the feasibility of interdiction on other waterways. These operations continued throughout 1970, though enemy activity was at a low to moderate level. The SEA LORDS operations were progressively turned over to the VNN during the year, and they were redesignated TRAN HUNG DAO.[39]

37. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. V-11 - V-12.
38. Ibid., pp. V-11 - V-12, F-2 - F-16.
39. Ibid., F-16 - F-24.

Air Operations

As the United States reduced its forces in South Vietnam, air operations took on increasing importance there. During 1970, US forces relied on air resources to seek out and destroy both the enemy and his supplies and to support US and RVNAF ground operations and interdiction. Throughout the year, the allies held air superiority in Southeast Asia. Air-to-air combat had almost ceased after the bombing halt in North Vietnam in November 1968, and only enemy ground fire and surface-to-air missiles posed any serious threat to allied air operations. In fact, the greatest hindrance to US air operations in 1970 came not from Hanoi, but from the budget restrictions that necessitated continuing reductions in US air activity levels for Southeast Asia.

In September 1969, the Secretary of Defense had set air activity levels for the first half of 1970 at 1,400 B-52 and 14,000 USAF tactical air sorties per month, and US Navy tactical air sorties at the beginning of 1970 were limited to 4,200 per month. In presenting a report on the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program to the Secretary of Defense on 29 January 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested that the current air activity levels be maintained. The Secretary responded on 13 March. With respect to sortie levels, he instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that it was essential to study the situation thoroughly and adjust programs "in the most prudent manner" to available resources.[40]

On 30 April 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense revised force and activity levels for Southeast Asia to conform with the Secretary's fiscal guidance. To meet the FY 1971 budget, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented activity levels of 1,000 B-52, 10,000 USAF tactical air and 2,700 USN tactical air sorties per month.

40. (TS-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1970, II, p. 142. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-42-70 to SecDef, 29 Jan 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/552-9, 24 Jun 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 3. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamization - Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (I&M) Program and Related US Planning (U)," 13 Mar 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-15, 15 Mar 70, same file, sec 4. Other aspects of the JCS report on the RVNAF I&M Program are treated in Ch. 10.

At the same time, they recommended that supplemental FY 1971 funds be provided to allow for surges in air activity. On 2 June, they again addressed the question of air activity levels, providing the Secretary of Defense two alternatives. The first, Alternative A, retained the currently authorized monthly levels of 1,400 B-52, 14,000 USAF tactical air, and 3,500 USN tactical air sorties, while the second, Alternative B, would reduce the activity levels to those presented in April. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval of Alternative A with appropriate supplemental funding.[41]

Three days later, on 5 June, the Secretary of Defense notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he could not at that time approve a request for supplemental funds for FY 1971. Any additional costs, he directed, would be met through reduced activities in Southeast Asia or elsewhere. With respect to air activity levels, the Secretary directed continuation of the current rate until 15 July 1970. He told the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assume that the monthly sortie rates thereafter would be not more than 1,200 for B-52s, 10,000 for USAF tactical fighters, and 3,600 for US Navy fighters. He emphasized, however, that these figures were average monthly rates. If circumstances permitted, lower levels should be flown during periods of relative inactivity, allowing some added operational surge capability when needed. This procedure, he believed, "would also allow us to signal more readily to the enemy through marked operational sortie rate increases."[42]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were reluctant to accept this decision. On 26 June, the Acting Chairman informed the Secretary that he and his colleagues, as well as the field commanders, supported continuation of the current sortie

41. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-202-70 to SecDef, 30 Apr 70, Encl to JCS 2472/552-31, 27 Apr 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 9. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-266-70 to SecDef, 2 Jun 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/625, 25 May 70, JMF 911/374 (24 Apr 70) sec 1.

42. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamization--Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program and Related Planning," 5 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-36, 11 Jun 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 10.

levels. In July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again raised the matter of air activity levels with the Secretary of Defense. In assuring him of the effectiveness of the air interdiction campaign in Southeast Asia (in response to a concern expressed by Deputy Secretary Packard), the Joint Chiefs of Staff resubmitted the two alternatives for air activity levels they had proposed on 2 June. Alternative A, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, provided a level of activity that "approached" the minimum requirements of the field commanders. Alternative B was the level that the Services could produce within budget constraints; it represented, however, a 40 percent reduction in tactical air sorties and a 28 percent reduction in B-52 operations from FY 1970 levels, and both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders believed that it would entail substantial risks to US efforts in Southeast Asia. Therefore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, "from a military standpoint," the retention of air activity specified in Alternative A of their 2 June recommendations. They went on to recommend that, regardless of the level of activity authorized, the responsible field commanders be permitted to apply available assets within rules of engagement and operating authorities without further constraints on tactics, techniques, or distribution of sorties among operational areas and target systems.[43]

The Secretary of Defense submitted the question of air activity levels to the President, who resolved the matter on 12 August. He directed the Department of Defense to provide funding adequate to support a FY 1971 air activity level of 14,000 tactical air (both Air Force and Navy), 1,000 B-52, and 1,000 gunship sorties monthly in Southeast Asia, but to authorize "a lower sortie level than funded." The President specified that between 10,000 and 14,000 monthly tactical sorties should be flown, "depending upon the circumstances as determined by COMUSMACV." To compensate for the reduction in air activity levels, he directed continuing efforts to enhance the capabilities of both the VNAF and the RLAF.[44]

43. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-367-70 to SecDef, 30 Jul 70, Encl to JCS 2472/646-1, 27 Jul 70, JMF 907/322 (11 Jul 70).

44. (S-GP 1) Extract from NSDM 77 (revised), 12 Aug 70, JMF 001 (CY 1970) NSDMs sec 2.

The President's decision resolved the question for the moment, but it arose again several months later. On 7 November 1970, the Secretary of Defense stressed to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the importance of viewing the US tactical air effort "in context with the total allied effort." While US sorties had been decreasing, allied capability was expanding, and it partially offset the US reductions. He stated that US sortie levels might be further reduced during FY 1972 by about 30 percent, although the decline in the overall allied effort would be less than 15 percent. The Secretary wanted to ensure "that these more realistic sortie levels are used in our tactical air planning for next year."[45]

In late November and early December both the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as a group, and the Chairman, acting separately, expressed concern to the Secretary of Defense that decisions were being reached to reduce US sortie rates in Southeast Asia on the basis of fiscal considerations rather than on operational needs. In his 8 December memorandum, Admiral Moorer recommended that decisions on US air sortie levels be made on the basis of military requirements, as determined by the field commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and not strictly on budget factors.[46]

On 17 December 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again appealed to the Secretary of Defense. All of them, with one exception, supported continuation of air sorties for the remainder of FY 1971 as currently programmed. For FY 1972, they recommended a monthly average of 1,000 B-52, 700 gunship, and a minimum of 10,000 (7,300 USAF and 2,700 USN) tactical air sorties rather than monthly averages of 700 B-52, 450 gunship, and 8,325 (5,625 USAF and 2,700 USN) tactical air sorties as currently programmed in Service budgets. Acceptance of the programmed FY 1972 levels, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, would threaten the success of Vietnamization and increase the risk of enemy actions that could reverse the downward trend in US casualties. They

45. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Allied Tactical Air Sorties Rates for FY 1972 (U)," 7 Nov 70, Att to JCS 2339/333, 16 Nov 70, JMF 907/323 (7 Nov 70).

46. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-551-70 to SecDef, 27 Nov 70, Encl A to JCS 2339/33-1, 23 Nov 70; (TS) CM-413-70 to SecDef, 8 Dec 70; same file.

urged the Secretary of Defense to provide additional funds and resources to support their recommended FY 1972 activity levels since reprogramming within or between the Services to support them would cause increased risk in other important areas or functions. The dissenter was the Chief of Staff, Army, who did not support these recommendations because of reservations concerning accompanying force levels, which he felt the Army could not meet.[47]

On 24 December, the Secretary of Defense advised Admiral Moorer that he had taken steps to ensure funds to fly the higher sortie levels recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Further, he said that a final decision on activity and force levels for use in FY 1972 planning would be made at a later date. On the last day of the year, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a Program/Budget Decision approving an increase of $249.1 million in FY 1972 for Southeast Asia. Included in that decision was support for the following numbers of monthly sorties: 10,200 tactical air (7,500 USAF and 2,700 USN), 1,000 B-52, and 700 gunship. Again, this action resolved the immediate question, but the conflict between military requirements and budget resources for air activity levels would be a continuing problem in the coming months.[48]

Within the activity levels determined in Washington, the field commanders carried out air operations in Southeast Asia during 1970. General Abrams used tactical air strikes to support ground operations throughout South Vietnam. In addition, there was continued employment of tactical air in neighboring Laos and Cambodia to strike enemy troop concentrations, supply caches, and infiltration routes. Within the overall authorizations, preplanned distribution of sorties was 45 percent in-country and 55 percent out-country early in the year. In May and June 1970, during the

47. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-576-70 to SecDef, 17 Dec 70, Encl to JCS 2472/695, 14 Dec 70, JMF 907/372 (14 Dec 70). For discussion of the objections of Chief of Staff, Army, see Ch. 10, p. 402.

48. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Force and Activity Levels in Southeast Asia for FY 72 (U)," 24 Dec 70, Att to JCS 2339/333-2, 6 Jan 71, JMF 907/323 (7 Nov 70). (S) Program/Budget Decision 505, "Southeast Asia High Option," 31 Dec 70, JMF 907/372 (14 Dec 70).

Cambodian campaign, the out-country figure rose significantly at the expense of strikes in South Vietnam. The sorties distribution returned to something like the previous ratio in the period July-September, but during the last quarter of 1970, increasing percentages of sorties went to Cambodia and Laos. In connection with the reduction in tactical air sorties and associated budget restrictions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a reduction of the Seventh Fleet attack carrier forces (CVAs) from four to three, effective "about 1 November 1970." The Secretary of Defense approved with the stipulation that there would be no announcement prior to the effective date.[49]

In addition to tactical air, the United States continued to use ARC LIGHT, conventional B-52 bombing operations, against enemy targets in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. But, as a result of the sorties reduction approved by the President in August, ARC LIGHT sorties for 1970 totaled only 15,015, or 4,414 less than the previous year. The greatest number of ARC LIGHT missions were sent into Laos, followed in order by MR 1, MR 3, Cambodia, MR 2, MR 4, and the DMZ. Beginning in September, all B-52 operations against targets in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were flown from Thailand.[50]

The United States also used its air resources in Southeast Asia in 1970 for reconnaissance and the collection of intelligence, for tactical airlift, and for search and rescue operations. This last category of operations resulted in 1970 in 303 "saves," of which 174 were "combat saves." Air strikes against North Vietnam (ROLLING THUNDER) had not been authorized since 1 November 1968, but the ROLLING THUNDER target list was continually revised and kept current in order to maintain the capability for immediate resumption of effective bombing of North Vietnam, if it should be authorized.[51]

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49. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. VI-20 - VI-26. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1971, pp. VI-11. (S-GP 3) JCSM-383-70 to SecDef, 14 Aug 70, App to JCS 2147/515-1, 9 Aug 70; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "CVA Force Levels (U)," 19 Aug 70, Att to JCS 2147/515-2, 20 Aug 70; JMF 466 (30 Jul 70).

50. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. VI-27.

51. Ibid., pp. VI-34 - VI-39, VI-119.

Air Operating Authorities Over North Vietnam

The question of operating authorities against North Vietnam was another matter of serious concern to US commanders in Vietnam during 1970. The United States had ceased all offensive air operations against North Vietnam on 1 November 1968 and also curtailed offensive actions in the DMZ. The enemy had taken advantage of these restrictions during 1969 to increase his forces in and around the DMZ. Throughout the year the Joint Chiefs of Staff had attempted, with only limited success, to secure permission to eliminate the Communist buildup in and just above the DMZ. In late 1969, North Vietnam also began to augment its air defenses in the NVN panhandle, moving SAMs and AAA there targeted against US aircraft operating in nearby Laos and South Vietnam. As a consequence, the year 1970 brought continuing efforts by US military commanders and by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to obtain additional authorities to meet this mounting threat.

The issue was formally raised on 22 December 1969 when CINCPAC asked JCS permission to retaliate against a SAM site that had fired on US planes over Laos several days earlier, as well as to destroy any other SAM installations that might be discovered during the retaliatory strike. He also wanted authority for pre-emptive attack, on a case-by-case basis, on any NVN SAMs threatening US operations over Laos and for permanent IRON HAND (fighter aircraft) overflight of North Vietnam when B-52 strike forces entered a SAM threat area in Laos.[52]

General Wheeler decided not to seek approval of strikes against the SAMs as requested by CINCPAC, but he did ask Secretary Laird on 24 December for authority for IRON HAND overflight of North Vietnam as necessary to protect B-52 forces operating in SAM/AAA threat areas over Laos or South Vietnam. He explained that the current restrictions against such overflight precluded adequate protection of B-52 forces, which could be attacked by SAMs when flying within 19 nautical miles of the NVN border and by NVN-based 100mm antiaircraft artillery when within three nautical miles of the

52. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 220618Z Dec 69, filed with Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 280336Z Jan 60, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 70.

border. The military risk of the protective overflight would be no greater, General Wheeler added, than that to aircraft currently overflying Laos or South Vietnam within range of active NVN SAM/AAA sites.[53]

At the time he received this request, Secretary Laird still had before him another one submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 30 October 1969, to allow US aircraft attacking targets in Laos to maneuver over North Vietnam and the DMZ.[54] Meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 5 January 1970, he asked them to combine these requests into a single submission for the President. Accordingly, two days later the Chairman submitted a draft memorandum for the President asking overflight authority for fighters on IRON HAND missions and for aircraft engaged in the attack on lines of communications in Laos--both the bombers themselves and the non-ordance-carrying (illuminator) aircraft needed to permit the delivery of laser-guided bombs. Unless these authorities were granted, General Wheeler said, operations to interdict the flow of supplies through Laos would continue to be severely handicapped.[55]

On 28 January, Secretary Laird notified General Wheeler that the President had approved the requested overflight authorities, with the proviso that laser-illuminator aircraft overflight of North Vietnam not exceed 3 nautical miles. In addition, authority was granted for IRON HAND aircraft to fire anti-radiation missiles at AAA/SAM radar signals emanating from North Vietnam below 19 degrees north when such signals clearly posed a threat to friendly forces. The new authorities were for a short term, extending through 31 March 1970.[56]

Meanwhile CINCPAC on 11 January had renewed his proposal to attack SAMs in North Vietnam. He again requested authority to strike SAM and SAM/AAA radars in North Vietnam that threatened US air operations in Laos, as well as permission to destroy truck parks and associated logistic

53. (TS-GP 3) CM-4796-69 to SecDef, 24 Dec 69, same file, Dec 69.
54. See Ch. 5, p. 169.
55. (TS-GP 1) CM-4806-70 to SecDef, 7 Jan 70; (TS-GP 1) DJSM-21-70 to CJCS, 7 Jan 70; same file, Jan 70
56. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 28 Jan 70, OCJCS File, SecDef memos.

buildups in North Vietnam within 25 kilometers of Ban Karai and Mu Gia Passes. On 28 January, CINCPAC alerted General Wheeler to the location of a new SAM site within five miles of Ban Karai Pass, stating that the North Vietnamese SAMs now posed a "clear and present threat" to US air interdiction operations. At a time when enemy logistic efforts in southern Laos were at an alltime peak, CINCPAC believed that it was essential to destroy SAMs in North Vietnam that were endangering US air operations in Laos.[57]

On the following day, 29 January, General Wheeler relayed CINCPAC's views to the Secretary of Defense. It would be advantageous, the Chairman said, for US commanders to have authority for pre-emptive attack of SAM and AAA positions posing a threat to US reconnaissance and bombing operations in Laos.[58]

The Secretary of Defense desired detailed recommendations on proposed changes in the current operating authorities, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided them on 3 February in the form of a draft message. Apparently after a discussion with the Secretary in which various refinements had been made in the authorities, General Wheeler notified CINCPAC and COMUSMACV on 9 February that the following had been approved: pre-emptive attack on "SAM/AAA installations in North Vietnam near the Laotian border south of 20 degrees north" that threatened US aircraft operating against targets in Laos; follow-on attacks, for a 72-hour period, against SAM/AAA installations in North Vietnam south of 19 degrees north that fired on US reconnaissance aircraft; attack by US aircraft or surface-to-air missiles against hostile aircraft operating over North Vietnam that indicated intent to attack US or allied aircraft outside of North Vietnam; and attack on ground control intercept (GCI) sites supporting MIG aircraft that attacked US air operations and that flew from fields in North Vietnam below 19 degrees north. This last authority was limited to the 72-hour period following such a MIG attack, and all of the authorities extended through 31 March 1970.[59]

57. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, CINCPAC to CJCS, 112245Z Jan 70; CINCPAC to CJCS, 280336Z Jan 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.
58. (S) CM-4868-70 to SecDef, 29 Jan 70, same file.
59. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-44-70 to SecDef, 3 Feb 70; (TS) Msg CJCS 1970 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 9 Feb 70; JMF 912/323 (2 Feb 70).

Weather conditions in Southeast Asia prevented immediate attack on the threatening SAMs, and on 16 February, the President inquired about the delay in using the expanded authorities. General Wheeler immediately advised the President of the reason and assured him that the Seventh Air Force was fully prepared to strike as soon as opportunity offered. But on the following day, 17 February, the Secretary of Defense temporarily rescinded the authority to attack enemy missile and antiaircraft installations.[60]

General Abrams protested the rescission of the authority for pre-emptive strikes on 22 February, pointing out indications of a break in the unfavorable weather. On 6 March, at the direction of the President, the Secretary of Defense amended the operating authorities over North Vietnam, but he did not reinstate the pre-emptive attack of NVN SAMs. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were now permitted to delegate to field commanders the authority to destroy SAM/AAA installations and immediate support facilities in North Vietnam below 20 degrees north that fired at US or allied planes operating outside North Vietnam. Such attacks were restricted to the 72-hour period following the SAM/AAA firing. Authority to attack GCI sites, however, was now reserved to the Secretary of Defense and would be approved only for facilities positively known to have been employed in connection with an attack by NVN aircraft. Secretary Laird considered these changes to be sound, but requested JCS views as to their feasibility.[61]

Replying on 11 March 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not comment on the new delegation of authority to field commanders, but they took the opportunity to urge restoration of the right of pre-emptive attack. Mere retaliation for cross-border SAM/AAA firings was "too restrictive," they said, in view of the increasing enemy capabilities. Regarding action against GCI installations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff

60. (TS-GP 1) CM-4909-70 to Pres, 16 Feb 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 70. (TS) Msg, JCS 2544 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 17 Feb 70, JMF 912/323 (2 Feb 70).

61. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 2419 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 22 Feb 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 70. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Operating Authorities and Rules of Engagement over North Vietnam," 6 Mar 70, JMF 912/323 (2 Feb 70).

warned that to require previous approval in Washington would appreciably delay reaction to any NVN attack. Moreover, the boundary line for such action should be moved to 20 degrees north, in order to take in important sites at Bai Thuong, which was being increasingly used as a base.[62]

The Secretary of Defense took no action on the JCS request of 11 March, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not pursue the issue of pre-emptive attack on North Vietnamese SAMs further. One reason, perhaps, was that in April the North Vietnamese began to withdraw the SAMs from Route Package 1, the area south of 18 degrees, and this removal was completed in early May. General Abrams attributed the withdrawal to US protective reaction against the SAM firings and the approach of the rainy season.[63]

Meanwhile, on 26 March, General Wheeler reminded the Secretary of Defense that the existing operating authorities over North Vietnam expired at the end of the month. He requested extension through 30 June 1970 of the authorities approved on 28 January: maneuvering overflight for both laser illuminator and ordnance delivery aircraft as well as IRON HAND overflight and firing of anti-radiation missiles at SAM/AAA radar signals from North Vietnam below 19 degrees north. He also sought extension for retaliatory attack on SAM/AAA installations in the same area and engagement of enemy aircraft operating over North Vietnam that threatened US or allied operations outside of NVN borders as approved on 9 February and modified on 6 March. The following day, the Secretary of Defense approved the extensions, but with provision for IRON HAND aircraft to strike enemy SAM/AAAs in North Vietnam below 20 degrees north that fired at US aircraft over Laos or NVN. These authorities were later successively extended at the request of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, into 1971.[64]

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62. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-109-70 to SecDef, 11 Mar 70, same file.
63. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. VI-127.
64. (TS-GP 1) CM-4985-70 to SecDef, 26 Mar 70; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 27 Mar 70; seen in OCJCS Files and used in preparation of (TS) JCS Hist Div study, "JCS Recommendations/ SecDef Actions on Vietnam," but not found during later research. The same is true of (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Jun 70, though the proposal to which it replied is available as (TS-GP 1) CM-5321-70 to SecDef, 23 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/640, 30 Jun 70, JMF 907/323 (25 May 70). Further

Attack on Logistics Targets in the Panhandle of North Vietnam

In late March, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff were seeking extension of the operating authorities over North Vietnam, the President requested plans for possible use of B-52s in the area of passes between North Vietnam and Laos, including Nape, Mu Gia, and Ban Karai. On 15 April 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a plan prepared by CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to the Secretary of Defense. It envisioned attack only on Ban Karai because, according to the field commanders, the other two passes did not at that time offer lucrative targets. The Joint Chiefs of Staff found the plan "feasible" and agreed with COMUSMACV and CINCPAC that tactical air rather than B-52s should be used. Tactical aircraft would be as effective as B-52s and presented less risk. Moreover, as COMUSMACV had observed, "The propaganda value to the enemy of the destruction of one B-52 will be greater than the military gains we might accrue."[65]

Subsequently, the Secretary of Defense inquired about attacking logistics targets along Route 1039. General Wheeler replied on 17 April, confirming that traffic had increased on Route 1039 during the past few days, but adding that Ban Karai Pass and Mu Gia continued to carry heavy traffic. From a military standpoint, General Wheeler said, it would be desirable to extend interdiction efforts into North Vietnam along these entry routes, and he requested permission to confirm precise locations of certain "lucrative logistics-associated targets" on the NVN side of the major entry routes with prestrike reconnaissance. The Secretary

extensions may be traced through the following: (TS-GP 1) CM-308-70 to SecDef, 21 Oct 70; (TS) Memo, ASD(ISA) to CJCS, 26 Oct 70; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Operating Authorities," 3 Nov 70; (TS) Msgs, JCS 4437 and 5220 to CINCPAC, 27 Oct and 5 Nov 70; OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia Air Operations, Jul 70-Jun 71.

65. (TS) OCJCS Routing Slip for Docs for Clearance and/or Signature, "B-52 Strikes in North Vietnamese Passes (TS)," 15 Apr 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 4581 to CINCPAC, 8 Apr 70. Tab C to Briefing Sheet for CJCS, 14 Apr 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 70. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-169-70 to SecDef, 15 Apr 70, JMF 912/323 (26 Mar 70).

of Defense approved, and the reconnaissance, conducted on 18 April, confirmed a buildup in activity in the Route 1036/1039/1032 complex. Traffic through Ban Karai and Mu Gia, however, had declined. Accordingly, on 20 April General Wheeler sought authority for a 72-hour strike on the 1036/1039/1032 complex to a depth of 20 nautical miles into North Vietnam. Inasmuch as Route 7 through Barthelemy Pass, farther north, remained a major logistics route into northern Laos, General Wheeler also requested authority for tactical photo reconnaissance of this route, again to a depth of 20 nautical miles.[66]

On 25 April 1970, before the Secretary of Defense had replied to this request, General Wheeler told the Secretary that new information had been received from General Abrams stressing the "magnitude of logistic traffic" in the Route 1036/1039/1032 complex. The Chairman again urged favorable consideration of strikes on those targets, noting that the dry season would soon end. He believed "we should implement this action at the earliest possible time."[67]

After a brief delay, apparently caused by preoccupation with the final planning for the US/RVNAF attacks into Cambodia, Secretary Laird approved the requested strike. Accordingly, on 29 April 1970, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized COMUSMACV and CINCPAC to strike logistics targets in the Route 1036/1039/1032 complex in North Vietnam to a depth of 20 nautical miles. The strike would be for a 48-hour period rather than the 72 hours originally requested. General Wheeler also directed the field commanders to coordinate the strike closely with the beginning of the US/RVNAF thrust into Base Areas 352/353 in Cambodia.[68]

On 1 May 1970, in accordance with the decision of the President, the Acting Chairman, Admiral Moorer, ordered three additional strikes on lucrative targets in North Vietnam along the supply routes leading into Laos and South Vietnam.

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66. (~~TS~~) CM-5055-70 to SecDef, 17 Apr 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 5334 to COMUSMACV, 17 Apr 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-5062-70 to SecDef, 20 Apr 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 70.

67. (~~TS~~) CM-5076-70 to SecDef, 25 Apr 70, same file.

68. (~~TS~~) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Request for Authority," 27 Apr 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 70. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 5876 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 29 Apr 70, same file, May 70.

Suggested target areas included Route 15 to Mu Gia Pass, Route 137 to Ban Karai, Route 7 to Barthelemy Pass, as well as the Route 1039/1036/1032 complex. This authorization was rescinded on 2 May, but subsequently reinstated the same day.[69]

In accordance with the above authorities, US forces carried out strikes on logistics targets in North Vietnam on four successive days, 1-4 May. Forces of the 7th Air Force struck target complexes on Routes 1036/1039/1032 on 1 and 2 May; in coordination with the Navy's Task Force 77, they hit the Mu Gia Pass (Routes 15/101) vicinity and along Routes 1032, 1036, and 1039 and also Route 7 on 3 May; and on 4 May the 7th Air Force concluded the campaign with strikes on the Route 137 complex (Ban Karai Pass). In all, 708 sorties were flown. One F-4 strike aircraft and one F-4 reconnaissance escort were lost to ground fire with one crew recovered and one missing, and one RF-4 was damaged.[70]

Admiral McCain believed that the strikes were among the most successful ever conducted against forward elements of the NVN logistics system. The enemy had been caught by surprise at a time of great confusion occasioned by the Cambodian invasion, and in the middle of a "last ditch" attempt to push supplies south before the rainy season. Large supply concentrations along the entry corridors to Laos and the DMZ had been exposed to attack. The Admiral estimated the enemy's losses at between 10,000 and 50,000 tons of all classes of supplies. The Acting Chairman, Admiral Moorer, advised the Secretary of Defense that the results of the strikes, together with the loss of supplies in the Cambodian base areas, should have a substantial impact on the enemy's ability to conduct operations in South Vietnam and Cambodia.[71]

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69. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6013 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 1 May 70; (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 6077 and 6080 to C/Ss PAC and MACV, 2 May 70; (TS) CM-5097-70 to SecDef, 1 May 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 70. Available sources do not indicate the reason for the rescission and reinstatement of the three additional strikes, but possibly there was a need to adjust the timing with relation to operations in Cambodia.

70. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, CINCPAC to CJCS, 041939Z and 050643Z May 70, same file.

71. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 130426Z May 70; (TS-GP 1) CM-5169-70 to SecDef, 15 May 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 70.

The only adverse aspect of the strikes in North Vietnam arose from a delay in notification to Washington of the attack on the Mu Gia Pass area. United States forces struck Mu Gia on 3 May, yet no prior intent notice was received in Washington--as was done for the other strikes. A report of the strike was not dispatched until 040744Z May, nearly 28 hours after its occurrence, and did not reach Washington until approximately 41 hours after the attack. As a result, when a Defense Department spokesman announced the strikes in Washington on 4 May, he stated that only three areas had been struck, specifically denying any attack in the Mu Gia area. On the following day, 5 May, the Defense Department had to retract the statement and acknowledge the bombing of the Mu Gia Pass area on 3 May.[72]

This incident caused the Secretary of Defense considerable embarrassment, and General Wheeler directed his Assistant, Lieutenant General John McPherson, who was in Hawaii at the time, to investigate. After discussions at PACOM and MACV, General McPherson explained to General Wheeler that the problem stemmed largely from the haste with which the strikes had been carried on (compounded by the "on-again-off-again 24-hour hold") and the time consumed in coordinating between the 7th Air Force and TF 77. When 7th Air Force officials learned that the Navy planned to attack Mu Gia, the aircraft were scheduled to take off from the carriers in 81 minutes. An "intent" message seemed useless at that point, the more so since the JCS message authorizing the strikes had imposed no requirement for it. As for the delay in reporting, it resulted from a misunderstanding that had caused CTF 77 to send his report to CINCPAC through time-consuming SSO channels instead of forwarding it to the 7th Air Force via courier. Moreover, field commanders, unaware that a press conference was scheduled for 4 May in Washington, had stressed accuracy and completeness in reporting rather than speed. All echelons, General McPherson concluded, were reviewing procedures for correction of any deficiencies noted.[73]

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72. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6262 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 6 May 70; (U) Msg, CJCS 6311 to LTG McPherson, Asst to CJCS, TDY CINCPAC, 6 May 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 70. NY Times, 5 May 70, p. 1, 6 May 70, p. 1.

73. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 6262 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 6 May 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msgs, McPherson to CJCS, 070944Z and 091136Z May 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 70.

Secretary Laird also expressed concern that the Mu Gia strike was an additional strike beyond those authorized on 29 April and 1 May. Admiral Moorer, who was again the acting Chairman, explained to Mr. Laird on 15 May that the field commanders considered the 3 May effort against Mu Gia and the 1032/1036/1039 area a "single coordinated strike." They had conducted it accordingly with "near simultaneous" time on all targets.[74]

Throughout the remainder of May and into June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were occupied preparing plans in response to requests from either the Secretary of Defense or the White House for attacks against various targets in North Vietnam. These included: a three-day plan for air and naval operations against Thanh Hoa, Vinh, and/or Quang/Dong Hoi; one-day operation against nine selected targets in the NVN panhandle; and an aerial attack on the the NVN POL pipeline complex. None of the plans, however, was approved for execution.[75]

The Renewed Search for Air Authorities over NVN

In the late summer and early fall of 1970, US military commanders began to prepare for the approaching 1970-1971 dry season campaign. The reduction of US forces in South Vietnam made it necessary to place increased emphasis on the effective use of US air power; at the same time budget reductions demanded judicious use of available resources. Consequently, the US commanders in Vietnam developed a single integrated interdiction program (SIIP), which applied US air power in Southeast Asia as a unified effort. The SIIP encompassed portions of Laos as well as Cambodia and South Vietnam.[76]

74. (TS) CM-5157-70 to SecDef, 15 May 70, same file.
75. (TS-GP 1) CM-5118-70 to SecDef, 7 May 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 70. (TS-GP 1) CM-5261-70 to SecDef, 7 Jun 70; CM-5260-70 to SecDef, 9 Jun 70; CM-5268-70 to Spec Asst to Pres for NSA, 9 Jun 70; CM-5292-70 to SecDef, 15 Jun 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 70.
76. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-367-70 to SecDef, 30 Jul 70, Encl to JCS 2472/646-1, 27 Jul 70, JMF 907/322 (11 Jul 70). (TS-GP 1) CM-307-70 to SecDef, 21 Oct 70, OCJCS File 091 SEA Air Ops, Jul 70-Jun 71.

The SIIP was designed to operate within existing authorities, but some of these--the right of aircraft to maneuver over North Vietnam and to retaliate against SAM/AAA installations in North Vietnam--were scheduled to expire on 1 November 1970. In seeking their extension, the Chairman included one new authorization: overflight of North Vietnam, not to exceed three nautical miles, by aircraft delivering electro-optical (E-O) guided ordnance. Admiral Moorer explained to Secretary Laird that targets with sharp light contrast, such as gun positions in caves, were particularly vulnerable to bombs guided in this manner. To gain favorable access and proper light contrast for attack of such targets, the Admiral stated, aircraft would occasionally have to penetrate NVN airspace, but no more deeply than if they were delivering laser-guided ordnance. The extension of the authorities granted by the Secretary included approval of the E-O overflight.[77]

The North Vietnamese, meanwhile, were preparing for the forthcoming dry season by extending existing lines of communication and opening new ones. By early fall, US intelligence reported that the enemy was beginning his dry season logistics effort earlier than usual and that more would be moved through the Laotian panhandle than in previous years. The road/POL pipeline/waterway complex west of the DMZ was expected to serve as a major corridor, and a westward expansion of the supply system in Laos was predicted.[78]

A parallel effort to increase and improve protective measures and counter-air capabilities in both Laos and southern NVN accompanied the enemy's extension of his infiltration system. In mid-October, Admiral Moorer advised the Secretary of Defense that deployment of enemy SAM and AAA units to the vicinity of the NVN-Laos passes was likely to occur. A week later, he reported the detection of an increase in heavier caliber weapons and fire control radars together with a shift of gun concentration from coastal areas of North Vietnam to the LOCs and passes leading into Laos. Moreover, at least 12 SAM-firing battalions were

77. (TS-GP 1) CM-308-70 to SecDef, 21 Oct 70; (TS) Memo, ASD(ISA) to SecDef, 26 Oct 70; (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Operating Authorities," 3 Nov 70; same file.

78. (TS-GP 1) CM-308-70 to SecDef, 21 Oct 70, same file.

deployed south of the 20th Parallel, and recent photography had revealed 10 occupied sites in the area. Two more battalions were believed to be in the area south of Vinh. The Chairman pointed out that previously two regiments of four firing battalions each had defended the southern panhandle. Now, he said, a third regiment had been activated, probably for defense of the major passes into Laos.[79]

To meet this increasing SAM/AAA threat, COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff resumed their quest, which was to continue throughout the 1970-1971 dry season campaign, for authority to mount pre-emptive strikes against SAM/AAA sites in the NVN panhandle. CINCPAC submitted his first request for such authority on 10 October 1970.[80]

In passing this request to the Secretary of Defense, Admiral Moorer stated:

> This year, with fewer sorties and forces to employ against a more determined enemy, we can ill afford to permit the enemy to drive the B-52 forces away from any of the crucial interdiction areas near the NVN border within range of his SAM/AAA sites . . . identified by COMUSMACV.

Admiral Moorer requested authority to destroy SAM/AAA installations below 20 degrees north within 25 nautical miles of the Laotian border or the DMZ that threatened US aircraft operating over North Vietnam or Laos. The requested authority would include both pre-emptive and retaliatory strikes. Admiral Moorer appreciated the political implications of his request, but considered the authority "well within the realm of executive policy for protective reaction for forces operating in Southeast Asia."[81]

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79. (~~TS~~) CM-293-70 to SecDef, 14 Oct 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN. (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-308-70 to SecDef, 21 Oct 70, OCJCS File 091 SEA Air Ops, Jul 70-Jun 71.

80. CINCPAC's message of 10 Oct 70 has not been found but is referred to in (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 250228Z Oct 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN.

81. (~~TS~~) CM-293-70 to SecDef, 14 Oct 70, same file.

Secretary Laird rejected the request on 22 October. Although sharing the desire to reduce risks to US aircrews, he wanted "no military initiatives at this time" that could affect the favorable impact of President Nixon's recent peace proposals. Consequently, he directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to examine alternatives that did not entail substantial political risks, yet would enhance the protection of US aircrews if NVN deployed AAA and SAM forces in a manner to threaten critically US interdiction efforts in Laos.[82]

The Secretary of Defense's response did not satisfy the field commanders and, during the remainder of October, CINCPAC continued to seek authority for pre-emptive strikes against occupied SAM/AAA installations in North Vietnam below 20 degrees north. In a request on 27 October, he suggested a procedural alternative. Upon locating a threatening SAM/AAA site, COMUSMACV would issue to CINCPAC and Washington a declaration of intent to strike the site. Dispatched at least 12 hours prior to the attack, it would allow ample time for consideration of all factors involved "at highest level." Barring receipt of a hold order, COMUSMACV would then execute the strike as planned or as soon thereafter as the weather permitted. But none of CINCPAC's requests met with approval.[83]

On 13 November 1970, North Vietnamese ground fire hit and downed an unarmed US RF-4C reconnaissance aircraft 17 nautical miles north-northeast of Mu Gia pass. The following day, CINCPAC submitted an urgent request to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for pre-emptive strikes of enemy SAMs that threatened US planes over Laos or North Vietnam. This request, however, arrived in Washington at the same time that Admiral Moorer was tasked to develop a plan for a three-day strike against targets in North Vietnam below 20 degrees north. Subsequently, Admiral Moorer delegated this responsibility to CINCPAC, adding that no action would be taken on

82. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Air Operating Authorities in Lao/NVN Border Areas," 22 Oct 70, same file.

83. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 232146Z Oct 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep-Oct 70. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, CINCPAC to CJCS, 250228Z and 270100Z Oct 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN.

the proposal for pre-emptive attacks pending consideration of this strike plan.[84]

At CINCPAC's direction, COMUSMACV prepared and submitted a plan for 72-hour retaliatory air and naval operations against air defense targets in North Vietnam below 20 degrees north, but when authorized, the strike did not follow the COMUSMACV plan. On 19 November 1970, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to execute a protective reaction strike against air defense and logistics targets in North Vietnam south of 18 degrees 15 minutes north. The Chairman's directive provided only for a one-day strike with a second strike the following day if pilot debriefs and poststrike reconnaissance of the first strike indicated that a second would be productive. Attack was authorized against AAA/SAM-associated equipment threatening US activities in Mu Gia, Ban Karai, and Ban Raving areas and stockpiled supplies and vehicles in the general area of these AAA/SAM complexes, as well as interconnecting routes. Additionally, strikes were authorized against logistic stockpiles and associated transport on or near the routes leading into the pass area. As an exception to the prohibition against strikes above 18 degrees 15 minutes north, the Chairman authorized attack by IRON HAND and flack suppression aircraft on SAM/AAA sites above the line that posed a threat to strike forces.[85]

United States forces executed the strike, nicknamed FREEDOM BAIT, on 21 and 22 November, Saigon time (20 and 21 November, Washington time). A total of 210 aircraft from the 7th Air Force and Task Force 77 participated in two

84. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 265-70, 13 Nov 70. NY Times, 14 Nov 70, 8. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 142340Z Nov 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 15354 to CINCPAC, 16 Nov 70; (~~TS~~) Draft DJSM Att to J3M-2097-70 to DJS, 16 Nov 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN. (Msg, CJCS 15293 to CINCPAC, 14 Nov 70, first requested plans for the 3-day strike. This msg has not been found, but it was possible to reconstruct it from the later cited documents.)

85. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msgs, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 150654Z Nov 70; COMUSMACV 14807 to CINCPAC, 17 Nov 70; and CJCS 15483 to CINCPAC, 19 Nov 70; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN.

waves. Deteriorating weather forced cancellation of a third wave, severely curtailing the strike effort. Bomb damage assessment indicated considerable damage to logistics targets, but, although a number of SAM sites and related installations were attacked, their operational status was not appreciably impaired. General Abrams reported that the threat to the US interdiction effort from SAMs remained "virtually unchanged."[86]

Secretary Laird announced the air strikes in Washington at 0255 hours on 21 November 1970. "As part of our publicly announced policy and determined effort to protect American lives," he said, "we are conducting limited protection reaction air strikes against missile and antiaircraft facilities in North Vietnam south of the 19th parallel." The action was in response to attacks on unarmed US reconnaissance planes. These enemy attacks, the Secretary declared, were in violation of the 1968 bombing halt understanding that unarmed reconnaissance would continue. Mr. Laird said that the strikes were designed to protect the lives of US pilots flying interdiction missions against NVN military supplies throughout southern Laos moving toward South Vietnam. On the following day, he added that the United States would continue "protective reaction" operations as required to protect US pilots.[87]

One hour before the first air strike on 21 November (Saigon time), the United States launched an abortive effort to free US prisoners of war believed to be held near Hanoi. In a daring heliborne-raid, a small US party landed at Son Tay camp, 23 miles west of Hanoi, only to find the prisoners had been removed. The party successfully withdrew without serious casualties. One man was slightly wounded by enemy rifle fire and one helicopter was destroyed intentionally by the raiders after a crash landing. The United States did not announce the attempted rescue until 23 November.[88]

The FREEDOM BAIT attack did not accomplish its purpose of seriously damaging the NVN air defenses. On 23 November, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that, although FREEDOM BAIT should reduce the

86. (TS) NMCC Memos for Record, "Initial Report on Strikes in NVN," 21 Nov 70, and "Report on Strikes in NVN," 22 Nov 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 15061 to CINCPAC, 23 Nov 70; same file.
87. NY Times, 21 Nov 70, 11; 22 Nov 70, 1.
88. Ibid., 24 Nov 70, 1, 12.

immediate threat, it was only a temporary solution. He went on to request standing authority for pre-emptive attacks on occupied SAM and SAM-support installations and components in North Vietnam within 19 miles of the Laotian border or the DMZ. Admiral Moorer believed that FREEDOM BAIT had reduced the political impact of such protective reaction strikes. "I see no political risks in these authorities," he said, "which are not outweighed by the continuing threat to our current interdiction and reconnaissance operations."[89]

The Secretary of Defense did not approve the requested authority. On 30 November, he informed Admiral Moorer that he found existing authorities adequate for the present threat. He reiterated his desire to avoid actions that might endanger the President's peace initiatives or lead to more serious violations of the 1968 bombing halt understandings. In addition, he feared that any expansion in strike authority at that time might undermine congressional support for the 1971 Defense budget and the supplemental military assistance appropriation. He directed Admiral Moorer to watch the situation closely; should a pattern of hostile reactions or threats develop, he would consider another strike such as FREEDOM BAIT. He shared Admiral Moorer's concern for the safety of the B-52 force. If the Admiral believed the threat was increasing, the Secretary suggested the following actions: increases in the number of IRON HAND aircraft; changes in tactics or flight patterns of the B-52s; and substitution of tactical aircraft for B-52s in the high-risk areas near the borders.[90]

On several occasions during December 1970, Admiral Moorer informed the Secretary of Defense of increasing NVN air defense activity. He continued to seek permission not only to attack SAM sites and support installations, but also to react to an expected deployment of MIGs to airfields south of 20 degrees north. None of these requests was granted. The Chairman asked CINCPAC on 8 Debember to comment on Secretary Laird's suggested changes in operating methods. Admiral McCain referred the query to CINCSAC, who replied that

89. (~~TS~~-GP 1) CM-382-70 to SecDef, 23 Nov 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN.

90. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Request for Strike Authority," 30 Nov 70, same file.

current B-52 tactics were believed to be the most effective possible but that they were under constant study.[91]

On 1 January 1971, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC reported the firing of three SAMs at US aircraft over Laos in the vicinity of Ban Karai Pass and requested authority to strike the offending site. This time the authority was granted. On the same day, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized armed reconnaissance in the Ban Karai-Route 137 area, as soon as the weather permitted, followed by a one-time strike when the site or equipment was located. The weather prevented immediate implementation of the strike, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff extended the authority first through 4 January and, subsequently, until 18 January. In response to a COMUSMACV/CINCPAC request, they also obtained Secretary Laird's approval for expansion of the authority to include a one-time strike against two SA-2 missiles on transporters on Route 101F.[92]

The authority for the one-time attack on SAM sites in the Ban Karai-Route 137 area expired on 18 January without its having been executed. Admiral Moorer explained to the Secretary of Defense: "Weather and enemy caution precluded effective armed reconnaissance or strike action against located SAM/AAA equipment and installations while the authority was in effect." Consequently, during the latter part of January 1971, the NVN air defense threat remained unchanged. Admiral

91. (TS) CM-397-70 to SecDef, 1 Dec 70; (TS-GP 1) CM-431-70 to SecDef, 14 Dec 70; (TS-GP 1) CM-452-70 to SecDef, 21 Dec 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS 16306 to CINCPAC, 8 Dec 70; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCSAC to CINCPAC, 121750Z Dec 70; same file.

92. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 011953Z Jan 71, JCS IN 21317; (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 9204 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 1 Jan 71; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040735Z Jan 71, JCS IN 23257; (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 9322 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 5 Jan 71 (this msg has handwritten notation of SecDef approval); (TS) Draft memo, CJCS to SecDef, "Authority to Strike Sites in NVN (TS)," n.d.; (TS) Memo, ASD(ISA) to DSecDef, "Request for Strike Authority," n.d. (has handwritten approval by DSecDef, dated 5 Jan 71; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 9219 and 9383 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 2 and 6 Jan 71. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 111135Z Jan 71 (this message, which extended the authorities until 18 Jan 71, has not been located, but is referred to in a draft message attached to (TS-GP 1) CM-523-71 to SecDef, 20 Jan 71, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN.

Moorer, on behalf of COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, continued to seek throughout the remainder of the dry season campaign expanded authorities to meet and destroy that threat.[93]

The Situation at the Year's End

The military situation in Vietnam at the close of 1970 was encouraging. During the year, the RVNAF expanded by approximately 80,000 men and assumed a major share of the combat operations. Simultaneously, US strength dropped by almost 140,000 men, and this reduction was accompanied by a decline in casualties. American combat deaths in Vietnam in 1970 fell to approximately 4,200, or about half of the 1969 figure and significantly below the record figure of 14,561 in 1968. Even as the United States disengaged from the fighting, the military operations continued to go well. The enemy had abandoned large-scale operations, reverting to guerrilla warfare and economy-of-force tactics. The RVNAF extended its outposts into areas formerly controlled by the Viet Cong, exerting government control over more of the countryside. In addition, both US and RVNAF spokesmen claimed that the Cambodian invasion, the major operation of the year, had significantly weakened the enemy's ability to attack South Vietnam. The fall-off in enemy operations, together with the extension of RVN control over the countryside, allowed steady and continuous progress in pacification during the year, and these indicators all seemed to point toward the success of President Nixon's Vietnamization policy.[94]

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93. (TS-GP 1) CM-523-71 to SecDef, 20 Jan 71, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, SAM Sites in NVN.

United States aircraft did carry out two protective reaction strikes in other areas of North Vietnam on 8 January 1971. The pilot of a F-105 escorting B-52s in Laos fired at a SAM installation in the Mu Gia pass area when he discovered that his plane was being tracked by enemy radar, and an A-4 accompanying a reconnaissance flight over North Vietnam fired at a coastal radar site 110 miles above the DMZ when it became "locked in" by enemy radar. Neither attack was successful. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 6-71, 9 Jan 71. NY Times, 10 Jan 71, 1; 13 Jan 71, 8.

94. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. I-1 - I-6, III-94 - III-96, V-14.

At the end of 1970, as had been the case at the end of every year since the United States involvement in Vietnam began, the encouraging indicators were paralleled by a number of worrisome uncertainties. Following the Cambodian operation, the North Vietnamese immediately began a supply buildup in southern Laos and Cambodia, with signs pointing to the biggest logistical effort of the war. The ability of the Cambodian army to withstand harassment by enemy forces was uncertain, and the long-standing animosities between the Cambodians and the Vietnamese produced tensions among the FANK and RVNAF forces operating in Cambodia. Additionally, the continuing drawdown of US combat forces left fewer assets in South Vietnam.

Another cause of concern to US officials was the failure of the Republic of Vietnam to root out the Communist subversive apparatus. Although the estimated number of agents in South Vietnam had declined from 100,000 to 60,000 since 1968, the remaining agents could still play an important role in the enemy's current strategy of guerrilla action, terrorism, and political subversion. Some US officials also questioned the ability and inclination of the local RVNAF forces--the RF and PF--to cope with the increased enemy guerrilla tactics and terrorism. The record of the RF and PF had, at best, been spotty, and it was feared that they could not contend with the expected increase in guerrilla activity in the coming year. There was also some anxiety over the coming political campaign in South Vietnam, with the possibility that a strongly contested presidential election might set off another period of coups and countercoups.[95]

In spite of these uncertainties, US and South Vietnamese officials were cautiously optimistic over the military situation. A military defeat of South Vietnam appeared unlikely for several years to come. The enemy's general offensives had failed, and his supply and infiltration system was severely damaged. But, despite the improvement on the battlefield, the hopes for a lasting peace were no nearer to realization at the end of 1970 than at the beginning of the year. The Paris talks remained deadlocked with scant prospect for any political settlement. More and more observers predicted a future marked by neither total peace nor all-out

95. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. I-3 - I-6. NY Times, 27 Dec 70, 3.

war. One experienced US official in Saigon summed up this feeling when he stated: "My own thought is that nobody is going to live happily everafter."[96]

96. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. I-6. NY Times, 27 Dec 70, 3.

TABLE VIII

Forces in Vietnam, 1970

US Forces[1]

	1 January	31 December
Army	330,648	250,653
Air Force	58,463	43,137
Navy	30,236	16,502
Marine Corps	55,039	25,394
Coast Guard	433	108
Total	474,819	335,794

RVNAF[2]

ARVN	416,278	414,074
VNN	30,143	40,709
VNMC	11,528	13,635
VNAF	36,469	44,997
RF	260,455	283,106
PF	214,383	250,889
Total	969,256	1,047,410

Third Country Forces[3]

Australia	7,672	6,768
Republic of China	29	31
Republic of Korea	48,869	48,537
New Zealand	552	441
Philippines	189	74
Spain	10	7
Thailand	11,568	11,586
Total	68,889	67,444

1. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. IV-7.
2. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VI-13. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1971, pp. VIII-7, 15, 18 21, 21.
3. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. IV-33.

TABLE IX

US Senior Advisers for 1970[1]

MR 1

	LTG Herman Nickerson, Jr.	USMC	CG, III MAF
Mar 70	LTG K.B. McCutcheon	USMC	CG, III MAF
9 Mar 70	LTG Melvin Zais	USA	CG, XXIV Corps[2]
Jun 70	LTG James W. Sutherland	USA	CG, XXIV Corps
Dec 70	LTG Donn J. Robertson	USMC	CG, III MAF

MR II

	LTG Charles A. Corcoran	USA	CG, I FFORCEV
Feb 70	LTG Arthur S. Collins,Jr.	USA	CG, I FFORCEV

MR III

	LTG Julian J. Ewell	USA	CG, II FFORCEV
Apr 70	LTG Michael S. Davison	USA	CG, II FFORCEV

MR IV[3]

1. First named incumbent occupied the position on 1 January 1970. Date of successor is indicated.

2. After 9 March 1970 the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) was a separate uniservice command subordinate to and under the control of CG, XXIV Corps.

3. MR IV did not have a Senior Adviser in 1970. The Commanding General of the Delta Military Assistance Command (DMAC) on 1 January 1970 was MG R. Wetherill, USA. He was replaced in January by MG Hal D. McCown, USA.

TABLE X

1970 Holiday Cease-fire Violations and Casualties[1]

	Major Violations	Minor Violations	US KIA	US WIA	RVNAF KIA	RVNAF WIA	Enemy Kills
Tet	73	39	3	20	7	36	133
Buddha's Birthday	58	85	1	15	15	97	149
Christmas	47	41	0	4	13	49	32
New Year's	48	37	1	11	12	51	63

1. (S-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 32-70, 7 Feb 70; 117-70, 19 May 70; 300-70, 28 Dec 70; 1-71, 4 Jan 71.

Chapter 10

VIETNAMIZATION IN 1970

Vietnamization was the policy designed to end US military involvement in Vietnam, even if diplomatic negotiations produced no solution. It consisted of two complementary aspects--a strengthening of the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam in order for them to take over the combat effort and a progressive reduction of US forces in Vietnam. President Johnson began the process in 1968 when he initiated planning to improve and modernize the RVN forces with a view to their shouldering a larger share of the war. President Nixon expanded and accelerated these plans during 1969 and began actual withdrawal of US troops, calling this approach "Vietnamization."

The stalemate in the negotiations during 1970 necessitated continued reliance on Vietnamization as the means of reducing US involvement in Vietnam. In 1969, public criticism had been a major influence on policy decisions, but in 1970 economic and fiscal considerations became the dominant factors. The Administration desired faster RVNAF buildup accompanied by hastened US withdrawals, but it was wary of approaching Congress for the money needed to speed the expansion of the RVNAF. Throughout the year, the Secretary of Defense repeatedly counseled the Joint Chiefs of Staff that all funding for increased RVNAF improvement must be found within existing and projected budgets--in other words, through compensating reductions in Southeast Asia or other defense programs. As Secretary Laird explained to General Abrams during a visit to Vietnam in early 1970, "the major constraint on US involvement was now economic." Outlays for Vietnam, he said, could no longer be considered separately from other worldwide defense needs.[1]

The Consolidated Phase III RVNAF I&M Program

Planning for faster improvement of the RVNAF had begun in late 1969. On 10 November 1969, the Secretary of Defense

1. (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, February 10-14, 1970," 17 Feb 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 70.

asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a Phase III RVNAF program (the consolidation phase). It should be designed to raise RVNAF effectiveness to the point where the Republic of Vietnam could maintain "at least current levels of security" while US forces were reduced to a "support force" by 1 July 1971 and to an "advisory force" two years thereafter. Two alternative US support force levels were to be considered, totaling 260,000 and 190,000 respectively. The plan was to include an analysis of RVNAF missions, force structure, and new equipment requirements. Moreover, it was to address qualitative deficiencies in the RVNAF, in training, morale, and leadership. Finally, it was to include a review of US redeployment plans to insure that they properly reflected the objectives of Phase III.[2]

After consulting CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted their Phase III program to the Secretary of Defense on 29 January 1970. Their conclusion was that neither of the two manpower figures suggested by Mr. Laird would provide a US support force adequate to enable the Republic of Vietnam to maintain current levels of security against the existing VC/NVA threat. Fortunately, however, the threat seemed to be declining. The Joint Chiefs of Staff cited pacification progress in the past 15 months and a 50,000-man decline of in-country enemy strength during the past year. The Phase III program was predicated on the assumption that the enemy threat would continue to decline. This assumption was necessary if US manpower figures within range of the ones originally suggested by Secretary Laird were to be achieved. But even then, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had to acknowledge that "the current FY 1971 budget does not provide sufficient resources to support the extra cost of Vietnamization along with the US force levels and recommended out-of-country/offshore effort discussed in this report."

The Phase III program focused attention on three major areas: first, it would expand the RVNAF and initiate measures to improve the quality of the forces; second, it considered four alternative US support force structures to be attained by the end of FY 1971; third, it recommended a MAAG force

2. (PS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamization--RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Aspects and Related US Planning (U)," 10 Nov 69, Att to JCS 2472/552, 10 Nov 69, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 1.

structure for end FY 1973. Whereas past RVNAF I&M programs had raised RVNAF levels almost to the limit that the RVN manpower base could support, the Phase III program recommended only slight increases in the RVNAF structure along with some internal readjustments. For example, the 11 ARVN divisions, which were nearly complete, would be allotted an additional 10 battalions of artillery as well as truck companies and medical units. The VNMC would receive another brigade headquarters. The CIDG would be phased out, thus reducing the Vietnamese Special Forces. The VNN would receive additional small craft for combat, minesweeping, harbor defense, and logistics, raising the total VNN inventory to 1,700 ships and craft.

The Phase III program would add five helicopter, two transport, and two attack squadrons to the VNAF and increase current squadron unit equipment to achieve a greater effect without enlarging the VNAF command and control structure. Ultimately, the VNAF would be expanded to a total force of 49 squadrons. Finally, the territorial forces (RF/PF) and the National Police would be expanded to maintain the current momentum of pacification and to provide additional command and control elements for already approved units.

The Phase III program recommended the expansion of the RVNAF sensor program to prepare the RVNAF to assume responsibility for the security of the DMZ and of major installations and cities. Signal Intelligence forces would be doubled and provided with additional equipment while the RVNAF logistic system was being expanded to provide combat service support for the proposed overall force structure increases. The entire Phase III force structure increases and added equipment requirements would cost approximately $980 million and would expand the RVNAF to the following levels:

Forces	FY 1970	Proposed End FY 1971	FY 1972	FY 1973
Regular Forces				
ARVN	391,235	406,962	410,720	422,224
VNN	37,697	37,697	37,697	37,947
VNAF	38,536	38,536	41,766	43,737
VNMC	13,070	13,435	13,435	13,435
Total Regular	480,538	496,630	503,618	517,343
Territorial Forces				
RF	275,670	287,591	287,591	287,591
PF	239,390	247,799	256,571	256,571
Total Territorial Forces	515,060	535,390	544,162	544,162
Total RVNAF	995,598	1,032,020	1,047,780	1,061,505

As part of the Phase III program the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a training plan for the RVNAF for the period 1970-1973, as developed by COMUSMACV. Their projections indicated that in-country training centers would be at or near maximum use during the next two and a half years. Offshore training facilities were expected to train some 15,000 RVNAF personnel during the same period. The US advisory program, reduced in size, would be reoriented to emphasize training, organization, and management instead of tactics.

The second major area of the Phase III program evaluated the effect of reducing US support forces to 190,000 or 260,000 men, as the Secretary had directed. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered two other possible figures, 218,000 and 270,000. All were based on the following assumptions: that the enemy threat would continue to decline through end FY 1973 (at an unspecified rate); that momentum in pacification would be maintained; that RVNAF capabilities would continue improving; that two FWMAF divisions would be maintained in-country; and that the US would provide support forces to conduct interdiction, air defense, and ARC LIGHT missions through FY 1973. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the 190,000 and 218,000 figures infeasible. Such forces would be too small to respond effectively to contingencies, and the progress of Vietnamization as well as the

protection of US forces would be jeopardized. The 260,000 and 270,000 alternatives were more acceptable. Under either, US forces would maintain the capability to provide the RVNAF with combat support to offset possible shortfalls and retain a US capacity for self-defense. The difference between the two figures seemed small, but it was significant when calculated in terms of combat capability. Trimming the 270,000 force structure by 10,000 would result in a 20 percent reduction of combat maneuver battalions. Therefore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval of the 270,000 figure.

Because it would be difficult to forecast the level of the enemy threat after July 1971, the Joint Chiefs of Staff avoided setting a US force structure goal for FY 1972. But assuming continued RVNAF improvement and retention of current US out-of-country/offshore support forces through mid-FY 1973, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended initiation of planning for a 43,000 MAAG force structure for end FY 1973. The FY 1971 force structure would have to be phased down to the MAAG force on a "cut and try basis," they believed. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were unwilling to describe the composition of either the MAAG or the supplemental support until actual conditions were known.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff requested expeditious approval of their Phase III program, including the 270,000 US in-country force level for end FY 1971 and a 43,000-man MAAG by the end of FY 1973, to permit development of follow-on plans and directives and as a basis for coordination with the Republic of Vietnam. They were firm in recommending that the phasedown to the FY 1971 and 1973 goals be undertaken on the "cut and try" principle, applied under the guidelines they had set forth rather than following a schedule of "predetermined fixed force levels" for successive dates. Finally, since the FY 1971 budget was "stringent to the point of inflexibility," the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested that sufficient additional resources be provided to support the program. "To the extent that the program recommended may not coincide with current . . . fiscal guidance, differences will have to be resolved, keyed to the most urgent priority--the attainment of US objectives in Southeast Asia."[3]

3. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-42-70 to SecDef, 29 Jan 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/552-9, 24 Jan 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 3.

Secretary Laird did not act on this Phase III program until 13 March 1970, and in the meantime, a number of events, both preceding and following the JCS submission, influenced the Secretary's decision. On 12 January 1970, even before the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted their recommendations, the Republic of Vietnam presented the United States with a request for a 170,164-man increase in the RVNAF by the end of FY 1971, which would raise the total RVNAF structure to 1,100,000. The South Vietnamese wanted to implement a sensory device plan for border surveillance and infiltration control and to provide additional radar, artillery, armor, and air defense support as well as strengthen the RF and PF. In addition, assistance in improving the standard of living for RVNAF servicemen was desired. Specifically, the Republic of Vietnam asked for renewal of the canned food assistance program, as implemented in 1968, and building material for 20,000 housing units per year for five years for RVNAF dependents.[4]

Three days later, on 15 January, the Deputy Secretary of Defense forwarded to the Service Secretaries, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and various other Defense components tentative fiscal guidance for the FY 1972 budget. He believed that the total DOD figures represented the maximum that could be obtained in view of available economic resources, the non-defense demands on the Federal budget, and the attitude of Congress and the general public on defense expenditures. He emphasized that, unless there was some change in the international situation, it would be unrealistic to plan on higher funding levels than those he set forth. If increases were recommended in one category, reductions should be identified in other categories to stay within the overall totals. With regard to Southeast Asia, the tentative guidance provided for a US force structure in the Republic of Vietnam of 260,000 by the end of FY 1971 and 29,500 by the conclusion of FY 1973--both below the preferred levels that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to recommend two weeks later in their Phase III RVNAF I&M program.[5]

4. (S) RVNAF Force Structure Increase Plan 12-69, n.d., Encl to (S-GP 4) Ltr, C/S MACV to CJCS, 14 Jan 70, Att to JCS 2472/588, 29 Jan 70, JMF 911/535 (12 Jan 70).

5. (S-GP 1) Memo DSecDef to CJCS et al., "FY 72-76 Fiscal Guidance Memorandum," 15 Jan 70, Att to JCS 2458/677, 16 Jan 70, JMF 555 (15 Jan 70) sec 1.

After more than a month of study, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense on 21 February of their concern over the severity of the fiscal constraints reflected in the tentative guidance. They considered that it did not provide sufficient funds, within a prudent level of risk, to maintain an adequate overall US force structure and deterrent posture under current world conditions. With respect to Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted the assumption of a continuing reduction in US forces, reaching MAAG levels by the end of FY 1973. There was no allowance for the possibility that enemy activity might be such as to preclude these withdrawals, in which case additional funds would be required. Their further comment implied that the restrictions on funding could make this unfavorable development more likely. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the phasedown of out-of-country and offshore effort envisaged in the tentative guidance would fail to provide the level of support necessary for the RVN Armed Forces, as recommended in their recent RVNAF Phase III report.[6]

As already mentioned, Secretary Laird visited South Vietnam in early February and explained to both US and RVN leaders that the "major constraint" on US involvement was now economic. Reduced US funds, he said, were now "consistently narrowing US operational latitude" in Southeast Asia, a fact that provided "an incentive and reinforcement to the Vietnamization policy." Mr. Laird sensed a lack of full realization in Vietnam of the impact of the cuts in the FY 1970 budget and those pending for FY 1971. Noting that there appeared to be a difference "on the order of $1 billion" between COMUSMACV's desires and available resources, the Secretary told General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker that no supplemental Vietnam appropriations could be expected. This left two alternatives, he said: to find more effective ways of using existing resources or to pull out more US troops.

The Secretary of Defense returned to Washington impressed with the progress in the military aspects of Vietnamization, but aware that "monumental" tasks remained. He reported to the President that the economic aspects of Vietnamization were

6. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-65-70 to SecDef, 21 Feb 70, Encl A to JCS 2458/677-8, 14 Feb 70, same file, sec 2.

fraught with potential hazards. Stabilization and expansion of South Vietnam's economy were matters to which both the United States and the Republic of Vietnam must devote immediate attention.

Secretary Laird found continuing US redeployment an "agreed assumption" in Vietnam, with only the issues of composition and timing remaining. The South Vietnamese, he told the President, were "perhaps more confident . . . than our U.S. leadership." Indeed, COMUSMACV had contended that the next (fourth) redeployment increment would be crucial; if military reverses were sustained in the wake of troop withdrawals, "the psychological impact could be severe." Although the Secretary did not fully understand General Abrams' fears, he advised the President that "redeployment increment four will be more difficult than the immediately succeeding increments."[7]

After his return from Vietnam, the Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to draft a plan for reducing US strength in Thailand by approximately 10,000 spaces, to reach 32,200 by 30 June 1971. Although he believed the United States should defer any decision on such reductions until enemy intentions for the current dry season became more clear, he thought preliminary planning should begin immediately in view of the complexity of the problem and the need for consultation with the Royal Thai Government on the political implications.[8]

On 13 March 1970, the Secretary of Defense notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff of his decision on the Phase III RVNAF program. At the outset, he made it clear that no additional funds could be provided, noting that it was "most unlikely" that Congress would provide additional FY 1970 or 1971 appropriations for the Vietnam war. Consequently, he directed that all funding for the proposed plan must be met from within existing and foreseeable DOD budgets; when recommended levels of activity could not be thus supported, the Joint Chiefs of Staff should identify appropriate trade-offs.

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7. (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, February 10-14, 1970," 17 Feb 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 70.

8. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Force Planning--Thailand (U)," 19 Feb 70, Att to JCS 2353/180-4, 19 Feb 70, JMF 910/374 (25 Aug 69).

Within these limits, the Secretary approved the general concept of the JCS Phase III plan and the programs and force structures proposed for the RVNAF for FY 1970 and FY 1971. This approval was subject to revision based upon further detailed planning, consideration of the proposals submitted by the Republic of Vietnam on 12 January, and more careful study of South Vietnamese economic limitations. He deferred approval of the RVNAF programs for FY 1972 and FY 1973, except for VNAF pilot training, and requested revised recommendations regarding RVNAF programs for those fiscal years based on the RVN 12 January proposals and on a study of costs. With regard to US force structure planning, the Secretary of Defense approved only the FY 1973 MAAG. He requested reevaluation of the proposed FY 1971 structure, taking into account budgetary decisions and guidance. The Secretary recognized the JCS rationale for supporting a 270,000 force level for end FY 1971, but he believed that US planning should continue to address both the 260,000 and 190,000 levels to allow maximum flexibility in meeting future developments.[9]

Later in March, Secretary Laird issued final fiscal guidance for FY 1972. Implicit in the guidance was acceptance of the 260,000 level for US forces remaining in South Vietnam by the end of FY 1971, but the figure for end FY 1973 was 43,400--the MAAG level the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended rather than the 29,500 that had appeared in the tentative guidance.[10]

The Secretary of Defense forwarded to the Department of State both the JCS Phase III program and his decision on it. In subsequent comments on this exchange, Secretary of State Rogers commended the agreement reached that the US military presence in South Vietnam would be cut down to a 43,000-man

9. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamization--Consolidated Improvement and Modernization (I&M) Program and Related US Planning (U)," 13 Mar 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-15, 14 Mar 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 4.

10. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., "FY 1972-76 Fiscal and Logistic Guidance--Planning Assumptions for the War in Southeast Asia," 24 Mar 70, Att to JCS 2458/677-19, 27 Mar 70, JMF 555 (15 Jan 70) sec 3.

MAAG by mid-1973. The preference of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a 270,000 force level at the end of FY 1971 was viewed less favorably, since the justification given was that this level would provide US combat elements that could offset RVNAF combat shortfalls. Secretary Rogers observed, "It had not been our understanding of Administration policy that U.S. forces would have this kind of combat role at that time." The Secretary of State "especially" endorsed the recommendation that flexibility be maintained in execution of redeployment schedules, to allow for acceleration as well as prudent delay.

> The "cut and try" method should be designed to give the President maximum ability to adjust his decisions . . . to developments which bear on them. Given the current events in Cambodia and Laos there are both dangers and opportunities which we cannot fully foresee at this time.[11]

Further US Redeployments

While US officials in Washington deliberated over the Phase III RVNAF improvement program, US troop redeployment from South Vietnam continued. At the start of 1970, the United States had completed two withdrawal increments amounting to 65,000 men, and US forces totaling 474,819[12] remained in South Vietnam (although the authorized ceiling approved by the President was 484,000). In mid-December 1969, President Nixon had announced a third US redeployment of 50,000 to be completed by 15 April 1970.[13] This third increment, nicknamed KEYSTONE BLUEJAY, began in early February 1970 after being purposely delayed in order to retain as many US troops as possible in South Vietnam during the Tet period (5-6 February). The KEYSTONE BLUEJAY redeployment proceeded without incident and was completed by 15 April 1970. Major US units departing South Vietnam included the 1st Infantry Division, the 3d Brigade of the

11. (TS-GP 3) Ltr, SecState to SecDef, 14 Apr 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-28, 17 Apr 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) Sec 8.

12. The figure reported at the completion of the second increment on 15 December 1969 was 472,442; see Chapter 4, p. 125.

13. See Chapter 4.

4th Infantry Division, the USAF 12th Tactical Fighter Group, and the USMC 26th Regimental Landing Team. In all, the third redeployment increment comprised 29,500 Army, 2,000 Navy, 5,600 Air Force, and 12,900 Marine Corps personnel.[14]

As this third increment neared completion, it was obvious that the President would have to make an announcement on the further course of redeployment. With this in mind, COMUSMACV forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 March 1970 a detailed assessment of the situation in South Vietnam. He reported that an enemy logistical buildup in Laos as well as the shifting of regiments from III to IV CTZ portended increased offensive activity in South Vietnam during the spring and early summer. General Abrams considered the US ground, naval, and air forces currently committed to the conflict in South Vietnam essential to the success of Vietnamization. Any planning for further reductions should be based on the cut and try method and assessment of the impact of all elements of the total situation. He feared, however, that additional redeployments were being contemplated without regard to the operational requirements or the progress of the RVNAF. Such action, he believed, could upset "the military and psychological balance" in South Vietnam and jeopardize the ultimate success of the Vietnamization program. The US withdrawals already accomplished, he stated, had strained the capabilities of the RVNAF, and he opposed further redeployments pending developments over the next three months. The Joint Chiefs of Staff gave this assessment to the Secretary of Defense on 16 March 1970, recommending that it be provided to the President.[15]

What use the Secretary made of the COMUSMACV assessment is not found in the record, but on 31 March 1970, he asked for JCS views on continuing redeployments. He wanted them to consider not only military developments, but also

14. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. IV-7 - IV-16.

15. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 3303 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 13 Mar 70; (TS-GP 4) JCSM-117-70 to SecDef, 16 Mar 70, Encl to JCS 2472/552-17, 16 Mar 70; JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 6.

budgetary "facts of life" and the question of US public support for continued Southeast Asia operations.[16]

Replying three days later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided the Secretary an assessment of the situation in South Vietnam. It reflected the significant progress in the Vietnamization program of the past 10 months as well as the critical nature of the coming several months. The gains thus far were "fragile," and the enemy was capable of causing setbacks in the current favorable trends. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the 115,500 US withdrawals to date with the accompanying one-third reduction in maneuver battalions had exceeded the decrease in enemy forces. In addition, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces could mount offensives on short notice, though the Joint Chiefs of Staff doubted such attacks could be sustained. Further reduction in the already limited allied capabilities during the next few months clearly risked a successful enemy effort to slow or reverse the pacification trends.

Holding that action in South Vietnam could not be considered in isolation from the uncertain situations in Cambodia and Laos, the Joint Chiefs of Staff affirmed General Abrams' call for a pause in redeployments. All factors counseled such a course in order to assess and consolidate the gains already made in Vietnamization. They added that continuation of withdrawals without a pause would bring into question the "credibility" of the cut and try principle. Consequently, they recommended that the decision and announcement on further US troop redeployment from South Vietnam be deferred until 15 June 1970. They recognized that this delay might bring adverse public reaction, but believed that the reaction could be reduced by "a factual public affairs program." With respect to budget implications, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that the impact of a pause in redeployments would be "relatively small in FY 1970," adding that the trade offs necessary to reconcile resources and requirements for

16. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Redeployment Planning," 31 Mar 70, Encl to JCS 2472/611, 2 Apr 70, JMF 911/374 (2 Apr 70).

FY 1971 would be addressed in their reassessment of Phase III of the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, scheduled to be submitted to the Secretary by 30 April 1970.[17]

The JCS advice went unheeded. President Nixon announced further redeployments on 20 April 1970. Reporting the return of 115,500 US troops as of 15 April, he told the nation in a televised address that "We have now reached a point where we can confidently move from a period of 'cut and try' to a longer-range program for the replacement of Americans by South Vietnamese troops." An additional 150,000 US troops would be withdrawn over the next year. The President avoided setting out any schedule for this reduction, merely stating that it would be completed "during the spring of next year," with the timing and pace determined by "our best judgment" of the current military and diplomatic situation.[18]

The President's announcement decided the basic question on further US redeployments, but the composition and scheduling of these redeployments was to take four months to resolve. In accordance with the presidential decision, the Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 April to recommend a plan for the reduction of 150,000 authorized spaces in RVN to reach a ceiling of 284,000 by 1 May 1971. The Secretary directed that the plan provide for a 50,000 reduction by 15 October, but it need not exceed 60,000 by the end of the year.[19] Acting on presidential guidance, Secretary Laird instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to base the plan on only one of the three previously announced criteria for US withdrawals--progress in the

17. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-150-70 to SecDef, 3 Apr 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/611, 2 Apr 70, same file.

18. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 373-377.

19. The withdrawal of 60,000 men would leave 90,000 to be redeployed between 1 January and 30 April 1970. The three increments--50,000, 10,000 (the difference between 60,000 and 50,000), and 90,000--were referred to in subsequent redeployment planning as the "original schedule."

improvement of the RVNAF. The other two criteria--progress in negotiations and the level of enemy activity--would have bearing only to the extent of causing acceleration or temporary delay of redeployments, and the plan must have sufficient flexibility to permit these alterations.[20]

Revised Phase III RVNAF I&M Program

At the time of President Nixon's decision on further US force reductions and Mr. Laird's request for a redeployment plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were completing revision of their Phase III RVNAF I&M program, in accordance with the Secretary's 13 March directive. On 30 April they submitted this revised program, advising Secretary Laird that it represented a "reconciliation" between needs and available resources.

The plan included a revised Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, subsequently referred to as CRIMP, based on reassessment of the recommendations contained in the original Phase III program (as submitted on 29 January) and taking into account the RVN proposals made in January 1970. The revised program had the support of COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Republic of Vietnam, and provided for:

20. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "US Troop Redeployment Planning, Vietnam," 24 Apr 70, JMF 911/374 (24 Apr 70).

Forces	FY 1971	Proposed End FY 1972	FY 1973
Regular Forces			
ARVN	434,019	441,829	447,456
VNN	39,611	39,611	39,611
VNAF	38,780	44,712	46,998
VNMC	13,462	13,462	13,462
RF	294,446	294,446	294,446
PF	258,027	258,027	258,027
Total RVNAF	1,078,345	1,092,087	1,100,000
Total Paramilitary	179,410	163,285	149,160
Total RVNAF plus Paramilitary	1,257,755	1,255,372	1,249,160

In accordance with the RVN January request, the revised program also provided for additional canned food assistance for the RVNAF, at a cost of $95.4 million over the period FY 1971-1973, and for construction of 20,000 RVNAF dependent shelters per year for five years at a cost of $6 million per year.

The new program, like the earlier version, contained annexes dealing with RVNAF improvement in the areas of intelligence, communications-electronics, training, and morale. Training of the RVNAF was an area in which both the Secretary of Defense and the President had expressed a special interest. The training annex presented a concept for developing a self-sufficient RVNAF by 1 July 1973 through a combination of training at RVNAF Service schools and training centers, in-country on-the-job training, and offshore schooling.

Accompanying the revised program was a tentative US force structure involving approximately 260,000 men, to be achieved by 30 June 1971. This proposal, which reflected the Secretary's fiscal guidance of 24 March 1970, was subject to revision to conform with execution of the recently announced withdrawal of 150,000 spaces by the spring of 1971. The Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized to the Secretary of Defense

the need to avoid personnel turbulence and disruption of RVNAF morale in executing redeployments. Hence the manner in which the pending 150,000 withdrawal was accomplished was of "critical concern." For the end of FY 1973, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested a 44,755-man US force in the Republic of Vietnam--a MAAG of 25,650 spaces plus a 19,105-man force for "supplemental requirements." This force exceeded slightly the Secretary's guidance, which had specified a figure of 43,400 by the same date.

To meet the requirements of their revised program without additional funds, the Joint Chiefs of Staff identified the following trade offs: reduction of US space authorization in Thailand to about 32,200 by 30 June 1971 (in keeping with Secretary Laird's directive of 19 February 1970[21]); redeployment and deactivation of an Army division from Korea by 15 May 1971 and withdrawal of two USAF fighter squadrons from Korea by 1 September 1970; reduction of US air activity in Southeast Asia to a monthly average of 1,000 B-52 and 12,700 TACAIR sorties in FY 1971, with provision for surges, given additional funds, to meet emergencies; reduction of naval gunfire support from six to three ships; and unilateral reprogramming by the US Navy and Air Force involving possible early deactivations of selected units.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff made quite clear to the Secretary of Defense that this program, drawn to conform to his guidance, did not satisfy them. They found it not in consonance with the rate of progress in Vietnamization, the current enemy threat, or the uncertain situation in Laos and Cambodia. Therefore they requested that the Secretary of Defense seek further funds to retain surge capability options and to accommodate the 150,000 personnel reduction to progress in Vietnamization, thereby avoiding personnel and logistical turbulence and allowing periods of level-strength stability between redeployment increments. But even if additional funds were provided, the "substantial reduction" involved in the revised program would, in the JCS view, incur "unacceptable" military risks.[22]

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21. See above, p. 380.

22. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-202-70 to SecDef, 20 Apr 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/552-31, 27 Apr 70; JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 9.

The Services, too, were not happy with this revised program, though for a different reason. The Secretaries of the Army and the Air Force both notified the Secretary of Defense that their budgets did not contain sufficient flexibility to meet the additional unfunded FY 1971 requirements of the revised RVNAF I&M program.[23]

The Cambodian incursion, launched on 1 May 1970, brought a great public outcry in the United States. The seeming expansion of the war in the face of the President's recent announcement of further troop reductions produced considerable doubt both in Congress and in the press regarding the Administration's intentions in Vietnam. Concern over this reaction made Secretary Laird particularly vigilant with regard to variations in US troop strength. On 15 May, he advised General Wheeler and the Secretaries of the Military Departments that, even though actual force levels remained under the authorized ceiling, an increase such as had occurred between 30 April and 7 May (1,136 personnel) could create "potentially troublesome effects." Every effort should be made, he said, to avoid further increases and, if possible, to effect gradual reductions while the full FY 1971 schedules were being formulated.[24]

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff replied that, by earlier agreement, redeployments were planned and residual strengths maintained on the single criterion of authorized troop level, without regard to the actual personnel count as it fluctuated from week to week. Abandonment of this policy, he contended, would deny COMUSMACV required flexibility in managing troop strengths and might, as a consequence of statistical confusion, create a credibility gap. The Secretary responded that he did not desire "to establish dual accounting standards, i.e., (1) an authorization ceiling and (2) a lower actual manpower ceiling." He fully endorsed the continued use of the authorized strength approach by COMUSMACV

23. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecAF to SecDef, "Vietnamization-Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program and Related Planning," 5 May 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-34, 11 May 70; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, same subj, 14 May 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-35, 15 May 70; JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 10.

24. (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., "Personnel Strength in RVN," 15 May 70, Att to JCS 2472/622, 19 May 70, JMF 911/101 (15 May 70).

in managing the redeployment effort. The Secretary's concern was that an actual gain of 7,000 to 8,000 men, even though still below the authorized ceiling, might be presented by the news media as a major increase in the US commitment to Southeast Asia. This could create "substantial public consternation and concern" by casting doubt on the President's pledges to continue overall withdrawal and terminate the operations against the Cambodian sanctuaries by 30 June. Therefore Secretary Laird thought it important to monitor the troop strength fluctuations closely in order to insure, if possible, "that the actual strength does not go above the current level," approximately 430,000.[25]

Reassured, General Wheeler stated that he foresaw no difficulties in adhering to this guidance. Indeed, a forecast of US strength in Vietnam through 30 June 1970 on a weekly basis, recently completed by the Joint Staff, showed that a steady decline to the level of 421,300 could be anticipated. Minor variations from the predicted figures might occur. The Chairman assured the Secretary of Defense that "any unusual situation which may develop will be brought to your immediate attention."[26]

The Cambodian invasion and the defensiveness engendered in the Administration by the public reaction also affected US redeployment planning. In a request to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 15 May for a plan to terminate all US operations in Cambodia by 30 June, Secretary Laird advised that no amount of tactical triumphs in Cambodia would satisfy the American people; rather, the worth of those operations must be demonstrated in lower casualties, increased Vietnamization, continuing redeployments, and progress in negotiations. With respect to US redeployment schedules, he asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider three additional possibilities: acceleration of the 150,000 redeployment previously announced; implementation of at least a 174,000-man reduction through

25. (S) CM-5211-70 to SecDef, 23 May 70; (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA and CJCS, "Personnel Strength in RVN," 27 May 70, Att to JCS 2472/622-2, 27 May 70; same file.
26. (S-GP 3) CM-5237-70 to SecDef, 28 May 70, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2472/622-2, 1 Jun 70, same file.

30 June 1971 to a 260,000 ceiling (the schedule on which the FY 1971 budget request was based); and moving to a 240,000-man authorization by May-June 1971, a level alluded to by the President in an 8 May press conference.[27]

On 2 June 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense two alternatives for a 150,000 space reduction in response to his 24 April request. Alternative A, derived from CINCPAC recommendations, was essentially the original schedule suggested by the Secretary of Defense. It consisted of two increments, 60,000 during the period 1 July-31 December 1970 (with 50,000 redeployed by 15 October) and 90,000 between 15 February-30 April 1971. An important feature was continuation of the currently authorized air sortie levels. Alternative A provided relatively greater security in South Vietnam and surer progress in Vietnamization by delaying departure of the largest US contingent until late in the time span, but would incur significantly higher expense. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said that the cost of this alternative would exceed current budget requests by $1 billion; the trade offs necessary to meet this situation would require reductions to "substantial risk levels" in forces committed to NATO or available for worldwide contingencies.

Alternative B, developed by the Joint Staff, envisioned reduction in three increments: 60,000 between 1 July and 15 October 1970; another 40,000 by 31 December 1970; and the remaining 50,000 by 1 May 1971. Accompanying this would be a reduction in air sortie levels. The Joint Chiefs of Staff described Alternative B as a course that met the directed budget constraints by making major reductions solely in Southeast Asia programs. "It requires acceptance of dangerous risks in Southeast Asia, but it avoids the disadvantages of the worldwide trade-offs in Alternative A."

In view of the risks they had identified, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that neither of the alternatives was "militarily prudent." They recommended approval of Alternative A, but with provision of the supplemental funding necessary to preclude the trade offs and reprogramming that

27. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Planning," 15 May 70, Att to JCS 2472/261, 16 May 70, JMF 907/501 (15 May 70).

would otherwise be required. They commented on the possibility of accelerating the withdrawal during 1971, as the Secretary had requested, but made no recommendation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that any decision in this matter should await an assessment of the situation made in late 1970.[28]

Even though the scheduling of the 150,000 redeployment was not yet resolved, the President on 3 June announced the withdrawal of an initial increment of that package. In a televised report on the Cambodian operations, President Nixon told the nation that 50,000 men of the previously announced 150,000 redeployment would be out of Vietnam by 15 October 1970.[29]

Decision on the Revised Phase III Program

On 5 June 1970, the Secretary of Defense responded to the JCS recommendations on both RVNAF improvement and redeployment alternatives. After recognizing the "concerted staff effort and the hard choices they represent," he went on to point out that since the JCS submission on RVNAF I&M on 30 April, events in Cambodia as well as serious budget deficits had altered in a major way "the manner in which we must address RVNAF Improvement and Modernization and the results we must expect from it." It was now abundantly clear that, upon completion of the Cambodian operations, the United States must accelerate improvement of the RVNAF "in every possible way." That acceleration, as well as stepped up US redeployments, relied on RVN capability to assume a much greater responsibility for the conduct of the war by the end of FY 1971.

The Secretary of Defense approved the revised Consolidated RVNAF I&M Program for FY 1971-1972 and the 1973 portion for planning purposes, subject to further review in light of US budget and RVN economic constraints. He deferred final FY 1973 approval pending a better long-range view of the effects

28. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-266-70 to SecDef, 2 June 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/625, 25 May 70, JMF 911/374 (24 Apr 70) sec 1.
29. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 476-480.

of the Cambodian operations, US redeployments, and the impact of budgetary and economic constraints on the FY 1972 RVNAF structure.

The Secretary did not approve the JCS recommendations for supplemental FY 1971 DOD budget requests to cover the costs of the enlarged program. Rather he directed that all funding for Southeast Asia must be met under "existing and foreseeable DOD budget ceilings." Secretary Laird observed that "the political and economic climate, now even more than in March, militates against requesting supplemental funds for FY 1971 except for pay increases."

The Secretary of Defense continued to place high priority on US efforts to improve RVNAF leadership, training, and morale. He approved the JCS proposals to supply additional canned foods and to construct RVNAF dependent housing.

Although concerned that the United States not detract from the RVN resolve to assume greater responsibility for the war, Mr. Laird thought that the United States would be remiss, in light of US budgetary programs and South Vietnamese economic perils, not to develop plans to reduce the RVNAF at the earliest possible moment. Accordingly, he asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to begin "a comprehensive review" directed toward reducing the RVNAF structure to 1,000,000 by the end of FY 1973 (the revised Phase III program called for 1,100,000 by that time). The Secretary wanted this report by 1 December 1970.

With regard to US forces in South Vietnam, the Secretary advised that budget planning should continue to assume a strength of approximately 260,000 men as of the end of FY 1971, though the option of more rapid redeployment must be retained. He approved for planning a 25,000 MAAG structure with a 19,000 supplemental MAAG for the end of FY 1973, making 44,000 spaces in all. Decision was deferred on the JCS alternatives for the 150,000-space redeployment pending clarification of DOD budget levels, but as an interim measure he directed a 50,000 withdrawal by 15 October 1970 in accordance with the President's announcement.

The Secretary of Defense also approved a reduction of approximately 10,000 spaces in Thailand and a US monthly air

sortie level for Southeast Asia of 1,200 B-52 and 13,600 TACAIR effective 15 July 1970 (in place of the current 1,400 and 14,000 levels for those activities).[30]

The Secretary's decision of 5 June determined the size and nature of the RVNAF that the United States would support, and the remainder of the year was spent in working toward the goals of the Consolidated Program. In mid-June, however, the President requested JCS views on possible follow-up actions to capitalize on the results of the Cambodian operation. Among other suggestions, he requested assessment of an ARVN or RF/PF expansion to cope with border threats as well as to facilitate US redeployment. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that such changes were neither necessary nor feasible. The existing force balance, they thought, was "the optium obtainable within aggregate RVN manpower and economic limitations." Evidently their advice was accepted, for no further action resulted from the President's suggestions.[31]

As the Secretary had requested, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the possibility of reducing the RVNAF manpower goal to 1,000,000 by FY 1973 and tendered their judgment on this matter on 1 December 1970. Backing the recommendations of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again supported the current RVNAF structure as appropriate for the current situation. They reviewed three alternatives for reducing the RVNAF to a 1,000,000-space ceiling under three varying reduced enemy threats, but concluded that all three required further evaluation. For the present, they supported the approved 1,100,000 RVNAF force for the end of FY 1973. Consequently, the Secretary of Defense took no further action to reduce the RVNAF.[32]

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30. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamization--Consolidated Improvement and Modernization Program and Related Planning," 5 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-36, 11 Jun 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 10.

31. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, "Possible Actions in Support of Vietnamization and Negotiations," 15 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/633, 16 Jun 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-305-70 to SecDef, 19 Jun 70, App to JCS 2472/633-1, 16 Jun 70; JMF 911/535 (15 Jun 70).

32. (~~TS~~-GP 4) JCSM-552-70 to SecDef, 1 Dec 70, Encl to JCS 2472/552-44, 12 Nov 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 11.

RVNAF Improvement and Modernization--Special Operations

Throughout its involvement in South Vietnam, the United States had carried out covert activities, or "special operations" as they were called, both to harass the enemy and to gather information. In 1964, even before the commitment of US ground combat troops in Vietnam, the United States initiated OPLAN 34A, consisting of limited clandestine actions against North Vietnam, and used US destroyers for DE SOTO patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin to collect intelligence. Subsequently, with the expansion of the conflict, the United States began aerial reconnaissance of North Vietnam, Laos, and areas of Cambodia. Other important special operations included SHINING BRASS and DANIEL BOONE/SALEM HOUSE, which inserted tactical intelligence missions into Laos and Cambodia, respectively. All special operations in North Vietnam ceased with the 1968 bombing halt, but those in Laos and Cambodia continued. The US Studies and Observation Group, a subordinate command of COMUSMACV, was responsible for all these operations.[33]

With the adoption of the Vietnamization policy, the United States decided to transfer special operations, on a reduced scale, to the Republic of Vietnam. But in this instance, Vietnamization involved particular problems owing to the need for the strictest secrecy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided for the development of a RVNAF special operations capability in their plans for RVNAF improvement, but for security reasons, the special operations portion was staffed and processed separately.

On 20 March 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense the Special Annex to their Phase III Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program. It provided for the development of the necessary capacity within the RVNAF, while US participation was phased down to a support force by mid-1971 and to an advisory force by mid-1973. The goal was to develop an ability within the RVNAF to conduct special operations at approximately 25 percent of the current

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33. See (~~TS~~) The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, Chs. 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, 24, 35, and 52. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1971-72, p. B-1.

level. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized, however, that if NVA activity in enemy-held border areas did not diminish, the intelligence-gathering function of special operations would remain of critical importance. Therefore, continued US assistance would be required until RVNAF operational capabilities became adequate to reduce the risk of a surprise enemy offensive. This JCS program would reduce US special operations advisers to the RVNAF from the current 1,246 to 399 by FY 1973 and would lower the cost of US support from $26.2 million in FY 1970 to $13.1 million in FY 1973.[34]

To facilitate OSD review of the JCS program, the Assistant Secretary (ISA) asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide an evaluation of covert activities and an appraisal of the ability of the Republic of Vietnam to continue them effectively. Replying on 12 May 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff observed that measurement in statistical terms was difficult. More broadly, special operations could be credited with collecting essential intelligence on enemy movements, logistical buildups, and tactical intentions throughout the border areas of Laos and Cambodia and in the vicinity of the DMZ. The LOC intercept and harassment achieved by these operations tied down sizable enemy forces in passive security roles. With respect to RVN ability and motivation to perform such operations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that South Vietnamese forces had participated fully in both past and present special operations and that the Joint General Staff had indicated "strong interest" in continuing them during the Vietnamization process.[35]

In his 5 June decision on the JCS revised Consolidated Phase III RVNAF I&M Program, the Secretary of Defense questioned the desirability of US support for RVNAF special operations. He wondered if the projected results warranted a US investment of $13.1 million a year and 399 US advisers, as well as 2,500 high-quality Vietnamese personnel. He wanted a further study

34. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-123-70 to SecDef, 20 Mar 70, Encl to JCS 2472/522-10, 10 Feb 70, JMF 911/535 (10 Nov 69) sec 4.
35. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-228-70 to SecDef, 12 May 70, App to JCS 2472/522-32, 5 May 70, same file, sec 10.

of the need for this program and of the possibility of turning it over more quickly to the RVNAF.[36]

On 14 October 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again assured the Secretary of Defense that the RVNAF needed a special operations capability in order to meet enemy offensive operations and to provide security for the remaining US forces in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff still considered their 20 March special operations program valid, but in view of budget constraints, they recognized that the pace of the turnover to the RVNAF must be increased. Accordingly, they recommended accelerated RVNAF Special Forces training and reduction of US FY 1973 costs from $13.1 million to $9.8 million, with the US adviser requirement lowered from 399 to 155. The Secretary of Defense approved this proposal for planning purposes on 12 November 1970, pending completion of studies of US strategy alternatives for Southeast Asia for the period 1970-1975, as the President had directed on 17 August 1970.[37]

Further Planning for US Withdrawals

The question of US force structure in South Vietnam remained to be determined even after the Secretary's decision of 5 June on the RVNAF improvement program. Although he had directed the withdrawal of 50,000 US personnel by 15 October, Secretary Laird had deferred a decision on the scheduling of the remaining 100,000 of the announced 150,000 reduction pending budget clarifications.

Previously, on 2 June 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed two redeployment schedules. Both would see the entire increment of 150,000 withdrawn by 1 May 1971. The difference lay in the number of troops to be withdrawn by the end of calendar 1970: 60,000 under Alternative A (which the Joint Chiefs of Staff preferred), and 100,000 under Alternative B. In late July 1970, however, the Secretary of the Army notified

36. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamization-Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program and Related Planning," 5 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-26, 11 Jun 70, same file.

37. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-482-70 to SecDef, 14 Oct 70, Encl to JCS 2472/552-41, 22 Sep 70, same file. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Special Operations," 12 Nov 70, Att to JCS 2472/552-42, 13 Nov 70, same file, sec. II. For the President's directive regarding strategy alternatives (NSSM 99), see Ch. 9.

the Secretary of Defense that because of budget and manpower limitations the Army was incapable of implementing Alternative A and barely able to meet the requirements of Alternative B. Added to this was Secretary Laird's conviction, expressed even more strongly than before to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 30 July, that "a supplemental budget request for FY 1971 is infeasible." Consequently he suggested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff revise their redeployment plans in light of the monetary and Army manpower problems.[38]

On 13 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented the Secretary of Defense with five alternatives for a 150,000 redeployment. They resubmitted their Alternatives A and B, as proposed on 2 June, and advanced three new ones: Alternative B (Modified), consisting of three 50,000 increments to be completed by 15 October 1970, 31 December 1970, and 30 April 1971, respectively; Alternative C, representing the recommendations of the field commanders and calling for three increments of 50,000, 40,000 and 60,000 within the same time periods as B (Modified); Alternative D, differing from Alternative C only in the internal composition of the increments, with partial substitution of Marine Corps units for Army spaces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that all the Alternatives, except Alternative A, imposed "imprudent risks to Vietnamization and U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia." But recognizing that Alternatives A and B were no longer possible because of budget and timing factors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff indicated that of the three remaining courses, "Alternative C is preferable."[39]

After a discussion of the matter with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary Laird forwarded their recommended alternative to the White House on 20 August, stating that he was "inclined to accept" it. His remaining hesitancy arose from the fact that even this redeployment schedule would not bring authorized manning down to budget request levels during the

38. (U) Memo, SecA to SecDef, "Manpower and Costs Related to Vietnam Withdrawals," 23 Jul 70; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Redeployment Planning (U)," 30 Jul 70, Att to JCS 2472/625-1, 30 Jul 70; JMF 911/374 (24 Apr 70) sec 2.

39. (TS-Gp 3) JCSM-388-70 to SecDef, 13 Aug 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/625-2, 10 Aug 70, same file.

remainder of 1970. Only with the final withdrawal increment would it come into conformance with the FY 1971 budget figures, reaching 284,000 men on 1 May 1971. Nevertheless, "though budget pressures would be exceedingly tight," Secretary Laird believed that the Department of Defense could, by managing its funds "with the utmost discretion," allow for the higher troop levels outlined in the JCS recommendation.

The Secretary informed Dr. Kissinger that within the Department of Defense he had already ruled out the alternative of seeking additional appropriations. He was convinced that "there is no practical chance that supplemental funds could be obtained. The very act of making a supplemental request would, in fact, open the door for Congressional actions which could prove inimical to our interests in Southeast Asia."[40]

The President deferred a decision, asking for the views of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as those of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV on the risks associated with the redeployment schedule (Alternative C) outlined by Secretary Laird. When the President announced the 150,000 reduction figure, he had anticipated that no more than 60,000 troops would be withdrawn from South Vietnam before the end of 1970. Although he agreed that there would be no supplemental budget requests in FY 1971, he wanted estimates of the costs and manpower requirements necessary to hold to "the original schedule" (increments of 50,000, 10,000, and 90,000).[41]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated the cost of the original redeployment schedule, even with reduced air sortie levels, at about $400 million above the FY 1971 budget. In addition, they now realized that the Army could no longer support the manpower requirements of that schedule without reduction of worldwide commands below acceptable readiness conditions. Consequently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered Alternative C, as presented to the White House on 20 August by the Secretary of Defense, the "most suitable of

40. (~~S~~) Memo, SecDef to Dr. Kissinger, "Southeast Asia Redeployments," 20 Aug 70, JMF 907/374 (20 Aug 70).

41. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecDef, "Southeast Asia Redeployments," 4 Sep 70, Att to JCS 2472/669, 8 Sep 70, same file.

those now feasible," even though it involved a certain amount of risk. They recommended an early decision on redeployments through 30 April 1971, but they believed that public announcement of the size and timing of the withdrawals should be withheld in order to retain flexibility.[42]

The Secretary of Defense forwarded the JCS views to the White House on 17 September, confirming that Alternative C met military requirements better than any other, under existing manpower and fiscal constraints. He believed the added risk of this course was "minimal, particularly when viewed in the context of the progress of pacification and Vietnamization."[43]

The President accepted the advice of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and on 12 October he announced a 40,000-space reduction in the period between "now and Christmas." Subsequently, the President reaffirmed this public announcement. As relayed by Dr. Kissinger on 27 October, he directed that, until specific decisions were made to the contrary, there should be no withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam beyond those already approved and scheduled.[44]

Earlier, on 7 October, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had notified the Secretary of Defense of approval of CINCPAC's troop list for the 40,000 redeployment for the period 15 October-31 December 1970. On the day of the President's announcement, the Secretary authorized the Joint Chiefs of Staff to proceed with the execution of Alternative C redeployments. Later, on 8 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded with their approval CINCPAC's troop list for the withdrawal of the 60,000 spaces that constituted the final increment of Alternative C.[45]

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42. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-438-70 to SecDef, 11 Sep 70, App to JCS 2472/669-2, 10 Sep 70, same file.

43. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Dr. Kissinger, "Southeast Asia Redeployments (U)," 17 Sep 70, Att to JCS 2472/669-3, 30 Oct 70, same file.

44. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, p. 836. (TS-GP 1) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to Secs State and Def and Dir OMB, "FY 1971-1976 Interim Guidance on US Deployments," 27 Oct 70, Att to JCS 2101/574, 28 Oct 70, JMF 374 (27 Oct 74).

45. (TS-GP 3) CM-268-70 to SecDef, 7 Oct 70, Att to JCS 2472/625-8, 7 Oct 70; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Southeast Asia Redeployments," 12 Oct 70, Att to JCS 2472/625-9, 13 Oct 70; JMF 911/374 (24 Apr 70) sec 2. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-564-70 to SecDef, 8 Dec 70, App B to JCS 2472/690, 30 Nov 70, JMF 907/374 (22 Nov 70).

The actual withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam in 1970 proceeded in accordance with the Washington decisions. Following the President's 3 June announcement, the United States redeployed 50,000 troops between early June and 15 October in Operation KEYSTONE ROBIN (ALFA). Another 40,000 departed in Operation KEYSTONE ROBIN (BRAVO), 16 October through 30 December 1970. As a result, US strength in South Vietnam on 31 December 1970 stood at 335,794, a figure well below the authorized ceiling of 344,000. Major US Army units redeployed during the last seven months of 1970 included: the 199th Light Infantry Brigade; the 3d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division; the remaining portion of the 4th Infantry Division; and the 25th Infantry Division, minus the 2d Brigade. Principal Marine Corps units leaving Vietnam during the same period were the 7th Marine Regiment, a regimental landing team and associated aviation units, an attack squadron, a medium helicopter squadron, a composite reconnaissance squadron. At the close of 1970, the United States had removed over 205,000 troops in five increments, and another 60,000-man increment was approved and scheduled for redeployment during the first four months of 1971.[46]

In December 1970, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again addressed the question of US force levels in Vietnam for the end of FY 1971 and in FY 1972. They told the Secretary of Defense on 17 December that recent budget and program decisions had resulted in funding constraints and manpower limitations, necessitating significant changes in earlier planning factors. Budget reductions for FY 1971 and lowered draft calls in the months September through December 1970, combined with reprogramming to absorb these impacts, had limited the ability of the Military Departments to support US forces both in Vietnam and throughout the world. In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff anticipated that the budget and manpower limitations expected in FY 1972 would cause similar if not more serious shortfalls.

Consequently, alternative force levels for Southeast Asia had been reviewed, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented the Secretary of Defense a revised US force structure for Vietnam at the end of 1971. In place of the 260,000 figure approved by the Secretary on 5 June 1970, they now set forth a requirement for a total force of 255,000, including 198,000 Army,

46. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. IV-7, IV-12 - IV 31. For US forces at the beginning and close of 1970, see Table XII at the end of this chapter.

11,600 Navy/Coast Guard, 44,700 Air Force, and 700 Marine Corps. For a year later, at the end of FY 1972, they thought that a US force structure of approximately 200,000 (152,800 Army, 8,400 Navy/Coast Guard, 38,100 Air Force, and 700 Marine Corps) would be needed in South Vietnam, although this figure was subject to validation by CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, less the Chief of Staff, Army, recommended that the Secretary of Defense support these force levels. The Army Chief of Staff believed that his Service could not meet the proposed manpower levels in Vietnam without "serious degradation" of force levels elsewhere, including NATO.[47]

The force level question, however, was not to be immediately resolved. The Secretary of Defense replied to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 December 1970, promising a final decision for use in FY 1972 planning after his January trip to Southeast Asia. Meantime, he told them, steps had been taken to ensure that funds for the maintenance of the proposed manpower strength were included in the FY 1972 budget recommended to the President.[48]

RVNAF Progress

As US forces redeployed from South Vietnam during 1970, the improvement of the RVNAF proceeded. The South Vietnamese forces continued to expand, though not at the dramatic rate of the previous year. By December 1970 the RVNAF possessed 188 maneuver battalions, while the US force had declined from 93 to 54. In addition, the RVNAF assumed an increasing share of the planning for and conduct of combat, and the Cambodian operation demonstrated an enhanced competence in both of these activities.[49]

47. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-576-70 to SecDef, 17 Dec 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/695, 14 Dec 70, JMF 907/372 (14 Dec 70).

48. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Force and Activity Levels in Southeast Asia for FY 72 (U)," 24 Dec 70, Att to JCS 2339/333-2, 6 Jan 71, JMF 907/323 (7 Nov 70).

49. All information in this section, unless otherwise stated, is from (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, Chs. I, VII, and IX, and (TS-GP 1) OJCS (J-3) "A Periodic Summary of Progress Toward Vietnamizing the War (U)," Mar 71, PAD-VSUM 1-71.

During the year, the RVNAF significantly enlarged their operating areas throughout South Vietnam. In MR 1, the ARVN assumed responsibility for western Quang Tri Province, formerly patrolled by US Marines, as well as several fire support bases below the DMZ and in southwestern Quang Tri and western Thua Thien Provinces. When the US 4th Infantry Division redeployed in the fall, the ARVN moved into its area, including most of MR 2 except for the coastal region. Similarly, the departure of the US 25th Division from MR 3 in November 1970 left the RVNAF responsible for most of the area. Military Region 4 and Saigon had been the full responsibility of South Vietnamese troops since late 1969.

To meet these increased combat responsibilities, the RVNAF had at the end of 1970 regular land forces consisting of an ARVN of 414,074 and a VNMC of 13,635.[50] During the year, the ARVN was strengthened by the addition of: two armored brigade headquarters to provide command and control elements for armored cavalry squadrons and infantry, artillery, and engineer units in MRs 2 and 3; 176 fire support platoons (105mm) to allow increased fire support for RF/PF, population security, and the protection of key land and water lines of communications and to free ARVN artillery for mobile operations; two 175mm gun battalions to replace US units along the DMZ; and two air defense artillery battalions. During the same period, the VNMC grew by two infantry battalions and a 105mm artillery battalion. These additions completed the planned improvement of the South Vietnamese Marines.

The territorial units, the Regional and Popular Forces (RF and PF), also became stronger during 1970. A reorganization directed by President Thieu in July 1970 made both these forces part of the ARVN. This move, he hoped, would eliminate the "second class" image borne by the territorial forces and would better provide for training and redistributing the RF and PF to replace regular ARVN troops in pacification and territorial security operations. The PF would revert

50. The 1970 year-end RVNAF strength figures are from (S/GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1971, pp. VIII-5 - VIII-22. For a comparison of strengths at the beginning and close of 1970, see Table XI at the end of this chapter.

to Ministry of Interior control in the post-insurgency period. By the close of the year the RF strength was 283,106, slightly below its authorized level, while the PF stood at 250,889--a little higher than the planned year-end ceiling.

General Abrams was quite pleased with the RVNAF territorial forces in 1970. He found their performance improved and noted progress on leadership and training problems. They had become increasingly effective in MR 1, resulting in enhanced population security. In MR 3, they successfully shouldered a heavier security burden when the ARVN forces left the area to participate in the Cambodian operations. Their performance also improved throughout the year in MR 4. Only in MR 2 did the territorial forces fail to measure up to expectations. Improvements there in training and leadership did not keep pace with increased terrorist activity.

During 1970, the United States continued to turn over functions to the Vietnamese Navy (VNN), transferring the ships necessary for the enlarged Vietnamese responsibilities. The goal of this program was to develop a VNN capability comparable to the current in-country USN/VNN force. The turnover process, including base transfers, was scheduled for completion in mid-1972, although the VNN would still require US air and logistic support. This transfer program had begun in 1968, and by the end of December 1970 the US Naval forces in South Vietnam had handed over 1,300 operational and 127 support craft to the VNN. In the course of the year, the VNN took over river security operations in MR 3 and along the Cua Viet and Perfume Rivers, as well as harbor defenses for Cam Ranh Bay, Chu Lai, Da Nang, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Tan My, and Vung Tau. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the VNN in September assumed complete responsibility for the MARKET TIME inner barrier, with the United States maintaining only offshore air surveillance of the SVN coast.

The VNN personnel structure expanded in 1970 in accordance with plans, but there was a shortage of qualified officers and petty officers to man the rapidly growing VNN ship inventory. This deficiency was expected to continue into 1972, when training was scheduled to catch up with the expanding VNN. Nevertheless, General Abrams was able to state at the end of 1970 that the VNN was one of the ten largest navies in the world.

Improvement and modernization of the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) proceeded ahead of schedule in 1970, and COMUSMACV rated VNAF combat performance on a par with corresponding US units. The competence of the VNAF, he said, was particularly demonstrated in the 1970 air operations in Cambodia in support of ARVN and FANK units. During the year, the VNAF was reorganized to accommodate a 45-squadron force by 1972 composed of five air divisions, 10 tactical wings, five maintenance and supply wings, and seven air base wings. The first air division was activated on 1 March 1970, two more on 1 May, another a month later, and the final one in September. During the year, 525 air crews were formed, and the United States turned over 310 UH-1 helicopters in Vietnam to the VNAF. But by the end of the year, although the number of rated squadrons had increased, those in full operational readiness had declined. This situation resulted from a shortage of air crews and from high maintenance requirements resulting from unexpectedly high sortie rates. At the end of 1970, the VNAF still required further helicopter squadrons for combat support, search and rescue, and medical evacuation operations. It needed additional A-1 and A-37 fighter squadrons for fire power support to maneuver battalions and a proportionate increase in forward air controllers.

Throughout 1970, both the Republic of Vietnam and the United States devoted special attention to the problems confronting the RVNAF. As identified from past experience, these problems included morale, leadership, training, and logistics. As already noted, the Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed these areas in developing the Consolidated Phase III RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program and its subsequent revision. They prepared separate annexes covering each of these matters, identifying the problems and proposing remedial measures. In his approval of the Consolidated Phase III Program, Secretary Laird stressed the need to improve the RVNAF in all these areas. Consequently, there was progress during 1970, but none of the weaknesses was eliminated. The buildup of the RVNAF had been so rapid and the problems so enormous and so ingrained that they could not be easily or rapidly eliminated.

Progress in raising morale was difficult to assess, but COMUSMACV judged that there was improvement in 1970. The most positive indication, he believed, was the increased effectiveness of the RVNAF in combat. To raise morale, the Republic of

Vietnam, with US assistance and encouragement, provided better food and living conditions for RVNAF servicemen and their families; instituted a uniform leave program, including transportation to and from furloughs; made available additional uniforms and mosquito netting; and established rest camps with recreation and entertainment. In addition, the Republic of Vietnam granted all RVNAF troops a 19 percent pay increase on 1 October 1970, but, even so, the RVNAF soldiers remained one of the lowest paid groups in the South Vietnamese society. Whether these measures would be sufficient to maintain improved morale was uncertain, since the changing role of the RVNAF brought additional stresses. The RVNAF assumption of a greater responsibility for the war meant increased time in combat with longer periods away from base camps and families--and at a time when US assistance was decreasing.

Closely related to the matter of morale was the high RVNAF desertion rate--a long-standing problem with the South Vietnamese armed forces. Desertions had peaked in 1968 and receded only slightly in 1969. Despite persistent efforts to remove the believed causes of desertion there was no improvement during 1970. In fact, the rate at the end of 1970 was slightly higher than the previous year--11.8 per 1,000 in December 1970 as compared with 11.1 the previous December. The VNMC continued to lead the RVNAF services with a desertion rate of 34.1 per 1,000 in December 1970, while the ARVN rate at the same time was 15.8. Both RF and PF desertions turned upward during the year, reaching 12.3 and 6.3, respectively, by December. High desertions had not bothered either the VNN or the VNAF, and the rate for both in December 1970 stood at slightly less than three per thousand.

In 1970, the RVNAF continued to be plagued by a leadership problem. Not only was there a shortage of leaders, especially at the junior and non-commissioned officer levels, but also low quality performance. Factors affecting the quality of leadership included: combat commanders below the authorized grades with duties beyond their experience and training; insufficient use of battlefield promotion quotas and failure to recognize individual qualifications and performance; slow progress in implementing an officer rotation policy to develop leadership and competence; and diversion of many competent officers to civilian functions. These factors were easily recognizable and efforts were instituted in 1969 and continued throughout 1970 to eliminate them.

United States officials were particularly interested in building effective leadership in the RVNAF. As already mentioned, when approving the Consolidated Phase III RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, Secretary Laird emphasized the necessity for improved leadership. In the fall of 1970, he again stressed the "extreme importance" of US action to enhance RVNAF leadership, requesting a JCS assessment of efforts to place the best RVNAF officers into key assignments. The Joint Chiefs of Staff replied on 3 December 1970 with a detailed account of the successful replacement of ineffective RVNAF leaders. They assured the Secretary that the COMUSMACV procedure and policy in this sensitive area were both "appropriate and adequate."[51]

Offering a picture of general improvement during 1970, a MACV report in early 1971 stated:

> Leadership in the Vietnamese Armed Forces is improving at a satisfactory rate quantitatively and qualitatively. The Chief, Joint General Staff and the JGS as a unit are performing in an eminently satisfactory manner. The appointment of new commanders of MRs 2 and 4 during 1970 makes all four commanders excellent choices who are performing well. With few exceptions division and regimental commanders are considered satisfactory. The quality of leadership at battalion and lower levels in both regular and territorial forces is expected to improve as projected force levels are reached. More selectivity will be possible for procurement and promotions and qualified replacements will become available to relieve the ineffectiveness. Current JGS programs of inspections and visits are causing all forces to become more responsive to orders and directives from higher headquarters.[52]

Nevertheless, leadership in the RVNAF still fell short of desired levels at the close of 1970. Like morale, it was a matter that required continued attention.

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51. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Leadership (U)," 13 Oct 70, Att to JCS 2472/675, 15 Oct 70; (S-GP 4) JCSM-558-70 to SecDef, 3 Dec 70, Encl to JCS 2472/675-1, 30 Nov 70; JMF 911/535 (13 Oct 70).

52. Quoted in (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. VII-24.

The scarcity of qualified leaders reflected the lack of adequate training for the RVNAF--yet another endemic weakness in the South Vietnamese armed forces. The RVNAF simply could not keep pace with the training needs of the accelerated force buildup and the demands for qualitative betterment called for in the improvement and modernization program. In 1970, the RVNAF trained 570,740 personnel in 32 national, regional force, popular force, and division training centers and 87,197 personnel in 15 technical, four combat arms, and four academic schools as well as on-the-job training with US units, yet this was, apparently, not enough to fill the gap.

The training organization of the RVNAF remained unchanged throughout 1970, with the Central Training Command overseeing the major portion of the activity. Land forces continued to receive training in three phases (individual, unit, and operational readiness) at centers throughout South Vietnam. Attendance at these centers was consistently above their rated capacity, although many lacked adequate facilities. The VNMC reached its final authorized strength in 1970 and its training program fulfilled the needs during the year. The VNN trained 33,095 personnel during the year, or 80 percent of its goal. Nonetheless, there remained a serious shortage of petty and warrant officers, traceable to a reluctance of commanders to release experienced personnel from operational duty to serve as instructors.

Vietnamese Air Force training also progressed during the year, though it, too, suffered from a lack of experienced and available cadre and instructor personnel. In January 1970, the USAF and the VNAF began an integrated program where both VNAF officers and airmen received on-the-job instruction with US 7th Air Force units. The courses varied from two weeks to two years with emphasis on base operating support functions--an area that had not previously received as much attention as operational support training. Despite the RVNAF training progress in 1970, numerous difficulties remained. There were deficiencies in the quality of the teacher cadre; lack of training standardization; shortfalls in personnel programming; lapses in the quality of the training; and weaknesses in the logistics support for training facilities.

A strengthened and enlarged logistics system was essential to support the expanded forces called for in the RVNAF improvement and modernization program, and provision for this had been

included in the program. At the end of 1969, the RVNAF had been providing "marginally adequate" support for their forces, with continued dependence on US support in such areas as sea and airlift, port operations, and equipment overhaul.

In 1970, improvement of the RVNAF logistics system progressed satisfactorily. No operations were cancelled or curtailed because of a lack of supplies, and the RVNAF successfully supported its operations in Cambodia. Nevertheless, the RVNAF had not attained logistics self-sufficiency at the close of the year. Deficiencies or shortfalls still existed in the areas of airlift, marine maintenance, materiel rebuild, technical training, and supervisory skills.

To overcome these weaknesses, the RVNAF with US advice and assistance proceeded during 1970 with various logistics improvement programs. Some of these had been started earlier. Both the Combined Logistics Offensive Plan (CLOP) and the Country Logistics Improvement Plan (CLIP)[53] had begun in 1969 and continued in 1970; the former dealt with short-term problems while the latter covered longer term weaknesses. In June 1970, the RVNAF replaced CLOP with the Logistics Offensive II, designed to cover remaining CLOP projects as well as newly identified problems. Actually, by this time 101 of the original 121 CLOP projects had been completed and 17 had been deleted; thus only three remained to be transferred to the new offensive. The plan for this offensive, the RVNAF Logistics Improvement Plan 1970, identified 65 new problems with appropriate corrective action. All action was assigned to RVNAF elements with US participation limited to advisory assistance.

The progress in overcoming longer term logistics weaknesses followed a similar pattern. The CLIP actions advanced so well in 1970 that, at midyear, the RVNAF initiated a FY 1971 CLIP with 56 new projects. By December 1970, most of the original CLIP projects had been accomplished.

The RVNAF also proceeded with other programs and actions to improve its logistics capability during 1970. The VNAF reorganized the Air Logistics Wing into an Air Logistics Command designed to maintain overall control of inventory assets. Development of base depots, upgrading facilities,

53. See Ch. 6, pp. 202-203.

utilities, and equipment proceeded in accordance with a plan prepared the previous year. Improvement continued in highway transportation. In 1970 the RVNAF was self-sufficient in this area and even occasionally carried cargo for US and other Free World forces. Limited ability to discharge deep-draft vessels had always been a weakness of the RVNAF, and US military officers or civilian contractors had performed this function throughout the US involvement in Vietnam. But, in 1970, the RVNAF gradually assumed responsibility in this area. The ARVN Saigon Transportation Terminal Command handled all RVNAF general cargo arriving and departing the Saigon area. In addition, the RVNAF operated ammunition barge discharge sites at Binh Thuy and Saigon Newport and conducted all port operations and inland water distribution of cargo in the Delta. At various other South Vietnamese ports, however, the RVNAF still required US assistance both in unloading deep-draft vessels and in ammunition barge discharge.

Despite the remaining weaknesses and problems, the RVNAF were stronger both in numbers and quality at the close of 1970 than ever before. South Vietnamese forces were assuming a growing share of the combat and were extending outposts into areas long held by the Viet Cong. Government control was increasing and pacification gains continued. More importantly, the RVNAF improvement was permitting significant US troop withdrawals without any retrogression in the conduct of the war. Consequently, at the end of 1970, Vietnamization seemed to be succeeding.

United States officials, both in Vietnam and Washington, were pleased with this success. President Nixon expressed his satisfaction in a television interview on 4 January 1971. In responding to a question about achievements during the past year, he cited Vietnam. While admitting that he had not ended the war as he had hoped, he pointed out that "we now see the end of Americans' combat role in Vietnam in sight." Most US ground combat forces, he continued, would be out of Vietnam by May 1971 and US casualties had decreased markedly. "Our Vietnamization policy has been very carefully drawn up," the President said, "and we are withdrawing in a measured way on the basis that the South Vietnamese will be able to defend themselves as we withdraw, and it is working."[54]

54. Public Papers, Nixon, 1971, pp. 6-23.

TABLE XI

RVNAF Strengths, 1970

1 January 1970[1]

Service	Authorized	Assigned
ARVN	374,132	416,278
VNN	28,700	30,143
VNAF	32,587	36,469
VNMC	10,419	11,528
RF	255,167	260,455
PF	182,725	214,383
Total RVNAF	883,730	969,256

31 December 1970[2]

Service	Authorized	Assigned
ARVN	433,989	414,074
VNN	39,611	40,709
VNAF	38,780	44,997
VNMC	13,462	13,635
RF	294,446	283,106
PF	250,027	250,889
Total RVNAF	1,070,315	1,047,410

1. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VI-2.
2. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1971, pp. VIII -5, 7, 15, 18, 21, and 22.

TABLE XII

US Forces in Vietnam, 1970[1]

	1 January 1970	31 December 1970
Army	330,648	250,653
Navy	30,236	16,502
Air Force	58,463	43,137
Marine Corps	55,039	25,394
Coast Guard	433	108
Total	474,819	335,794

1. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. IV-7.

Chapter 11

PACIFICATION, 1969-1970

Pacification Before 1969

Pacification was the process of establishing in South Vietnam a stable, prosperous society with effective local governments loyal to the national government in Saigon. It included not only the provision of security to the people in the countryside by more or less conventional military and police operations, but also the voluntary involvement of the people in the creation of viable, self-sustaining political and economic institutions. Even more than many of the other operations in Vietnam, pacification posed a complex set of problems. General Westmoreland indicated in 1968 something of the difficulties involved in the conduct of the pacification programs:

> The objectives of pacification are not so difficult to describe but the attainment of those objectives involves cultural and social forces not so easy to understand and certainly not easy to manage. The aspects of pacification most easy to measure are often not the crucial aspects--and conversely, the less tangible aspects are not easy to perceive, let alone measure.[1]

By 1969 the pacification program in Vietnam had been evolving for many years, with the effort to counter the activities of the Viet Cong at the local level passing through numerous forms. A decade earlier the Diem government had established land development centers and then agrovilles, both of which were protected farming communities. They were replaced by the Strategic Hamlet Program, patterned after British experience in Malaya. The strategic hamlets proved to be vulnerable to attack, infiltration, and subversion, and they collapsed with the end of the Diem

1. (U) CINCPAC-COMUSMACV, Report on the War In Vietnam (as of June 1968), Sec II, Report on Operations in South Vietnam January 1964-June 1968, p. 229. The background information in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, is based on this report.

government in November 1963. The Viet Cong were able to consolidate their holdings in the countryside during the turmoil that followed, even though the government launched a new control effort with the Chien Thang (Victory) National Pacification Plan in 1964. In 1965 pacification support continued to be hindered by political instability; national planning and coordination remained inadequate. Some progress in pacification was achieved, however, with the introduction of US fighting forces. The territorial security they furnished increased the number of people who lived under government control.

In 1966 Ambassador Lodge created the Office of Civil Operations under Deputy Ambassador William J. Porter to consolidate the fragmented civilian pacification effort. At the same time General Westmoreland created a Revolutionary Development Division in MACV to coordinate military participation in pacification. By mid-1966 the Military Assistance staff division of MACV had begun to work jointly for both General Westmoreland and Ambassador Porter. Then in May 1967 all US pacification efforts in Vietnam were consolidated in a single office responsible to COMUSMACV. Mr. Robert W. Komer was assigned as Deputy COMUSMACV for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS).

In 1966 and 1967 the Vietnamese Government itself strove to create or improve a number of programs. Several were combined under the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, which trained and directed the Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC), to carry pacification to the villages. The Vietnamese also recognized the crucial importance of territorial security and by early 1967 had assigned over 50 regular ARVN battalions as well as almost all the Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF) to this effort. The regular battalions were supposed to counter any move into their area by the enemy's main forces and to operate against local and guerrilla forces. The RF, generally organized in company-sized units, also operated against enemy local forces and provided security around and between the hamlets of a village. They supported and reinforced the platoon-sized PF units charged with hamlet and village security. The RDC shared the task of defending the hamlet itself with the PF. The National Police (NP) not only provided normal law and order services, but with at least the nominal support of all the military and civilian intelligence agencies, also operated against the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI)--the

underground leadership of the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam, comprising the political, administrative, supply, and recruitment apparatus of the Viet Cong.

The VCI constituted the main internal security problem in the countryside. Only by destroying the effectiveness of this group could there be any hope for lasting success in pacification. To achieve this goal, in 1968 the Vietnamese Government established the Phung Hoang or PHOENIX Program, aimed at eliminating the threat from the VCI (or "neutralizing" it, in the accepted term). Through Province and District Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Centers, the PHOENIX Program coordinated police efforts with the Revolutionary Development Cadre, ARVN, Regional and Popular Forces, and Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), as well as special intelligence agencies.

Special efforts had also been made to persuade Viet Cong to return to the government side through the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Program, which had begun in 1963. The success of this program varied in proportion to the military progress of allied forces. The number of Hoi Chanh, or ralliers, rose to 27,000 in 1967, but dropped to less than 20,000 in 1968.

After the creation of CORDS in May 1967, pacification support and direction ran to the field agencies and commands through COMUSMACV channels, although US civilian agencies, such as USIA and AID, continued to deal directly with their Vietnamese counterparts at the national level in Saigon. Below that level, all aspects of the advisory effort came under COMUSMACV's supervision and operational control. By June 1968 approximately 1,600 US civilians and 6,000 US military personnel were engaged primarily in support of the pacification program.

The Tet offensive in 1968 had an important effect in the development of a pacification program in South Vietnam. Immediately thereafter, the Republic of Vietnam organized the People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF), requiring all able-bodied male citizens between the ages of 16 and 17 and between 39 and 50 to participate in the defense of their local areas. In addition, government planners organized and coordinated the existing programs under an Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) in the last two months of 1968 and January 1969. The APC included provision for a Central Pacification and Development Council to determine objectives and to oversee the execution of programs.

The gains realized in this campaign were not always as large as the goals, but they were nonetheless substantial. Almost 2,500,000 people were brought under RVN control; 8,600 Hoi Chanh rallied to the government side; 6,000 VCI were neutralized; and membership in the PSDF, the armed militia in the countryside, rose to more than a million. General Abrams reported that the APC was highly successful and had definitely given the Republic of Vietnam the initiative in pacification.[2]

Thus by the end of 1968, all the important elements in the RVN pacification program had been created and were at last given central direction under the APC. The National Police, the Regional and Popular Forces, and the People's Self-Defense Force all had the task of providing security. Various other programs, such as the Revolutionary Development Cadre, Chieu Hoi, and PHOENIX, had specific roles to play in winning the countryside. By December 1968, 76.3 percent of the rural population lived in areas rated "relatively secure" under the Hamlet Evaluation System.[3]

The 1969 Pacification and Development Plan became effective on 1 February 1969 upon the expiration of the APC and was an extension of it. The Republic of Vietnam hoped to maintain throughout 1969 the momentum created under the APC. The APC and the 1969 plan were the first attempts by the South Vietnamese to present in a unified way the strategy, concepts, priorities, and objectives necessary to guide the total RVN pacification effort.

The 1969 plan, published in December 1968, expressed as its basic theme the need for a community spirit between government forces and the people to achieve maximum results. It defined eight primary objectives:[4]

1. Bring security to 90 percent of the population by the end of 1969 and extend national sovereignty throughout the country.

2. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VIII-5 - VIII-8.
3. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1968, p. 526.
4. (C-GP 3) RVN, 1969 Pacification and Development Plan, 15 Dec 68, JMF 911/319 (15 Dec 68).

2. Neutralize 33,000 VCI by the end of 1969.

3. Involve additional people in the People's Self-Defense Force to bring its strength up to 2,000,000 members.

4. Establish local government in the villages throughout the country.

5. Rally 20,000 Hoi Chanh.

6. Decrease the number of refugees to less than 1,000,000 and resettle or return to their homes 300,000 people.

7. Increase the information and propaganda effort.

8. Encourage the rural economy.

The goals of the 1969 plan were intended to be reached by the end of the year, but success during the early months led to the introduction of an accelerated plan with a deadline of 31 October. Thereafter a succession of similar plans guided operations through February 1971. Thus in 1969 and 1970 the Republic of Vietnam operated under six different but overlapping pacification plans. Each of these plans had the same basic objectives enumerated in the 1969 plan; they differed from one another chiefly by having higher or lower goals set for each of their component programs. In all of these plans the first objective, territorial security, was by far the most important. In FY 1968, 1969, and 1970 the provision of territorial security, primarily through the operation of the RF and the PF, required 81 percent of the pacification budget. All the other programs, including the headquarters organizations in Saigon, shared the remaining 19 percent.[5]

5. (U) United States General Accounting Office, International Division, Background Information on United States Participation in Pacification and Development Programs in Vietnam Administered by Civil Operations for Rural Development Support, July 1971, p. 136, JMF 911/319 (1 Jul 71).

Policy Review by the New Administration

Upon entry into office, the Nixon Administration had several sources of current information to assist it in reviewing pacification policy. A Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) on Vietnam had just been completed, and other studies were instituted by the new administration. National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 1, 21 January 1969, posed several specific questions about pacification, and on 25 January the President himself requested information on current plans for improving South Vietnam's internal security capabilities. In March 1969, Secretary Laird visited Vietnam and reported to the President on his trip. The information furnished in these reports did little to simplify the formulation of pacification policy by the President and his advisers. Instead it documented the split between OSD-State Department-CIA and JCS-MACV-Embassy Saigon about the nature of the struggle in Vietnam.[6]

The earliest of these studies, the Special National Intelligence Estimate, reflected the more pessimistic views held by the civilian agencies. It indicated to the President that the pacification program as a whole had made a significant contribution to the prosecution of the war and had strengthened the position of the Republic of Vietnam, and that President Thieu's government seemed finally to be aware of the need for a vigorous pacification effort. But the SNIE also advised that a large part of the countryside was still contested, with neither side firmly in control. It was almost impossible, according to the report, to measure directly the loyalty of the people to the Republic of Vietnam, and the most common attitude of the peasants was war-weariness and apathy. Even if security conditions remained good, progress in pacification would be painfully slow. The report warned that "administrative capability of Vietnamese officials is weak; Revolutionary Development is heavily dependent on American advice, assistance, and inspiration. Pervasive corruption is a constant threat to the whole system."[7]

6. (S) SNIE 14-69, 16 Jan 69, DIA files. (S-GP 3) NSSM 1, 21 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2472/413, 22 Jan 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 1. (S-GP 4) Msg, CJCS 1163 to COMUSMACV, 28 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, March 5-12, 1969," 13 Mar 69, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS to SEA, Mar 69.

7. (S) SNIE 14-69, 16 Jan 69, DIA files.

The responses to NSSM 1 represented both viewpoints. Seven of 28 questions posed by Dr. Kissinger were directed at an evaluation of the pacification program. General Abrams and the Joint Chiefs of Staff reported that the Republic of Vietnam was enjoying the greatest degree of control exercised in the current decade. The relatively secure population had improved slowly and unevenly from about 40 percent in early 1965 to more than 75 percent of the total in South Vietnam by the end of 1968, in spite of heavy enemy attacks during Tet and May in that year. The urban population after Tet had taken a distinctly hostile attitude toward the Viet Cong and particularly toward the North Vietnamese Army. In the III CTZ, interviewers found an almost total reliance by the enemy on terrorism and coercion, with the abandonment of attempts to woo the population. The shift from a predominately Viet Cong force in 1967 to one composed largely of North Vietnamese troops in 1968 precipitated a drop in civilian support of the enemy. The increasing urbanization of South Vietnam added to the government's control of its population. Free World Military Assistance Forces, US civil and military advisors, anti-Viet Cong Infrastructure programs, and the Accelerated Pacification Campaign had all contributed to this change. The Joint Chiefs of Staff predicted continuing gains in the 1969-1970 period. They pointed out that

> the Government of Vietnam is stronger and more stable than in the past several years. It has a freely elected, constitutional government which is slowly becoming more responsive to the aspirations of the people. President Thieu is the most knowledgeable Government of Vietnam official concerning pacification and he is highly effective in that role. . . . There have been many pacification programs in the past, but none on the scale and with the resources and the leadership being demonstrated today. . . . the outlook is most favorable.[8]

8. (S) NSSM 1, 21 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2472/413, 22 Jan 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 1. See Ch. 1, pp. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-58-69 to SecDef, 4 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-2, 1 Feb 69, same file, sec 2.

In contrast to these views, the OSD response to NSSM 1 found very little progress in pacification. The OSD report, for example, said that an

> analysis of the available data tends to lead to the following overall conclusions: (1) The portions of the SVN rural population which was aligned with the VC and aligned with the GVN is approximately the same today as it was in 1962: 5,000,000 GVN aligned and nearly 3,000,000 VC aligned; (2) At the present, it appears that at least 50 percent of the total rural population is subject to significant VC pressure and influence.[9]

These differing views were too far apart to allow a unified response to NSSM 1. Summarizing the replies, the NSC Secretariat thus described the disagreement.

> Two well-defined and divergent views emerged from the agencies on the pacification situation in Vietnam. One view is held by MACV and Embassy Saigon and endorsed by CINCPAC and JCS. The other view is that of OSD, CIA and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) in State. (The East Asian bureau in State lies somewhere in between.) The two views are profoundly different in terms of factual interpretation and policy implication. Both views agree on the obstacles to improvement and complete success. What distinguishes one view from the other is each's assessment of the magnitude of the problem, and the assessment of the degree of improvement likely to take place in the near future.[10]

President Nixon's expressed interest in South Vietnam's internal security was formalized by NSSM 19, issued on 11 February 1969 by Dr. Kissinger. It directed the Secretary of Defense, in cooperation with the Secretary of State

9. (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "NSSM No. 1, Situation in Vietnam," 10 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-4, 11 Feb 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 3.

10. (TS) Memo, NSC Secretariat to Vice Pres et al., "Revised Summary of Responses to NSSM 1: The Situation in Vietnam," 22 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-8, 24 Mar 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 5.

and the Director of Central Intelligence, to prepare a study of RVN capabilities in this area with particular reference to plans for expanding and improving the indigenous police forces.[11]

General Wheeler had already begun preparing a reply to the President's 25 January request. After consulting COMUSMACV, he reported to Secretary Laird that internal security forces in South Vietnam were expanding and improving. The National Police had increased four-fold in the last four years. Its efforts were supplemented by the Regional Forces, the Popular Forces, and the People's Self-Defense Force, all of which were also expanding. There existed problems in leadership, administration, and training, but the current plans for future development, extending into 1972, were considered adequate to meet RVN's internal security needs. The Chairman's report concluded that the existing programs had proved their worth and needed only to be expanded.[12]

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs prepared an initial study in reply to NSSM 19 and forwarded it for JCS consideration in April. This ISA study contrasted sharply with General Wheeler's view. The basic conclusion was the same as that voiced in OSD responses to NSSM 1, namely, that despite gains made in 1968, levels of internal security were very little higher than in 1962. Government and VC forces seemed nearly evenly matched at the critical hamlet and village level. The study raised serious questions about RVN interagency rivalry, about basic Vietnamese attitudes toward their hamlet and their government, and about Vietnamese ability to master a US-style bureaucracy. In contrast to the integrated political-military structure of the VC/NVA, the RVN had "an unintegrated and relatively uncoordinated structure seeking political objectives primarily by military means."

The OSD study offered no solutions for these far-reaching problems. It concluded that total allied forces were large enough to provide an adequate degree of internal security although sufficient forces were not being devoted to internal

11. (S-GP 4) CM-3946-69 to SecDef, 19 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/426-1, 26 Feb 69; (TS) NSSM 19, 11 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/426, 12 Feb 69; JMF 911/233 (11 Feb 69) sec 1.

12. (S-GP 4) CM-3946-69 to SecDef, 19 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/426-1, 26 Feb 69, same file.

security at the local level. To remedy this situation, the report proposed a reorganization of the forces employed. They were to be grouped into two broad types, a quasi-military Territorial Security Force (TSF) and a police-type Internal Security Force (ISF), with control assigned to the proper levels and with lines of responsibility running to the appropriate ministries in Saigon. Regional Forces would constitute most of the TSF, along with National Police Field Forces (NPFF) and Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), which were guerrilla-type forces organized by the US Central Intelligence Agency. The ISF would use the National Police, Popular Forces, Revolutionary Development Cadre, and PSDF as its main elements. The OSD study concluded that this reorganization was a feasible way to accomplish the needed short-term gains in RVN internal security capabilities.[13]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, did not agree with the changes called for in the ISA study. Instead, they supported the evolutionary programs for the development of internal security forces devised by COMUSMACV and already transmitted through the Chairman to the President in March. They considered the reorganization proposed by ISA to be unnecessary and likely to disrupt current progress.[14]

The OSD response to NSSM 19 went through several versions, the last of them appearing in July. The basic disagreements remained unresolved. The NSC Review Group examined the paper on 10 July, but it was never subsequently considered by the NSC and no formal disposition was made of it.[15]

When Secretary Laird met with US officials on his fact-finding trip to Vietnam in March, he was told by COMUSMACV and US Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker that the pacification program had been receiving considerable attention and was on

13. (S) OSD Draft National Security Study: South Vietnam's Internal Security Capabilities, 28 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/426-4, 2 Apr 69, JMF 911/233 (11 Feb 69) sec 2.
14. (S-GP 4) JCSM-221-69 to SecDef, 12 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/426-5, 9 Apr 69, same file, sec 3.
15. (S) JTP for ASD(ISA) and Dir Plans and Policy, 10 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/426-7, 10 Jul 69, JMF 911/233 (11 Feb 69) sec 4. Interview, Robert J. Watson with COL William F. Lackman, Jr., OASD(ISA), 10 May 73.

the verge of making great progress. Ambassador Bunker explained to him that President Thieu had instilled "great energy, vigor and imagination into the pacification program. He has by far the most comprehensive grasp of pacification of anyone in the government." The Ambassador thought that progress had been made and was continuing at an accelerated rate. "This has been true especially in pacification which embraces so many aspects of our total effort."[16]

Earlier on the same day, Mr. William E. Colby, Deputy COMUSMACV for CORDS, had presented the Secretary with a more detailed, more cautious, but nevertheless optimistic report on the conduct of the pacification program. He did not ignore the problems. There was a perpetual shortage of trained manpower; many of the RVN attempts to draw the Vietnamese into participation in local government ran against their Confucianist background; the VCI still flourished; and corrpution was a problem. But in each case he outlined the steps being taken to overcome the problems and cited the recent gains made by the Republic of Vietnam. He assured the Secretary that COMUSMACV "believes that the strengths outweigh the vulnerabilities, and that a continuation of this kind of effort can result in a stronger Vietnam that can face the VC, though perhaps not the NVA in the future."[17]

Secretary Laird's report to the President on his trip contained none of Ambassador Bunker's optimism and none of Ambassador Colby's plans for the future. The Secretary did not believe that "true pacification and RVN control over its own population can be achieved while our own forces continue such a pervasive presence in South Vietnam." He concluded, apparently agreeing with the OSD position on NSSM 1, that despite the high figures reported on the level of RVN control, "some appreciable VC influence continues to exist for the major share of the Vietnamese people." He found the task of extending government control over the people difficult under peaceful circumstances and "herculean while hostilities continue at the present level."[18]

16. (C) Presentation by Amb Ellsworth Bunker, SecDef Briefing, 7 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/448, 14 Mar 69, JMF 911/075 (14 Mar 69) sec 1.

17. (C) Briefing for SecDef and Party, MACV Hq, 7 Mar 69, by Amb Colby, Att to JCS 2472/448, 14 Mar 69, same file.

18. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, March 5-12, 1969," 13 Mar 69, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS to SEA, Mar 69.

The President, however, took no action to resolve the differing views concerning pacification in South Vietnam. Rather, his attention in the conduct of the war seemed concentrated on negotiations and on Vietnamization, both of which were aimed at reducing US involvement. In any event, the lack of presidential action gave tacit approval to the existing pacification efforts.

Concern over the PHOENIX Program

Nevertheless, one specific aspect of the pacification program had to be considered at the policy level in Washington during 1969. This was the PHOENIX program, formally created by RVN presidential decree on 1 July 1968. Until then the Republic of Vietnam had given only lukewarm support to the elimination of the pervasive political infrastructure of the VC. Indeed, according to US intelligence analyses, RVN intelligence and police activities had all too often been directed against noncommunist groups rather than against the VC. There had been, in addition, "a reluctance of the army and other governmental groups, especially the police, to work effectively together." Until 1968, the only agencies specifically operating against the Viet Cong infrastructure were the Chieu Hoi program to rally individual VC to the government side and the Provincial Reconnaissance Units, a guerrilla organization sponsored by the CIA.[19]

The purpose of the PHOENIX program was to destroy the VCI, which constituted the political, administrative, supply, and recruitment apparatus supporting VC operations against the Republic of Vietnam. The core of the VCI consisted of the members of the Peoples Revolutionary Party and included the leaders of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam. General Abrams estimated the strength of VCI in November 1969 at approximately 75,000.[20]

The PHOENIX program involved many different RVN agencies. The National Police and its components, the National Police Field Force and the Special Police, together with the Provincial Reconnaissance Units, were mainstays of the new

19. (S) SNIE 14-49, 16 Jan 69, DIA files.
20. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 16592 to CINCPAC et al., 24 Dec 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Dec 69.

program, but the military also contributed through its intelligence and security services as well as through the operations of regular, regional, and popular forces. The People's Self-Defense Force, the Revolutionary Development Cadre, the Information Services, local officials, and other governmental elements were also included.

The key organizations in the program were the District Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Centers (DIOCC), which were established at each of the 250 or so Vietnamese districts to serve as a central point for collecting information and for coordinating operations against the VCI. Counterparts were established at provincial and regional areas, and at the national level in Saigon. United States participation in PHOENIX proper was limited to the provision of military advisers for the district centers.

The Republic of Vietnam established numerical quotas for the neutralization of VCI personnel by PHOENIX agencies in each geographic area. A member of the VCI could be neutralized in any one of three ways: he could be killed in the course of security operations; he could be captured; or he could be induced to rally to the Republic of Vietnam. Government policy stressed the desirability of capture and rallying over killing in meeting operational goals.

The PHOENIX program was beset with difficulties and criticisms almost from its beginning. Ambassador Colby reported to Secretary Laird in March 1969 that although PHOENIX officials claimed 16,000 neutralizations in 1968, nearly all the losses had been replaced. Some of these replacements doubtless came from within the VC organization, but "the quagmire of the GVN administrative-judicial system" also on occasion allowed VCI members to return to their former activities. In a report for the President, General Wheeler stated that suspects had been released by local officials prior to their trials; moreover, even when cases were tried, lenient sentences had been given by provincial security committees for various reasons, including lack of evidence, corruption, inadequate prison space, or even failure to appreciate the danger of the VCI. Once the local officials had processed a VCI member through the PHOENIX program and counted him against their quota, there was no workable records system to keep track of him. Early in 1969 US officials could

not establish how many VCI were still in jail or how many had been released.[21]

The PHOENIX program experienced these difficulties in part because the program was new. Only in 1967 did US or RVN planners begin to give major attention to the neutralization of members of the enemy infrastructure, and not until mid-1968 did the program begin to function. In 1969 Mr. Colby thought that the Republic of Vietnam still needed to teach "a lot of people what the infrastructure was, that the enemy really is a political as well as a military force."[22]

In October 1969 the Secretary of the Army, Stanley R. Resor, expressed his concern to the Secretary of Defense that in US attempts to make the PHOENIX program more efficient, the social and moral costs involved might be ignored. He recommended a review of the program to determine if emphasis should shift from the present dragnet method to a more selective attack on the VCI. He was particularly concerned with the provision of US military advisers for the Provincial Reconnaissance Units, which the press had accused of carrying out a program of political assassination.[23]

The Secretary of Defense was also concerned about US military participation in the PRU program. He wished to reduce activities that might prove both "embarrassing to the Department of Defense and counter-productive to our efforts in Vietnam." He asked the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to conduct an immediate review of the PRU program, including not only the

21. (C) Briefing for SecDef and Party, MACV Hq, 7 Mar 69, by Amb Colby, Att to JCS 2472/448, 14 Mar 69, JMF 911/075 (14 Mar 69) sec 1. (S) SNIE 14-69, 16 Jan 69, DIA files. (S-GP 1) CM-3946-69 to SecDef, 19 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/426-1, 26 Feb 69, JMF 911/233 (11 Feb 69) sec 1. (TS-GP 1) Memo, "Trip Report, SEA, 9-23 February 1969," Att to SACSA M-133-69S, 3 Mar 69, in SEA Briefing Book for CJCS, Mar 69, Operational SecW, OCJCS File 337 SecDef/CJCS to SEA, Mar 69.

22. (S) Briefing for SecDef and Party, MACV Hq, 7 Mar 69, by Amb Colby, Att to JCS 2472/448, 14 Mar 69, JMF 911/075 (14 Mar 69) sec 1.

23. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, "The Phoenix and Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Programs in Vietnam," 20 Oct 69, Att to JCS 2472/541, 21 Oct 69, JMF 911/310 (20 Oct 69).

value of the program but plans for reducing US participation in it. He thought "we should divest ourselves of this mission as early and as completely as possible, unless you find overriding reasons to the contrary."[24]

General Wheeler replied that the PRU had been quite effective in neutralizing the VCI and that steps were already being taken to correct the abuses in the program. The PRU was a CIA-funded and directed operation, he continued, and General Abrams had himself been concerned for some time with a situation in which he was ultimately responsible for military advisers but had no control of their activities within the program. In September 1969 General Abrams had begun to withdraw the 108 military advisers by a process of attrition, and all would have departed by October 1970. The Secretary of Defense made no objection, and the withdrawal of US military personnel from the PRU program continued.[25]

Pacification in 1969

Meantime, progress was being reported in the pacification effort. When Secretary Laird visited Saigon in early March 1969, Ambassador Colby told him that the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) rating for relatively secure hamlets had risen by more than one percent during February and that progress in expanding and training the RF, PF, and PSDF was proceeding according to plan. Ambassador Colby stressed that the most important strength of the program was the momentum of success. The military forces had pushed the big war away, he said, so that pacification could continue behind this shield.[26]

In mid-March President Thieu reorganized his cabinet to strengthen his government. The most significant feature of

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24. (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Evaluation of US Involvement in the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Program in the Republic of Vietnam," 29 Nov 69, Att to JCS 2472/557, 1 Dec 69, same file.

25. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-752-69 to SecDef, 8 Dec 69, Encl to JCS 2472/557-1, 6 Dec 69, same file. Interview with COL R.A. Wyatt, J-3 (SACSA), 19 Feb 71.

26. (C) Briefing for SecDef and Party, MACV Hq, 7 Mar 69, by Amb Colby, Att to JCS 2472/448, 14 Mar 69, JMF 911/075 (14 Mar 69) sec 1.

the reorganization was the creation of a Deputy Premier for Pacification and Reconstruction. President Thieu named his old and trusted friend, Lieutenant General Tran Thien Khiem, to the new post. General Khiem, who continued as Minister of Interior, was now subordinate only to President Thieu and the Premier and had authority to call upon any of the government's agencies for pacification support. President Thieu also appointed Nguyen Van Vang Minister of Revolutionary Development, a post that had been vacant for some months.[27]

By mid-year considerable gains were reported in pacification. The Hamlet Evaluation System showed a relatively secure population of 85.6 percent, an increase of over six percent since initiation of the 1969 Pacification and Development Plan on 1 February. Ambassador Colby reported that pacification had a program, an organization, a certain momentum of its own, and enough resources to keep going. He praised the support given by President Thieu, who had done "a very fine job." At mid-year the Ambassador reported to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on various weaknesses in the program, but he continued to maintain that credits outweighed the debits, resulting in "nothing outstanding, nothing spectacular, but a steady increase."[28]

In the light of the progress made thus far, the Republic of Vietnam decided to accelerate the program. A directive from the Prime Minister on 26 June announced Phase II of the 1969 Pacification and Development Campaign to cover the four-month period 1 July through 31 October 1969. This Phase II program, subsequently designated the 1969 Accelerated Pacification Campaign (1969 APC; not to be confused with the original November 1968-January 1969 APC), called for the fulfillment, or over-fulfillment of the eight objectives originally scheduled for the earlier 1969 campaign.[29]

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27. NY Times, 12 Mar 69, 12; 13 Mar 69, 19.

28. (C) MACV, Material for CJCS, 20 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/509, 24 Jul 69; (S-GP 4) Pacification Briefing by Amb Colby for CJCS, 17 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/513, 29 Jul 69; JMF 911/080 (17 Jul 69).

29. (C) Prime Ministerial Directive No. 924, "Phase II Goals of 1969 PD Plan," 26 Jun 69, Encl to Memo, DepCORDS/MACV, 28 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/499, 9 Jul 69, JMF 911/319 (26 Jun 69) sec 1.

Pacification work under the 1969 APC made significant progress, and by 31 October most of the goals of the campaign had been achieved, including a relatively secure population of 90 percent and a fully secure population of 50 percent. These objectives, originally set for the end of the year, had been attained while US troop withdrawals from Vietnam were beginning. The expiration of the 1969 APC on 31 October 1969 left the RVN without a formal plan or schedule for the remainder of the year. Efforts during November and December centered principally on consolidating previous gains and upgrading hamlet security.[30]

Although the improvement during 1969 resulted largely from favorable trends on the battlefield, it was in part at least attributable to the growing strength of forces involved directly in pacification. The Regional and Popular Forces had the crucial role of providing territorial security in support of pacification. Both consisted of volunteers recruited from the local population. A program to build them up had begun in 1968 with President Johnson's decision to improve and modernize the RVNAF. At the beginning of 1969 strengths stood at 220,900 for the RF and 173,200 for PF. At the Midway Conference in June, the Republic of Vietnam requested an accelerated RVNAF expansion, including additional RF and PF troops. After reviewing the RVN proposals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the PF be increased by 36,700 in FY 1970 and by 24,550 in FY 1971 while the RF should be enlarged by 15,570 and 5,170 in the same years. The Secretary of Defense approved these increases, and during the four months of 1969 APC the territorial security forces expanded rapidly. By 1 November 1969 strengths stood at 253,892 for the RF and 206,545 for the PF, a total of 460,437.[31]

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30. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Combat Analysis Group, J-3, CAG-VSUM 1-69, "A Periodic Summary of Progress Toward Vietnamizing the War (U)," Nov 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 5A. (The periodic summaries published by the Combat Analysis Group in this numbered series will be cited hereafter by their CAG-VSUM short title.) (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VIII-33 - VIII-36.

31. (~~S~~-GP 4) CAG 3-69, "Analytical Supplement to Statistical Digest of Military Developments in SEA (U)," 15 Aug 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Aug 69. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp.VIII-27, VIII-31. (~~S~~-GP 4) JCSM-462-69 to SecDef, 29 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/497-3, 26 Jul 69, JMF 911/535 (8 Jun 69) sec 2. (~~S~~-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., 12 Aug 69, Att to JCS 2472/497-5, 13 Aug 69, same file, sec 3.

The desertion rates for the Regional and Popular Forces were lower than the RVNAF average during the year, and the RF/PF kill ratio rose in each quarter of 1969. There were problems, of course, particularly in leadership. Both RF anf PF were below authorized strength in NCOs and in officers, and even though the charts showed RF officer strength near 100 percent of the authorization by 31 December 1969, 80 percent of these were lieutenants or aspirants.[32]

Another important element in providing territorial security was the Peoples Self-Defense Force, which had been organized in 1968 as a kind of home guard. The RVN Mobilization Law of 19 June 1968 required the participation of all able-bodied males aged 16-18 and 39-50, with youths 12-15, men over 50, and women serving as volunteers in support groups. The PSDF was created to improve the maximum number of citizens in support of the government by having them actually engaged in its defense as well as to provide the population a means to defend themselves and to promote a sense of community development. The 1969 Pacification and Development Plan called for a PSDF of two million members, with 400,000 members armed. By the end of the year, PSDF membership stood at 3,219,000, with 1,098,000 trained and 399,500 armed.[33]

The MACV Chief of Staff reported that the PSDF had come a long way in the course of the year. He thought a good measure of its success, and of its future potential, was that the VC had found the PSDF important enough to make it a target. He also saw certain problems. There were delays in obtaining and servicing weapons and a lack of standarization in training. Although the Ministry of Interior had issued broad guidelines for the PSDF, there was considerable local variation in the implementation of these standards. The PSDF was, he believed, a temptation for politicians who might wish to gain control of it for partisan purposes.[34]

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32. (S-GP 4) CM-4260-69 to SecDef, 24 May 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 69. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-69, Nov 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 5A. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, Mar 70, JCS Hist Div files.

33. (S-GP 4) J-5 BP, "Arming PSDF (U)," 3 Dec 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Dec 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VIII-49.

34. (U) Ltr, C/S MACV to CINCPAC, 27 Nov 69, Att to JCS 2472/565, 9 Dec 69, JMF 911/319 (12 Nov 69).

The purpose of the Revolutionary Development Cadre was to develop a sense of leadership and community spirit in the local communities. The RDC consisted of teams sent to the villages and hamlets after the RF or PF had established a minimum level of security. There they were to identify the VCI, to organize and train the PSDF, to assist in the organization of local elections, and to initiate self-help programs. In February the Republic of Vietnam reduced the size of each RDC team from 59 to 30 men, thus doubling the number of teams. This reduction theoretically did not degrade team performance since one half the function of the larger teams was security, and this function was being assumed by the RF and the PF. During 1969, the RDC strength rose from 43,900 at the end of January to 51,300 by the end of the year.[35]

South Vietnam had suffered throughout its existence from a lack of police forces. There was no nationwide police force at all until the National Police (NP) was formed in 1962. The NP grew from 19,000 in 1963 to 78,000 by the beginning of 1969. The latter figure included a special organization known as the National Police Field Force, which numbered about 15,000 by the end of 1969 [redacted] The rapid growth of the NP had resulted in a leadership problem, and the percentage of trained and experienced officers in the NP was low. According to Mr. Colby, the NP had tended to stay in towns, protecting the government from the population in the traditional way of a colonial police, and had left the countryside without police protection. The increased pacification efforts in 1968 and 1969, however, stressed not only the expansion of the NP, but also its extension into the hamlets and villages.[36]

35. (S-GP 4) CAG 2-69, "Analytical Supplement to Statistical Digest of Military Developments in SEA (U)," 15 Jul 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69. (S-GP 3) MACV Fact Book, Vol II, Item 1B, Att to JCS 2472/448-4, 17 Mar 69, JMF 911/075 (14 Mar 69) sec 2. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, Mar 70, JCS Hist Div files.

36. (C) Briefing for SecDef and Party, MACV Hq, 7 Mar 69, by Amb Colby, Att to JCS 2472/448, 14 Mar 69, JMF 911/075 (14 Mar 69) sec 1. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, Mar 70, JCS Hist Div files. (U) "Progress of the Pacification Program," Rpt by Subcom of H. Com on Armed Services following a visit to RVN, 15-17 Jan 70, H-3-38, 9 Feb 70, 91st Cong, 2d sess (hereafter cited as H. Rpt, "Progress of the Pacification Program").

The United States was particularly interested in the strengthening and expansion of police forces in Vietnam. President Nixon had expressed interest in this subject, and Secretary Laird discussed the matter with President Thieu during his visit to Vietnam in March. President Thieu assured Mr. Laird of his determination to establish police forces in the villages.[37]

The goal for the NP in 1969 was to increase its strength from 78,000 to approximately 92,000, but by mid-year the NP had actually declined to 76,800. The decrease resulted from attrition and the effect of the RVN mobilization decree, which restricted NP recruitment to men over 35. The Republic of Vietnam authorized in September 1969 the transfer of 13,000 men from the RVNAF. Nevertheless, the NP strength on 31 December had reached only 85,200, just seven thousand more than at the beginning of the year.[38]

The Chieu Hoi program had been persuading members of the Viet Cong to return to the government side since 1963. The 1969 RVN Pacification and Development Plan set a goal of 20,000 Hoi Chanh. Despite a slight decline during the 1969 Tet campaign, progress was above expectations. As a consequence, the Republic of Vietnam raised the goal to 25,000 and eventually to 29,600. By mid-year the number of ralliers had already reached 20,924, and by the end of the year 47,023. The great majority of these returnees came from the Delta, where authorities attributed the outstanding success of the program to the expansion of security into contested and VC-controlled areas of the countryside. The closing weeks of 1969, however, saw a slight fall in the number of Hoi Chanh. This trend continued into 1970 as the Republic of Vietnam slowed its expansion into VC territory.[39]

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37. (S) Memo of Conv, SecDef et al., and Pres Thieu et al., Saigon, 8 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/463, 8 Apr 69, JMF 911/075 (CY 69).

38. (C) MACV Material for CJCS, 20 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/509, 24 Jul 69, JMF 911/080 (17 Jul 69). (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, Mar 70, JCS Hist Div files. (U) H. Rpt, "Progress of the Pacification Program."

39. (S-GP 4) CAG 2-69, "Analytical Supplement to Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia (U)," 15 Jul 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 69. (C) MACV Material for CJCS, 20 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/590, 24 Jul 69, JMF 911/080 (17 Jul 69). (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, Mar 70, JCS HIst Div files.

After a period of indoctrination at a Chieu Hoi Center, each Hoi Chanh was given the option of returning to his home village if it was secure, of going to a Chieu Hoi resettlement village, or going elsewhere to an area of his choice. He was also given a chance to serve with the Republic of Vietnam. Under the "Turnabout" program, the government sent groups of volunteer Hoi Chanh (known as Armed Propaganda Teams, or APTs) into contested areas or back to their local villages to induce further ralliers. Another employment of Hoi Chanh, which made use of their intimate knowledge of the enemy at the local level, was as members of US or RVNAF combat units, where they helped to search out enemy supply caches, to interrogate captives and suspects, and to identify members of the Viet Cong. By December 1969, some 2,245 of these "Kit Carson Scouts" were serving with allied forces in South Vietnam. In mid-1969, Mr. Colby proposed to the Republic of Vietnam the recruitment of PF platoons directly from the Chieu Hoi centers as a possible means of easing the overcrowding of these centers. This proposal produced much discussion, but no final action in 1969.[40]

The US Embassy in Saigon pointed out that many of the Chieu Hoi ralliers might better be described as refugees rather than enemy soldiers who had abandoned the fight. Embassy officials believed that perhaps as many as 50 percent of the ralliers were refugees, persons who had served the VC for a period of a month or so as laborers or guerrillas, who did not bring any weapons with them, and who had been induced to rally by a third person who received a financial reward for bringing them in. Moreover, little was known about the ralliers after they left the Chieu Hoi centers. Many reportedly returned to their hamlets, where they might again be impressed by the VC, making them eligible for a second rally. There was also abuse of the Third Party Award Program, under which the government paid rewards for inducing VC members to defect. Numerous reports of collusion between prospective ralliers and third parties for sharing of the rewards led to the termination of the program in November 1969.[41]

Other vital aspects of pacification were the establishment of local rural government and the resettlement of refugees.

40. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, p. VIII-67. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VIII-56.

41. (S-GP 4) ODASD(SA) SEA Analysis Rpt, Jun 69, pp. 31, 32, JMF 911/337 (Jan 69) sec 1c. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VIII-60.

The Republic of Vietnam held elections in 749 villages and 4,461 hamlets in March and June 1969, with voter turnout averaging 89 percent. In September 1969, the RVN sponsored elections in another 147 villages and 933 hamlets. By the end of December HES figures showed that more than 2,000 of 2,117 villages and 9,800 of 10,706 hamlets had elected officials.[42]

At the beginning of 1969, there were about 1,328,500 registered refugees in South Vietnam. The 1969 Pacification and Development Plan called for the reduction of this number to less than one million, even while making allowance for the possibility that additional refugees might be generated in the course of the year. The first half of 1969 saw a steady reduction in the number of refugees to a total of roughly 1,200,000. Accelerated resettlement under the 1969 APC reduced the total to 536,800 by the end of October. In November and December the reduction continued and by the end of the year only 268,300 refugees remained on government rolls, far surpassing the original 1969 goal. Overall during the year 488,200 refugees were returned to their native villages and 586,300 were resettled in new areas, totaling 1,074,500 either returned or resettled.[43]

The Republic of Vietnam considered the psychological and information effort as an integral part in the development of political support. The 1969 Plan set no specific goals for this area, but rather announced an increased effort to explain the 1969 pacification programs to the entire population, particularly in rural areas, and to encourage the people to participate actively in local government and in pacification efforts. However, the information program in 1969 was not a success. General Abrams called the information program overly mechanical and not "infected with the dynamism which had caught the rest of the pacification program." He thought it had not really reached the people who counted, the uncommitted peasants and workers to whom the VC had potential

42. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-69, Nov 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 5A. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VIII-39 - VIII-41.

43. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, Mar 70, JCS Hist Div files. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VIII-88 - VIII-92.

appeal. A Joint Staff evaluation of the 1969 information program stated that a great deal more needed to be done; it cited as an example the unsatisfactory status of the village and hamlet information cadre who had received no pay since April 1969.[44]

The increased security achieved in the countryside during 1969 stimulated the development of the rural economy by facilitating improvements in transportation. During the course of the year, the Republic of Vietnam completed 161 kilometers of roads, while it built 2,400 meters of new bridging and repaired about 1,300 meters. By the end of the year, 3,785 kilometers of roads, 546 of railroad, and 1,754 of waterways were open. Trade and traffic increased between country and town, and press accounts told of highways clogged with trucks and cars.[45]

In the production of rice, the Republic of Vietnam hoped not only to attain self-sufficiency but to resume its status as an exporter of the crop, by increasing annual production from five to six million tons. The government set as a goal for the year the planting of 200,000 hectares in "miracle" rice, a five-fold increase over the 44,000 hectares planted in 1968. In fact, 240,000 hectares were so planted during 1969. Other steps to increase agricultural production were taken. In 1969, the government made 400 loans totaling over four billion piasters to assist agricultural and fishery projects. The government also distributed plows, pumps, and other farm equipment in increasing numbers and attempted to import tractors and other mechanized farm machinery. Because of the improved security conditions, the Republic of Vietnam was able to remove certain restrictions on fishing in coastal waters that had originally been imposed to prevent enemy infiltration.[46]

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44. (C) Briefing for SecDef and Party, MACV Hq, by Amb Colby, 7 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2572/448, 14 Mar 69, JMF 911/075 (14 Mar 69) sec 1. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 1285 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 28 Jan 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 70. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, Mar 70, JCS Hist Div files. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, p. VIII-78.

45. NY Times, 16 Oct 69, 1. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 1285 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 28 Jan 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 70.

46. (TS-GP 1) CAG-VSUM 1-70, Mar 70, JCS Hist Div files. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VIII-80 - VIII-81, VIII-88. (U) H. Rpt, "Progress of the Pacification Program."

Despite the assurances made by President Thieu, one area of rural economic development in which the Republic of Vietnam made little progress in 1969 was land reform. In a country where landless tenants tilled 60 percent of the land, there was large opportunity for the government to offer a genuine reform program to gain the support of the tenant farmers. Land reform plans for South Vietnam dated back to 1954, but little had been accomplished. In a New Year's speech, President Thieu promised to assist the people in acquiring property "through a truly vigorous and revolutionary land reform program," and in May the Republic of Vietnam announced the distribution of 147,200 hectares of government-owned rice land, much of it expropriated from French owners. But only 74,700 hectares had been transferred by the end of 1969 in spite of a special effort made during the 1969 APC.[47]

On 2 July 1969, President Thieu presented the SVN National Assembly with a revolutionary new proposal. Under the title "Land-to-the-Tiller," the government would give one million hectares of privately owned land free of charge to the tenants who currently worked it, with the government compensating the absentee landlords for their expropriated property. The program would virtually prohibit anyone from owning more land than he or his family could cultivate, and would give title to any tenant who filed application for the land he worked. The United States, having pressured the Republic of Vietnam for years to implement an effective land reform policy, was highly pleased with the proposed program. President Nixon at the Midway Conference in June had pledged $10 million for the purpose, and he wrote President Thieu a personal letter reaffirming US support and assistance for the program. The "Land-to-the Tiller Program" held great promise for the future, but it did not begin until well into 1970.[48]

Thus broadly viewed, US officials in Vietnam as well as the RVN had cause to feel considerable satisfaction with the progress of the pacification program by the end of 1969. If available statistics and indications were reliable, the

47. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VIII-83 - VIII-85.

48. NY Times, 28 Jun 69, 3; 17 Mar 70, 12; 25 Mar 70, 15; 27 Mar 70, 3. (U) Ltr, Pres Nixon to Pres Thieu, 11 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1969, pp. VIII-86 - VIII-87.

situation should grow steadily brighter. This optimism over the progress and future prospects of the pacification program was shared by a congressional subcommittee that visited Vietnam in January 1970. Three members of the House Committee on Armed Services reported that the pacification program "is going in the right direction and has made some significant progress down a long and difficult road." The subcommittee noted that anyone who had followed reports on Vietnam over the years had learned the value of skepticism. Nevertheless the members found that the signs for the future were good, stating that the "leadership at the top" appeared to be giving increased attention to pacification and exerting a genuine effort to make government more responsive at the local level.[49]

The two US officials most directly responsible for US support of the pacification program, General Abrams and Ambassador Colby, were particularly pleased with the results in 1969. General Abrams believed that the Republic of Vietnam during the year had taken the strategic and political initiative from the enemy, and both of them cited the growing momentum of the program and the beginning of political awareness and cohesiveness among the population. Their experience with overly optimistic claims of success led them to add that the progress had yet to be tested by a sustained enemy attack. Nevertheless, noting the continued high priority placed on the program by President Thieu, General Abrams predicted that the current level of pacification would be maintained in 1970.[50]

Policy Review in 1970

After the success in the pacification effort during 1969, neither the White House nor the Defense Department planned any major evaluations of overall pacification policy in the early months of 1970. Secretary Laird's 15-page report to the President on his February 1970 visit to Vietnam scarcely mentioned pacification. The only study in progress at the

49. (U) H. Rpt, "Progress on the Pacification Program."
50. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 13589 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 19 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 1285 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 28 Jan 70, same file, Jan 70. (S-GP 4) CM-5304-70 to SecDef, 18 Jun 70, same file, Jun 70.

beginning of the year was one undertaken by the Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG), which the National Security Council had created in September 1969 to conduct systematic analyses of US programs and activities in Vietnam. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was a member of this group along with the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, the Under Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Director of Central Intelligence.[51]

In an effort that extended well into the spring of 1970, the VSSG had under continuous development a report on "The Situation in the Countryside." The objective was not only to understand the situation in the countryside and the factors affecting it but to develop a methodology for predicting changes in the situation. The study evaluated the pacification program and its relation to military developments and other factors. Draft versions of this report emphasized the interrelated nature of military and pacification operations. "If the enemy gets the upper hand in the main force war, he is more capable of preventing GVN control gains and causing the GVN to lose control [of the population] . . . . The GVN can also capitalize on the mutually reinforcing aspects of the control and main force wars."[52]

The VSSG figures showed a rapid expansion of government control in 1969, followed by a slowdown in the rate of expansion in 1970. The study revealed in addition the essentially military nature of the RVN control of the civilian population. It concluded that "the GVN has made little social or economic progress, at least of the sort that might be relevant to increasing its political support and viability. This is not immediately important in terms of its ability to exercise a high degree of physical control over the people. For the longer run, however, these failures make the control gains tenuous."[53]

51. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, February 10-14, 1970," 17 Feb 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 70. (TS) NSDM 23, 16 Sep 69, JMF 001 (CY 1969) NSDMs.
52. (S) VSSG, "The Situation in the Countryside," 10 Jan 69 [i.e., 70], Office for NSC Affairs files, J-5.
53. (S) VSSG, "The Situation in the Countryside," 15 Apr 70, Office for NSC Affairs files, J-5.

"The Situation in the Countryside" never reached a final form, and it was not submitted to the NSC for formal consideration. Like the responses to NSSM 19, the information in this VSSG study was thus not considered by any higher policymaking body.[54]

In another forum, however, Senator J. William Fulbright directed attention to the overall pacification policy. In February and again in March 1970, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee under his chairmanship held hearings on the US role in pacification. The Committee heard testimony from Ambassador Colby, from John Paul Vann, Deputy for CORDS, IV Corps, and from others involved in pacification in Vietnam.

The two main witnesses provided the Committee with a picture of growing strength in the program. Ambassador Colby reported that the Republic of Vietnam was "organized to conduct a people's war and is showing the leadership and drive to create a better and safer society for its citizens." He acknowledged that the success of pacification in the future depended on the participation of the people as well as the government of South Vietnam. Mr. Vann, with seven years of experience in Vietnam, told the Committee that he had been dissatisfied with the manner in which the war was conducted until 1968. But he indicated that with the changes made since then on both the allied and enemy sides, "our objectives, and coincidentally the objectives of the majority of the Vietnamese people, will be achieved."[55]

In the first four months of 1970, gains in pacification came at a slower rate than in 1969. From December 1969 to January 1970, the number of hamlets under government control increased by only 0.7 percent. For January 1970, the HES rating actually showed a drop from the previous month, but this resulted from the adoption of a revised Hamlet Evaluation System; when measured by the old system there was still a slight gain. Under the revised system, small gains of 0.6 and 1.2 percent were reported for February and March, respectively, but a drop of 0.8 percent was recorded in April.

54. JCS records reveal neither a final draft of "The Situation in the Countryside" nor any indication of its disposition by the VSSG.

55. Hearings, Vietnam, Policy and Prospects, 1970: Civil Operations and Development Support Program, S. Com on Foreign Relations, 91st Cong, 2d sess, pp. 13-14, 98.

On 26 May 1970, Secretary Laird asked General Wheeler to have COMUSMACV and CINCPAC prepare a plan to regain momentum. The impending return of allied units from Cambodia, the Secretary believed, would provide an opportunity to reverse the unfavorable trend.[56]

General Wheeler forwarded the COMUSMACV reply to the Secretary's request on 18 June 1970. The field commander acknowledged that pacification then presented a spotty picture and suggested that it reflected a change in the nature of the pacification struggle. In many places the excitement of expanding into new territory, with measurable success, was being replaced by the routine and inconclusiveness of the activities necessary to solidify the pacification gains made in 1969. The President and the national leadership had been distracted by new economic, political, and international problems, while the Communists had just now begun to oppose the pacification effort effectively. General Abrams reported that most of the goal set for Phase I of the 1970 Pacification and Development Plan would not be met. But the Republic of Vietnam was aware of the problems involved and was taking steps to correct them in a Special Pacification Campaign. He recommended that US forces "move to include development-type activities within our range of priorities in order to consolidate and sustain gains made." He also noted that "security-related programs such as improvement of RVNAF, Territorial Security, PHOENIX, PSDF, and the expansion and improvement of the National Police will continue to receive high priority."

The Chairman added that the "Pacification Program is critical to the future of Vietnam and must remain essentially Vietnamese in character if it is to be successful." He suggested seven specific areas that needed continuing emphasis. Among them were the PHOENIX Program, improvement in the quality of RVN leadership and reduction of corruption, expansion of territorial forces, and fulfillment of the "Land-to-the Tiller" program.[57]

56. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. VIII-16 - VIII-19. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Momentum of Pacification," 26 May 70, Att to JCS 2472/628, 28 May 70, JMF 911/319 (26 May 70).

57. (S-GP 4) CM-5304-70 to SecDef, 18 Jun 70, same file.

Of the seven areas suggested by General Wheeler, the only one to receive serious attention in Washington was the PHOENIX Program. Although the definitions of VCI were tightened and there was steady reporting of VCI neutralizations throughout 1970, performance continued to lag behind expectations. On 24 June 1970, Mr. David Packard, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, asked the Chairman to consider the problem. The conflict in Vietnam was becoming increasingly more political, he said, making an effective effort to eliminate the VCI "essential" to a wide range of RVN programs. He asked General Wheeler for recommendations that might stimulate the PHOENIX Program. The Assistant Secretary (ISA), Mr. G. Warren Nutter, followed up this memorandum with a request for certain information. What was being done, he asked, to improve the leadership of the PHOENIX Program? To make it better known? To ensure that VCI members were incarcerated, and that those released from prison did not return to the VC? To provide better exchange of information at various levels?[58]

In reply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary of Defense on 15 August 1970 that the weaknesses of PHOENIX had been fully recognized in both Washington and Saigon. In the past, the program had been somewhat neglected and too many separate agencies had been involved. In response to Mr. Nutter's specific questions, they supplied detailed information furnished by COMUSMACV and CINCPAC. Among their recommendations for improvement of the program were the following: that the Federal Bureau of Investigation be asked to provide a team of experts to advise on the neutralization of important VCI; that it be made clear to both US and RVN agencies that the PHOENIX Program was fully as important as the tactical operations; that the US Army provide more experienced officers to assist the PHOENIX Program; and that COMUSMACV and the US Embassy in Saigon strongly urge the Republic of Vietnam to institute a number of specific reforms.[59]

58. (S-GP 4) Memo, DSecDef to CJCS, "Phung Hoang/Phoenix Program," 24 Jun 70, Att to JCS 2472/635, 26 Jun 70; (S-GP 3) Memo, ASD(ISA) to DJS, "The Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program," 15 Jul 70, Att to JCS 2472/635-1, 15 Jul 70; JMF 911/319 (24 Jun 70).

59. (S-GP 4) JCSM-394-70 to SecDef, 15 Aug 70, Encl to JCS 2472/635-2, 4 Aug 70, same file.

The last of these recommendations received the full endorsement of the Secretary of Defense on 7 November 1970. At the same time Mr. Laird directed that General Abrams set up a special review group headed by Ambassador Colby to take "a fresh, unconstrained look that goes to the heart of the problem and develop an action program designed to solve the basic GVN and US deficiencies on a top priority basis." He stressed the extreme importance of improving internal security in South Vietnam and agreed with the Joint Chiefs of Staff that neutralizing the VCI was as important as tactical operations.[60]

The special review group reported its findings to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 12 December 1970. The members concluded that while the VCI continued to be a serious threat, it had been reduced in effectiveness. The PHOENIX Program, however, had contributed little to this reduction. Some of the problems the program faced were "in the nature of facts of life, e.g., the military one-year tour and the civilian staffing limitation." The review group offered 27 specific recommendations for improvement, but warned that "no dramatic and sweeping actions can promise a rapid change in the overall atmosphere." But the government and the people of South Vietnam needed to understand better the nature of the VCI and the necessity of operations to protect the nation from it. The Republic of Vietnam must make a sustained effort to select and train the proper personnel. "This effort should be encompassed," they said, "in a program to build a professional and responsive National Police to contribute over the years to the internal security of South Vietnam." On 17 December Ambassador Colby briefed Secretary Laird on the results of the study.[61]

Pacification in 1970

The conduct of the Pacification Program in South Vietnam during 1970 followed very closely the pattern of 1969. The objectives were similar, the programs were very nearly the same, and a steady refinement of these programs produced by

60. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "PHUNG HOANG/Phoenix Program," 7 Nov 70, Att to JCS 2472/635-3, 9 Nov 70, same file.

61. (S) Fact Book, DEPCORDS, "Internal Security in South Vietnam," 12 Dec 70, cited in (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. VIII-48 - VIII-54. NY Times, 11 Dec 70, 8. (U) 1st N/H of JCS 2472/635-3, 23 Sep 71, JMF 911/319 (24 Jun 70).

the end of the year a higher level of security for South Vietnam as a whole. The 1970 Pacification and Development Plan became operative on 1 January of that year. The plan originally divided the year into three phases, the first ending on 30 June 1970 and the second on 31 October. The last two months of the year were designated as a "supplementary" phase to serve as a link with the 1971 plan. In May 1970, President Thieu initiated a Special Pacification and Development Plan to cover the July-October 1970 period in an attempt to stimulate enthusiasm for and effort in the pacification program. Subsequently, the supplementary phase of the 1970 plan was extended through 28 February 1971 in order to bring pacification planning into alignment with the Vietnamese calendar.[62]

The 1970 plans called for territorial security levels high enough to bring 100 percent of the villages and hamlets into the relatively secure category, with 90 percent enjoying full security. At the same time a new set of criteria was introduced into the HES that made those goals more difficult to achieve. The changes were made to improve the accuracy and reliability of the HES, but they also produced a drop in the relatively secure rating from 92.7 in December 1969 under the old system to 87.9 in January 1970 under the new. As mentioned above, territorial security made only small gains in February and March and then suffered a drop in April. Thereafter, the Republic of Vietnam managed to reverse the

62. (C) RVN Pacification and Development Plan for 1970, n.d., JMF 911/319 (26 Jun 69) sec 2. (C-GP 4) Memo for Record, Amb William E. Colby, Dep COMUSMACV/CORDS, "Presidential Meetings with Corps Commanders and Province Chiefs (22 and 24 June 1970)," 25 Jun 70, Att to DJSM-981-70 to CJCS, 16 Jul 70, JMF 911/319 (25 Jun 70). (S-GP 1) RVN, Presidential Guidance No. 31, "1970 Pacification and Development Plan," 8 May 70; (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 53290 to CG XXIV Corps et al., 12 Oct 70, cited in (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. VIII-8 - VIII-11. (S) Memo, "Current Status of the Pacification Program in South Vietnam," 7 Oct 70, Att to Memo, Dep DCI to CJCS, 7 Oct 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep-Oct 70.

trend, and there were slight gains each successive month throughout the remainder of the year. By December 1970, 95.1 percent of the hamlet population lived in relatively secure areas and 84.6 percent in fully secure areas. Though showing an improvement, these figures were still short of the ambitious 1970 goals.[63]

The increasing level of security was provided by larger and better local forces. The Regional, the Popular, and the People's Self-Defense Forces all made substantial gains in 1970. They carried an increasing burden of territorial security as US forces withdrew and the ARVN took over the "big war."

The Joint General Staff proposed to strengthen the RF and the PF by authorizing for FY 1970 the strength increases originally planned for FY 1971. Secretary of Defense Laird approved this acceleration and ordered the necessary equipment to be supplied from existing command resources and from stocks left behind by departing US units. Regional and Popular Force strength rose by more than 59,000 men in 1970 to a total of almost 534,000. The People's Self-Defense Force demonstrated an even larger gain in reported numbers. In December 1969 there were 3,200,000 men and women organized in the PSDF. At the end of 1970 there were almost 3,900,000, of whom some 2,900,000 were trained and 445,000 armed. There was some doubt as to the accuracy of the figures and of the military effectiveness of these units, but the increase over 1969 remained impressive. In 1970 the PSDF began organizing key interteams (KIT) of 35 men each who were trained at PF training centers and then returned to their hamlets to instruct other PSDF members. By the end of the year, over 434,000 PSDF combat members had been organized into KITs.

Unlike the PSDF, the National Police continued to suffer from manpower problems in 1970. The Republic of Vietnam did succeed in stationing half of the force in district-level or lower offices, but the goal of 108,000 NP was not even approached. The infusion of 13,000 men from the RVNAF, begun in 1969, was completed in June, bringing the NP to 88,400.

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63. The material on the conduct of pacification in 1970 has been drawn from Chapter VIII of (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, and from (TS-GP 1) Plans & Analysis Div, J-3, PAD-VSUM 1-71, "A Periodic Summary of Progress Toward Vietnamizing the War," 24 Mar 71, JCS Hist Div files, unless otherwise stated.

No progress was made in the expansion of the NP during the latter half of the year. In fact, by the end of 1970 the force was still more than 20,000 men below authorized strength, with 87,900 on its rolls.

The loss of momentum noted by the Secretary of Defense in early 1970 was particularly apparent in the Chieu Hoi Program. Returnee rates were well below the levels that produced 47,000 ralliers in 1969. The numbers rose and fell in response to the tactical situation, falling during Tet and rising again during RVN operations in Cambodia. Phase I produced only 17,200 ralliers against the 30 June goal of 25,000. By the end of the year the total had risen to 32,700 returnees, a sizable number although still well below the previous year.

One reason cited for the Chieu Hoi drop was the lower overall level of combat activity in 1970. Exposure to government forces gave individuals in the enemy ranks a chance to rally, and the opportunity decreased when the forces remained out of contact. Another possible reason was a tightening of the enemy organization; each VC member had become responsible for the conduct of his immediate associates.

As part of the PHOENIX Program, the Republic of Vietnam had begun a poster campaign to identify and to facilitate the capture of important VC late in 1969. In spite of this new activity, PHOENIX suffered the same lag as the pacification effort as a whole. In the first quarter of 1970, neutralizations were well below the 1969 level. Part of the decrease resulted from a new, more stringent definition of neutralization. In order to be counted, a captured VCI member must also be sentenced to a jail term of at least a year. The use of this new definition did not end the practice of releasing VCI members without a trial, but it prevented them from being counted toward the quota in such cases. The government was still having problems in judicial administration, and long delays before trial were common. Nevertheless the number of neutralizations increased, especially during the special and supplementary pacification campaigns in the latter half of the year. December set a monthly record of 2,600; for the year there were 22,300 neutralizations, compared to 19,500 the year before.

The three-year terms of local government officials elected in 1967 expired in 1970. During the year, elections were held for these offices and elections occurred for the first time in some other hamlets and villages. As a result, 2,100 villages and 10,200 hamlets, or 97 percent, had elected governments at the end of the year. Seventy-five percent of the registered voters participated in these local elections. In June, elections were held for provincial and municipal councils to fill 554 available seats. Only a small number of VC terrorist incidents occurred around the polling places, and enemy forces mounted no concerted effort to interfere with the elections.

After the large drop in refugee totals during 1969, only relatively small improvements took place in 1970. In fact, the number of Vietnamese considered refugees rose to 428,000 at the end of 1970 compared to 268,000 the year before. This apparent increase was the result of a change in the reporting method, under which those en route to their villages were added to the refugee rolls. In figures more nearly consistent with 1969 data, the number of refugees dropped during 1970 to 214,000. More than 525,000 persons were processed and removed from refugee status in 1970.

The lower refugee levels attained in 1969 and 1970 compared to earlier years also reflected an effort to avoid making refugees out of the people. On 8 February 1970 General Abrams re-emphasized to his commands the importance of not creating refugees. He said:

> The policy of the GVN and this command requires that the relocation of people to regroup them for greater security or to remove them from enemy control be kept to an absolute minimum. Such relocations generally work against US and GVN policy objectives. Not only do the people become a burden on the Government, which must house, feed, and resettle them, but their allegiance or potential allegiance to the GVN is undermined by the hardships which they undergo.[64]

64. (S-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to CG, DMAC, 8 Feb 70, cited in (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. VIII-75, VIII-77.

The various psychological and information programs were pursued without any great enthusiasm again in 1970. There were few changes in the programs for economic development. The "Land-to-the-Tiller" program was passed in March 1970, and 345,000 hectares were scheduled to be transferred by December. But President Thieu did not transfer the first parcel of land until late in August. Landlords, particularly loyal absentee military men, resisted the program, and only slightly more than a third (125,000 hectares) of the 1970 goal was reached. Miracle rice planting rose from 250,000 to 306,000 hectares, well below the goal of 500,000 hectares. The more favorable but unquantifiable elements of economic activity were summarized by Ambassador Colby: "the re-opened roads, busy markets and solvent farmers, especially in the populous delta . . . marked the atmosphere resulting from expanded security, revived production and reopened circulation."

Growing RVN Presence in the Countryside

In 1969 and 1970 considerable progress had been made in pacification. Nearly 42,000 VCI had been neutralized under the PHOENIX Program; almost 80,000 Hoi Chanh had rallied to the government; more than 1,600,000 refugees were removed from the rolls; the RF had expanded from 221,000 to 283,000 and the PF from 173,000 to 250,000; the PSDF had grown from 1,000,000 to 3,900,000. More and more of the necessary pacification tasks were performed by RF, PF, and PSDF personnel; even the National Police had increased from 77,000 in June 1969 to 88,000 and had distributed more of its men into the countryside; 97 percent of the hamlets and villages had an elected government; and 125,000 hectares had been distributed in "Land-to-the-Tiller." The Hamlet Evaluation System showed a steady increase in the proportion of relatively secure population, from 76.3 percent at the end of December 1968 to 95.1 percent at the end of December 1970.

General Abrams looked confidently ahead to 1971. As he told CINCPAC in February of that year:

> The GVN seems aware of [its] problems, and its government-wide and carefully structured 1971 . . . plan contemplates a continued drive to improve territorial security, a major effort in internal security through a strengthened National Police and a more effective PHOENIX Program, a continued program of political development from the local communities upward, and an extensive effort at local economic and social development throughout the country to convince the population of the better life that lies ahead through the GVN . . . President Thieu is obviously resolved to press [pacification] as a part of his overall program of demonstrating the increased security and benefits his administration has brought to Vietnam.[65]

Despite this hopeful outlook, there remained some unresolved doubts and questions concerning the effectiveness of the pacification programs. Experience indicated that the degree of success corresponded very closely to allied military activity. For example, pacification regained momentum in 1970 only after the enemy had been engaged during the Cambodian cross-border operation, and the July-October Special Pacification Campaign successes coincided with the height of a campaign against enemy sanctuaries in Vietnam.

There were other forces at work that did not seem to be adequately evaluated by the statistical tools at hand. In III Corps, population security had been largely dependent upon the presence of friendly troops on the avenues of approach to the north and west of Saigon. In II Corps the high level had sometimes been achieved by forcing people into secure areas. The Central Intellignece Agency reported that the prime cause of the reported pacification progress in 1970 was the lack of enemy military activity. "Significant intangibles such as the impact of terrorism and threats on popular attitudes, enemy proselyting efforts and VC penetrations," according to the CIA report, "are not

65. (Ø) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 9 Feb 71, JCS IN 98932.

measured by HES to any acceptable degree, even though they might have decisive impact on long-run allied objectives."[66]

Nonetheless, with a minimum of supervision from the Joint Chiefs of Staff or any other Washington agency, the Republic of Vietnam, aided by US advisers, succeeded in extending its control over the countryside. Critics could and did reveal weaknesses and shortcomings in individual programs; they pointed out the subjective nature of the HES and the possible fragility of pacification gains. But the conclusion seemed inescapable that in spite of a diminishing US presence, the Republic of Vietnam had established a firmer control in the countryside than it had exercised in many years.

66. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 13589 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 19 Oct 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 69. (S) Memo, "Current Status of the Pacification Program in SVN," 7 Oct 70, Att to Memo, Dep DCI to CJCS, 7 Oct 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep-Oct 70.

Chapter 12

NEGOTIATIONS TO END THE CONFLICT, 1969-1970

The Setting

Almost from the beginning of its combat involvement in Vietnam in 1965, the United States sought a negotiated settlement of the war. Its leaders had presented appeals for peace in talks with numerous world figures and heads of international organizations and had arranged private contacts with North Vietnamese officials. Hanoi, however, steadfastly rejected all overtures. Finally, on 31 March 1968, President Johnson restricted the bombing of North Vietnam to the area immediately north of the Demilitarized Zone where enemy buildup was threatening allied positions. This action was taken, he told the American public, in an attempt to get talks started on a settlement of the conflict. On 3 April Hanoi declared it was ready to establish preliminary contact with US representatives. Following the exchange of numerous proposals, the United States and North Vietnam finally agreed on Paris as the site for the talks. There, on 13 May 1968, under the great crystal chandeliers of the ballroom of the old Majestic Hotel, representatives of the two nations met for the first time. Ambassador W. Averell Harriman headed the US delegation, and former foreign minister Xuan Thuy led the North Vietnamese. The Republic of Vietnam did not participate in these talks but did send observers.[1]

During the succeeding five months, the bilateral Paris talks made no progress. The primary issue was the US bombing of North Vietnam. Xuan Thuy wanted an unrestricted cessation while the United States insisted on certain conditions--observance of the DMZ, absence of attack on major South Vietnamese cities, and inclusion of the Republic of Vietnam in the negotiations. Finally, on 27 October 1968, an agreement was reached. In return for a bombing halt, North Vietnam consented in a secret minute to begin serious discussions toward peace in Vietnam. The United States made clear that continuation of the bombing halt would depend on respect of the DMZ and the South Vietnamese cities. Four days later, on 31 October, President Johnson publicly announced the end of all bombardment of North Vietnam effective

1. (TS-GP 1) JCS Hist Div, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968, pp. 49-23 - 49-25, 53-1 - 53-9.

at 0800 (Washington time) the following morning. Expanded talks, he said, would begin on 6 November and include both the Republic of Vietnam and National Liberation Front (NLF). He also declared that the talks could not continue if North Vietnam abused the DMZ or shelled South Vietnamese cities.[2]

The United States had consulted the Republic of Vietnam on the bombing halt, but President Thieu would not approve the agreement. He adamantly refused to engage in talks that included the NLF. To do so, he believed, would imply official recognition and could lead to the formation of a coalition government in South Vietnam. A five-point program, broadcast by the Front on 4 November, tended to confirm President Thieu's fears. This program provided for the removal of the current Saigon government, formation of a broad coalition government, and the holding of free elections. In his 31 October announcement, President Johnson had stated that attendance of the NLF representatives at the talks in no way involved recognition. After receiving further US assurances on this point, President Thieu announced on 26 November 1968 that the Republic of Vietnam would join the peace talks.[3]

The RVN delegation, led by Vice President Ky, arrived in Paris on 8 December, but procedural issues still had to be resolved. The questions of flags, name plates, and the shape of the table all became obstacles. The issue of the table was particularly troublesome. Should it be square, oblong, round, or oval? One table or two? These questions reflected the contention among the participants about the nature of the talks. The Republic of Vietnam insisted they were two-sided, objecting to any arrangement that might imply recognition of the NLF. The United States supported that position, but North Vietnam maintained that the NLF was an equal party and, hence, the talks were four-sided. Finally, after long and tedious discussions, agreement was reached on a circular unmarked table, flanked by two smaller rectangular tables, for secretarial purposes, at opposite points on the circle. Now the contending parties could speak of either two- or four-sided conference as suited their preferences. Speaking order was also arranged, with the South Vietnamese taking the lead for the US/RVN side, and it was decided on 18 January 1969 to hold the first plenary session

2. Ibid., Chs. 53 and 54.
3. Ibid., pp. 54-10 - 54-12, 54-16 - 54-17. NY Times, 5 Nov 68, 16. Dept of State Bulletin, 16 Dec 68, pp. 621-622.

the following week. Thus, by the time the Nixon Administration took office, the only progress toward negotiating a peace was agreement on procedural matters.[4]

The Nixon Administration Begins Development of a Negotiating Position

Richard M. Nixon had called for a settlement in Vietnam while seeking the presidency in 1968, but throughout the campaign and during the period between the election and his inauguration, he consistently refused to comment on how he would proceed with the negotiations. He opposed an immediate US withdrawal or a coalition government in South Vietnam, but he would go no further. Public pronouncements about his intended actions, he maintained, might jeopardize the discussions currently under way. But Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, designated by the President-elect to be his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, was not so reticent. He published an article about the Vietnam negotiations that appeared in the January 1969 issue of Foreign Affairs. He charged that there was a lack of US planning for the negotiations and a US inclination to deal with cases as they arose. He called for an "agreed concept of ultimate goals and how to achieve them."[5]

Dr. Kissinger's criticism of the absence of US planning for negotiations somewhat overstated the case. With the North Vietnamese agreement in October 1968 to begin serious talks, the responsible US agencies in Washington, Paris, and Saigon had begun consideration of varying approaches to the negotiations. Ambassador Bunker had submitted to Washington a series of planning papers developed in conjunction with COMUSMACV, and General Wheeler supported these positions in Washington discussions. The US delegation in Paris had also sent back positions on various aspects of the negotiations. There was a lack of agreement, however, within the US Government on the issues of mutual withdrawal and verification.

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4. (S) Msgs; Saigon 45262 to State, 20 Dec 68, JCS IN 81817; Saigon 45344 to State, 21 Dec 68, JCS IN 85560; Saigon 45839 to State, 31 Dec 68, JCS IN 98798; Saigon 59 to State, 2 Jan 69, JCS IN 11558; Saigon 154 to State, 4 Jan 69, JCS IN 15070; Saigon 527 to State, 10 Jan 69, JCS IN 25386. (S) Msg, Paris 788 to State, 18 Jan 69, JCS IN 42584.

5. Henry A. Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," Foreign Affairs, Jan 69, pp. 211-234.

The Paris delegation stressed the need for flexibility, while the military commanders, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, counseled adherence to an unyielding stand. With respect to a cease-fire, both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Department of State believed any agreement must include verified NVN withdrawal from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Analysts in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, on the other hand, concluded that a cease-fire could, in itself, facilitate a political settlement. As a result, when the Johnson Administration left office, there was no final, definitive US negotiating position.[6]

Upon his entry into office, President Nixon and his advisers began an immediate review of the US negotiating strategy. As related in Chapter 1, on 21 January the President directed a thorough review of the entire Vietnam situation, addressing a series of questions to concerned departments and agencies. The first four questions related to the negotiating "environment." Why, the President wanted to know, had North Vietnam come to Paris? He also asked about the impact of possible outcomes in Vietnam on other Southeast Asian countries, the influence of Moscow and Peking on Hanoi, and the existence and possible significance of factions within the NVN leadership.[7]

The preparation, submission, and refinement of the answers to the Vietnam questionnaire have been described in Chapter 1. Negotiations were not a matter of direct JCS concern or expertise, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had little to contribute to this area of the review. They thought that a number of purposes had brought the North Vietnamese to Paris, the most important being to secure a complete halt of the bombing in the north and to

6. (S) Msgs, Saigon 41539 and 43180 to State, 30 Oct and 7 Nov 68, JCS IN 78880 and 89554. (S) Msg, State 287493 to Saigon 14 Dec 68, JCS IN 72086. (S-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 020536ZDec 68, JCS IN 45199. (S-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 39647 to JCS, 3 Dec 68, JCS IN 47955. (S) SACSA PP 68, 6 Nov 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, MG Seignious to CJCS, 30 Nov 68; OCJCS file 091 Vietnam (Negotiations), 1 Oct-30 Nov 68. (S) "Brief of Paris Message on Mutual Withdrawal...with CINCPAC and COMUSMACV comments," n.d., J-5 Bamboo File. (S) Msg, Paris 25688 to State, 23 Dec 68, JCS IN 86440. (TS) J-5 Paper, "Vietnam: Cease Fire," 17 Dec 68, J-5 Working Files.

7. (S-GP 3) NSSM 1, 21 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2472/413, 22 Jan 69, JMF 911/399 (21 Jan 69) sec 1.

attempt to drive a wedge between the United States and the Republic of Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff declined to speculate on the impact of various Vietnam solutions on the rest of Southeast Asia, stating that it was necessary "to lean heavily on past national reactions to critical situations and overall evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of the nations of the area." They cited a lack of information on Soviet and Chinese influence over North Vietnam, but offered the general opinion that neither major Communist power was exerting serious pressure on Hanoi nor enjoyed the assured support of a stable faction with the NVN leadership.[8]

In the final consolidated interagency submission on the Vietnam questions, it was suggested that a variety of motives had brought North Vietnam to the Paris talks; weakness, however, was not one of them. The JCS opinion on Soviet and Chinese influence and factions was shared by most other elements of the US Government. Additionally, there was agreement that Peking opposed the negotiations, while the Soviet Union preferred an early negotiated settlement on terms as favorable as possible to Hanoi. There was no consensus, however, on the question of the impact of possible Vietnam solutions. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the questionnaire respondents divided generally into two groups. One was hopeful of the current and future prospects in Vietnam and included the military (COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and the US Embassy in Saigon; the other, comprising the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Department of State, was more skeptical. While not forecasting victory, the first group believed that the US negotiators should "know that the tides are favorable." The second group recognized that US negotiators were in a stronger position than previously, but considered a compromise settlement the only feasible outcome for Vietnam.[9]

Besides the Vietnam questionnaire, another review effort had been set in motion on the first full day of the Nixon Administration. On 21 January 1969, Dr. Kissinger

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8. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-58-69 to SecDef, App to JCS 2472/413-2, 1 Feb 69, same file, sec 2.

9. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to NSC Review Group, "NSSM 1 - Vietnam Questions," 14 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-6, 17 Mar 69; (TS-GP 3) Memo, NSC Staff to Vice Pres et al., "Revised Summary of Responses to NSSM 1: The Situation in Vietnam," 22 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/413-8, 24 Mar 69; same file, sec 5

circulated a paper on Vietnam alternatives to the members of the National Security Council, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Director of Central Intelligence; he scheduled it for discussion at a NSC meeting on 25 January. The study included three sections: alternative outcomes in Vietnam (assured RVN control of South Vietnam, mutual withdrawal with or without political accommodation, and territorial accommodation); alternative military strategies (continuation of current operations, actual or threatened escalation, or reduction of US forces); and negotiating and military strategies to attain alternative outcomes.[10]

The Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5), Joint Staff, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) prepared a critique of the alternatives paper for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense. This critique found it a basic problem that the paper dealt with Vietnam "in isolation from U.S. national interests and objectives in a worldwide sense." There was need for a determination of objectives and the development of broad negotiating options. Consequently, the staff members recommended to the Secretary and the Chairman that the paper be revised and extended prior to further consideration.[11]

The Joint Staff also prepared a separate point paper for the Chairman on negotiating objectives and strategy for use at the forthcoming NSC meeting. The Joint Staff listed the following as objectives: an effective cease-fire; verified withdrawal of all North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; verified cessation of infiltration; a substantial reduction in terrorism; prisoner repatriation; and restoration of the integrity of the Demilitarized Zone. Further, a US MAAG should be retained, necessary support for the RVNAF continued, and RVN sovereignty

10. (TS-GP 1) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to Vice Pres et al., "NSC Meeting, January 25, 1969," 21 Jan 69, Att to JCS 2472/415, 23 Jan 69, JMF 911/077 NSC (21 Jan 69). No evidence has been located to indicate who requested or prepared the study. It may have resulted from a meeting that Mr. Nixon had with key policy advisers on 28 December 1968. According to the NY Times, he assigned Dr. Kissinger the task of coordinating a paper on "realistic" options to be used in selecting courses of action for Vietnam. NY Times, 29 Dec 68, 1.

11. (TS-GP 1) ISA/JS TP for SecDef and CJCS, n.d., Att to JCS 2472/415-1, 28 Jan 69, JMF 911/077 NSC (21 Jan 69).

preserved. While recognizing that negotiating strategy did not lie "within the normal purview" of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Staff nevertheless anticipated that the Chairman might be asked for his views. In that event, the Joint Staff advocated an initial "hard line" US position on negotiations, incorporating the objectives set forth above. During the give and take of the actual talks, the United States could fall back, "slowly and as obstinately as possible without totally blocking progress," toward the minimum conditions considered essential for an end to hostilities.[12]

The available record does not reveal what position the Chairman took on negotiations at the NSC meeting on 25 January, or what disposition was made of the alternatives paper. Apparently this first NSC meeting of the Nixon Administration was only exploratory with regard to the negotiations question, and the concerned departments and agencies continued the development of position papers. Within the Department of Defense, representatives of the Joint Staff and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) jointly prepared papers on mutual withdrawal and cease-fire. It was the Joint Staff/ISA position that any armistice in Vietnam must be linked to explicit agreements regarding withdrawal, that limitations must not be imposed upon allied access to any area, and that a cease-fire agreement need not embrace either implementation and verification machinery or negotiations addressing an internal political settlement.[13]

To facilitate orderly negotiations planning in Washington, President Nixon on 13 February 1969 created the Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam to prepare policy and contingency papers for consideration by the NSC Review Group and the National Security Council. Ambassador William H. Sullivan, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern and Pacific Affairs, chaired this body, which met twice weekly. Department of Defense members included two representatives from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) and two from the Joint Staff--the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) and the Chief of the Far East Division, Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5). Later, in June 1969, the membership

12. (S) J-5 PP, "Military and Negotiating Strategy for Vietnam (U)," n.d., Att to DJSM-119-69 to CJCS, 24 Jan 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 69.

13. (S) Draft ISA/Joint Staff Papers; "Cease-fire: Issues and Options," 1 Feb 69; "Mutual Withdrawals: Major Issues," 11 Feb 69; J-5 Working files.

of the group was reduced and the Chief of the J-5 Far East Division became the Joint Staff representative and SACSA the alternate. As a result, the Joint Staff contributed to the preparation and development of all Ad Hoc Group papers on Vietnam negotiations, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or his representative, participated in all NSC Review Group decisions on these papers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, did not normally review the Ad Hoc Group papers or take a position on them.[14]

Expanded Paris Talks Begin

While President Nixon and his advisers in Washington undertook consideration of a detailed negotiating position, the talks proceeded in Paris. With the entry of the new President into office, the US cast of characters at the talks changed. Henry Cabot Lodge, who had twice served as the US Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam, was named US Representative and Lawrence Walsh the Deputy Representative, supplanting W. Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance, respectively. Simultaneously, Lieutenant General Frederick C. Weyand replaced Major General George M. Seignious as the Military Adviser to the US Representative. The officer in this position regularly briefed the Paris delegation on the military situation in Vietnam and provided professional advice in support of Defense positions on the negotiations. He had no independent voice in the delegation's decisions, but, in practice, General Weyand became a full participant in its deliberations. He received staff support from the Director of the Plans and Policy Directorate (J-5) of the Joint Staff. This responsibility was carried by a Watch Group of J-5 action officers under the direction of the Chief, Far East Division, J-5.[15]

The first plenary session of the expanded Paris talks convened at the Hotel Majestic on 25 January 1969. In an opening statement, Ambassador Lodge assured the North Vietnamese and NLF delegates that the United States sought no permanent establishment of troops or bases in South Vietnam. Nor did the United States desire to invade North Vietnam or

14. (C-GP 3) NSSM 21, 13 Feb 69, Att to JCS 2472/428, 15 Feb 69; (C-GP 1) DJSM-270-69 to Dr. Kissinger, 19 Feb 69; (C-GP 3) DJSM-897-69 to Dir J-5 et al., 12 Jun 69; JMF 911/001 (13 Feb 69).

15. NY Times, 6 Jan 69, 1, 3. (C-GP 4) Draft memo for SecDef, Att to DJSM-1078-69 to CJCS, 5 Nov 69, JMF 911/305 (CY 1969).

overthrow its government. Ambassador Lodge went on to propose immediate restoration of the DMZ in accordance with the 1954 Geneva Agreement, mutual withdrawal of all external forces from South Vietnam, and discussion of the release of prisoners of war. The RVN delegate, Ambassador Pham Dang Lam, proclaimed the legitimacy of his government and called for North Vietnam to cease aggression against it. In reply Xuan Thuy and Tran Buu Kiem, the NLF delegate, demanded an end to US "aggression," unilateral withdrawal of allied troops from South Vietnam, replacement of the Thieu government with a peace cabinet, and a "political solution" for South Vietnam in accordance with the NLF program.[16]

The positions presented on 25 January proved to be the basic positions that the opposing sides would maintain for many months to come. In weekly plenary sessions throughout February and March, the delegates continued fruitless discussions on these points. The enemy post-Tet offensive in South Vietnam, launched on 23 February, and a related dispute over the bombing halt "understanding" of 1968 further hindered the Paris talks. The North Vietnamese and NLF delegations repeatedly asserted that their offensive had been undertaken in response to US intensification of the war, and the allied side, equally adamant, denied there was any basis for that allegation. Shelling of South Vietnamese cities had launched the offensive, but US objections that these attacks violated the bombing halt agreement elicited the enemy retort that the agreement had been "unconditional."[17]

In addition to the public plenary sessions, there was also the possibility of private talks. In his January 1969 Foreign Affairs article, Dr. Kissinger had suggested such a course. The United States and North Vietnam, he wrote, could hold talks on mutual withdrawal and related issues while Saigon and the NLF representatives could hold parallel meetings,

16. Dept of State Bulletin, 10 Feb 69, pp. 124-125. (S) Msg, State 10775 to Saigon and Paris, 23 Jan 69, JCS IN 48690. (S) Msgs, Paris 1070 to State, 24 Jan 69, JCS IN 51196; 1147, 25 Jan 69, JCS IN 55604; 1155, 26 Jan 69, JCS IN 55603.

17. (S) Msgs, Paris 1430 to State, 30 Jan 69, JCS IN 63152; 1798, 6 Feb 69, JCS IN 76902; 2161, 13 Feb 69, JCS IN 90783; 2552, 20 Feb 69, JCS IN 14248; 2926, 27 Feb 69, JCS IN 27269; 3082, 3 Mar 69, JCS IN 35331; 3642, 13 Mar 69, JCS IN 55324; 4012, 20 Mar 69, JCS IN 69180.

confining their discussion to internal structure of South Vietnam. Under this procedure, the four-sided plenary talks would serve primarily to "legitimize" the work of the two negotiating groups, "which need not be formally established and could even meet secretly."[18]

Prior to President Nixon's assumption of office, the matter of secret talks had been raised at a meeting of the heads of the US and NVN missions in Paris on 17 January 1969. No agreement was reached, but the two delegations anticipated that discussions looking to private talks would continue after the new administration took office in Washington. Several days after the second plenary session on 30 January 1969, Ambassador Lodge informed Secretary of State Rogers that it was unlikely that any progress would be made in the plenary sessions. For any serious negotiations, the Ambassador said, the US delegation would have to move to private meetings, and he hoped to propose such a course by mid-February. With the enemy post-Tet offensive, however, Ambassador Lodge postponed the proposal for secret talks, considering them inappropriate as long as the offensive continued.[19]

Agreement on a Negotiating Position

In Washington, on 12 March 1969, the President directed the preparation of two papers "in connection with private talks at the Paris Vietnam negotiations." He wanted the Vietnam Ad Hoc Group to provide the NSC Review Group with a paper covering the strategy for private talks with North Vietnam and another treating the mutual withdrawal of forces. The NSC Review Group considered initial drafts of the two papers on 20 March. In light of this review, the Ad Hoc Group revised and resubmitted the papers to the Review Group on the following day.[20]

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18. Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," Foreign Affairs, Jan 69, p. 323.

19. (S) Msgs, Paris 1172 to State, 27 Jan 69, JCS IN 56057; 1522, 1 Feb 69, JCS IN 67087. (S) Msg, Paris 3388 to State, 10 Mar 69, OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtgs/PLUS, 1 Dec 68-15 Mar 69.

20. (S-GP 3) NSSM 29, 12 Mar 69, Att to JCS 2472/444, 13 Mar 69; (S) Vietnam Ad Hoc Group Draft Papers, "A General Strategy and Plan of Action for Viet-Nam Negotiations" and "US Position on Mutual Withdrawals," n.d., Atts to Memos, AsstSecState to Chm NSC RG, 15 Mar 69; JMF 911/305 (12 Mar 69).

The negotiating strategy paper set forth the general objective as the opportunity for the South Vietnamese "to determine their own political future without external interference." It listed seven specific objectives, including: mutual withdrawal; reduction in hostilities; restoration of the DMZ; eventual cease-fire or total cessation of hostilities; release of prisoners; interim supervision machinery; and restoration of the 17th Parallel as the dividing line between North and South Vietnam. It also set forth 13 lesser priority objectives ranging from a recognized international status for both Vietnams pending reunification to the possibility of US economic assistance for North Vietnam in conditions of peace. On the key issue of the internal political structure of South Vietnam, the Ad Hoc Group reiterated the consistent US position that this was a matter for the South Vietnamese to resolve.

The strategy paper contained a section on "Give and Take" in the negotiations and a "Game Plan" for private talks. The latter envisioned early discussions on a bilateral US/NVN basis, with separate RVN/NLF contacts getting under way as soon as possible. The Ad Hoc Group stated that US efforts should initially stress mutual withdrawal, giving secondary, but significant, emphasis to restoration of the DMZ, and pursue the question of prisoners. A further issue was reduction of the level of hostilities. "In addition to the DMZ," the Group said, "we need to work toward a state of communication between Hanoi and ourselves that might permit us to exchange signals on partial withdrawal." Here opinion within the Ad Hoc Group divided. One faction (Position A) thought that the United States should give single attention to partial withdrawal, while a second (Position B) believed that "other forms of mutual reduction" in the level of fighting might become necessary. A final issue to be resolved in the private talks was the handling of a cease-fire. The Ad Hoc Group believed that the United States should avoid injecting this matter into early stages of the discussions.[21]

The Ad Hoc Group presented the mutual withdrawal paper in the form of an instruction to Ambassador Bunker for use in discussions with RVN officials. As indicated by the Group, the basic US objectives were the withdrawal of NVN

21. (S-GP 3) Vietnam Ad Hoc Group, Revised Draft Paper, "A General Strategy and Plan of Action for Vietnam Negotiations," 21 Mar 69, Encl to Att to JCS 2472/455, 25 Mar 69, same file.

military forces and "other elements" from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and adequate assurances, including inspection and verification machinery, that complete withdrawal had occurred. This withdrawal paper reflected two significant differences of opinion. One concerned the "residual forces" that the United States could leave in South Vietnam following agreed withdrawals, and the second related to the time period for the completion of US and allied withdrawals following the NVN withdrawal. On the residual forces issue, one position in the Ad Hoc Group favored the withdrawal of all US and allied combat or "directly combat-related" forces and units; a second supported retention of selected combat and directly combat-related forces "at least for a period of time." Concerning the time period for the completion of US and allied withdrawals, one faction favored achieving it within six months after the NVN withdrawal, thus adhering to a previously stated US position. The other group believed that commitment to a stated time limit should be avoided, leaving US withdrawals to be completed "as soon as practicable" after the NVN removal.[22]

The National Security Council was scheduled to consider the two negotiating papers on 28 March, and on the day before the meeting, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) and the Director, Joint Staff, submitted a talking paper for the use of the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both considered the strategy paper "a reasonable and useful" listing of objectives. Both also thought that it was necessary to work toward mutual withdrawals, but that "restrictions on specific weaponry or certain types of offensive operations" could be detrimental to US interests in South Vietnam. The Assistant Secretary, however, did not completely rule out other forms of mutual reduction and recommended that the Secretary of Defense support Position B in the divergence on that issue. The Director, Joint Staff, did not agree and recommended that the Chairman support Position A.

With regard to the withdrawal paper, the Assistant Secretary and the Director were in full agreement. They both believed that the United States should be free to leave selected combat and directly combat-related forces

22. (S-GP 3) Vietnam Ad Hoc Group, Revised Draft Paper, "US Position on Mutual Withdrawals," 21 Mar 69, Encl to Att to JCS 2472/444-1, 25 Mar 69, same file.

in South Vietnam for a period of time after NVN withdrawal, but without specifying a time limit. Accordingly, they recommended that the Secretary and the Chairman support this position.[23]

The National Security Council discussions of 28 March on Vietnam have been described in Chapter 1. As a result of that meeting, the President set forth his decisions on Vietnam policy, including the US negotiating position, on 1 April 1969, and resolved the questions at issue in the Vietnam Ad Hoc Group's draft papers. The Unites States would initiate no proposals, the President directed, to "de-escalate" the war. Should North Vietnam raise this issue, the United States would discuss it only in the context of mutual troop reduction. On the definition of US forces subject to withdrawal, he decided that all combat forces could be removed from South Vietnam if North Vietnam met specific conditions for the withdrawal of its forces and gave assurances on verification and maintenance of the agreement. In addition, there would be no public repudiation of the US pledge to complete allied withdrawals within six months of Hanoi's withdrawal. The President pointed out that control over the timing of allied withdrawal was not impaired by this commitment, since in practice the United States would be the one to decide if North Vietnam had, in fact, complied with the terms of the agreement. Subject to these modifications, the President approved the two negotiating papers, and the Secretary of State forwarded them to Ambassador Lodge in Paris and Ambassador Bunker in Saigon on 8 April 1969. Now, at last, the United States had a defined negotiating position.[24]

New Initiatives: The Talks in April and May 1969

Even before the approval of a negotiating position in Washington, Ambassador Lodge had made a beginning on private talks with the North Vietnamese. After obtaining assurance that the RVN delegation did not object, the US Representative met with Xuan Thuy for private discussions for the first

23. (S-GP 3) ISA/JS TP for SecDef and CJCS, n.d., Att to JCS 2472/444-2,27 Mar 69, same file.

24. (S-GP 1) NSDM 9, 1 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/459, 2 Apr 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 1. (S-GP 1) Msgs, State 56525 and 56526 to Paris and Saigon, 8 Apr 69, OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 16 Mar-30 Apr 69.

time on 22 March 1969. He told the North Vietnamese delegate that the United States was willing to begin simultaneous mutual withdrawal of forces. In the process, all NVN forces must evacuate South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Ambassador Lodge avoided any mention of a simultaneous completion of such withdrawals. Minister Thuy rejected the US offer, reiterating the standard NVN demand for a unilateral US withdrawal from Vietnam.[25]

Following this first private meeting, the United States made no immediate effort to continue the private discussions. As Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy expressed it: "Our whole approach to private contacts will remain measured and steady, avoiding any misleading impression that we feel under pressure of time deadlines or public opinion." The United States, nevertheless, had been encouraging secret talks between the Republic of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front. President Nixon, while visiting Europe, met with Vice President Ky in Paris on 2 March 1969 and urged such an approach. Ambassador Bunker pursued a similar tack with President Thieu in Saigon. After some reluctance, President Thieu announced on 25 March the willingness of his Government to begin "unconditional private talks" with North Vietnam and the NLF in Paris, either jointly or separately. National Liberation Front delegate Kiem brusquely dismissed the RVN offer as not "serious" and termed it a Nixon Administration "maneuver."[26]

During April 1969 the United States and the Republic of Vietnam took several additional actions to push the negotiations off dead center. On 7 April, speaking before the National Assembly in Saigon, President Thieu presented a peace platform. The key point was a proposal for a two-party system in South Vietnam and an offer of anmesty to the Viet Cong with a place in the political arena, provided they renounced violence and respected the constitution. They could engage in political activities as the National Liberation Front but not as a Communist party, since Communists were prohibited by law from participation in the government.

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25. (S) Msg, Paris 4145 to State, 22 Mar 69, JCS IN 06895. (S-GP 1) Msg, State 47852 to Bangkok, 28 Mar 69, OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 16 Mar-30 Apr 69.

26. (S-GP 1) Msg, State 47852 to Bangkok, 28 Mar 69; (S-GP 1) Msg, State 55060 to Paris, 10 Apr 69; OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 16 Mar-30 Apr 69. (S) Msgs, Paris 3027 and 4426 to State, 2 and 27 Mar 69; JCS IN 00243 and 83326. NY Times, 26 Mar 69, 1.

There was little likelihood of NLF acceptance, but, nevertheless, President Thieu moved closer than ever before to accepting the Viet Cong as a political force in South Vietnam.[27]

To indicate the seriousness of the allied peace efforts, President Nixon and Secretary of State Rogers publicly voiced their support for President Thieu and his overture to the NLF. At a press conference on 18 April, the President cited RVNAF improvement and the increased political stability in South Vietnam as factors that afforded the Saigon government "a better opportunity for negotiating room" at the Paris conference. Three days later, Secretary Rogers commended President Thieu's "constructive initiative" in declaring his readiness to talk with the NLF. The Secretary saw no reason why military and political settlements could not be worked out at the same time.[28]

The simultaneous consideration of political and military issues was a new approach not previously introduced at the Paris talks. Consequently, at the 14th plenary session, on 24 April 1969, Ambassador Lodge presented this proposal. The United States, he declared, would respect whatever political settlement was worked out between the South Vietnamese factions so long as it was reached by free choice.[29]

The North Vietnamese and NLF spurned all these allied proposals when they responded on 8 May 1969 with a 10-point NLF plan for peace in Vietnam. The essential features were unilateral unconditional withdrawal of US forces and liquidation of military bases; free elections, the drafting of a new constitution, and, ultimately, a coalition government in Saigon. The plan made no mention of the withdrawal of NVN forces from the south. It merely stated that the question should be settled by the Vietnamese themselves.[30]

Six days after the presentation of the NLF plan, the United States offered a new proposal. In a televised report to the nation on Vietnam on 14 May 1969, President Nixon reiterated the US position: "mutual withdrawal of non-South

27. Washington Evening Star, 7 Apr 69, A-1.
28. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 299-300. Dept of State Bulletin, 12 May 69, p. 400.
29. (S) Msgs, Paris 5760 and 5931 to State, 22 and 24 Apr 69, JCS IN 44999 and 49617.
30. NY Times, 9 May 69, 6.

Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam and free choice for the people of South Vietnam." To achieve these objectives, he proposed a set of specific measures. The "major portions of all U.S., allied, and other non-South Vietnamese forces" would withdraw from South Vietnam over a 12-month period. At the end of that period the remaining forces would move into designated base areas and refrain from combat operations. Thereafter the US and allied forces would complete withdrawal as the remaining NVN forces were returned to North Vietnam. The President's measures also provided for an international supervisory body, acceptable to both sides, to verify the withdrawals, participate in arranging cease-fires in Vietnam, and oversee elections; a rapid release of prisoners of war; and the observance by all parties of the 1954 Geneva Accords regarding South Vietnam and Cambodia and the Laos Accords of 1962.[31]

In these measures, the President set out publicly several of the objectives of the negotiating strategy that he had approved on 1 April 1969. But the 14 May proposal also contained new elements, indicating some shifts on the issues of withdrawal and political settlement--the basic points in dispute at the Paris meetings. The specific 12-month period for withdrawal of major forces, the repositioning of remaining troops, the tying of completion of US withdrawal to that of the North Vietnamese, and the international supervision of elections were all new developments since the approval of the strategy paper. The President's plan, Dr. Kissinger told the press in a background briefing just prior to the broadcast, was not a response to the NLF 10-point proposal. "We had intended to make this ever since we completed our review of our negotiating position in March," Dr. Kissinger related, "and the only question remaining was the timing." The plan was offered at a time when some movement to end the impasse in the talks seemed possible.[32]

Refinement of the US Position

In Washington, meantime, officials were giving further attention to various issues involved in the negotiations. When President Nixon approved the US negotiating position on 1 April, he also directed studies covering certain

31. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 369-375.
32. (E-GP 1) Msg, State 76873 to all Dipl Posts, 15 May 69, JCS IN 88908.

aspects of mutual withdrawal, verification for such withdrawal, detailed political settlement in South Vietnam, and international guarantees for a Vietnam settlement. The Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam was to prepare the studies, and Dr. Kissinger issued the formal directive on 10 April 1969.[33]

The Ad Hoc Group submitted the studies to the NSC Review Group on 27 June 1969. The mutual withdrawal paper examined both NVN and RVN attitudes toward withdrawal, as well as eight major considerations affecting withdrawal decisions. It then evaluated four specific "scenarios," including one tailored to the President's 14 May peace proposals. In the verification paper, the Ad Hoc Group urged that the United States seek effective international verification machinery since its unilateral capability to monitor NVN withdrawal was limited. The paper reviewed three suitable options for international verification: a UN-sponsored body, a new body established by an international conference, or an improved ICC. As to international guarantees, the Ad Hoc Group pointed out that the objective was to negotiate guarantees aimed at improving chances for peace in Southeast Asia without further US military commitments. Consequently, the international guarantees paper considered six methods not involving direct military commitments.[34]

Finally, an Ad Hoc Group paper considered three possible political settlements in South Vietnam. The first, Alternative A, would retain the current constitution and RVN leadership and would provide for NLF participation in elections as a political party. Alternative B, described as "an interim distribution of local political power," would offer the Viet Cong a degree of territorial control in return for acceptance of RVN national authority. Alternative C was a peace cabinet, substituting noncommunist figures acceptable to the

33. (TS-GP 1) NSDM 1, 1 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/459, 2 Apr 69; (TS-GP 3) NSSM 37, 10 Apr 69, Att to JCS 2472/466, 11 Apr 69; JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) Sec 1. The President also directed study of Vietnamizing the war; preparation of that study is described in Ch. 4.

34 (S-GP 3) Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam Papers; "Phased Mutual Withdrawal," 19 Jun 69; "Verification of Mutual Withdrawal and of Possible Renewed Infiltration in Vietnam," 16 May 69; "International Guarantees," n.d.; Atts to Memo, Chm, Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam to NSC RG, "NSSM 37," 27 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/466-1, 3 Jul 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 2.

"other side" for the present RVN leaders. The Ad Hoc Group recommended that the United States maintain a flexible position on the political issue and that further consideration be given to a settlement that lay between Alternatives A and B--one emphasizing division of political power at the local rather than national level, but with the division made on the basis of election results.[35]

The Joint Staff, together with the staff of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), prepared a joint position on the four Ad Hoc Group papers for use by the Defense representatives in NSC Review Group discussions. The two staffs noted that the papers, with the exception of the one dealing with political settlement, were intended to provide background information and broad alternatives and did not require decisions "at this time which will constitute national positions on negotiations matters." On the issue of the future political system of South Vietnam, the staff report supported the Group's recommendation for further examination of a political course lying between Alternatives A and B as presented in the paper. The Ad Hoc Group papers did undergo revision and further refinement during the remainder of the year, but no decision was reached on them.[36]

Summer Doldrums: The Talks May through July 1969

The two conflicting sets of proposals, the NLF 10 points of 8 May and President Nixon's 14 May measures, served as the basis for discussions in Paris during the next several months, but no progress resulted. Although Ambassador Lodge

35. (S-GP 3) Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam Paper, "Internal Political Settlement in South Vietnam, Issues, Positions and Alternatives," 26 Jun 69, Att to Memo, Chm Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam to NSC RG, "NSSM 37," 27 Jun 69, Att to JCS 2472/466-1, 3 Jul 69, same file.

36. (TS) TP for ASD(ISA) and Dir, J-5, n.d., Att to JCS 2472/466-2, 10 Jul 69, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 2. (S-GP 3) Memo, NSC Staff to ASD(ISA) et al., "NSSM 37: Supplementary Papers," 31 Jul 69, Att to JCS 2472/466-3, 4 Aug 69, same file, sec 3. (TS-GP 1) Memo, NSC Staff to ASD(ISA) et al., "Paper on Territorial Accommodation in South Vietnam (NSSM 37), "4 Nov 69, Att to JCS 2472/466-4, 10 Nov 69, same file, sec 4. (TS-GP 1) Memo, NSC Staff to ASD(ISA) et al., "NSSM 37: Paper on Phased Mutual Withdrawal," 30 Sep 69, Att to JCS 2472/466-5, 6 Jan 70, same file, sec 5.

saw sufficient common ground in the two positions for productive negotiation, the NVN and NLF representatives did not. They were content to repeat their standard charge that the United States was the aggressor in South Vietnam and must unconditionally withdraw and allow formation of a coalition government, which could then negotiate a peace.[37]

The private discussions between the United States and North Vietnam resumed on 7 May 1969, but they, too brought no advances toward a peaceful settlement. Following the 7 May meeting, Ambassador Lodge reported to Washington that "nothing happened which was inconsistent with the theory that they believed in their hearts that they can get a better deal by waiting." At the next private session, on 31 May 1969, Ambassador Lodge proposed, as he had already done in the plenary sessions, that the United States and North Vietnam consider mutual withdrawal while the Republic of Vietnam and NLF delegates discussed internal political settlement in parallel private meetings. But Le Duc Tho, who represented North Vietnam at the meeting, rejected the suggestion. The private sessions, he declared, must treat all the issues of the NLF 10-point program, not just one specific problem. Nor would the NLF enter into private talks with representatives of the Thieu regime. Le Duc Tho did indicate one change in the NVN position. Previously, the North Vietnamese had insisted that the United States must deal directly with the NLF. Now Tho "made no bones about" the fact that North Vietnam would negotiate on behalf of the NLF on all matters, including those relating to the south.[38]

Meantime, President Thieu had indicated a further shift in his position on political settlement in Vietnam. In a private discussion with Secretary Rogers in Saigon on 16 May, President Thieu stated that the NLF could participate in South Vietnamese elections as a Communist party, as the NLF, or as a new party with a different name. If the NLF ran under its

37. (S) Msgs, Paris 7949 and 8438 to State, 29 Mar and 5 Jun 69; JCS IN 27063 and 39199.

38. (S) Msgs, Paris 8112 to State, 31 May and 1 Jun 69, OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 1 May-30 Jun 69.

own label, rather than as the Communist party, President Thieu said, there would be no need to amend the constitution.[39]

On 8 June 1969, Presidents Nixon and Thieu met at Midway Island and announced the scheduled withdrawal of 25,000 US troops from South Vietnam. In a joint statement the two Presidents confirmed their conviction that "the form of government under which the people of South Vietnam will live should be decided by the people themselves" and declared their respect for any decision the people of South Vietnam arrived at through free elections.[40]

Two days later, on 10 June 1969, the National Liberation Front announced in Paris that a national congress of representatives from all South Vietnam had met several days previously in a "liberated area" of the south and formed the "Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam." The following day, Tran Buu Kiem announced that the PRG would take the NLF's place at the conference table. Mr. Kiem would return to Vietnam while Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, his former deputy at the talks, would serve as PRG foreign minister and head the new government's delegation in Paris. As outlined by Mr. Kiem, PRG policy showed no differences from that of the NLF. The latter had long called for the removal of the "puppet regime" in Saigon, and the PRG also refused to discuss a political settlement with the Republic of Vietnam, dismissing President Thieu and his government as "a handful of traitors."[41]

The United States, of course, had no intention of abandoning President Thieu. At a press conference on 19 June, President Nixon made this point quite clear. He would not accede to enemy demands to dispose of President Thieu. Such an action, Mr. Nixon said, would mean "a surrender on our part, a defeat on our part, and turning over South Vietnam to the tender mercies of those who have done a great deal of damage." President Nixon noted the previous forthright offer of President Thieu to meet with the NLF and alluded to a forthcoming RVN proposal for a political settlement.[42]

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39. (S) Msg, Saigon 9541 to State, 16 May 69, same file.
40. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 445-447.
41. NY Times, 11 Jun 69, 1; 12 Jun 69, 1.
42. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, p. 476.

President Thieu made his new political settlement offer on 11 July 1969. In a televised speech, he called for elections in South Vietnam in which "all political parties and groups, including the N.L.F.," could participate. He offered special guarantees that his government would abide by the results of the election and challenged the other side to do the same. Finally, he renewed his earlier offer for unconditional private talks with "the other side."[43]

During his 11-day around-the-world trip, President Nixon made an unscheduled visit to South Vietnam. After meeting with President Thieu on 30 July, Mr. Nixon again called for peace in Vietnam, but he believed "the record is clear as to which side has gone the extra mile" in behalf of that objective. "We have gone as far as we can or should go in opening the door to peace, and now is the time for the other side to respond."[44]

At the end of July, however, the Paris talks remained deadlocked. In the public plenary sessions, the North Vietnamese and the PRG rebuffed all US/RVN offers. They resolutely insisted on complete allied acceptance of their position as expressed in the NLF's 10 points of 8 May 1969. Likewise, the private discussions had proved barren. At a private meeting on 18 July 1969, the first since 31 May, Xuan Thuy dismissed President Thieu's 11 July proposal, insisting that peace could be obtained only through acceptance of the NLF/PRG program. He did suggest to Ambassador Lodge that, in addition to continuing their meetings, similar sessions be held at a secondary level, and Ambassador Lodge agreed. The first such meeting took place on 29 July 1969, but no headway was made.[45]

In mid-July, General Wheeler had expressed his disillusionment with the lack of progress in the negotiations. Writing to the Secretary of Defense on 14 July, he observed that he could see no forward movement at the Paris peace table. In fact he considered the enemy reaction to

43. NY Times, 11 Jul 69, 2.
44. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 585-586.
45. (S) Msgs, Paris 10650, 11017, and 11514 to State, 12, 19, and 29 Jul 69, OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 1 Jul 69-31 Mar 70.

the President's 14 May presentation and to President Thieu's recent offer "regression, not progress." He thought that diplomatic pressures should be exerted upon the Soviet Union to induce the North Vietnamese "to pursue peace negotiations rather than engaging in meaningless polemics." Secretary Laird forwarded the Chairman's suggestion to Dr. Kissinger as worthy of "thoughtful consideration."[46]

In late 1968 and early 1969, Soviet diplomats had displayed a cooperative attitude toward the Vietnam negotiations, and the United States had hoped that the Soviets might be helpful in influencing the North Vietnamese to proceed with purposeful talks. Upon his arrival in Paris, Ambassador Lodge and members of his delegation had met frequently with the Soviet diplomats in the French capital to exchange views on Vietnam problems and discuss the progress, or lack thereof, at the peace talks. After his first meeting with Soviet Ambassador to France Zorin on 31 January 1969, Mr. Lodge reported to Washington that the Soviet Ambassador was obviously interested in getting Soviet endorsement of the NVN position on record. Ambassador Lodge was impressed, however, with the "cordial tone" of the Soviets and their readiness "to talk turkey" with him.[47]

But, as the months slipped by and the talks remained at an impasse, the anticipated Soviet help did not develop. What action was taken on General Wheeler's 14 July 1969 recommendation for pressure on the Soviets is not indicated in the available record. In what may have been an attempt to pass the word indirectly, Ambassador Lodge did complain to the French Foreign Minister in early August about the Soviet Union's lack of disposition to use its influence with the North Vietnamese. Two months later, the Soviet Minister in Washington assured Assistant Secretary of State Sullivan that the Soviets were interested in playing an active role as interlocutors with North Vietnam, but the implied assistance did not materialize throughout the remainder of 1969.[48]

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46. (S) CM-4433-69 to SecDef, 16 Jul 69; (S) Memo, SecDef to Dr. Kissinger, 16 Jul 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations), 1 Apr - 31 Aug 69.

47. (S) Msg, Paris 1523 to State, 1 Feb 69, JCS IN 67089.

48. (S) Msg, Paris 11905 to State, 6 Aug 69; (S-GP 1) Msg, State 170777 to Moscow et al., 8 Oct 69; OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 1 Jul 69-31 Mar 70.

An Appeal to Ho Chi Minh

By mid-July, President Nixon, too, was convinced that some dramatic step was necessary to get the negotiations moving. In a personal letter of 15 July 1969 (which was not made public until 3 November), President Nixon appealed to Ho Chi Minh to begin serious negotiations. He reviewed his proposal of 14 May, which he believed fair to all parties, and added that the United States was ready to discuss other programs as well, "specifically the 10-point program of the NLF." The time had come, the President wrote, to move forward at the conference table. He promised that the United States would be "forthcoming and open-minded" in a common effort for peace.[49]

Ho Chi Minh flatly rejected President Nixon's initiative. In a letter written on 25 August 1969, just a few days before his death, he accused the United States of increasing military action, B-52 operations, and the use of toxic chemicals in Vietnam. The solution, the North Vietnamese President said, could only be found in the NLF/PRG 10 points. If the United States truly desired peace, it must cease its aggression, withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, and respect the right of the Vietnamese people to settle their internal problems.[50]

In early August, before receiving this reply, President Nixon had made yet another attempt to generate some movement in the negotiations by means of private talks. After consultations with Secretary of State Rogers and Ambassador Lodge and with the approval of President Thieu, he dispatched Dr. Kissinger to Paris on 4 August 1969 as his personal representative to undertake secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese. This trip, however, brought no progress toward a peaceful solution. Dr. Kissinger was to repeat these missions to Paris on twelve occasions during the next 30 months, but his extended discussions with the North Vietnamese principals gained no success. The meetings were treated with extreme secrecy and not publicly revealed until President Nixon described them when reviewing past peace efforts in a television address on 25 January 1972. At that time he acknowledged the personal assistance of French President Pompidou in arranging the secret talks.[51]

49. Ltr, Pres Nixon to Ho Chi Minh, 15 Jul 69, Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, p. 910.
50. Ltr, Ho Chi Minh to Pres Nixon, 25 Aug 69, Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 910-911.
51. Public Papers, Nixon, 1972, p. 101.

The death of Ho Chi Minh on 3 September 1969 in no way lessened the enemy's intransigence at the Paris conference. Neither the plenary nor the private sessions brought any forward movement. Not only was President Nixon growing concerned over the lack of progress at the Paris talks, but he was coming under increasing domestic pressure in the fall of 1969 for an end to the war. As described in Chapter 5, the depth of public feeling against the war was visibly demonstrated in the 15 October moratorium and the preparations for a November mobilization. On 13 October, in an attempt to deflect public attention from the approaching moratorium, the White House Press Secretary announced that the President would address the nation on Vietnam on 3 November. Speculation was widespread that the speech would feature some major development toward ending the war.

In anticipation of the President's speech, Ambassador Lodge proposed a new tactic at the plenary session on 30 October. He suggested that, at the next meeting on 4 November, the four spokesmen meet in a "restricted" session and discuss any issue any of them cared to raise. This proposal, the Ambassador had told Washington, would not only help to set the stage for the President's speech, but would allow a means for follow-up. In addition, Ambassador Lodge considered his approach a positive and constructive counter to a 16 October NVN call for a private US/PRG meeting, an eventuality that would exclude the Republic of Vietnam. The NVN and PRG representatives, however, flatly rejected Ambassador Lodge's suggestion.[52]

President Nixon did not announce any dramatic development in the settlement of the war in his 3 November speech. He reaffirmed his peace proposals of 14 May and reviewed for the public his other "initiatives for peace." He cited US flexibility and good faith demonstrated at 40 public meetings in Paris and mentioned US discussions with the Soviets. He revealed, for the first time, his 15 July letter to Ho Chi Minh, as well as an approach for "a rapid, comprehensive settlement" made through a third party soon after his election. This third party, he said, was in direct contact on a personal basis with the leaders of North Vietnam, but he gave no further details. All these attempts, the President reported, were to no avail. The fault lay in "the other side's absolute refusal to show the least willingness to join us in seeking a just peace."

52. (S) Msg, Paris 16543 to State, 26 Oct 69, OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 1 Jul 69-31 Mar 70. (S) Msg, Paris 16792 to State, 30 Oct 69, JCS IN 33981.

President Nixon offered no additional peace proposals in his 3 November speech. Rather, after reviewing the progress in Vietnamization, he announced the course of action he planned to follow: a rejection of "precipitate withdrawal" and a search for a "just peace," preferably through negotiation, but otherwise by means of continued Vietnamization.[53]

Consideration of a Cease-Fire

When the White House Press Secretary first gave notice that the President would address the nation on 3 November, some commentators anticipated that a cease-fire would be announced. This did not occur, but the possibilities of a cease-fire approach had been under consideration by the Nixon Administration for some time. The basic negotiating strategy paper, approved by the President on 1 April, had listed "an eventual cease-fire or total cessation of hostilities" as a specific objective.

A study of cease-fire issues and options, dated 17 April 1969, had been prepared by representatives of the Joint Staff, ISA, and the Department of State. It showed agreement on the point that a cease-fire must be coupled with mutual withdrawals, but need not be combined with either the establishment of international inspection-verification machinery or progress toward a political settlement. Also, an enemy cease-fire proposal might be accepted and implemented immediately within certain limited areas, such as the DMZ or the city of Saigon, while the practical details of a nationwide cease-fire were being resolved. There were, however, other issues where the three agencies could not agree. The Joint Staff preferred that arrangements for monitoring any cease-fire be agreed upon before the cease-fire went into effect; the ISA staff and the Department of State did not believe such agreement was necessary beforehand. In addition, the Joint Staff wanted no limitation imposed on RVN access to any areas of South Vietnam in a cease-fire agreement. But the other two agencies foresaw the possibility of a tacit understanding between the Republic of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front, with each voluntarily refraining from sending its forces into areas controlled by the other. Finally, the ISA staff advocated an allied cease-fire initiative at Paris, the Joint Staff disagreed, and the Department of State reserved judgment.[54]

53. Public Papers, Nixon, 1969, pp. 901-909.
54. (S) ISA/Joint Staff/Dept of State Draft Paper, "Cease-Fire: Major Issues and Options," 17 Apr 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations), 1 Apr-31 Aug 69.

From Paris, Mr. Philip Habib, a Department of State member of the US delegation, commented on the desirability of preparing possible US counterproposals to enemy tactical cease-fire initiatives. Subsequently, Mr. William Sullivan, Chairman of the AD Hoc Group on Vietnam, created a working committee within the Group to pursue this task, and consideration of cease-fire positions continued.[55]

During the summer of 1969, further divisions of opinion developed within the US Government over a cease-fire position. In May and June, Secretary Rogers twice asked the President to propose a cease-fire, and in Paris, several Department of State members of the delegation argued strongly that a cease-fire would assist in advancing the negotiations. In Ad Hoc Group discussions, however, both the Joint Staff and CIA members asserted that a cease-fire was not, of itself, a valid negotiating goal. A standstill agreement without assurance of progress at Paris, they contended, would divide and "de-stabilize" the Republic of Vietnam. Generals Wheeler and Abrams also opposed an unconditional cease-fire. In August, COMUSMACV told General Wheeler that any enemy cease-fire proposal should be regarded as a request for relief and that the enemy "should have to negotiate, i.e. pay something for a cease-fire under the current battlefield situation." In reply, General Wheeler pledged to the field commander his support in the effort to keep cease-fire tied to withdrawal.[56]

Nonetheless, advocacy of a cease-fire continued. Secretary Rogers still believed that, before public opinion again became restive, "we should get on record [at Paris] with a position on cease-fire, something tied in with withdrawal and supervision." According to General Weyand, Ambassador Lodge advocated a private cease-fire offer "as a ploy to delete the issue and put us on the high side morally." The

55. (S) Ltr, Philip Habib to Heyward Isham, 12 May 69; (S) Memo, William Sullivan to RADM H. H. Epes, Jr., "Revised Paper on Cease-fire," 3 June 69; J-5 Files.

56. (TS) Memo for Record, CAPT R. L. Scott, J-5, "NSC Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam," 9 Jul 69, J-5 Files. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 10174 to CJCS, 6 Aug 69; (S-GP 3) Msg, CJCS 9951 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 12 Aug 69; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations), 1 Apr-31 Aug 69.

Ambassador looked upon a cease-fire offer as "a psychological gambit," since he did not believe the enemy would accept.[57]

At a White House meeting on 12 September 1969, President Nixon canvassed his chief advisers, including Ambassador Bunker, General Wheeler, General Abrams, and Admiral McCain, on the matter of a cease-fire. Subsequently, he ordered Ambassador Bunker to begin discussions to determine "specific conditions which the GVN considers essential for acceptance of a ceasefire." The approach should be exploratory, the President said, and should avoid "any hint" of US pressure on the South Vietnamese.[58]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff feared that the growing public agitation against the war might cause the President to decide upon an early cease-fire, and they were apprehensive that his 3 November speech would contain such an announcement. Accordingly, they prepared for the President on 31 October 1969 their recommendations against a unilateral US cease-fire in Vietnam. These JCS views and the delay by the Secretary of Defense in transmitting them have been described in Chapter 5. But, in any event, the President made no mention of a cease-fire on 3 November.

As on past occasions, both North Vietnam and the PRG reacted contemptuously to President Nixon's 3 November address. At the 6 November Paris plenary session, and in subsequent meetings, both Mr. Thuy and Mrs. Binh attacked the President and his speech. They asserted that Vietnamization was merely a maneuver to prolong the war and the US occupation of Vietnam. Repeating their usual accusations against the United States and the leaders of the Republic of Vietnam, they left no doubt that their position on settlement terms was unchanged. Symptomatic, perhaps, of the near-hopeless feeling regarding the negotiations was the 20 November announcement that Ambassador Lodge and his

57. (S) Memo for Record, RADM H. H. Epes, Jr., "Cease-fire in Vietnam," 29 Aug 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations), 1 Apr-31 Aug 69. (TS) Msg, LTG Weyand to RADM Epes, 10 Oct 69, J-5 Files.

58. (TS) NSDM 24, 17 Sep 69, JMF 001 (CY 1969) NSDMs.

deputy, Mr. Walsh, would resign from their Paris assignments effective 8 December 1969.[59]

In some of his final messages to Washington, Ambassador Lodge suggested that the United States and the Republic of Vietnam take the initiative in proposing holiday truces. Specifically, he called for a standdown extending from Christmas through New Year's. He also believed that the allied side should offer to transform this truce into a permanent cease-fire. Such an initiative, the Ambassador believed, would win worldwide public support and "offer hope of ending the current stalemate as no other proposal can do at this particular time."[60]

Ambassador Lodge's recommendation rekindled debate over cease-fire within the US Government. On 21 November 1969, General Wheeler called to Secretary Laird's attention the JCS views of 31 October against a unilateral cease-fire. He strongly recommended that the Department of Defense oppose any cease-fire that did not include provision for verified withdrawal of "non-South Vietnamese forces." He also objected to Christmas, New Year's, or Tet truces in excess of 24 hours each.[61]

In Saigon, Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams took a similar position. They favored a 24-hour truce at Christmas, as was observed in 1968. Rather than offering to extend the truce, the Ambassador and the General proposed a declaration of US willingness to negotiate a permanent cease-fire. The problem they wished to avoid lay in the possibility that the public might find the distinction between an extension of a holiday truce and a negotiated cease-fire difficult to understand. It was not just a matter of duration. A one-day truce did not require the detailed safeguards that should be negotiated for a permanent cease-fire. "As we see it," they continued, "we would come under pressure to prolong the temporary

59. (S) Msgs, Paris 17230, 17608, and 17969 to State, 2, 13 and 20 Nov 69, JCS IN 46383, 57005, and 69797. Dept of State Bulletin, 15 Dec 69, pp. 549-550.
60. (S) Msg, Paris 17921 to State, 19 Nov 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations), 1 Sep 69-
61. (S) CM-4743-69 to SecDef, 21 Nov 69, same file.

truce and would find it more and more difficult to explain our position if the enemy responded in some vague or ambiguous manner."[62]

President Nixon resolved the question on 3 December 1969. He did not want the issue of brief holiday truces linked with initiatives for a permanent negotiated cease-fire. In addition, he wanted to avoid speculation that the United States was considering new proposals for a permanent cease-fire in South Vietnam. Accordingly, he approved a 24-hour truce for Christmas and another for New Year's, with a coordinated US/RVN announcement to be made in Saigon. His decision regarding a permanent cease-fire, he directed, should not "preclude continuation of the studies under way on this subject." The results of such studies, including the views of the Republic of Vietnam, would be forwarded through the NSC system for formal consideration before any discussions with Hanoi's representatives. This presidential decision in early December foreclosed cease-fire negotiations for the immediate future.[63]

The Talks at the End of 1969

The Paris talks remained at a standstill in December 1969. At the last plenary session Ambassador Lodge attended, he expressed both his own personal frustration and that of the US Government with the lack of progress in the talks. After 45 weeks, he declared, "the only concrete progress here is agreement on the shape of the table!" In closing remarks, he repeated the US desire for an early negotiated settlement. Although he was leaving Ambassador Lodge told the other side, a representative of the President would continue to participate. "We remain ready for compromise. When you are also ready, progress can be speedy."[64]

62. (S) Msg, Saigon 23502 to State, 24 Nov 69, OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 1 Jul 69-31 Mar 70.
63. (TS) Extracts from NSDM 36, 3 Dec 69, JMF 001 (CY 1969) NSDMs.
64. (S) Msgs, Paris 18402 and 18497 to State, 2 and 4 Dec 69, JCS IN 87976 and 91723.

At a tea break during the 4 December session, Ambassador Lodge and Mr. Philip Habib, Mr. Lodge's senior adviser and designated successor at the talks, spoke privately with Xuan Thuy. For a last time, Ambassador Lodge advanced the US proposals. The next move was up to North Vietnam, he said, repeating that when the North Vietnamese were ready, the United States would be willing to meet them "more than half-way." In reply, Xuan Thuy merely reaffirmed the NVN position as advanced during the previous 45 meetings.[65]

By the end of 1969, the fundamental issues facing the delegates at the Paris peace talks had been clearly set forth, but neither side had found any common ground for agreement. The United States had defined its negotiating position in early 1969. Essentially, the United States proposed a verified mutual withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces from the south and a political settlement arranged by the South Vietnamese themselves. Ambassador Lodge presented this position in Paris in both the plenary and private sessions. In his 14 May speech, President Nixon had refined the position slightly, calling for the withdrawal of all major outside forces within one year. He reaffirmed this proposal in the letter to Ho Chi Minh on 15 July and in his 3 November speech. Meantime, President Thieu had suggested direct private discussion between his government and the NLF and free elections in South Vietnam with the NLF participating.

The United States had not relied solely on negotiations in 1969 to demonstrate its desire to end the war. As Ambassador Lodge reminded the other side at the 4 December Paris session, the United States had "significantly" reduced its presence in South Vietnam. More than 60,000 US troops--20 percent of all US combat forces--had been withdrawn in 1969 and US air operations had been reduced by more than 20 percent.[66]

Yet, during the year, the enemy curtly rejected all allied approaches. The United States was the aggressor, both North Vietnam and the NLF/PRG asserted, and if the United States truly desired a settlement, then it should

65. (S) Msg, Paris 18517 to State, 4 Dec 69, OCJCS Msg Bk, Paris Mtg/PLUS, 1 Jul 69-31 Mar 70.
66. (S) Msgs, Paris 18402 and 18497 to State, 2 and 4 Dec 69, JCS IN 87976 and 91723.

withdraw its forces from Vietnam. Nor would they condescend to discuss a political settlement with the current Government of the Republic of Vietnam, which they labeled a puppet under the pay and control of the United States. During the year, the enemy did lessen the intensity of his military actions in South Vietnam, and infiltration fell off in the latter part of the year. Some persons in the United States, both in and out of government, interpreted this decline in activity as an enemy bid for a mutual reduction in hostilities that should be met with a further lowering of US combat participation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, believed that the drop in enemy action and infiltration resulted from allied military pressure. In any event, if the enemy was truly attempting a signal, he had yet to give any indication of it at the Paris talks.

From his experience as the military representative at the peace talks, General Weyand was pessimistic about the prospects for the negotiations at the end of 1969. He found that the enemy objective had not changed during the course of nearly a year of discussions. If anything, the enemy's negotiating stance had hardened over the year. General Weyand believed that the enemy would refuse to negotiate in Paris on US terms, would not talk with the Republic of Vietnam, and would not deviate from the demand for a coalition government in South Vietnam and rapid and unconditional US withdrawal. Nor would the enemy accept a political settlement based on free elections or the "status quo." The enemy viewed President Thieu's "uncertain" political control in South Vietnam and wavering US public support for the war, the General continued, as vulnerabilities fatal to the US position. He predicted that the enemy objectives would be pursued through heightened military pressure, using military force "to the fullest extent possible in 1970" to discredit the Vietnamization program and force major concessions from the United States at the Paris table.[67]

Reviews Looking Toward a New Peace Initiative in 1970

With Ambassador Lodge's departure from Paris, Mr. Philip Habib became the acting head of the US delegation to the

67. (S) Msg, GEN Weyand to C/S MACV and J-5 Far East Div, 12 Dec 69, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations), 1 Sep 69-

peace talks. Whereupon Xuan Thuy and Mrs. Binh boycotted the meetings in protest of the failure of the United States to name a top-level replacement for Ambassador Lodge. At the first plenary session of 1970, on 8 January, Mr. Habib called on the other side to engage in "genuine negotiations" and proposed a restricted session for the following week. But the North Vietnamese and the PRG, represented by second-ranking delegation members, rejected the US proposal. Succeeding meetings in January and early February saw no progress in the negotiations, nor would North Vietnam consent to any private sessions. Although Mrs. Binh returned to the talks on 22 January, Xuan Thuy continued his boycott. On 11 February 1970, at a Paris reception, he made clear that North Vietnam would not resume private talks until the United States sent a representative of suitable stature to Paris. President Nixon, who two weeks previously had publicly expressed his confidence in Mr. Habib, took no action to replace him. Although the sessions continued, Xuan Thuy did not return to the table, and prospects for a settlement remained poor.[68]

With the talks in Paris at an impasse, there seemed little need for further development of negotiating positions in Washington, and consideration of these papers slackened in late 1969 and early 1970. This lack of action had led to some difference of opinion within the Joint Staff. Early in February 1970, the Director, Far East Division, J-5, Rear Admiral H.H. Epes, Jr., wrote COMUSMACV's Acting Chief of Staff, stating: "I believe we have gone just about as far as possible in this area [developing positions] pending some movement in the talks which would provide a sense of direction for the development of more specific positions." He was also of the opinion that only a limited number of the 1969 studies on negotiating issues had any merit.[69]

One member of Admiral Epes' staff did not agree. Captain R. L. Scott, USN, the principal J-5 action officer

68. (S) Msgs, Paris 16, 231, 352, 546, 816, 1073, and 1388 to State, 2, 8, 10, 15, 22, and 29 Jan and 5 Feb 70, JCS IN 46277, 55266, 60557, 67270, 78848, 90961 and 12660. NY Times, 12 Feb 70, 3. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, p. 41.

69. (S) Memo, RADM H.H. Epes, Jr., to MG R.F. Shaefer, 2 Feb 70; J-5 Files.

on negotiations, addressed a memorandum to the Admiral on 18 February, expressing his concern regarding the status of US planning for the talks:

> It is sometimes said by those involved in the preparation of negotiations papers that nothing more can be done "until something moves in Paris." I believe this to be incorrect, and a dangerous frame of mind. Basic positions for Paris can be prepared, the details of which might be time-sensitive, but the fundamental aspects of which would be durable.

Despite the current dim prospects for the negotiations, Captain Scott did not believe that the United States could afford to be unprepared for substantive talks. He did, however, agree with Admiral Epes' dissatisfaction with the existing studies. Of the total catalogue of issues, including cease-fire, internal political settlement, prisoners of war, verification, and mutual withdrawal, only a position on the last question was sufficiently developed to allow US response if productive talks proved possible. Captain Scott also criticized the lack of "orderly consultation" with the Republic of Vietnam on substantive negotiating questions.

Recognizing that the Joint Staff had only a limited role in the negotiations, Captain Scott recommended the following: review of JCS and Joint Staff positions on various negotiating issues "to insure that we, at least, have our thoughts in order on all foreseeable issues which lie within our purview"; encouragement of the Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam to develop "meaningful and useful" guidance for Paris and Saigon; and resumption of regular consultative meetings in Saigon, similar to ones held in 1968.[70]

Of all the various negotiating issues, only the question of a cease-fire was under active consideration within the US Government at the beginning of 1970. In his decision of 3 December 1969, President Nixon had prohibited linking proposals for holiday truces with a permanent cease-fire.

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70. (TS) Memo, CAPT R.L. Scott to RADM H.H. Epes, Jr., "US Negotiations Positions (U)," 18 Feb 70, J-5 Files. A J-5 memo for COL Borman, 6 Apr 70, J-5 Files, indicated that RADM Epes "passed" this memo to OSD.

He had indicated, however, that he wanted the cease-fire planning to continue, and on 15 January 1970, the Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam forwarded a draft cease-fire paper to the NSC staff and to the US Embassy in Saigon for comment and recommendation.

The Ad Hoc Group set forth the main issues involved in a general cease-fire, focusing principally on conditions that the United States should insist be met before it would agree to this action. The major issue raised was whether or not the United States would accept a general cease-fire in the absence either of agreement on mutual withdrawals or of a substantial de facto North Vietnamese withdrawal. The Joint Staff position was that a cease-fire must be linked to NVN withdrawal. The ISA representation within the Ad Hoc Group agreed with the Joint Staff on this point but differed on some of the other issues connected with a cease-fire. The Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency would accept a general cease-fire without withdrawal, but with regroupment of forces substituted as the necessary condition.

Regroupment was the assembly of military forces within mutually agreed and clearly defined geographic areas in South Vietnam--a form of disengagement that could become the preparatory stage of withdrawal. In all variants under consideration, regroupment would apply to NVA troops, but it might extend to US and Free World forces as well, in effect leaving the RVNAF to confront the Viet Cong in the remaining active hostilities. Enemy agreement to a cease-fire seemed somewhat more likely if linked to regroupment rather than withdrawal, and there were indications that even some RVN officials had begun to think it acceptable, always assuming that North Vietnamese withdrawal would be the subject of further negotiation. The disadvantages were readily recognized. As the Ad Hoc Group's paper put it, "areas into which the enemy is regrouped can be considered as being for practical purposes ceded to him for what might be a long period of time."[71]

71. (TS-GP 1) Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam, Draft Paper, "An agreed General Cease-fire in Viet-Nam (TS)," 15 Jan 70, Encl to Att to JCS 2472/466-6, 1 May 70, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 5. (TS) J-5 Far East Div Paper, "Status of NSC Negotiating Papers," 12 Mar 70, J-5 Files, indicates that the cease-fire paper was circulated to the NSC Staff and the Embassy, Saigon.

The Secretary of Defense was somewhat concerned over the lack of joint US/RVN planning on the cease-fire question. Reporting to the President on 17 February on his recent trip to Vietnam, he noted that little thought had been given to the handling of a situation in which the enemy, achieving a short-term tactical military success, might follow up with a Paris initiative calling for a localized or even a general cease-fire. "In concert with State Department officials--in Washington, Saigon and Paris--and with the GVN leadership--in Saigon and Paris--we must accelerate and solidify our contingency planning."[72]

Shortly thereafter, Ambassador Bunker sounded out President Thieu regarding the possibility of a cease-fire. Mr. Thieu told the Ambassador that if Hanoi should propose a cease-fire, the United States and the Republic of Vietnam would have two alternatives. They could either negotiate all issues before agreeing to a cease-fire, or negotiate a cease-fire at once and then try to resolve the related issues of withdrawal, regroupment, and political settlement. The first alternative was preferable, Mr. Thieu observed, but might not be realistic or feasible. His government was prepared to accept the second, provided North Vietnam would agree to a cessation of its infiltration and terrorism and accept international supervision of the cease-fire. Other aspects, including regroupment, withdrawal, and political settlement, could be worked out after the cease-fire. The RVN President, apparently enthusiastic about the second alternative, suggested that if the United States and his government firmly believed that this approach would lead to an end of the conflict, it might be advantageous to initiate the proposal in Paris.

President Thieu's apparent willingness to defer discussion of withdrawal until after a cease-fire had been concluded was a departure from the previous RVN stand. General Abrams, in relating this information to General Wheeler on 4 March 1970, said he had been concerned at first that the rather unexpected development in RVN thinking had resulted from a change of view among the US diplomatic representatives in Saigon. He had discussed this possibility with Ambassador Bunker, who had assured him that the Embassy view continued to be

72. (S) Memo, SecDef to President, "Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, February 10-14, 1970," 17 Feb 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 70.

consistent with COMUSMACV's position that a cease-fire had to be tied to agreement on verified withdrawal.73

Despite the assurances of Ambassador Bunker, General Wheeler was concerned about the possible shift of position in Saigon. On 7 March, he informed COMUSMACV that from an analysis of earlier RVN statements it appeared that President Thieu might not realize all the implications of his latest stand. "As you can imagine," he wrote, "those in Washington and Paris who advocate early US cease-fire initiative were quick to grasp Thieu's statements to support their position." He assured General Abrams that the JCS position stressing the absolute need for mutual withdrawal had strong support within OSD and the NSC staff. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were pressing for early NSC consideration of the Ad Hoc Group's 15 January cease-fire paper and resolution of the splits contained therein. Only after the US Government established its own position would it be possible to work out a suitable agreement with the Republic of Vietnam. To back up the JCS views, General Wheeler requested General Abrams' comments on the cease-fire paper as soon as possible. Fortunately, he concluded, the NSC staff had assured him that the White House considered the matter merely an exercise in contingency planning, not a "forerunner of early initiative for cease-fire."74

Responding to the Chairman's request, COMUSMACV repeated his long-standing belief that the United States should not permit the cease-fire issue to be separated from a negotiated agreement on verified mutual withdrawal. Any such separation, he declared, "would inevitably result in the progressive erosion of our relative military balance, as well as the over-all security and political situation throughout SVN." Moreover, it would represent "another concession to the enemy" even before any meaningful progress on settlement of basic issues had been achieved.75

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73. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 2843 to CJCS, 4 Mar 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations), 1 Sep 69-

74. (S-GP 3) Msg, CJCS 3336 to COMUSMACV, 7 Mar 70, same file.

75. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 3120 to CJCS, 10 Mar 70, same file.

Meantime, because of his dissatisfaction over the lack of progress in developing consolidated US/RVN negotiating positions, Secretary Laird had requested an assessment of the status of the current negotiating positions, together with proposals for further action. The Joint Staff and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) prepared the assessment. Noting that nearly a year had elapsed since the strategy and withdrawal papers were approved by the President on 1 April 1969, the two staffs thought it was time to review them to assure readiness for possible opportunities. Accordingly, they recommended that the Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam act "with dispatch" on the current cease-fire paper and, in addition, be tasked to revise the other negotiating papers as appropriate. After obtaining Secretary Rogers' concurrence, Mr. Laird wrote Dr. Kissinger on 11 March 1970. The question of cease-fire had become more urgent as a result of the recent conversations in Saigon, he said, and it was important to reach positions on issues that might become critical when and if true negotiations began in Paris. He endorsed the Joint Staff/ISA recommendation for Ad Hoc Group action on the cease-fire paper and review of the negotiating papers developed during 1969.[76]

As an apparent result of the Secretary's recommendation, the President directed a comprehensive review of all existing negotiating studies "in order to be fully prepared for substantial negotiations in Paris." Dr. Kissinger informed the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence of the decision on 19 March, directing the Ad Hoc Group to review the overall strategy and mutual withdrawal papers, as approved on 1 April 1969, and the studies directed by the President shortly thereafter, including the questions of political settlement, verification, and international guarantees.[77]

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76. (S-GP 1) DJSM-391-70 to CJCS, 18 Mar 70, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 70) sec 6. (TS) Memo to SecDef, "Vietnam Negotiations," n.d., J-5 Files. (J-5 memo for COL Gorman, 6 Apr 70, J-5 Files, indicates that SecDef requested the study and that it was written by ISA and the Joint Staff.) (S) Memo, SecDef to Dr. Kissinger, "Vietnam Negotiations," 11 Mar 70, OSD Files.

77. (TS) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to SecState et al., 19 Mar 70, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 5.

Over the next three months, the Ad Hoc Group carried out the review. In comments on the strategy paper, submitted to the NSC Review Group on 27 March, the Group pointed out that should the decision be made to accept a cease-fire without NVN withdrawal, portions of the strategy paper would have to be revised. Until that issue was resolved, the Group recommended a delay in revision of the strategy paper. A revised mutual withdrawal paper of 14 May 1970 updated the alternative scenarios of the 1969 paper on the basis of current force levels and the recent advice of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. Other results of the Ad Hoc Group's efforts were a new verification study and an updated international guarantees paper, both completed in May. A revision of the internal political settlement paper, together with elaboration of the supplementary studies on mixed electoral commissions and territorial accommodation, was finished in early June.[78]

While this work was in progress, on 29 April 1970, the NSC staff circulated the Ad Hoc Group's cease-fire paper of 15 January, with additions incorporating comments from the Embassy in Saigon and a statement of the current RVN position on cease-fire. In the latter, the new line of thought that had first emerged during the Thieu-Bunker conversations of late February was dominant. President Thieu no longer listed NVN withdrawal among his conditions for a cease-fire. In his view withdrawal, and probably regroupment as well, could be expected only as part of a final settlement.[79]

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78. (TS) Memo, Chm, Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam to Chm, NSC Rg, 27 Mar 70, J-5 Files. (TS-GP 3) Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam Paper, "Phased Mutual Withdrawal," 14 May 70, Encl to JCS 2472/466-7, 21 May 70, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 5. (TS-GP 3) Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam Papers, "Verification of Mutual Withdrawal and Possible Renewed Inflation," 28 May 70; "International Guarantees," 28 May 70; "Mixed Electoral Commissions," 27 Apr 70; Encl to Att to JCS 2472/466-8, 12 Jun 70; (TS-GP 1) Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam Papers, "Internal Political Settlement in South Viet-Nam," 5 Jun 70, Encl to Att to JCS 2472/466-9, 18 Jun 70; "Territorial Accommodation in South Vietnam," 9 Jun 70; same file, sec 6.

79. (TS-GP 1) Memo, NSC Staff to ASD(ISA) et al., "Cease-Fire: NSDM 36," 29 Apr 70, Att to JCS 2472/466-6, 1 May 70, JMF 911/305 (1 Apr 69) sec 5.

No action, however, was forthcoming on the various revised Ad Hoc Group papers. One reason, perhaps, was the President's directive of 25 May 1970 for a study of diplomatic initiatives on Vietnam that might be taken following completion of the withdrawal of US forces from Cambodia on 30 June 1970. The President wanted the study to consider US strategy for convoking or participating in an international conference on Indochina, the types of forums for such a conference, and proposals that the United States might put forward there as well as the relation of these proposals to the "on-going" Paris negotiations. The study was also to include US strategy for possible regional conferences and other initiatives that could be taken to move toward a settlement. The President had directed preparation of the study by an ad hoc group chaired by the Department of State and including members from Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the NSC staff.[80]

A special interagency group prepared the study on diplomatic initiatives on Indochina, and after one revision presented it to the NSC Review Group for final consideration on 16 July. After discussing the desirability and scope of new initiatives to enlarge negotiations through some sort of international conference, the group examined possible forums for such an approach. These included a Geneva conference, consultations among interested nations, the United Nations, a conference of Asian states, and an expanded Paris conference. The group then considered means of enlarging the scope of the negotiations and the possible "price tag" for a new initiative. The group believed that North Vietnam would be reluctant to engage in more active negotiations at that time, since world opinion might view it as tacit acknowledgment of the success of the recent allied operations in Cambodia. Therefore the group thought that some further price would have to be paid to get negotiations started in the near future. This price was likely to include public commitment to a total US withdrawal by a specific date and US acquiesence in a political settlement that gave the Communists "a powerful voice" in South Vietnam.

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80. (TS-GP 3) NSSM 94, 25 May 70, Att to JCS 2339/322, 10 Jun 70, JMF 907/530 (25 May 70) sec 1.

With regard to specific proposals the group stated that, first, a decision must be made on whether to link any new approach to some substantive move by the other side. Proposals that the United States might advance included: various forms of cease-fire; a "package" including a general cease-fire throughout Indochina, US pledge of withdrawal, POW exchange, ICC reactivation, and enlarged negotiations; new attempts to formulate the withdrawal issue by linking it with further concessions; and an indication of readiness to discuss political issues. If an international conference could not be arranged, another possibility was the involvement of other Communist states, such as the Soviet Union and Poland, to work out a cease-fire, prisoner of war exchange, and ICC re-establishment. The interagency group had not been asked to present recommendations on possible initiatives, but it clearly leaned toward an expanded Paris conference as the most favorable option. On the questions of presentation and timing of new US initiatives, the group thought that the President should be the spokesman but that no move should be made until after the senior NVN representative returned to Paris.[81]

Meanwhile, at the direction of Dr. Kissinger, the Vietnam Special Studies Group had prepared a new cease-fire paper during June and early July 1970. This paper presented three "packages." The first called for a main force cease-fire in place, with no regroupment or withdrawal; the second added NVA regroupment to defined areas; and the third included withdrawal of NVA, US, and Free World main forces (excluding advisers) within one year. All three packages required a ban on terrorism and reprisals, on extension of control, and on infiltration. The paper did not recommend any one of the packages, but did conclude that, whichever

81. (TS-GP 3) Interagency Group Report, "Diplomatic Initiatives on Indochina," 4 Jun 70, Encl to Att to JCS 2339/322-2, 25 Jun 70, same file. (TS) Interagency Group Report, same subj, 14 Jul 70, J-5 Files, NSC/SRG #11 (16 Jul 70) Indo-China NSSM 94. (TS-GP 3) ISA/JS TP for SecDef and CJCS, n.d., Att to JCS 2339/322-5, 23 Jul 70, JMF 907/530 (25 May 70) sec 2.

was adopted, a "concerted" effort should be made to improve verification and enforcement capabilities.[82]

The NSC Review Group considered both the diplomatic initiatives and the new cease-fire papers on 16 July in preparation for a full Council meeting on 21 July 1970. During the discussion on the former, all members agreed that if the enemy suggested an Indochina conference, the United States should accept. Furthermore, the United States might find it advantageous to initiate such a proposal, but should not offer any concession or pay any price for its acceptance. In consideration of a Soviet role in the negotiations, Admiral Moorer expressed the opinion that "any positive action by the Soviets is unlikely." Although Dr. Kissinger tended to agree, he would not exclude the Soviets as a channel to North Vietnam. But the decision to use them as an intermediary, he added, should be made on a case-by-case basis rather than as a general policy. Dr. Kissinger informed the Review Group members that the President did not want to put forth any new initiative immediately, preferring to wait until the new US representative to the talks arrived in Paris and the plenary sessions with all members present got under way again. Then he would consider proposals in August or September.

The Review Group members then turned to a lengthy discussion of the cease-fire paper and its three packages. All agreed that the third (mutual withdrawal) presented the most favorable predicted results. There was some question as to General Abrams' preference, and Admiral Moorer clarified the matter. The field commander also favored the third alternative and considered the second (regroupment) the worst. Dr. Kissinger observed that, even though the third package would be the best choice for the Republic of Vietnam, it appeared unattainable since North Vietnam had already refused to discuss mutual withdrawal.[83]

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82. (S) Memo, Dr. Kissinger to USecState, et al., "Future Vietnam Special Studies Group Work," 25 May 70; (TS) VSSG Cease-fire Paper, 13 Jul 70; Atts to JCS 2472/648, 23 Jul 70, JMF 911/305 (25 May 70) sec 1.

83. (TS) Memos for Record, BG J.E. Glick, J-3, "National Security Council Special Review Group Meeting, 16 July 1970," 17 Jul 70; LTC C.M. Tronsure, Jr. (ISA), "Senior Level Review Group/VSSG Meeting, 16 July 1970," 16 Jul 70; same file, sec 1A.

For the 21 July 1970 NSC meeting, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) and the Director, Joint Staff, prepared talking papers on the diplomatic initiatives and cease-fire studies for the use of the Secretary of Defense and Admiral Moorer. The talking paper on cease-fire made quite clear that the basic split within the US Government over the withdrawal of NVN forces had not been resolved. The two Defense officials anticipated that the Department of State, supported by the Central Intelligence Agency, would take the position that NVN withdrawal was not vital to an acceptable cease-fire. It was recommended that the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman hold to the Defense position that NVA withdrawal was a necessary condition of any cease-fire. In a separate point paper, the Joint Staff strongly recommended that Admiral Moorer support the JCS position that any cease-fire proposal made or accepted by the United States should be with full concurrence of the Republic of Vietnam and be attendant upon verified North Vietnamese withdrawal from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and the sanctuaries of Laos.[84]

For the NSC discussion of the diplomatic initiatives paper, the authors of the talking paper recommended that Secretary Laird and Admiral Moorer emphasize that there was little the United States could do at that time to bring about "real movement" in the negotiations without making major concessions. If a new approach was made, they continued, consideration should be given to achieving "maximum propaganda advantage" from the initiative, but in a way that did not prejudice future initiatives. The two Defense officials also told their superiors that there was little likelihood of Soviet assistance in getting the negotiations moving. Finally, they thought an expanded conference covering Laos and Cambodia as well as South Vietnam, if it should become feasible, would be advantageous.[85]

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84. (TS-GP 3) ISA/JS TP for SecDef and CJCS, "Vietnam Special Studies Group Ceasefire Paper (8)," n.d., Att to JCS 2472/648, 23 Jul 70, JMF 911/305 (25 May 70) sec 1. (TS) J-5 PP for CJCS, "Recommended Position on Cease-fire," n.d., J-5 Files, NSC Mtg, No. 44 (21 Jul 70) Paris Talks.

85. (TS-GP 4) ISA/JS TP for SecDef and CJCS, "Response to NSSM 94," n.d., Att to JCS 2339/322-5, 23 Jul 70, JMF 907/530 (25 May 70) sec 2.

On the eve of the NSC meeting, Secretary Rogers pointed out to the President that a fairly broad consensus had developed within the group preparing the diplomatic initiatives paper to the effect that the United States should propose a package initiative. Such a package, he thought, should concentrate primarily upon the military aspects of the problem, leaving the political issues unresolved. It should include provision for a cease-fire in all of Indochina, international supervision, acceptance of the "principle" of US withdrawal, POW exchange, and an international conference on Indochina.

To implement his proposal, Secretary Rogers offered a detailed scenario with specific actions and timing. He would begin with immediate NSC approval of the negotiating package, followed by consultation with the Republic of Vietnam and then with other Asian allies and Laos and Cambodia. The President would publicly announce the proposal on 12 August. He would deliberately leave the nature of the cease-fire vague, but would stress the need to include Laos and Cambodia. He would also avoid any suggestion of a US timetable although making clear the US willingness to negotiate an agreed schedule for withdrawal. The President should emphasize the requirement for international supervision and "leave the impression that we consider the ICC alone to be inadequate for a satisfactory control." On the question of an Indochina conference, Secretary Rogers would have the President avoid specific details. He should, however, indicate preference for broader participation than the current four-sided composition of the Paris talks while making clear that the United States was "not willing to pay any price to obtain that new structure." If North Vietnam turned down this offer, the United States would simply continue negotiations in the Paris forum.[86]

The available record does not indicate what occurred at the NSC meeting on 21 July. The diplomatic initiatives and cease-fire studies had not been presented in the format of decision papers, and no decision was made on them.

86. (S) Memo, SecState to Pres, "NSC Consideration of Diplomatic Initiatives," n.d. (received by White House on 20 Jul 70), Att to Memo, Dr. Kissinger to Vice Pres et al., 20 Jul 70, J-5 Files, NSC Mtg No. 44 (21 Jul 70) Paris Talks.

Nor is there any record of specific action on Secretary Rogers' scenario, though it is clear that subsequent events did not follow his suggested timetable. Dr. Kissinger had already indicated that the President did not wish to launch an immediate initiative but would give the matter consideration at a later stage. As will be recounted, in early October the President did offer a new peace proposal; in substance it resembled the one advocated by Secretary Rogers in July.[87]

The Talks in 1970

As President Nixon and his advisers considered various new initiatives for the negotiations, the Paris talks remained at an impasse. Xuan Thuy's boycott of the sessions continued throughout the spring of 1970. The ouster of Prince Sihanouk and expanded fighting in Laos during March brought enemy allegations of US escalation of the war.[88]

Subsequently, on 1 April 1970, France called for a general peace conference for all of Indochina. Unexpectedly, the Soviet Union showed interest in the idea. At the United Nations on 16 April, Soviet representative Yakov A. Malik observed that only "a new Geneva conference" could bring a solution and relax tension. But the Soviet enthusiasm was short-lived, and within a week, Mr. Malik termed his suggestion unrealistic in the current circumstances. He had, apparently, exceeded his authority in supporting a proposal for a Geneva conference.[89]

President Nixon on 20 April 1970 announced the withdrawal of an additional 150,000 US troops from South Vietnam during the next year. This announcement was accompanied by a warning to the enemy that increased military action anywhere in Indochina risked "strong and

87. See below, p. 499.
88. (S) Msgs, Paris 3295 and 3630 to State, 20 and 26 Mar 70, JCS IN 87479 and 98132.
89. (U) Msgs, Paris 1387 and 1394 to State, 2 Apr 70; (S) Msg, Paris 1403 to State, 2 Apr 70; (S) Msg, State 4865 to Saigon et al., 3 Apr 70; (S) Msg, UN 1189 to State, 18 Apr 70; J-5 FE/South Asia Div Files, #83, Expanded Conference. NY Times, 17 Apr 70, 10; 19 Apr 70, 1; 21 Apr 70, 11, 30 Jun 70, 1.

effective measures" to meet the situation. The President went on to report that no progress had been made in the Paris talks. He repeated that the overriding US objective was the withdrawal of all outside forces from South Vietnam and a political solution there reflecting the independent choice of the South Vietnamese. President Nixon renewed the pledge that the United States would abide by whatever decision emerged from a free exercise of the political process agreed upon.[90]

As related in Chapter 7, President Nixon decided that the increasing North Vietnamese activity in Cambodia threatened US forces in South Vietnam, and at the end of April, US forces accompanied RVNAF units into Cambodia to clean out enemy base areas near the border. In protest, North Vietnam and the PRG cancelled the plenary session of the Paris talks scheduled for 6 May. Xuan Thuy and Mrs. Binh thereupon departed Paris for Vietnam as a further protest.[91]

In an attempt to achieve a settlement in Cambodia, Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik in early May 1970 called for a meeting of Asian foreign ministers to work out arrangements to preserve the independence and neutrality of that beleaguered country. Twelve nations, not including any Communist states, met in Djakarta on 16-17 May. A concluding communique recommended respect for Cambodian sovereignty and neutrality, immediate cessation of hostilities, reactivation of the international peacekeeping machinery in Cambodia, and the early convening of a new international conference to resolve the conflict in Indochina. United Nations Secretary-General U Thant also proposed an international conference to settle the war in Indochina. The United States welcomed both proposals, but the North Vietnamese rejected an international conference as "sheer hypocrisy" on 13 June 1970.[92]

In announcing completion of the US withdrawal from Cambodia on 30 June, President Nixon said that the United

90. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 373-377.
91. NY Times, 7 May 70, 1; 11 May 70, 20.
92. Ibid., 17 May 70, 1; 18 May 70, 1; 14 Jun 70, 4. Dept of State Bulletin, 25 May 70, p. 653; 8 Jun 70, pp. 710-711.

States would renew efforts to bring about genuine negotiations. All previous US proposals remained "on the conference table to be explored." Addressing the leaders in Hanoi, the President once more declared that "the time has come to negotiate." On the following day, the President acted to restore the high-level status to the Paris talks, announcing the appointment of David K.E. Bruce as head of the US delegation. He described Ambassador Bruce as "one of America's most distinguished diplomats" and said that the Ambassador would have "great flexibility" in the conduct of the talks.[93]

There had been speculation that Ambassador Bruce might bring a fresh initiative to the Paris talks, but at the first session he attended, on 6 August 1970, he merely referred to the various proposals put forth by both sides over the previous 18 months. What was required now, the Ambassador said, was an effort to narrow the differences and find a basis for agreement. "I am here," he told the other side, "to discuss all of the proposals we have made both in public and in private as well as to discuss the proposals you have made."[94]

Ambassador Bruce's arrival in Paris did prompt the return of Xuan Thuy and Mrs. Binh to the talks. On 17 September 1970, after a 10-month lapse, the principals of all four parties once again assembled at the table in the Majestic Hotel. On that occasion, Mrs. Binh presented an eight-point PRG solution to the conflict. Her proposals, however, contained nothing new. The PRG still insisted on total withdrawal of US and other non-Vietnamese troops and a coalition government in Saigon. On the issue of the withdrawal deadline, the PRG did relax its position slightly. The US removal of troops must be completed by 30 June 1971; formerly the PRG had allowed only six months. In addition, Mrs. Binh pledged that the Viet Cong would refrain from attacking the withdrawing troops.[95]

Ambassador Bruce initially characterized the Communist proposals as "old wine in new bottles." At the next plenary session, on 24 September, the US Ambassador told

93. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 540-541, 543.
94. Dept of State Bulletin, 24 Aug 70, p. 219.
95. NY Times, 18 Sep 70, 2.

the other side that the eight points represented only rearrangement of earlier proposals and the addition of some detail, but with the basic demands unchanged. He asked for further clarification, but in the following days none was forthcoming from either the PRG or the North Vietnamese delegation.[96]

On 7 October 1970, President Nixon launched the new peace initiative that had been under development since May. His televised address opened with a statement that the set of proposals had been discussed with the Governments of Laos, Cambodia, and the Republic of Vietnam. "All support it," the President said. He then detailed an offer that contained the following elements: a cease-fire in place; an international conference to deal with all of Indochina; the withdrawal of all US forces from Vietnam on an agreed timetable as part of an overall settlement; a political settlement that truly met the aspirations of all South Vietnamese and reflected "the existing relationship of political forces in South Vietnam"; and the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of war held by both sides.[97]

By offering a cease-fire in place the United States had now detached that issue entirely from the question of withdrawal. The President said the proposal was put forth without preconditions, but subject to the following general principles: the cease-fire "must be effectively supervised by international observers, as well as by the parties themselves": it should apply to the fighting in all of Indochina; it should halt all types of warfare, including terrorism; and no further outside forces should be infiltrated into any of the states of Indochina under cover of the standstill agreement. Finally, the cease-fire should not occur in isolation, but as part of a general move to end the war. "I ask that this proposal for a cease-fire-in-place be the subject of immediate negotiation," the President said. "And my hope is that it will break the logjam in all the negotiations."

Withdrawal was treated as a separate point. The President introduced it by saying "The third part of our peace initiative has to do with the United States forces in South

96. Dept of State Bulletin, 12 Oct 70, pp. 408-410.
97. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, pp. 825-828.

Vietnam." He reviewed the reduction of US troop levels there over the past 20 months and then announced the willingness to withdraw "all our forces" under the terms of a final settlement. Mr. Nixon made no direct reference to the enemy forces in South Vietnam, but a careful reading of his words would reveal that the goal of mutual withdrawal had not been abandoned by the United States. He declared his readiness to negotiate a timetable "for complete withdrawals," as part of a settlement "based on the principles I spelled out previously and the proposals I am making tonight." The President's statement was the first unequivocal acknowledgement that the United States contemplated a total withdrawal of its forces, but it was not the unconditional pledge of such action that the enemy had been demanding.

The President's peace initiative elicited a favorable reaction in the Congress. Both Democrats and Republicans, whether hawks or doves, applauded his effort, and the Senate adopted a resolution of support for the President's "fair and equitable proposal." But response from the enemy was less than enthusiastic. Ambassador Bruce presented the President's proposal at the 86th plenary session of the Paris talks on 8 October. While avoiding outright rejection, Xuan Thuy and Mrs. Binh denounced President Nixon's peace plan as "a maneuver to deceive world opinion." The "absurd" insistence on mutual withdrawal continued to be part of the US position, they noted, and they held fast to their demands for total and immediate US withdrawal and for overthrow of the "puppet" leaders in Saigon. Two days later, on 10 October, the Soviet Union dismissed the President's initiative as "a great fraud" and voiced support for North Vietnam and the PRG. Its spokesman charged that the offered cease-fire would simply freeze "the position of the American interventionists in an alien land."[98]

During October 1970, the United States continued to hope that there might be some move by the other side to negotiate on the President's proposals. Ambassador Bruce repeatedly stressed US flexibility and willingness to compromise, but to no avail. His efforts along this line culminated at the plenary session on 5 November 1970, when he told the

98. NY Times, 9 Oct 70, 1; 11 Oct 70, 1. Dept of State Bulletin, 26 Oct 70, p. 468.

other side: "I have listened carefully to your statement this morning. Unfortunately, you continued to adhere to your habitual formula of self-serving propaganda and preconditions to negotiations." In contrast, the United States had offered proposals that were "not put forth on a take-it-or-leave-it basis" but as a starting point for serious discussion. Whenever the other side was ready to engage in such discussion, it would find the United States responsive and reasonable. The other side, however, was not ready then or in succeeding weeks, and the talks remained stalled throughout the remainder of the year.[99]

The Prisoner of War Issue

The return of prisoners of war was a continuing allied goal in the Paris talks throughout 1969 and 1970. Release of captured personnel was one of the specific objectives of the negotiating strategy paper approved by President Nixon in April 1969, and the United States and the Republic of Vietnam repeatedly called for the exchange of prisoners during 1969. Public concern over the fate of the prisoners mounted in 1970, and the United States and the Republic of Vietnam pursued the matter with increased emphasis in the Paris negotiations. Given the contrast between their own intense interest and the apparent indifference of the other side, the leverage available to the two governments on this issue was slight. Their representatives in Paris sought to build a case on the ground that the matter was one of human decency as well as legal obligation under the 1949 Geneva convention on prisoners of war. This subject, they argued, should be kept distinct from the political and military aspects of the negotiations. The US and RVN delegates reiterated these points at almost every plenary session in 1970, making the issue the sole subject of their presentations on several occasions.[100]

In the hope of achieving at least a partial release of prisoners, Secretary Laird suggested a course of action to the Secretary of State on 31 January 1970. An attempt should be made to persuade President Thieu to offer the

99. Dept of State Bulletin, 23 Nov 70, pp. 652-653.
100. Ibid., 23 Feb 70, pp. 202-204; 20 Apr 70, pp. 726-727; 28 Dec 70, p. 773.

repatriation of a substantial number of NVN personnel held by the Republic of Vietnam. The release, which could be proposed during the approaching Tet period, would be unconditional but the announcement could "imply additional release as a quid pro quo if any sign of reciprocity were shown by the North Vietnamese." Hanoi's leaders then would be faced with three alternatives, the Secretary of Defense reasoned. They could refuse to accept the prisoners, but in doing so they would appear "inhuman both in this country and abroad." Second, they could accept their own men while refusing to release any captured Americans. The public in the United States would be expecting Hanoi to respond on an equal basis; its failure to do so, the Secretary thought, should help to "solidify opinion behind our effort in Vietnam." The final alternative open to the enemy would be to accept their prisoners and release some allied captives or, at the minimum, permit communication with them.[101]

Ambassador Bunker discussed the proposal with President Thieu, but no decision was reached in time for Tet. Subsequently, on 26 March, the head of the RVN delegation in Paris, Ambassador Phan Dan Lam, announced his government's willingness to release 343 sick and wounded detainees. The NVN representatives ignored the offer. At the next plenary session, on 2 April, Mr. Habib told the enemy that all that was required on their part was the simple step of making the necessary arrangements for the repatriation. He charged that the enemy's silence in the face of efforts to open "some meaningful discussion of the treatment and disposition of prisoners of war" showed an utter lack of humanitarian consideration.[102]

In a new approach, RVN Ambassador Lam announced on 11 June 1970 that his government intended to repatriate 62 disabled war prisoners and 24 captured NVN fishermen simply by transporting them by sea to a North Vietnamese area and releasing them. Subsequently, a spokesman for Hanoi indicated that his government would raise no objection since no discussion of repatriation procedures was involved.

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101. (S-GP 4) Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 31 Jan 70, Att to JCS 2472/591, 4 Feb 70, JMF 912/170 (31 Jan 70).

102. (S) Msgs, Saigon 2056 and 3824 to State, 11 Feb and 14 Mar 70, JCS IN 22528 and 76512. NY Times, 27 Mar 70, 3. Dept of State Bulletin, 20 Apr 70, pp. 526-527.

On 11 July the prisoners were delivered in VNN shipping to a point off the coast of North Vietnam. Transferred to two junks with Red Cross markings, they reached shore by beaching the vessels.[103]

Meanwhile the Secretaries of Defense and State had been giving thought to further steps beyond this modest exercise. On 11 July 1970, Secretary Laird forwarded to Admiral Moorer a draft State-Defense message for Ambassador Bunker in Saigon proposing a large release of prisoners held by the Republic of Vietnam. This release would be spaced over a period of six months or longer with a goal of generating "sufficient momentum behind the notion of 'prisoner release' to bring irresistible pressure to bear on North Vietnam to return our PWs." Since the proposal involved the possible establishment of a corridor through the DMZ to facilitate the return of the prisoners, the Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a plan for such a corridor.

The draft State-Defense message indicated appreciation of President Thieu's reluctance to release able-bodied men who might return to battle but suggested that the risks would be outweighed by the potential gain. Despite the appearance of giving something for nothing, there could be immediate gains as well. There were grounds for believing that "enemy prisoners will do us more good returned than held." Their departure would relieve the drain on resources involved in managing and caring for prisoners, and it would reduce overcrowding in the camps, lessening the possibility of serious disturbances. A further thought was advanced. The draft message showed an intention to ask Ambassador Bunker for comment on the following question: Might President Thieu's reluctance to release able-bodied prisoners stem from "a belief that US engagement in SEA and support of GVN will be prolonged if US PWs remain in enemy camps and MIA remain unaccounted for?"[104]

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103. NY Times, 12 Jul 70, 3. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCS 2472/645-1, 20 Jul 70, JMF 912/170 (11 Jul 70). (~~S~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1970, pp. X-53 - X-55.

104. (~~S~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Establishment of a DMZ Corridor," 11 Jul 70, Att to JCS 2472/645, 13 Jul 70, JMF 912/170 (11 Jul 70).

At JCS direction, CINCPAC prepared the DMZ corridor plan, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted it to the Secretary of Defense on 23 July 1970. They told the Secretary that the plan was feasible for execution provided a local truce could be arranged. In addition, COMUSMACV would need expansion of his current operating authorities in the eastern area of the DMZ to accomplish required tasks both before and during the actual exchange.[105]

No action resulted on the proposed release, nor were there signs in Paris of agreement on any of the issues involved in the prisoner of war question. Lieutenant General Julian J. Ewell, who had replaced General Weyand as the Military Adviser to the US delegation at the Paris talks in June 1970, reported to Admiral Moorer on 31 July that there had been "a little lower level activity" on the prisoner issue but without positive results. There were differences in the interpretation of the matter as set out in the NLF 10 points of May 1969. The enemy claimed that his 10 points provided for disposing of prisoners of war after the conclusion of hostilities. The US delegation maintained that, in the first place, the proposal did not say that, and even if it did, many questions relating to the prisoners needed settling during the war rather than after. General Ewell also referred to the recent RVN release of sick and wounded prisoners. Within the US delegation consideration had been given to other proposals that might provide an effective followup, but the effort was now suspended in anticipation of the new instructions Ambassador Bruce might bring from Washington when he arrived in early August.[106]

Admiral Moorer responded to General Ewell on 14 August, expressing deep concern for the Americans in captivity and stressing the primacy of this issue in the negotiations.

> I would like to have it clearly understood by all military personnel who are in any way related to the negotiations, that I consider early return of our men to be of paramount importance. Their release, in my opinion, should be an essential

105. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 170202Z Jul 70; (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-354-70 to SecDef, 23 Jul 70, Encl A to JCS 2472/645-1, 20 Jul 70; same file.

106. (~~FOUO~~) Ltr, LTG Julian J. Ewell to CJCS, 31 Jul 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Negotiations, n.d.

prelude to any further military concessions on our part. I would appreciate it if this were to be the tenor of your advice to Ambassador Bruce on this subject.[107]

On 2 September 1970, Secretary Laird renewed his proposal for large-scale prisoner releases. Saying that he wanted a "dramatic sequel" to the return of the sick and wounded North Vietnamese in July, he requested JCS views on how to influence President Thieu and his advisers to move rapidly ahead on an offer to release 500 to 1,000 enemy prisoners, including able-bodied men.[108]

Both General Abrams and Admiral McCain supplied the Joint Chiefs of Staff their views on the Secretary's proposal. The former saw two major obstacles to large releases--President Thieu's opposition to the return of able-bodied North Vietnamese and refusal of the prisoners to be repatriated. He suggested that a new approach to President Thieu might take the form of a proposal to repatriate older prisoners or those longest in captivity, or to arrange for interment of the able-bodied in a neutral country. General Abrams noted that in arranging for the earlier release of 62 sick and wounded prisoners it had been learned that relatively few in this category were willing to accept repatriation prior to the end of hostilities. No effort had yet been made to determine how many able-bodied North Vietnamese would volunteer to leave the prison camps. Responding to a subsidiary question that CINCPAC had raised, General Abrams presented a strong case against resort to forcible repatriation.[109]

Admiral McCain was in substantial agreement with COMUSMACV. While not necessarily favoring forced repatriation, he considered that any program contemplating the return of as many as 1,000 prisoners would inevitably bring that policy question to the fore. To induce President Thieu to offer large-scale repatriation, he suggested that the United States develop a firm plan beforehand, be ready to

107. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CJCS to LTG Julian J. Ewell, 14 Aug 70, same file.
108. (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Enemy PW Repatriation," 2 Sep 70, JMF 911/170 (2 Sep 70).
109. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 12133 to CINCPAC (info CJCS), 7 Sep 70, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep-Oct 70.

foot the bill, come to an early decision on whether to use forcible repatriation, and see to it that the Republic of Vietnam received the principal credit in any favorable publicity arising from the operation.[110]

After considering the comments of the field commanders, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense on 18 September of their support for his desire to secure a sizable repatriation of NVN prisoners held by the Republic of Vietnam. They believed such a release was "needed" and would serve the best interests of US servicemen held captive. They touched briefly on the forcible repatriation question, merely noting that "large-scale release efforts could require an early decision on this policy."

In particular, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended consideration of interning enemy prisoners in a neutral country under the auspices of an international body such as the United Nations or the Red Cross. This approach appeared to meet President Thieu's objections. If successfully implemented, it could generate strong world opinion conducive to similar action by the North Vietnamese, to the ultimate benefit of US prisoners. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thought the internment proposal might offer the opportunity for "a significant breakthrough in this highly perplexing and frustrating situation."[111]

In his 7 October peace initiative, President Nixon called for the immediate release of prisoners held by both sides. He proposed that "all prisoners of war, without exception, be released now to return to the place of their choice." For the first time, he included civilian as well as military prisoners, suggesting that "all journalists and other innocent civilian victims of the conflict be released immediately as well." The United States was ready, he said, to discuss in detail the procedures necessary for rapid completion of the release.[112]

110. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 080310Z Sep 70, same file.
111. (S-GP 4) JCSM-449-70 to SecDef, 18 Sep 70, Encl to JCS 2472/672, 18 Sep 70, JMF 911/170 (2 Sep 70).
112. Public Papers, Nixon, 1970, p. 827.

The enemy's subsequent denunciation of all aspects of President Nixon's effort brought forth an angry comment from Ambassador Bruce at the 88th plenary session on 15 October. Tying discussion of prisoners to US acceptance of the enemy's political and military demands was "an unconscionable attempt to use the prisoners and their families as bargaining pawns."[113]

Secretary Laird's idea for a "dramatic step" had lain dormant for several months, but following the President's October initiative he revived his repatriation plan. In a memorandum for the President on 18 November, he expressed the belief that it was essential to keep the October proposals before the enemy and the world and, when feasible, to initiate further actions that would highlight them anew. The prisoner of war situation, he thought, presented such an opportunity. He recommended that the US and RVN delegates in Paris propose to "release all North Vietnamese POWs desiring to return to the North in exchange for the release of all US and Free World POWs held in Indochina and all GVN POWs in North Vietnam." Since the enemy would probably reject the proposal, the allied delegation then should propose the unilateral release of all NVN prisoners who desired to return home. The Secretary suggested that the International Committee of the Red Cross be asked to poll the NVN prisoners to identify the willing returnees; their passage to the North could then be accomplished by opening a corridor through the DMZ. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, he told the President, had already prepared a contingency plan for such a corridor. The Department of State agreed that the objectives being pursued by Secretary Laird were desirable but wished to delay the decision until Ambassador Bunker could join the discussion during a forthcoming visit to Washington.[114]

At the Paris talks three weeks later, on 10 December 1970, the senior RVN delegate and Ambassador Bruce proposed an immediate general exchange of prisoners. Their approach was essentially a reiteration of the last point in the President's 7 October address, since Secretary Laird's phraseology--"all

113. Dept of State Bulletin, 2 Nov 70, pp. 553-556.
114. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Prisoner of War Initiatives," 18 Nov 70, Att to JCS 2095/66, 20 Nov 70, JMF 170 (CY 1970).

North Vietnamese POWs desiring to return"--was not used. Ambassador Bruce pointed out to the other side that this offer gave it the opportunity of securing the release of some 8,000 NVA troops in return for the freeing of far fewer allied prisoners. He suggested that the two sides meet the following morning to discuss specific procedures to implement the proposal.[115]

North Vietnam and the PRG, however, rejected the offer, and for the three remaining meetings of the year, they continued their uncompromising demands that the United States meet their preconditions for serious negotiation. President Thieu, apparently, would not consent to any release of prisoners held by the Republic of Vietnam without assurance of reciprocal action by the enemy, and the allies made no move toward unilateral repatriation. At the final session of the year, on 30 December 1970, Ambassador Bruce reviewed the record and found that Hanoi had consistently ignored appeals to provide the humane treatment of prisoners required by international law. The North Vietnamese had refused to permit inspection of detainee camps or to provide for regular exchange of mail between captives and their families, and the list of prisoners that they had recently furnished was obviously incomplete. By this record, he told the opposing delegates, "you made clearer than ever before that humanitarian considerations counted little with you and that you intended to use the helpless men you hold and their families as political pawns." Thus, at the end of December 1970, the United States was no closer to obtaining the release of its prisoners than it was when the substantive negotiations began two years previously.[116]

Conclusion

As with the prisoner of war question, so it was with all the other negotiating issues. At the conclusion of 1970, the two sides were no nearer a diplomatic settlement than in January 1969.

The primary objective of the United States during the two years of negotiations had been the withdrawal of all external

115. NY Times, 11 Dec 70, 5. Dept of State, Bulletin, 28 Dec 70, p. 773.
116. NY Times, 11 Dec 70, 5. Dept of State Bulletin, 18 Jan 71, pp. 75-77.

forces from South Vietnam and a political settlement decided by the South Vietnamese themselves free of outside interference. Throughout 1969 and in 1970, the United States had invariably insisted on mutual withdrawal of allied and North Vietnamese troops. In President Nixon's latest peace initiative, however, this stand had received only an indirect expression, since his address on 7 October 1970 highlighted the offer of complete withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam on an agreed timetable as part of an overall settlement. Despite the President's avoidance of the term "mutual withdrawal," the enemy delegations in Paris had no difficulty in detecting the unaccented reaffirmation of this principle that his speech contained.

With regard to a political settlement, the United States initially preferred to deal first with such military aspects as cessation of infiltration, restoration of the integrity of the DMZ, and withdrawal, reserving consideration of the post-hostilities political structure in South Vietnam for later. Subsequently, however, it offered to discuss military and political settlements at the same time.

The US negotiating strategy approved in early April 1969 had listed an "eventual" cease-fire as an objective for the Paris talks. For some months there was virtual unanimity within the US Government on the position advocated strongly by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV: no cease-fire should be contracted for that was not contingent upon an agreed and verified mutual withdrawal. By early 1970, however, representatives of the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency in the policy discussions were seeking other, less demanding conditions to be attached to the prospective cease-fire. When it became apparent in early March that President Thieu no longer insisted on NVN withdrawal in connection with a standstill agreement, US policy took a new turn. In his peace initiative of 7 October 1970, President Nixon proposed a cease-fire in place throughout Indochina. And it was no longer to be an "eventual" cease-fire, but a first step that he hoped would "break the logjam in all the negotiations."

Throughout the two years of Paris meetings, however, North Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government steadfastly rejected all allied proposals. With unvarying rigidity, they demanded immediate and unconditional US withdrawal from Vietnam without mention of a parallel removal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam, Cambodia, or

Laos. Any political solution, they insisted, must be on their terms. They refused any serious discussion of the political question with the Republic of Vietnam and continually called for the overthrow of President Thieu. Moreover, both North Vietnam and the PRG accused the United States in 1970 of perpetuating the war in South Vietnam, intensifying it in Laos, and expanding it into Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger had been hopeful that progress could be made in private talks, if not in the plenary sessions. The senior NVN representative did meet secretly with Ambassador Lodge during the spring and summer of 1969, but only to reiterate the uncompromising stands already on record. Thereafter, North Vietnam rebuffed all suggestions for private meetings with the principal US delegate during the remainder of 1969 and throughout 1970. Other unpublicised talks were occurring, however. Since August 1969, Dr. Kissinger had traveled periodically to Paris for secret discussions with the North Vietnamese, though again without achieving any forward movement in the negotiations. Publicly the enemy spokesmen also scorned the idea of a broader peace conference to deal with Indochina as a whole, when it was proposed successively by the French Government, the Djakarta foreign ministers' meeting, the UN Secretary-General, and President Nixon.

After reviewing the futile course of the Paris talks, Ambassador Bruce told the NVN and PRG delegates at the last plenary session of 1970: "Ladies and gentlemen, this is not a record of serious negotiations."[117] But the Communists, apparently, thought time was on their side and saw no reason to negotiate. They need only wait, they must have concluded, until the United States, wearied of its unproductive insistence on mutual concessions and weakened by rising dissent and disillusionment at home, accepted a settlement of the war on their terms.

Consequently, by the end of 1970, President Nixon had been unable to obtain a negotiated end to the Vietnam war. He had, however, in the first two years of his Administration reversed the ever increasing US commitment to the Southeast Asian conflict that had occurred in the period 1964 through 1968. Upon his assumption of office, President Nixon and his advisers had reassessed US policy in

117. Dept of State Bulletin, 18 Jan 71, pp. 75-77.

Vietnam. Realizing that US public support of the effort was no longer assured and that the United States could no longer afford the financial drain of the war, President Nixon decided to end US involvement in Vietnam. This would be accomplished through negotiations, if possible, or by means of Vietnamization, if necessary. Since the Paris talks brought no success in 1969 or 1970, the President had come to rely on Vietnamization to achieve his goal.

By December 1970, it appeared that the President's policy was succeeding. During 1969 and 1970, the United States withdrew over 205,000 men from Vietnam, and the number of US servicemen killed in action dropped from 14,500 during 1968 to 4,200 in 1970. "We now see the end of Americans' combat role in Vietnam in sight," President Nixon declared at the beginning of 1971.

> We are on the way out and we are on the way out in a way that will bring a just peace . . . that will build, I hope, the foundation for a generation of peace.[118]

In addition, the United States had reduced its air operations in Indochina and was turning over an increasing share of the fighting to the RVN troops. The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces assumption of the combat role bore witness to the success of Vietnamization. At the end of 1970, the RVN forces were not only larger but also better equipped and trained than ever before. In addition to the expanded participation in the fighting, the Republic of Vietnam had gained a definite momentum in pacification, exerting a growing control over the countryside and the rural population of South Vietnam.

What the coming year would bring in the negotiations the allies could not foresee at the end of 1970. The enemy appeared to believe that time was on his side, but for him to continue stringing out the negotiations was not without certain risks. The months expended in this way might be the very time necessary for the success of Vietnamization. Conceivably the last US forces might depart, leaving in place RVN forces that were fully capable of preventing North

118. Public Papers, Nixon, 1971, p. 7.

Vietnam from imposing its will on the south. Another uncertainty for the enemy was the question of how long the United States would tolerate the indignity of stalemated negotiations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders were united in recommending less restrictive authorities and expanded operations against North Vietnam. Might not the President, exasperated by the lack of progress toward a peaceful settlement, finally come to accept their advice and seek to influence the outcome by military action?