clean

~~TOP SECRET~~

SPECIAL HANDLING REQUIRED

Copy 35 of 35 copies

each of 87 sheets

~~LIMITED DISTRIBUTION~~

Mr. Ponturo
6 February 1964

WSEG FILE COPY

NO MARK

FIRST DRAFT

LOANED

CRITICAL INCIDENT NO. 3

WORKING PAPER NO. 3

THE SOUTH VIETNAM CRISIS OF 1961: DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM

RETIREMENT COPY
1967

INVENTORY FEB 13 1975

THIS DOCUMENT AS A WHOLE IS CLASSIFIED ~~TOP SECRET~~.
INDIVIDUAL PORTIONS AND ATTACHMENTS HERETO
CARRY THEIR APPROPRIATE CLASSIFICATION.

DECLASSIFIED BY AUTHORITY OF
THE JOINT STAFF
20Feb91 80-F01-997
DATE CASE #

EXCLUDED FROM THE GDS

GROUP 1

EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC
DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION

INVENTORY JAN 2 1972

NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION
"Unauthorized Disclosure Subject to
Criminal Sanctions"

INVENTORY MAR 3 1973

This material contains information affecting the national defense of the United States within the meaning of the Espionage Laws (Title 18, U.S.C., sections 793 and 794), the transmission or revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

Reproduction of this document in whole or in part is prohibited except with permission of the issuing office. It will not be removed from the WSEG area in the Pentagon without approval of the Director.

OASD(PA) DFOISR 83-TS-72 Doc 8
80F01997 Cy R-3

Return this document to TS/LD Section, Room 1D847, PERSONALLY, or call 77313 for pickup. Do not release to Messengers, Area Control Clerks, or anyone else. Make sure you obtain your receipt upon return of this document.

SJCS/Doc 810
Cy R-3
FOI 637A

~~TOP SECRET~~

095298
Log No. TS-64-69/1

F501

WSEG

TOP SECRET

FOREWORD

1. This draft Working Paper is part of an interim response to DJSM 1111-61 of 14 September 1961 and other JCS authorizations, in accordance with which WSEG has been conducting studies of command problems and procedures in a variety of recent critical situations. The overall purpose of these studies is to provide empirical data concerning the operations of the National command structure in actual crisis situations, in order to aid in the development of improved command and control systems and procedures.

2. The paper is a preliminary account of background factors in the development of the South Vietnam crisis of October 1961 - February 1962. During that period, as a result of intensified Communist insurgency in South Vietnam, the United States became deeply involved in active military support of that country, short of intervention with ground combat forces. This established the general pattern of response which still governs United States actions in South Vietnam. The command decisions and actions of that period, therefore, appear to constitute an important subject for study, both as an example of the handling of a difficult and complex political/military insurgency situation, and because it has remained and continues to be one of the most critical foreign problems confronting the United States.

3. This paper is an introductory narrative presenting command decisions and actions preceding the crisis in the fall of 1961. It is preliminary in nature, and subject to further revision and refinement as the study proceeds. Few conclusions are offered, and those offered are necessarily tentative. It is available at this time in the belief that it may be of some use during the period pending completion of the full study.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

C.I. NO. 3

WORKING PAPER NO. 3

THE SOUTH VIETNAM CRISIS OF 1961: DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page No.
INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND OF THE SITUATION	1
THE EARLY RESPONSE	8
NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GVN	15
SUGGESTIONS FROM STATE	22
THE DEPSECDEF TASK FORCE	29
THE FINAL REPORT AND THE DECISIONS	37
THE TASK FORCE ON VIETNAM	46
THE ISSUE OF U.S. COMBAT FORCES	53
THE ISSUE OF GVN FORCE LEVELS	60
THE SPECIAL FINANCIAL GROUP REPORT	73
CONCLUDING SUMMARY AND COMMENTS	77

TABLES

TABLE I	- TASK FORCE ON VIETNAM	47
TABLE II	- PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR VIETNAM (As of 23 May 1961)	49
TABLE III	- SUPPLEMENT TO PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR VIETNAM, 11 SEPTEMBER 1961	77

TOP SECRET

C.I. NO. 3

WORKING PAPER NO. 3

THE SOUTH VIETNAM CRISIS OF 1961: DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

1. This paper is the first of a series of four proposed to deal with command decisions and actions relating to the South Vietnam situation during late 1961 and the first months of 1962, from the perspective of the Joint Staff.

2. The intent in the series is to focus upon situational variations from critical incidents already studied by the WSEG Command and Control Group, in order to permit observations of command problems and processes in a context somewhat different from the others.

3. This paper, covering the development of a Presidential program of action with respect to South Vietnam in the first half of 1961, is concerned with the policies, decisions, and actions as they had accumulated by the fall of 1961. It is, therefore, introductory to the other three.

4. The other papers proposed will cover the development of a second Presidential program in the fall of 1961, the early implementation phase of the second program in the winter of 1961-1962, and the particular problem of command arrangements which existed throughout the period under study.

BACKGROUND OF THE SITUATION

5. When the Kennedy Administration took office in January 1961, the South Vietnam situation was already far advanced on the critical list of foreign trouble spots in which U.S. interests were threatened.

TOP SECRET

6. The U.S.-sponsored and supported Government of Vietnam (GVN) was being seriously undermined by Communist insurgency. Ostensibly an internal conflict with hostilities confined to South Vietnam, on the Communist side the effort was covertly aided and abetted by the Communist regime in North Vietnam, the so-called Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).

7. The situation did not appear on the international scene as an isolated incident. Together with the concurrent intensification of insurgency in Laos, it appeared as a move by the Communists to step up their long-term campaign to bring the whole of Southeast Asia under Communist control. Against the background of a belligerent Chinese Communist propaganda campaign, it appeared as a possible portent of new aggressive moves in Asia. In the context of Khrushchev's open espousal of "wars of national liberation," it appeared as an example and test of the preferred Communist strategy for conquering the weak, underdeveloped areas. And when associated with still other events -- Soviet missile threats, the revival of the Berlin issue, attempts to penetrate the Middle East, and actions in Cuba, the Congo, Indonesia, and elsewhere -- the insurgency in South Vietnam appeared to be part of a comprehensive Communist offensive against the "truce lines" established by the U.S. policy of containment.[1]

8. Communist insurgency in South Vietnam did not erupt suddenly. It had been an active threat for a number of years prior to 1961, and in a larger sense can be dated back to the

[1]As characterized by the Chairman of the State Department Policy Planning Council, who in 1961 was Deputy Special Assistant to the President for national security affairs, the intensified insurgency in South Vietnam was part of the Soviet "post-Sputnik" offensive, which began about 1958 and ended with the termination of the Cuban crisis in the fall of 1962. See W. W. Rostow, "The Third Round," Foreign Affairs, October 1963.

beginnings of the Indochina War in 1946.[1] After the cease-fire and partition of 1954, however, when the French surrendered Indochina and the independent GVN and DRV jurisdictions were established, insurgency in South Vietnam subsided considerably. The DRV, which was supposed to withdraw all Communist military forces to North Vietnam, did leave behind a hard-core politico-military apparatus to carry on a campaign of subversion, but for the next few years this campaign emphasized clandestine political action rather than guerrilla warfare. Violence was largely restricted to assassinations of local officials and GVN sympathizers, acts of terrorism in rural villages, and general harassment of government operations in areas in which GVN authority was not firmly established. Organized guerrilla units remained in being, but overt guerrilla warfare on any substantial scale was deemphasized.[2]

9. On the surface this Communist campaign met with little discernible success; but neither was it an outright failure. Against Vietnamese Communist (Viet Cong, or VC) and other dissidents, and at least on the military level, the GVN made substantial progress in consolidating its authority over most of South Vietnam. VC forces were whittled down, dispersed, and driven from critical areas of the country. By mid-1957, the GVN was able to relieve its regular armed forces of primary responsibility for internal security, and to transfer that responsibility to police and paramilitary organizations.

---

[1] Some unofficial observers prefer to speak of the 1946-1954 war against the French as the First Indochina War, and the subsequent insurgency in Laos and South Vietnam as the Second Indochina War. See Bernard B. Fall, The Two Vietnams, New York, 1963.

[2] The picture being sketched here is based upon a series of National Intelligence Estimates issued during the period. See NIE 63.1-3-55, 11 October 1955; NIE 63-56, 17 July 1956; and NIE 63-59, 26 May 1959; all SECRET.

TOP SECRET

By 1959, reduced to an estimated 2000 active guerrillas (and probably several thousand inactive ones), the VC in South Vietnam no longer appeared capable of bringing down the GVN, directly or indirectly, by their own efforts; and the prospects for Communist takeover short of an external attack from the North seemed rather slim. On the other hand, the GVN was still unable to make its authority stick in many areas without the immediate backing of military force; regular troops still had to be called upon from time to time to assist hard-pressed police and paramilitary forces; and a sizable number of VC militants seemed able to withstand all GVN efforts to destroy or eliminate them as a serious security problem. In short, despite many accomplishments, the GVN was hardly out of the woods, and the situation looked more like a stalemate than a victory.

10. Sometime in late 1959, at about the same time that the Communists went on the offensive in Laos, a change in VC strength and tactics became apparent in South Vietnam.[1] VC guerrillas, apparently reinforced by trained cadres infiltrated from North Vietnam and by local recruits as well, began to appear in greater numbers and in larger combat units, and they began to engage in more aggressive military action. Incidents of all types -- killings, kidnappings, raids, ambushes -- were stepped up in frequency and severity, and they began to occur in hitherto quiet parts of South Vietnam. Casualties from VC action began to mount seriously, especially among the paramilitary forces responsible for defense at the village level. Increasing areas of the country became insecure, or came under considerable VC control.

[1] NIE 50-61, 28 March 1961, SECRET.

TOP SECRET

11. As Communist influence spread, and as the GVN's inability to maintain effective internal security became more evident, discontent within South Vietnam intensified. Opposition to the regime, never far below the surface, became more vocal and active. Criticism of GVN leaders became widespread, both within the government and without. Pro-GVN elements became uneasy, and morale declined sharply.

12. The unstable position of the GVN was highlighted in November 1960, when an attempted military coup was narrowly defeated. Hitherto loyal paratroop forces in Saigon, joined by some civilian opponents of the regime, revolted and besieged the Presidential palace. The regime was saved by the hesitancy of coup leaders while they negotiated about political reforms with President Ngo Dinh Diem, and by their failure to cut communications from the palace. Diem was able to call upon other troops, who entered the capital the next day and readily subdued the rebels. The incident left the GVN quite shaken, however.

13. U.S. policy and prestige had become deeply involved in South Vietnam, and in Southeast Asia generally. During the Indochina War, the U.S. had provided major military assistance to France, in the form of large quantities of equipment. Then, in 1954, when the French war effort seemed on the point of collapse and a Communist victory imminent, the U.S. made strenuous diplomatic efforts to organize some form of united action by the three major allies -- the U.S., the U.K., and France -- to meet the emergency. This effort failed, and in the end the Western powers accepted an unsatisfactory settlement that left the Communists free to consolidate their hold in North Vietnam and left the rest of Southeast Asia vulnerable

to further Communist encroachments. With French forces withdrawn and the power of Communist China overshadowing the area, the danger that the remaining countries would sooner or later succumb, or turn toward accommodation with the Communist Bloc, seemed great.

14. In response to these circumstances, the U.S. moved urgently to establish a collective security arrangement for Southeast Asia, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The SEATO Pact, signed at Manila in September 1954, declared that "each party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area . . . would endanger its own peace and safety;" each would act to meet such aggression "in accordance with its constitutional processes;" and, in the event of threats other than external aggression (such as indirect aggression or subversion), the members would "consult immediately" on measures "for the common defense."[1] Signatories were the U.S., U.K., France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

15. South Vietnam did not become a member of SEATO, out of deference to the 1954 Geneva Accords, which barred the former Indochina states from membership in military alliances. However, a protocol to the SEATO Pact specifically included South Vietnam (as well as Laos and Cambodia) within the "treaty area" to which SEATO obligations were applicable.[2]

16. As the language of the treaty indicates, SEATO was not intended to imply commitments as strong as those of NATO, and

[1] "The Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, Signed at Manila, September 8, 1954." The text is available in the Council on Foreign Relations, Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1954, New York, 1955, pp. 319-323.

[2] Ibid, p. 323.

the U.S. discouraged proposals for the permanent assignment of forces to SEATO or for the creation of a close-knit NATO-type of command arrangement. Short of such steps, however, over the next years, the U.S. expended considerable effort in underwriting the SEATO defense structure, in promoting its image as a protective shield, and in otherwise asserting a strong stake in SEATO as a deterrent to Communist aggression and as a political/moral framework for intervention should deterrence fail.

17. The active role of the U.S. as the principal sponsor and mainstay of SEATO was especially prominent because of the weakness of its Asian members and because of the increasing reluctance of the Western allies to remain deeply involved in Southeast Asia, or to fully back firm anti-Communist policies in the area, after the loss of their colonies. The burden of SEATO defense became virtually a unilateral U.S. responsibility, and SEATO largely became a vehicle for associating U.S. power with the defense of Southeast Asia. This represented a new U.S. defense commitment.

18. In addition to establishing SEATO, the U.S. acted directly to support the more vulnerable and exposed countries of the area, to bolster their anti-Communist posture and policy, and to encourage their reliance on close alignment with the U.S. and the West.

19. South Vietnam, a prime Communist target in the area in critical need of outside help, became a focal point for much of this U.S. effort. U.S. backing was instrumental in the formulation of the GVN under President Diem, a strong anti-Communist who opposed neutralism and was clearly committed

to the West. The U.S. also assumed the preponderant burden of supporting the GVN armed forces and the GVN economy. U.S. military/economic assistance programs for South Vietnam became the largest in the area -- some $2 billion from 1955-1962.[1]

20. In sum, a number of U.S. interests were engaged in South Vietnam, over and above any political or military interest in the country itself. South Vietnam stood out in Southeast Asia as a special ward of the U.S., in which the U.S. had a substantial investment. It was closely identified with U.S. policies in the area, which were under challenge and test. And it was under the formal protection of a U.S.-sponsored collective security treaty, which had still to prove itself to some of the countries it was intended to defend. By the time the renewed insurgency developed in 1959, a threat to South Vietnam had become difficult to divorce from a threat to broader U.S. interests, in Southeast Asia and perhaps beyond.

THE EARLY RESPONSE

21. The deterioration of the internal situation in South Vietnam was noted within the Eisenhower Administration, and certain staff actions initiated during 1960 became important inputs to the deliberations and decisions of 1961. Chief among these 1960 actions was the development of a U.S. "Counterinsurgency Plan" (CIP).

22. The CIP had its genesis in an April 1960 CINCPAC staff study on means for combating Communist insurgency in South

[1] Viet Nam and Southeast Asia, Report of Senator Mike Mansfield, et al, to the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, Washington, 1963.

Vietnam (and Laos).[1] The study pointed to the recent escalation of the "undeclared covert war" in South Vietnam, and warned that it could lead to the downfall of the GVN if not suppressed. It called for clear recognition of the situation as an emergency. It outlined the nature of the counterinsurgency operations required, stated that neither the GVN nor the U.S. were properly geared to conduct them effectively, and proposed appropriate remedial measures.

23. The CINCPAC study was noteworthy for the breadth of both its diagnosis of the situation and its recommendations for dealing with it. It defined the primary objective of the conflict as gaining control of the local populace on a continuing basis. If the government side was to win, it must not only provide adequate physical protection against the VC, it must also, and concurrently, make positive efforts to win active public support and cooperation. Physical protection could not be accomplished merely by territorial military sweeps against the VC; it required a coordinated campaign, by military, paramilitary, police, and civil agencies, concentrating upon one area at a time, to eliminate the VC and establish effective defensive systems to prevent their return. Gaining popular support required coordinated operations by all government agencies in the socio-economic area, to extend government services, improve living standards, and eliminate basic grievances, in order to establish government authority securely in each region, district, and village.

24. The fundamental need, according to the CINCPAC study, was for the GVN to organize and conduct such a campaign.

[1] CINCPAC letter to JCS, Serial No. 00212, 27 April 1960; enclosure to JCS 1992/798, 3 May 1960, SECRET.

This would require a national plan for fully integrating civil/military resources, and a national operations control system for central direction and coordination. The control system envisaged was similar to that adopted in the Malaya counterinsurgency campaign, which brought together at each echelon civil, military, and police representatives, under a national executive policy council at the top and an overall military director of operations.

25. The CINCPAC study called for a set of Washington decisions: to encourage the GVN to adopt the national emergency organization and develop a national campaign plan, to authorize and direct U.S. agencies to support the GVN effort, and to provide the necessary material and "extraordinary" budgetary support. All U.S. agencies in the country should be directed to cooperate fully in planning and supporting the GVN campaign, coordinating their advice and aid and avoiding "uncoordinated or divergent actions or policies." On the military side, ChMAAG should direct his primary effort toward supporting the counterinsurgency effort. He should assume responsibility for training, advising, and supporting the GVN militia-type forces in addition to the regular forces, and he should support U.S. Information Service (USIS) and U.S. Operations Mission (USOM) in psychological and civic actions.

26. In forwarding the study to the JCS, CINCPAC stated that ChMAAG Vietnam (and Chief PEO Laos) had collaborated with his staff in putting it into final form and that both endorsed its conclusions and recommendations. He stated further that he intended to use the study as the basis for further actions but that these would be fruitless without the full support of all departments and agencies concerned.

27. The JCS forwarded the CINCPAC study to the SecDef, with the recommendation that he initiate action to obtain the prompt and full support of other departments and agencies for actions along the general lines proposed by CINCPAC.[1]

28. This step was apparently not specific enough for CINCPAC. He next forwarded (to the JCS) a draft JCS memo to the SecDef, enclosing a draft outline plan for counter-insurgency operations by the GVN, and a draft State-Defense-International Cooperation Administration (ICA) message directing the Country Team to develop the plan in detail and determine U.S. support requirements. The draft outline plan sketched briefly the operations control system and the principal operational concepts described in the initial CINCPAC study. The plan and estimates of U.S. personnel, materiel, and budgetary support required for the GVN to execute it, were to be prepared by the Country Team in sufficient detail for review by Washington agencies concerned. The plan was not to be made known to the GVN prior to Washington approval of its policy and funding implications. After the U.S. position was established, the Ambassador would be directed to obtain GVN acceptance of the plan, which was to be a prerequisite to the provision of U.S. support.[2]

29. The JCS accepted the memo drafted by CINCPAC, together with the outline plan and the draft message to the Country Team, and transmitted them to the SecDef on 30 August. In their memo the JCS added that the steps recommended by

[1]JCS 1992/814, 6 June 1960, SECRET.
[2]JCS 1992/821, 8 July 1960, SECRET.

CINCPAC were "worthy of consideration" as a model procedure for other underdeveloped countries with actual or potential insurgency problems.[1]

30. On 16 September the SecDef wrote to the SecState, forwarding the JCS memo and the draft outline plan. He noted the increasing urgency of the situation in South Vietnam, said he agreed in principal with the views of the JCS, and suggested that "our staffs . . . work together in developing appropriate implementing instructions" for the refinement of the plan.[2]

31. The necessary instructions, worked out by ISA and State, went to the Country Team on 19 October.[3] The completed CIP was submitted to State in a series of dispatches from Saigon in early January 1961,[4] and was ready for Washington staffing and decision when the Kennedy Administration took office, some eight months after the CINCPAC initiative.

32. As it came up for review by the new Administration, the CIP stressed heavily the political and administrative reforms required of the GVN, and the correction of GVN operational deficiencies. It went beyond the CINCPAC proposals in calling for some liberalization of the Diem regime, by bringing some non-Communist opponents into the government, surfacing or dissolving the regime's control apparatus, the clandestine Can Lao "party," lifting some

[1] JCS 1992/838, 30 August 1960, SECRET.

[2] N/H of JCS 1992/838, 20 September 1960, SECRET.

[3] Joint State-Defense message 658 to Saigon, 192020Z October 1960, SECRET.

[4] AmEmb Saigon to State, 276 of 4 January 1961, 280 of 6 January 1961, 286 of 9 January 1961, and 287 of 9 January 1961, SECRET.

inhibitions on legislative activity, and permitting greater freedom of the press. It called for fiscal reforms and improvements in the effectiveness of economic programs. It called for greater delegation of authority to military commanders, and a clearer and more streamlined chain of command. It called for an increase in regular military forces from 150,000 to 170,000 men, and the transfer of the Civil Guard (CG), a national internal security force, equipped like infantry but under the Interior Department, to the Defense Department. It called for intensified training in counter-insurgency tactics and techniques, strengthened intelligence and counterintelligence efforts, more intensive border/coastal surveillance, and more offensive utilization of the armed forces in counterinsurgency operations.

33. The Kennedy Administration took early action to approve the CIP. From the Joint Staff standpoint, the action was procedurally somewhat erratic. On 28 January, after a White House meeting attended by the CJCS, among others, the President authorized a $28.4 million increase in FY 1961 military aid to expand South Vietnam forces by 20,000 men and a $12.9 million increase to support a 32,000 CG.[1] Both measures were in the CIP. Both had also been recommended by ChMAAG and CINCPAC, but not yet by the JCS.[2]

34. Notification of the President's decision was issued by the White House on 30 January, and was circulated in the Joint Staff on 2 February.[3]

---

[1] N/H of JCS 1992/911, 2 February 1961, SECRET.
[2] CINCPAC letter to JCS, Serial No. 0041, 18 January 1961, SECRET.
[3] N/H of JCS 1992/911.

35. Meanwhile, based on the Presidential fund authorization, State proposed to ISA a joint State-Defense message approving the CIP. ISA, which had been reviewing the CIP since its receipt in early January, asked for CINCPAC and JCS comments.[1]

36. The Joint Staff was provided with the dispatches containing the CIP on 31 January, and J-3 was asked to furnish comments and recommendations by 1 February.[2] The initial reaction in J-3 was to recommend deferral, on grounds that CINCPAC comments and ISA conclusions on fund sources were prerequisite to approval by the JCS.[3]

37. On 3 February, however, after noting the President's decision on funds and State action to obtain approval of the CIP, the staff suggested that these actions made expeditious approval by the JCS desirable; but that since time did not permit review and comments by CINCPAC and the Services, there might remain a need for later revisions in the plan. On 6 February the JCS formally approved the CIP "in principle," subject to revision in support requirements that review by the Services might indicate as necessary or desirable. A memo to this effect went to the SecDef.[4]

38. The joint State-Defense message approving the CIP had already gone to Saigon, however, on 3 February.[5] This was two weeks after the Administration took office.

---

[1]JCS 1992/917, 3 February 1961, SECRET.
[2]JCS 1992/913, 31 January 1961, SECRET.
[3]JCS 1992/914, 1 February 1961, SECRET.
[4]JCS 1992/917, 9 February 1961, SECRET (Decision On).
[5]ChMAAG letter to CINCPAC, 3 February 1961, Enclosure to JCS 1992/928, 8 March 1961, SECRET; ChMAAG to CINCPAC, 040525Z March 1961, SECRET.

NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GVN

39. Washington instructions to the field were to present the CIP to the GVN as a package. If the GVN did not provide the necessary cooperation ("without which the plan will fail"), the Ambassador was to inform the SecState and make suitable recommendations, "perhaps including the suspension of the U.S. contribution." Although it was recognized that the Country Team must have some latitude in working out a "mutually agreeable version" with the GVN, it was hoped that there would be few changes and that the plan would not have to be again referred to Washington. A two-week time limit was suggested.

40. The Ambassador and ChMAAG formally presented a synopsis of the CIP to Diem on 13 February, and there ensued a series of detailed negotiations between the Country Team and top officials of the GVN.[1] ChMAAG and his principal staff officers conducted the negotiations on the military aspects, dealing at times with Diem (who was Defense Minister as well as President), his civilian deputy for Defense, and high-ranking military officers. Other parts of the Embassy worked similarly with their GVN counterparts.

41. It soon became clear that a quick acceptance of the CIP, with only minor changes, was not to be expected; that even the bait of substantially increased U.S. aid was insufficient to ensure agreement to the CIP as a complete package; and that a two-week time limit was quite unrealistic. Discussions on the CIP continued for months.

42. The principal stumbling blocks were the political and organizational measures proposed in the CIP. These were

[1] ASD/ISA, I-13678/61, 12 April 1961, SECRET.

known to be unpalatable to the GVN. Similar measures had frequently been suggested by U.S. representatives, with little or no effect except to aggravate U.S.-GVN relations and reduce GVN confidence in U.S. support.[1] GVN leaders had remained convinced that, at least in the prevailing circumstances, they needed to rely upon authoritarian methods and stringent controls, with power closely held and exercised by a dedicated uncompromising group like themselves. They tended to be deeply suspicious of any potential sources of antiregime activity, hypersensitive on the question of domestic or foreign criticism, and intolerant of political opposition as a threat to national security. President Diem, who had emerged from a difficult uphill struggle against both internal and external intrigues of a rather violent sort, seemed to have full confidence only in himself and members of his family. He preferred to operate through an informal chain of command of trusted officials, along with or instead of the regular machinery of government. He had been able, by and large, to keep rivals or possible rivals divided, isolated, or otherwise neutralized, to prevent the consolidation of military or civilian factions strong enough to overthrow him, and thus had managed to impose a kind of order and stability in the GVN. His methods, to be sure, left the lines of administrative and operational responsibility jumbled and confused, and contributed much to governmental inefficiency; but they were the methods he counted upon for the preservation of his regime.

43. It is not surprising, therefore, that the GVN proved stubborn during negotiations on the CIP, especially when it

[1]NIS 43D (South Vietnam), Section 55, November 1960, SECRET.

came to measures which required fundamental changes in the highly centralized and personal system of rule established by Diem.

44. The GVN would accept little in the way of political liberalization. It refused flatly to alter or disband the Can Lao machine, or to broaden the government by appointing one or two "responsible" non-Communist opponents to cabinet positions. It would only agree to "continue" to encourage more legislative initiative and more public debate and criticism (short of legislative investigation of government agencies), and to "continue" to dismiss incompetent or dishonest officials.[1]

45. On the proposed national emergency operations control system, the GVN appeared to agree to the main outlines, and assured U.S. representatives it would proceed with actual implementation. An Internal Security Council, composed of the president and key cabinet members, had already been established, presumably to function as a top policy-making and coordinating body.[2] It had a senior military commander as its permanent secretary-general, through whom council actions would presumably be implemented, as they would in the case of a director of operations. Similar arrangements at regional and provincial levels were agreed to. The military establishment would be reorganized with field command (formally in charge of the field forces) designated as the

[1]Saigon to State, 456, 13 April 1961, SECRET. This dispatch transmitted the final version of a memorandum of agreement between a Country Team staff group and a GVN group which met on 24 March.

[2]CINCPAC to JCS, 262255Z February 1961, TOP SECRET.

unified command under which all military operations would be conducted. The country would be divided into three subordinate corps zones as area commands with permanently assigned units. The corps zones, in turn, would be subdivided into smaller and more manageable divisional tactical zones and subzones.[1]

46. Although the GVN agreed to these measures and even began to issue some of the necessary decrees, the critical question was whether Diem would use the system, i.e., whether the Internal Security Council would in fact be a decision body, whether field command would in fact have operational control of the armed forces; or whether Diem would continue as before, making the decisions himself, bypassing command channels, and interfering at operating levels.

47. The handling of the Province Chief (PC) problem provided considerable grounds for skepticism. The PC in South Vietnam (there were some 40 provinces) was the administrative agent of the central government in his province. He was appointed by Diem himself, and in practice was directly accountable to him, almost as a personal henchman. He was responsible for internal security as well as political and economic matters, controlled police and other internal security forces, and even from time to time controlled military units assigned directly by Diem. Although generally a military officer, he was not in the military chain of command, and could utilize assigned forces at his discretion (subject only to Diem's approval). Moreover, the PC could often exercise an effective veto over the military plans and operations of other forces in his province, even when they

[1]Saigon to State 456, 13 April 1961, SECRET.

were assigned to an area commander in the military chain of command, since in any dispute he could appeal directly to Diem. This was politically vital to Diem, since it provided an important check on the military and helped to maintain his power of decision with respect to tactical operations. In any case, Diem seemed to trust the PC's more than the military commanders, he needed them more politically, and he tended to side with them. To American critics, Diem defended the PC as the man who often knew his province better than military commanders, and who was therefore often the better judge of appropriate military strategy and tactics there.[1]

48. U.S. representatives like ChMAAG held the PC arrangement largely responsible for the immobilization of the bulk of the GVN forces in static defense duties, and for their utilization in a fragmented, uncoordinated manner.[1] They felt that any plan to delegate operational control of military forces to a unified command, to establish a clear chain of command to tactical units, to conduct operations according to an integrated systematic plan, and to promote the offensive prosecution of the campaign, had to overcome the PC obstacle. This became the subject of many U.S.-GVN discussions, therefore, between ChMAAG and Diem, between the Country Team and GVN staff groups, and even between CINCPAC (visiting Saigon after a SEATO conference) and Diem.[2]

49. The GVN response in these discussions was to agree readily to the principle of units of command and clearcut channels, but to balk at any basic change in the role of the

[1]Saigon to State 422, 23 March 1961, CONFIDENTIAL, transmitting a record of a discussion between ChMAAG and Diem on 7 March.

[2]Saigon to State 422, 23 March 1961, CONFIDENTIAL; and 456, 13 April 1961, SECRET; CINCPAC to JCS, 011600Z April 1961, TOP SECRET.

PC. The PC was provided a second hat, as a military sub-zonal commander, formally responsible in military matters to field command through divisional and corps zone commanders (who could not, however, remove or discipline him); and he retained his hat as PC for political, economic, and psychological affairs, with direct access to the president. ChMAAG informed Washington, via an Embassy dispatch to State, that the situation would continue to be "difficult," and in the final analysis would depend upon Diem's decisions in conflicts between the PC and his military superiors.[1] CINCPAC's conclusion was that Diem would not turn all power over to the military and would continue to insist on split power lines; "this we have to live and deal with."[2]

50. The failure of the GVN to accept the CIP in its entirety, and its procrastination on those CIP measures it promised to adopt, precipitated a split within the Country Team and led to the breakdown of the package notion underlying the CIP. The Ambassador reported "considerable progress" in arriving at an agreed CIP, but advised that aid be withheld pending more concrete evidence of GVN intentions to implement CIP measures.[3] Even when he agreed on 15 April that procurement of long lead-time military equipment for the CIP force augmentation should proceed, he argued strongly against informing the GVN, in order to maintain "pressure" for further progress. Release of the aid, he said, was his only lever for insuring that Diem did not place all emphasis on the military aspects of counterinsurgency and ignore the "political" factors. He cited important CIP actions not yet

[1]Saigon to State 422, 23 March 1961, CONFIDENTIAL.
[2]CINCPAC to JCS, 011600Z April 1961, TOP SECRET.
[3]Saigon to State 456, 13 April 1961, SECRET.

undertaken by the GVN, such as a decree giving field command operational control of the armed forces, and directives on the basic reorganization and decentralization of governmental authority.[1]

51. ChMAAG, on the other hand, apparently came to believe early that sufficient agreement had been reached on the bulk of the CIP for the U.S. to proceed with supporting actions. Concerned with his lead-time problems, he pressed for early decision, especially on the military aid measures.[2] He criticized the "civilian element" in the Country Team for lack of understanding of military problems, and for attempting to drive Diem on the question of political reforms farther and faster than could be accomplished in the insurgency situation. Although the Ambassador was an obstacle to the candid expression of these views in ChMAAG's official communications,[3] military visitors to South Vietnam brought them back to Washington. One lieutenant general, asked by the SecDef to submit a memo on South Vietnam after a visit there, reported on 28 March that the GVN had accepted "80 percent" of the CIP.[4] A colonel from ISA who spent the first week of April in South Vietnam reported "substantial agreement" with the GVN, and said he considered the "few points" unacceptable to the GVN "not overriding" from the professional military

---

[1] Saigon to State Embtel 1606, 15 April 1961, SECRET.

[2] ChMAAG letter to CINCPAC, 3 February 1961, Enclosure to JCS 1992/928, 8 March 1961, SECRET; ChMAAG to CINCPAC 040525Z March 1961, SECRET; ChMAAG to CINCPAC 180541Z March 1961, SECRET.

[3] The South Vietnam Ambassador's jurisdiction over military matters, ChMAAG, and ChMAAG communications became an important issue in Washington. The nature of the problem and attempts to resolve it will be discussed in a separate paper on command arrangements.

[4] JCS 1992/927, 28 March 1961; JCS 1992/942, 31 March 1961; SECRET.

viewpoint, and not important enough to delay U.S. agreement.[1] Finally, on 25 April, while in Washington for high-level consultations on South Vietnam, ChMAAG was able to present his views in person. He recommended implementation of the CIP without further delay.[2]

SUGGESTIONS FROM STATE

52. Washington made its own independent contribution to the split within the Country Team on the treatment of the CIP as a package. Sometime in February Presidential attention was again drawn to the South Vietnam situation, probably as a byproduct of the high-level preoccupation at this time with the Laos crisis. This may have occurred in the course of continued military policy/budget reviews. On 10 February the SecDef, in a memo to ISA, stated that the President had asked for an examination of means to place more emphasis on the development of U.S. and foreign counter-guerrilla forces. He said this was a critical requirement in the defense of the Free World, and should be pressed "with all possible vigor."[3]

53. The increased interest in the general problem of counterinsurgency expressed in the SecDef memo escalated rapidly during 1961, and served to maintain high-level attention on South Vietnam as a living laboratory in which the theory and practice of counterinsurgency could be observed, and in which lessons could be learned. The Administration had initiated moves on the diplomatic front to seek a political solution in Laos, but the outcome was in some doubt and the possibility of a major Communist victory (and

[1]ISA I-13678/61, 12 April 1961, SECRET.
[2]Memo for Record, Pacific Branch, J-3, 27 April 1961, TOP SECRET.
[3]JCS 1969/188, 3 March 1961, SECRET.

a foreign policy defeat for the new Administration) could not be dismissed. Such a victory, or even a solution which permitted open Communist control of avenues of infiltration from North Vietnam through Laos, would greatly facilitate more extensive and possibly more overt Communist support of the VC campaign in South Vietnam. There were, in fact, signs that the Communists were already preparing for such a course of action. The VC guerrillas, estimated at about 10,000, controlled over half of the rural area south and southwest of Saigon and several sizable areas to the north. They seemed to be dangerously close to developing "liberated" zones in which they could rest, train, and regroup, collecting "taxes" and "conscripting" personnel, and otherwise functioning as a shadow government.[1] Radio Hanoi had announced the formation in South Vietnam of a "National Liberation Front" with pretensions to legitimacy, and this had been greeted by Moscow as marking a new stage in the struggle for South Vietnam.[2] The Administration thus faced the prospect that the Communist campaign in Laos, where the situation was ominous, was merely a prelude to a stepped-up offensive in South Vietnam, which was the more important target.[3]

54. In any case, on 24 February the SecState informed Saigon that the White House ranked the defense of South Vietnam as among the highest priorities of U.S. foreign policy; that the President was concerned about whether South Vietnam could resist during the 18- to 24-month period before the CIP could take full effect; and that he had asked State to study what steps could be taken promptly to help strengthen

[1]Department of State, Intelligence Report No. 8416, 10 March 1961, SECRET.

[2]Department of State, Current Foreign Relations, 1 March 1961, SECRET.

[3]NIE 50-61, 28 March 1961, SECRET.

South Vietnam.[1] The telegram went on to list a number of actions which should be undertaken "immediately," without awaiting for GVN approval of the CIP, unless the Ambassador (and, in the case of military measures, CINCPAC) objected.

55. The SecState suggestions included a number of military measures from the CIP, which were to be somehow "accelerated" or given "priority," such as programmed military assistance, activation and training of planned ranger companies, provision of village transceivers for internal security communications, support of GVN border patrol and civic action operations, and the like. In addition, the SecState suggested (a) an "IBM run" to find military personnel best qualified for counterguerrilla training, to be sent to MAAG Vietnam to replace those "less qualified now there;" (b) incorporation of British or Malay experts into the advisory program; (c) revision of the CIP force structure to provide additional ranger companies in lieu of proposed infantry regiments; and (d) preparation, "with or without GVN participation," of an overall operations plan for the GVN, geographically phased and with explicit means for consolidating safe areas following military operations. On the economic side, the SecState suggested additional steps in land distribution and measures to increase peasant income.

56. The Embassy's response was generally negative. In a long telegram sent 8 March the Ambassador said he was convinced that South Vietnam could survive if the GVN accepted the CIP; if it did not, its survival was problematical, even with increased U.S. aid.[2] He warned that the GVN would

[1]State to Saigon 1115, 24 February 1961, SECRET.
[2]Saigon to State, Embtel 1444, 8 March 1961, SECRET.

continue to procrastinate unless highly pressured, and held out against any release of military assistance in order not to jeopardize GVN acceptance of other parts of the CIP. On specific suggestions, the Ambassador said he supported the idea of an IBM run, but he defended MAAG personnel as fully qualified in wartime guerrilla experience, and cited the need for ChMAAG to insure a proper balance between counter-insurgency specialists and specialists in logistics, intelligence, communications, and other fields. He objected to the introduction of British and Malayan personnel as "confusing" and also unnecessary, since MAAG had studied and made liberal use of the lessons of the Malaya and other guerrilla campaigns, adapting them to the somewhat different circumstances in South Vietnam. He opposed the additional ranger companies in the force structure, on grounds that they could not be used gainfully due to lack of adequate controlling headquarters and commands, and anyway would probably be parcelled out to PC's and given static defense assignments. He defended CIP concepts for the phased reduction of the insurgency, as a basis for detailed operational planning, and he questioned the practicability of instituting new land reforms, since conditions were too unsettled in areas where security was worst and peasants most discontented.

57. The ranger company/infantry regiment issue, raised in the 24 February State suggestions and now rejected in the field was an old and sensitive one, and its resurrection showed that in spite of formal interagency agreement on the CIP there had not been a real meeting of the minds. The disagreement was fundamental, since it involved the internal-security/external-aggression problem.

58. When the CIP was being developed in the Country Team, the Ambassador had strongly opposed the 20,000-man increase in GVN forces proposed by ChMAAG, on grounds that the forces already available were not being adequately employed in counterinsurgency operations. He questioned the priority being accorded by the GVN and the MAAG to counterinsurgency requirements, as against those for external aggression. In his covering letter forwarding the CIP to State, for example, he stated that 4 of the 7 GVN divisions were "immobilized" to meet the invasion threat.[1] He had finally withdrawn his opposition to the increase only when ChMAAG convinced him that developments in Laos justified additional GVN forces.[2]

59. ChMAAG took the position that the 4 divisions were "80 percent" committed to antiguerrilla operations and "static guard duty," even though they were earmarked under agreed U.S.-GVN plans for resisting external attack; that overall "88.8 combat battalion equivalents" of the available 124 in the GVN forces were committed to internal security operations; that the situation left little margin for rotation of units on operational assignments, for necessary rest and retraining, and to provide a "minimum" strategic reserve for external aggression; and that although he considered the insurgency the highest priority problem and placed major emphasis on unconventional warfare in all training as a first priority, there was an ever-present second priority, the external threat, which could not be disregarded.[3]

---

[1] ChMAAG letter to CINCPAC, 3 February 1961, Enclosure to JCS 1992/928, 8 March 1961, SECRET.

[2] Saigon to State, 1231, 29 December 1960, SECRET; CINCPAC letter to JCS, Serial No. 0041, 18 January 1961, Enclosure to JCS 1992/908, 26 January 1961, SECRET.

[3] ChMAAG letter to CINCPAC, 3 February 1961, Enclosure to JCS 1992/928, 8 March 1961, SECRET; ChMAAG to CINCPAC 040525Z March 1961, SECRET.

60. In approving the CIP, State asked the Country Team to review "annually or more frequently" the balance of forces between those committed primarily to the defeat of the VC and those primarily for resistance to external aggression. The Ambassador was informed that this instruction was inserted because State had "reservations" as to the counter-insurgency emphasis in the recommended force structure, specifically the addition of 3 infantry regiments rather than additional ranger companies.[1]

61. ChMAAG had already justified details of the proposed augmentation of GVN forces in military channels, to CINCPAC and the JCS; they had been worked out with the GVN and finally accepted by the Ambassador as part of the CIP. Now, apprised of State's reservations on the ranger company/infantry regiment balance (which was being read by State as indicative of the internal-security/external-aggression balance), he sent CINCPAC (information JCS) a strong protest.[1] He criticized the "apparent misconception" that ranger companies were the principal military forces that could be effectively engaged against the VC, as a "dangerous oversimplification." He said that regiments were not heavy, ponderous, conventional units; they were flexible units which could be considered as one team, three, or nine, yet which were able to provide the necessary control, coordination, and support for the area-type operations envisaged under the CIP, more effectively than separate companies, "especially when trained under current directives requiring counterguerrilla training for all units." At the same time, the regiments

[1] ChMAAG to CINCPAC 040525Z March 1961, SECRET.

would add appreciably to GVN's capabilities to defend against external aggression, which was an ever-present threat.

62. Whether or not the Ambassador concurred in the argument that an appropriate internal-security/external-aggression balance was being met, in his 8 March reply to the State suggestions he did back ChMAAG on the ranger company/infantry regiment issue. He may have been influenced in this by the possibility mentioned in his telegram, that ranger companies would probably be assigned to PC's and used for static defense, their special training wasted. The regiments, whatever their merits as counterinsurgency forces, were perhaps more likely to remain in the military chain of command and be utilized under military direction according to operational plans.

63. State was apparently not entirely convinced, but went along. In a reply to the field, which was coordinated with ISA and the Joint Staff and went as a joint State-Defense message, the question of activating additional ranger companies was put aside for later review, depending on developments in the situation. The message also concurred that it was unwise to press further land reform at present, and that the balance of personnel in the MAAG should not be disrupted. It did, however, ask the Embassy and CINCPAC to reconsider the use of British or Malayan personnel, in order to "share" the defense of South Vietnam, since it was not in GVN or U.S. interests for the U.S. to remain the GVN's sole active supporter (i.e., the issue was not expertise but politics). On the general issue of the CIP, the message agreed that increased assistance should not be provided until the GVN accepted the CIP, but stated that since the success of the

TOP SECRET

CIP depended upon voluntary and willing GVN cooperation the Embassy should not push the GVN too hard.[1]

64. It is not clear that the injunction against pushing the GVN too hard had any practical effect upon the Ambassador. As noted above, he was still advocating strong pressure on Diem in mid-April.[2]

THE DEPSECDEF TASK FORCE

65. By mid-April, however, the question of pressuring Diem seemed barely alive. The situation in Laos had become much worse. Possibilities of military intervention had been taken under consideration, and actions to bolster neighboring countries like South Vietnam against the increased threat expected to result from a Communist-dominated (or even "neutral") Laos were under study.[3] Then, on 20 April, the President asked for a fresh review of U.S. actions in South Vietnam, precipitating a new round of Washington activity.[4]

66. (It may be significant that this was three days after the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion, and two days before the White House announcement of the appointment of the former Chief of Staff of the Army to "survey and review" U.S. paramilitary, unconventional, and guerrilla activities. Coincidentally, the President began making greater efforts

---

[1]State to Saigon 1218, 23 March 1961, SECRET.

[2]Saigon to State, Embtel 1606, 15 April 1961, SECRET.

[3]NIE 50-61, 28 March 1961, SECRET; JCS 1992/946, 4 April 1961, TOP SECRET; JCS 1992/953, 13 April 1961, SECRET.

[4]Memorandum from SecDef for DepSecDef, 20 April 1961, Enclosure to JCS 1992/965, 22 April 1961, TOP SECRET.

TOP SECRET

to focus public attention on the counterinsurgency problem in general and South Vietnam in particular.)[1]

67. This time the President turned to Defense rather than State. He asked that the DepSecDef appraise the status and prospects of the insurgency in South Vietnam, and recommend "a series of actions, military, political and/or economic, overt and/or covert," to prevent the Communist domination of the country. The DepSecDef was to draw on the views and resources of State and CIA as necessary, and was told that the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs would be available for consultation. The DepSecDef was to report to the President on or before 27 April.

68. An informal interdepartmental Task Force was organized, under the leadership of the DepSecDef, with representation from Defense, State, CIA, ICA, USIA, and the Office of the

---

[1] On 20 April, in his first public address after the Bay of Pigs incident, the President said: " . . . it is clearer than ever that we face a relentless struggle in every corner of the globe that goes far beyond the clash of armies or even nuclear armaments. The armies . . . and . . . nuclear armaments are there. But they serve primarily as the shield behind which subversion, infiltration, and a host of other tactics steadily advance, picking off vulnerable areas one by one in situations which do not permit our own armed intervention . . . . Too long we have fixed our eyes on traditional military needs, on armies prepared to cross borders, on missiles poised for flight. Now it should be clear that this is no longer enough . . . . We dare not fail to grasp the new concepts, the new tools, the new sense of urgency we will need to combat /this new and deeper struggle/ -- whether in Cuba or South Vietnam."
The next day at his news conference the President spoke of 7,000 to 15,000 well-disciplined guerrillas operating in South Vietnam, well supplied from across the border. It was the kind of problem, he said, that was going to be with us all through the decade, and how we were to fight it was one of the great problems now before the United States.
Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, John F. Kennedy, 1961, Washington, 1962, pp. 305-6, 311.

TOP SECRET

President.[1] Individual participants in the Task Force deliberations varied, but on the Defense side included at times the ASD/ISA and the Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations. The Joint Staff was represented by the Special Assistant (Policy) to the CJCS and by a colonel from the then Pacific Branch, Current Operations Division, J-3. Other agencies were represented by officials at the Assistant Secretary level or their alternates. ChMAAG Vietnam was brought back from the field to participate, along with the U.S. delegate to the North Atlantic Council, who had been designated to be the new Ambassador to South Vietnam but who had not yet taken up his post.[2]

69. The Task Force published a first draft report on 26 April.[3] Entitled simply, "A Program of Action to Prevent the Communist Domination of South Vietnam," it listed a number of political, military, economic, psychological, and covert measures in support of the GVN. The measures were listed in general terms, and without any particular rationale except that they were intended to be mutually supporting. Political measures included aiding the GVN "under Diem" to develop the widest possible consensus of

---

[1] Documents available for this study do not show how or by whom the decision was made to translate the rather general instructions from the President into the organization of a Task Force, or how or by whom the participants were selected. The memo for the DepSecDef cited above, however, would appear to have given him considerable latitude on the arrangements, and the Task Force instrumentality was in keeping with the new Administration's management ideas. See the testimony of the SecState before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, Committee on Government Operations, August 24, 1961 (Organizing for National Security, Vol. I, Hearings, pp. 1279 ff).

[2] Memo for Record, Pacific Branch, Current Operations Division, J-3, 27 April 1961, TOP SECRET; JCS 1992/970, 28 April 1961, TOP SECRET; JCS 1992/973, 2 May 1961, TOP SECRET; JCS 1992/975, 5 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

[3] JCS 1992/970, 28 April 1961, TOP SECRET.

popular support and to become the "polarizing spirit" against Communism in Southeast Asia. Military measures included increasing the MAAG by about 100 advisors, establishing a radar surveillance/warning system, and providing military assistance to the entire CG of 68,000, a Self Defense Corps (SDC, a village militia force, already in being) of 40,000, and a Junk Force (a force of native vessels, some motorized, being organized for coastal patrol). Economic measures included increased assistance, especially for simple "impact" projects in pacified areas. Psychological measures included expanding the GVN radio network, assisting the GVN with public information activities, and publicizing facts about Communist infiltration and terrorism. Covert measures included expanding intelligence and counter-intelligence operations and assisting in aerial reconnaissance (with U.S. or Chinese Nationalist crews and equipment). Unconventional warfare measures included joint MAAG-CIA support of GVN special forces, and sabotage/harassment/propaganda raids in North Vietnam.

70. The status of U.S.-GVN agreements on CIP measures was summarized in an annex to this draft of the Task Force report. Some of the CIP measures, such as dissolving the Can Lao or appointing oppositionists to the cabinet, seemed to be written off with the comment that the GVN was unlikely to agree to them. On others, such as designating a central headquarters for overall control of military operations and "government reorganization," agreement was reported as inadequate and the recommendation made that Diem be further urged to accept them.

71. The Task Force report recommended that the President declare South Vietnam "a critical area," and that he

establish a "Presidential Task Force" to provide overall direction, interagency coordination, and support of the program. The proposed membership was similar to the initial group of principals, with the DepSecDef as Director; the Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations as Operations Officer; the ASD/ISA; the Special Assistant (Policy) to the CJCS; Assistant Secretaries or Chiefs of Far Eastern sections of State, CIA, and ICA; the Deputy Director of USIA; and the Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The Ambassador, as head of the Country Team, was to be responsible for carrying out the program in the field. After Presidential approval, the Operations Officer of the Task Force was to proceed to South Vietnam for discussions with U.S. and GVN officials on specific actions to support the program, advising the Director of the Task Force of any changes that might be desirable.

72. While this 26 April draft was being circulated, Laos events again entered the picture. The U.S. had agreed to participate in negotiations on a neutralized Laos, assuming a prior cease-fire, but the military situation had continued to deteriorate and prospects for any acceptable outcome, short of military intervention, were far from bright. On 28 April, the day after an NSC meeting which discussed the Laos situation at some length, the DepSecDef Task Force on South Vietnam issued an addendum to its draft report, on the effect of a political settlement in Laos on the proposed Program of Action for South Vietnam.[1] The addendum pointed out that with or without the cover of

[1] N/H of JCS 1992/970, 28 April 1961, TOP SECRET.

the forthcoming negotiations, Communist control of the principal mountain passes on the Laos/South Vietnam border would pose a direct and serious military threat to South Vietnam, which could not be met by the internal security program alone. It required the prompt organization of two additional South Vietnamese divisions and an accelerated program for training the "entire" South Vietnam Army, in order to raise its combat effectiveness "by an entire order of magnitude" in the next 6 to 8 months. To accomplish this, the MAAG in South Vietnam would have to be augmented, with the addition of two U.S. "training commands" of 1600 instructors each, and a Special Forces Group of 400.

73. The JCS met on the 26 April draft report on 28 April and considered both the report and the 28 April addendum. The decision was to concur with the military actions recommended in both documents.[1]

74. The Task Force report was reviewed in an NSC meeting on 29 April. At the meeting, the President approved the military measures in the report proper: to increase the MAAG by about 100, to establish a radar surveillance system, and to support the SDC, the entire CG, and the Junk Force.[2] If the military measures in the addendum were discussed, no action was taken on them, but the Task Force was apparently asked to continue to work on the report.

75. During the next two weeks, the Task Force report was revised several times, and several drafts were discussed at additional NSC meetings. A 1 May draft incorporated additional military measures to cope with the "new situation"

[1]JCS 1992/970, 28 April 1961, TOP SECRET.
[2]JCS 1992/973, 2 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

TOP SECRET

on the Laos frontier: augmenting the MAAG with the two training commands and the Special Forces Group proposed in the addendum to the previous draft, assigning CINCPAC responsibility for coastal patrol in the southern area, using U.S. vessels as well as the GVN Junk Force; and initiating regular U.S. air surveillance along the border. It also went a bit further on intervention, recommending that the U.S. make it clear that it was prepared to intervene unilaterally in fulfillment of its SEATO commitment to South Vietnam, and that plans for intervention "with conventional nonnuclear forces" be reviewed and updated.[1]

76. The 1 May draft was scheduled for discussion by the Task Force on 3 May in preparation for the next NSC meeting. On 3 May, however, State submitted a new revision, spelling out U.S. policy objectives more explicitly and stressing the political and economic elements of the program.[2] Its approach on the GVN was interesting, in view of the recent experience in the CIP negotiations, and indicated that there may have been some controversy within the Administration over support of the Diem regime. The main task, the State draft said, was to create solid and widespread support for the counterinsurgency effort among key political groups and the general population in South Vietnam by providing them with a stake in a "freer and more democratic" society. At the same time, it was necessary to work through and support the present GVN, despite its "acknowledged weaknesses;" "no other even remotely feasible alternative" existed that did not involve an unacceptable degree of risk. Getting the GVN to agree to major alterations would be

[1]JCS 1992/973, 2 May 1961, TOP SECRET.
[2]JCS 1992/975, 5 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

TOP SECRET

difficult, and would require "astute dealing," but, given the positive inducements and points of pressure that were available, could be accomplished.

77. The starting point of "our new approach" must be to increase the confidence of Diem and the GVN in U.S. support, which had been undermined, partly by past U.S. efforts to get Diem to "mend his ways politically" and partly by Diem's conviction that the U.S. took an "equivocal" attitude at the time of the November 1960 coup. Circumstances for restoring Diem's confidence in the U.S. were now favorable, since there was a new administration in Washington and a new Ambassador about to go to Saigon.

78. The State paper proposed military security arrangements to establish "beyond a doubt" the U.S. intention to stand behind South Vietnam, which had been brought into question by U.S. actions in Laos. The arrangements which should be considered included a "clear-cut" defensive alliance and stationing U.S. or SEATO forces in South Vietnam, to put the Communist Bloc in the position of risking direct intervention in a situation where U.S. forces were already in place (by contrast with Laos, where they were not). U.S. forces could release South Vietnamese forces for counter-insurgency operations, assist in training, and provide significant resistance to any DRV/Chinese action. There were potential political/military disadvantages in committing U.S. forces, including the reaction of neutrals and non-Asian allies, the propaganda opportunity afforded the Bloc, and the risk of provoking DRV/Chinese military reaction -- it should be remembered, said the paper, that the French had tied up some 200,000 troops in their

unsuccessful Indochina effort -- but the JCS and CINCPAC should assess the military advisability and the forces required.

79. The State paper also proposed the dissolution of the DepSecDef Task Force, as having completed its assignment. It proposed a new Task Force to oversee the program, to be established in State, with the UndSecState as Chairman, the Asst/SecState Far East as Alternate, the then CINCPAC Political Adviser (POLAD) (who was due for a Washington assignment) as Director, the Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations as Deputy, and undesignated members from Defense, Treasury, the JCS, ICA, CIA, USIA, and the Office of the President. It was pointed out that an Operations Center had been established in State to insure "speed, coherence, and coordination in U.S. political, military, economic, informational, and psychological actions with respect to specific crisis situations." The Director of the Task Force would operate from this center, in close coordination with the Asst/SecState for Far Eastern Affairs and his staff, as well as other members of the Task Force.

THE FINAL REPORT AND THE DECISIONS

80. Much of the substance of the 3 May State draft was incorporated in the Task Force's final draft of 6 May, including the emphasis upon tangibly demonstrating support of the Diem regime and constituting a permanent Task Force under State leadership.[1]

[1] JCS 1992/978, 8 May 1961, TOP SECRET. The switch from Defense to State coincided with Administration efforts to "strengthen" the leadership role in foreign affairs of State in Washington and the Ambassador in the field. This will be discussed in a subsequent paper on command arrangements.

81. The U.S. objective, as stated in this final draft, was "to prevent the Communist domination of South Vietnam and create in that country a viable and increasingly democratic society." The concept was to initiate on an accelerated basis a series of mutually supporting actions, building on existing U.S.-GVN programs, "including as much of the CIP as can be agreed on." U.S. efforts were to be focused upon the immediate internal problem. They were to be infused with a sense of urgency and dedication, through cooperative interdepartmental support in the field and in Washington. They were to impress both the Vietnamese and the Communists that "come what may, the U.S. intends to win."

82. Political measures proposed were much as in the State draft: to increase the confidence of Diem and the GVN in the U.S., to strengthen Diem's popular support within South Vietnam, to help improve the GVN's relations with other countries and its status in world opinion, and to discuss with Diem a bilateral security alliance and the possible commitment of U.S. forces. Diem's confidence in the U.S. was to be strengthened by a message from the President expressing the President's personal support for Diem's courageous leadership in the struggle against Communism, and by a forthcoming Vice Presidential visit to Saigon.[1] The Vice President would attempt to obtain GVN agreements on the proposals in the Program (recognizing past difficulties in getting Diem to take effective action on reforms, the Vice President should solicit as specific an understanding

[1]The President announced at his news conference on 5 May that he had asked the Vice President to undertake "a special fact-finding mission" to Asia. In reference to this announcement, the President was asked about "reports" that he would be prepared to send American forces to South Vietnam, if necessary, to prevent the Communist domination of that country. Public Papers of the Presidents, 1961, p. 354.

as possible). The Vice President would also get across to Diem that the U.S. was relying upon him as a man of great stature and one of the strongest figures in Southeast Asia, and would try to impress him with the need for accelerated U.S.-GVN efforts.

83. The new Ambassador would attempt to "get on the same wavelength" with Diem. He would reappraise the political situation and obtain GVN agreement for a "realistic" political program along CIP lines, with the aim of producing favorable public attitudes and active popular cooperation against the VC. A new type of political development was needed, to spark a new spirit and rally the people to the government. Province, district, and village administrators must be replaced or reoriented in the direction of "democratic, humane, modern-style handling of the little people." The country should have a community development corps, political and administrative training schools, and a mass radio/television system to improve government-to-people communications.

84. The political objectives of the Program would be supported by economic measures as well, short-term "impact" projects in rural development and increased assistance in civic action. In addition, in order to demonstrate U.S. confidence in the future of South Vietnam, the U.S. would discuss with the GVN a joint 5-year economic development program. A high-level fiscal/economic team would be sent to South Vietnam to help work out the program.

85. Five specific military measures were proposed, in addition to those approved by the President on 29 April: (a) establishment of an effective border intelligence/patrol

system, by initiating aerial surveillance over the entire frontier and by applying "modern technological area-denial techniques," such as CW/BW, light plastic air-droppable land mines, and fluorescent materials; (b) establishment of a Combat Development and Test Center (CDTC) in South Vietnam, to develop new counterinsurgency techniques; (c) providing small U.S. civic action training teams to aid in health, welfare, and public works; (d) deploying a U.S. Special Forces Group to central South Vietnam, to accelerate Vietnamese special forces training; and (e) instructing the JCS, CINCPAC, and ChMAAG to assess the military utility of a further increase in forces from 170,000 to 200,000, in order to provide two new division equivalents for deployment to the northwest border region adjoining Laos.

86. In addition, it was noted that Defense was preparing for the possible commitment of U.S. forces "which might result from an NSC decision following discussions between the Vice President and Diem."[1] Defense was studying the size and composition of U.S. forces to: (a) provide maximum psychological impact in deterring further Communist aggression, rallying morale in South Vietnam, and encouraging SEATO support for the defense of South Vietnam; (b) release South Vietnamese forces from "advanced" and static defense

[1]When asked about sending U.S. forces to South Vietnam at the 5 May news conference, the President replied: "Well, we have had a group working in the Government and we have had a Security Council meeting about the problems . . . in Vietnam . . . . The problem of troops is a matter -- the matter of what we are going to do to assist Vietnam to obtain its independence is a matter still under consideration. There are a good many /things/ which I think can most usefully wait until we have had consultations with the government, which up to the present time -- which will be one of the matters which /the Vice President/ will deal with: the problem of consultations with the Government of Vietnam as to what further steps could most usefully be taken." Public Papers of the Presidents, 1961, p. 356.

positions; (c) provide maximum training to South Vietnamese forces; and (d) provide significant military resistance to potential DRV/Chinese action. Defense was specifically considering deploying two U.S. battle groups and an engineer battalion, to be located in the high plateau region in central South Vietnam, to establish two divisional field training areas, construct roads and landing strips, and provide logistical support to U.S./GVN forces in the area. Defense was also considering assigning CINCPAC responsibility for coastal patrol to prevent infiltration by sea, and for border surveillance and close air support of GVN forces in counterinsurgency operations.

87. In discussing future organizational arrangements, the 6 May draft followed the 3 May State position. Because of the critical nature of the situation in South Vietnam and the need for accelerated action, it recommended that the "direction, coordination, and support" of the Program be effected "through" a special Task Force on Vietnam, "established in and directed by" the Department of State, under the CINCPAC POLAD as Director, and with membership from Defense, Treasury, Bureau of the Budget, ICA, USIA, CIA, and the Office of the President. It would be the responsibility of the Director to (a) see that the Program as approved was carried out, (b) keep under continual review the adequacy of the Program in meeting its objectives, and (c) bring to the attention of the SecState and UndSecState, and the SecDef and DepSecDef, any need for changes or additions to the Program.

88. After final clearance by members of the Task Force, the 6 May draft was transmitted to the JCS by the Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations, acting for the

DepSecDef, on 8 May. He asked for comments by 9 May, so that the paper could be put in final form for presentation to the NSC without further formal meetings of the Task Force. The paper was referred to J-3 as a matter of urgency.[1]

89. In staffing the paper, J-3 stated that specific details in Army troop deployments and training detachments recommended in the Program were more properly decided after "major decisions" had been taken and ChMAAG and CINCPAC had the opportunity to comment; but that otherwise the general purposes of the military measures proposed were consistent with those of the 26 April draft previously approved by the JCS. It added that in view of the limited time available for review, the JCS could again restrict their comments to the military courses of action.[2]

90. On 9 May the JCS approved a memo to the SecDef, concurring in the proposed military actions, subject to later revisions in "detailed implementation" that might be desirable or necessary after comments by CINCPAC and ChMAAG. The memo added that details of Army troop deployments and training detachments should be decided only after recommendations from CINCPAC.[2]

91. The President formally approved the proposed Program of Action, including the specific military actions recommended, at an NSC meeting on 11 May.[3] As recorded in a National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM 52) of that date, the decisions were subject to amendments or revisions the

[1]JCS 1992/978, 8 May 1961, TOP SECRET.
[2]JCS 1992/980, 9 May 1961, TOP SECRET.
[3]JCS 1992/991, 16 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

President might wish to make after further discussion at the next NSC meeting. The decisions were as follows: (a) the President approved the U.S. objective and concept of operations in the Program; (b) he confirmed his approval of military actions considered at the 29 April NSC meeting; (c) he authorized the additional military actions -- border surveillance measures, the CDTC, civic action teams, deployment of the Special Forces Group, and assessment of the increase to 200,000; (d) he directed Defense to examine, "under the guidance" of the Director of the continuing Task Force, the size and composition of U.S. forces desirable in case of possible commitment to South Vietnam; (e) he approved actions to increase Diem's and the GVN's confidence in the U.S. and to increase their popular support within South Vietnam; (f) he approved negotiations to improve the GVN's relations with other countries and its standing in world opinion; (g) he authorized the Ambassador to begin negotiations with the GVN on a bilateral defense treaty, but with nc firm commitment without further review by the President; (h) he approved the specific economic actions recommended; (i) he approved strengthened efforts in the psychological field; (j) he approved the program for covert actions; (k) he authorized budgetary support of the decisions, reserving judgment on the levels of funding proposed in the Task Force report; and (l) he approved the continuation of the special Task Force on Vietnam, established in and directed by the Department of State under the CINCPAC POLAD as Director.

92. The substance of the President's decisions went to the field in a series of messages sent 12-14 May; the full text of the Task Force report was sent by pouch. The first

message informed the field that the President had approved continuation of the Task Force to coordinate and implement an action program "based on the CIP."[1] It asked the Ambassador to constitute a counterpart Task Force Saigon to handle the Program in South Vietnam. Messages dispatched by Task Forces on both ends were to carry the slug "TFVN" and were to receive highest priority action; all such messages were to be repeated information CINCPAC. Task Force operations were not, however, to "distort" existing channels of command and responsibility.

93. Other messages reporting the measures which the President had approved on 11 May invited CINCPAC and Task Force Saigon comments on the size and composition of U.S. forces for possible commitment to South Vietnam. Task Force Saigon was also asked to examine the diplomatic setting and political considerations involved in committing U.S. forces, and the political and fiscal implications of expanding those of the GVN.[2]

94. When the messages reached Saigon, the Vice-President was already there. He and a large party of Congressmen and officials had departed Washington on 9 May, in fact, the day the JCS concurred in the military actions in the Program and two days before the President formally approved it. The delegation arrived in Saigon on 11 May and remained until 13 May, when a joint U.S.-GVN communique was issued registering in general terms the new U.S.-GVN agreements.[3]

---

[1]State to Saigon 1387, 12 May 1961, SECRET.

[2]State-Saigon 1390, 13 May 1961, TOP SECRET; State-Saigon 1391, 13 May 1961, SECRET; State-Saigon 1392, 13 May 1961, SECRET; State-Saigon 1394, 14 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

[3]Facts on File, 1961, 379B3; Deadline Data on World Affairs, South Vietnam, 1961, 11-13 May; UNCLASSIFIED.

95. The Vice-President was apparently successful in carrying out the confidence-building aspect of his mission. At a reception in Saigon he referred to Diem as "the Churchill of today," and the communique said the U.S. recognized Diem as in the vanguard of leaders standing for freedom in the periphery of Communist empire in Asia. He told the National Assembly the U.S. was ready to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with South Vietnam in its war, and said the U.S. was ready to support a larger GVN army immediately. He obtained Diem's agreement to jointly study border control techniques, to consider the establishment of the CDTC, to accept U.S. civic action specialists, and to accept the team of economic/fiscal experts. He also obtained Diem's agreement that political/economic action was of equal importance to military action -- provided it was appropriate to South Vietnam, an underdeveloped country subject to Communist subversion. In return, the Vice-President pledged the increased U.S. aid measures of the Program: support for the additional 20,000-man force, the CG, the SDC, the Junk Force, and Special Forces. He agreed also that the U.S. would consider the case for further increase of GVN forces if needed.[1] Diem, in a 15 May letter to the President accepting the U.S. proposals, said he was most gratified by the Vice-President's question about his most urgent needs, "particularly as we have not become accustomed to being asked for our own views as to our needs." He said he would furnish his list in about a week.[2]

[1] Saigon-State 1731, May 12, 1961, SECRET; Saigon-State 1739, 13 May 1961, UNCLASSIFIED; Memo, "Vietnam," undated, a status report on agreements reached during the Vice-President's trip, ISA/FER files, SECRET.

[2] Letter from President Diem, 15 May 1961, ISA/FER files, TOP SECRET.

THE TASK FORCE ON VIETNAM

96. The new Task Force on Vietnam had its first meeting on 11 May, after the NSC meeting at which the President formally approved the recommendations in the DepSecDef Task Force report. At the meeting, which was held at New State, the Director stressed the President's interest in the Task Force and the importance of its efforts. He asked for extreme cooperation from all, especially in message distribution. Regular meetings were planned for each Monday, Wednesday and Friday, with additional meetings as required. It was agreed that the final composition of the Task Force would be determined during the following week, that each member would have a designated alternate, and that the first task of the group would be to prepare an authoritative list of the specific projects in the approved Program.[1]

97. As finally determined during the following week, the Task Force members were chosen from positions several echelons lower than had been contemplated during the DepSecDef Task Force deliberations.[2] The CINCPAC POLAD as Director had a Deputy Director from State, and, as shown in Table I, there were nine members, one each from the Office of the President, the Treasury, the Bureau of the Budget, CIA, ICA, USIA, State, ISA, and the JCS. There were also three "observers," from various branches of State.

98. Why the office of the Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations was not represented is not clear. The Assistant to the SecDef had been deeply involved as a

[1] JCS 1992/994, 22 May 1961, CONFIDENTIAL, enclosing a 15 May memo for the record by the JCS representative at the meeting.

[2] Department of State, "Composition of the Task Force on Vietnam," 16 May 1961, CONFIDENTIAL.

coordinator in the DepSecDef Task Force activities. He had a history of involvement in South Vietnam affairs; he had been proposed, first, as Operations Officer and then as Deputy Director of the continuing Task Force. For his office not to be represented in the Task Force seems to be something of an anomaly, since the Program involved Special Operations activities on the Defense side as well as CIA. However, membership in the Task Force on Vietnam was not a prerequisite to major participation in decisions and actions with respect to South Vietnam.[1]

TABLE I. Task Force on Vietnam

Members
Office of the President: Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (member of the NSC staff, alternate)
Treasury: Chief, Far East Division, Office of International Finance
Bureau of the Budget: Assistant for National Security Affairs (Area Chief, International Division, alternate)
CIA: Executive Officer, Far East Division
ICA: Deputy Director, Office of Far Eastern Operations (Vietnam desk officer, alternate)
USIA: Deputy Assistant Director, Far East (Vietnam affairs officer, alternate)
State: Director, Southeast Asia Affairs (special assistant, Office of Southeast Asia Affairs, alternate)
ISA: Deputy ASD/ISA, Regional Affairs (Director, Far East Region, and Assistant Director, Far East Region, alternates)
JCS: Chief, Pacific Branch, Current Operations Division, J-3
Observers
State: Senior Planning Officer, Office of Foreign Assistance Coordinator (Acting regional coordinator, Far East, alternate)
Chief, South Asia Division, Office of Intelligence Research and Analysis for Asia (Analyst for Vietnam, alternate)
Assistant legal adviser for Far East Affairs (Deputy Assistant, alternate)

[1] The Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations played in important role in subsequent events relating to South Vietnam. This will be treated in a paper covering the actions in the fall and winter of 1961.

99. The Presidential Program, as published by the Task Force on 23 May, included 33 items.[1] These are listed, in abridged form, in Table II.

100. The Task Force apparently continued to meet two or three times a week during the next few months; however, meetings subsequently fell off to once a week as the press of business declined. The frequency with which the principals attended the meetings also dropped. The meetings increasingly became occasions for routine briefings and exchanges of information on actions taken or pending. Problems were aired, however, and it is possible that the participants benefited from the opportunity to exchange views.[2]

101. In terms of affecting decisions on the Presidential Program, it is likely that one of the most important functions of the Task Force was to prepare a weekly item-by-item status report, keyed to the 33-point list and coalescing reports from each of the agencies involved. These reports were quite detailed, and served to record not only the status of actions on the U.S. side but also, due to the nature of the program, those of the GVN as well. They did not attempt to assess the general situation in South Vietnam, to estimate where the U.S. stood in achieving its overall objectives, or to recommend changes or improvements; but they did cover, in a single report, concrete happenings with respect to the Program.

---

[1]Task Force on Vietnam, Department of State, "Presidential Program for Vietnam," 23 May 1961, SECRET.

[2]Interview, ISA/FER, 30 August 1963.

TABLE II. Presidential Program for Vietnam
(As of 23 May 1961)

Objective: To prevent the Communist domination of Vietnam by initiating on an accelerated basis a series of mutually supporting actions . . . designed to create a viable and increasingly democratic society and to keep Vietnam free.

Program:

Political

1. Increase Diem's and the GVN's confidence in the U.S. by a series of actions and messages relating to the Vice President's trip.

2. Strengthen Diem's popular support by the political reappraisal and negotiations to be conducted by the Ambassador.

3. Begin negotiations on a bilateral arrangement but with no firm commitment without further review by the President.

4. Negotiate to improve the GVN's relationship with other countries, especially Cambodia, and the GVN's standing in world opinion.

5. Strengthen the GVN's border control arrangements; encourage Diem to renew border control discussions with Cambodia.

6. Coordinate with the GVN the effective use of aid from other governments, including the provision of counterinsurgency experts, for example, from Malaya.

7. Examine the diplomatic setting within which the possible commitment of U.S. forces might be undertaken.

8. Assess the political implications of increasing GVN forces to 200,000.

9. The Ambassador to recommend any reorganization of the Country Team necessary to accomplish Nos. 1 and 2.

Military

10. Install a radar surveillance system.

11. Provide military assistance for a 20,000-man increase in GVN forces.

12. Increase the MAAG as necessary to support the military portion of the Program.

13. Consider with the GVN whether a further increase beyond 170,000 is warranted.

14. Provide military assistance for a CG of 68,000.

15. Provide military assistance for an SDC of 40,000.

16. Provide military assistance for the Junk Force.

TABLE II (Cont'd)

17. Provide special forces training to GVN special forces.

18. Provide military specialists to work with GVN forces in health, welfare, and public works in the villages.

19. Study jointly with the GVN the border problem to develop techniques for border control.

20. Consider with the GVN the establishment of a facility in Southeast Asia to develop and test new techniques, using modern technology.

21. Fully examine the size and composition of U.S. forces desirable in case of their possible commitment.

Economic

22. Send a group of economic/fiscal experts to work with the GVN on a financial plan.

23. ICA to conduct a rural development civic action program, with short-range simple impact projects.

24. Develop a long-range development program to demonstrate U.S. confidence in the GVN; the Ambassador to inform Diem that the U.S. is prepared to discuss a 5-year program.

25. Assess the fiscal and other economic implications of an increase in GVN forces to 200,000.

Psychological

26. Aid the GVN to accelerate its public information program.

27. Document the facts on infiltration and terrorism, declassify and disseminate the information.

28. Increase the flow of information on conditions in North Vietnam.

29. Conduct agricultural pilot projects.

30. Rehabilitate VC prisoners; induce defections among the VC.

31. Participate in the forthcoming Saigon trade fair in an impressive way.

Covert

32. Program is to be carried forward.

Fiscal

33. The President reserves judgment on levels of funding proposed in the Task Force report.

102. To illustrate, the 10 July report, in its summary of the status of actions Nos. 10 to 21, the military actions, included the following information:[1]

> An AC&W team investigating the radar surveillance problem in South Vietnam completed its study on 20 June and was scheduled to submit a report to CINCPAC in July.
>
> Funds for the 20,000-troop increase had been made available, the GVN and the Ambassador had agreed on the provision of Direct Support funds, the call-up of the remaining 14,000 of the 20,000 soldiers was proceeding, and the JCS had queried ChMAAG on 30 June on whether the call-up rate could be accelerated.
>
> U.S. advisers and trainers had been assigned to the CG and selected leaders were being trained; CINCPAC had requested a Department of the Army emergency program deviation and the allocation of MAP funds for off-shore procurement of 35,000 khaki shirts and trousers for the CG.
>
> MAAG and the GVN had prepared TO&E's and were studying vehicle requirements for the SDC; a training program had been approved by Task Force Saigon on 27 June, and would be the basis for discussions with the GVN on SDC training, equipment, organization, and operations.
>
> The GVN had agreed to provide junks and engines for the Junk Force, and the U.S. had agreed to provide weapons and radios; the first radios had arrived and the first advisers were due in July; CINCPAC would help develop SOP's for coastal patrol.
>
> South Vietnamese special forces were largely committed to operations, but the training of those available was proceeding satisfactorily; recruiting of additional personnel was slow, because it was difficult to find personnel who met the necessary qualifications; 60 mountain tribesmen had been recruited but had not yet been fully screened and accepted by GVN authorities.
>
> ChMAAG on 27 May had requested an Army civic action mobile training team; its ETA was 8 July; MAAG was coordinating with USOM and USIS in military civic action through a Country Team psychological warfare subcommittee.
>
> A joint MAAG-GVN group to study the border problem had been established; a U.S. R&D team from Washington had suggested the use of chemical plant killers for clearing firebreaks along the border, and the MAAG R&D division was studying the proposal.
>
> On 6 July representatives from the Joint Staff, the Services, and DDR&E met to consider the structure and requirements for the CDTC; items for field test were on their way, including dogs and handlers, a high-powered loudspeaker, aerial spray tanks and defoliant chemicals, and Armalite rifles and ammunition.

[1] JCS 2343/3, 21 July 1961, SECRET.

103. Information on the status of the political, economic, and psychological measures in the Program was similarly reported, in substantial detail.

104. Field information on the status of military actions in the Program was submitted by ChMAAG in special weekly reports, keyed to items 10 to 21 of the Program.[1] The format of these reports was changed during July and they began to be given in two parts, one part covering progress to date and one part covering specific actions of the reporting period, a form which was probably somewhat more informative and useful in Washington. Then, in August, ChMAAG began to submit the reports every two weeks and added a third section, on the status of the military portion of the CIP.[2] The latter was initiated in response to increased uncertainty and concern in Washington about the extent to which the GVN was carrying out its commitments under the CIP, and apparently was the first attempt to submit regular progress reports on the question.

105. Besides serving as an agency through which the specific elements of the Presidential Program could be monitored, the Task Force played an important role in the preparation and dissemination of messages, and probably facilitated interagency communications at the working level. The original idea that the Program would be "directed, coordinated, and supported" through the Task Force (albeit without distorting existing channels of command and responsibility) was apparently not carried out, however,

---

[1] ChMAAG to CINCPAC (info JCS and ISA) 061051Z, 130903Z, 200915Z July 1961, SECRET.

[2] ChMAAG to CINCPAC (info JCS and ISA) 050345Z, 180109Z August 1961, SECRET.

and perhaps could not have been carried out. Traditional procedures were still in existence, and came into play with respect to the major decisions on the Program that had not been finalized by the President's 11 May actions. Inter-agency controversy over outstanding issues did not disappear for long, and in any case was of a nature that required resolution at the highest levels, up to and including the President. The existence of the Task Force, composed of middle echelon officers and officials, may have provided some lubrication, but it almost certainly did not provide any striking short-cuts or reduce the complexity of the management process, which continued to be slow and difficult. The Task Force remained, however, as a symbol of the President's direct interest in his Program of Action, and of his determination to obtain an unusual degree of inter-agency consultation, coordination, and harmony in exexuting it.

THE ISSUE OF U.S. COMBAT FORCES

106. One of the main issues in the Presidential Program that still required resolution after 11 May was that of committing U.S. forces to South Vietnam. The issue had been discussed, as a consequence of events in Laos, and in conjunction with possibilities of intervention in Laos and/or deploying forces to Thailand, in various meetings of the DepSecDef Task Force and the NSC. Little of the discussion, however, was concerned with executing the contingency plan for insurgency in South Vietnam, CINCPAC's OPLAN 32-59, Phase II (since superseded), which involved U.S. military action against the Communists. U.S. forces were considered for other purposes, not addressed by existing plans.

107. The first proposal of the DepSecDef Task Force, as noted above, was to augment the MAAG with two U.S. training commands and a Special Forces Group, in order to train the South Vietnamese. Next, without making it an outright proposal, State suggested that consideration be given to stationing U.S. or SEATO forces in South Vietnam, to release South Vietnamese forces for counterinsurgency, assist in training, and provide significant resistance in the event of DRV/Chinese intervention. This suggestion was carried forward in the Task Force's final report, which added the psychological purposes of deterring Communist intervention, rallying morale in South Vietnam, and encouraging SEATO support. For these purposes, the report mentioned that Defense was considering the deployment of two battle groups and an engineer battalion (in addition to the Special Forces Group already in the Program), as well as assigning to CINCPAC additional responsibilities in coastal patrol, border surveillance, and close air support.

108. Much of the impetus behind these proposals stemmed from the Laos situation. In an NSC meeting on 5 May, about a week before the Geneva negotiations on Laos were scheduled to begin, the President authorized efforts to reassure Sarit (of Thailand) and Diem that the U.S. was not abandoning Southeast Asia. He decided that Sarit could be told the U.S. was considering sending troops to his country, and asked the SecState and the SecDef for recommendations on the number of U.S. "training troops" to be sent to South Vietnam.[1] In a meeting of the SecState and the DepSecDef later that day, note was made of the question of stationing "combat units" in South Vietnam. The

[1]JCS 1992/986, 16 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

conferees were reported to have "decided" against this, for the time being; but this was probably a decision to postpone the question only until after the Vice-President's trip, as indicated in the next day's draft of the Task Force report. The "combat units" was probably a reference to the two-battle-group idea mentioned in the report as under consideration.[1]

109. On 8 May, referring specifically to the two-battle-group concept, the DepSecDef asked the JCS to further review the military advisability as well as the size and composition of U.S. forces for possible commitment to South Vietnam. He said he hoped JCS views could include some expression from CINCPAC and that they would be available prior to the next NSC meeting (then scheduled for 12 May, actually held 11 May).[2]

110. CINCPAC was queried by the DJS on the same day, and opposed the idea. He said the situation did not call for it; the training label was merely a "subterfuge;" the U.S. should not commit forces until it had to, and then should commit them with the intention of going in to fight. He also added, probably with possible Laos requirements in mind, that committing U.S. forces to South Vietnam would destroy his flexibility.[1] In the event of commitment, moreover, CINCPAC said his existing plan for intervention was still valid, it had been coordinated with and concurred with by all component and logistical commanders, and the forces therein were the most suitable in size and composition for initial deployment.

---

[1]JCS 1992/983, 10 May 1961, TOP SECRET.
[2]JCS 1992/979, 8 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

111. CINCPAC's views were reflected in the paper prepared for the JCS on the question, a DJS memo staffed by J-3. It proposed a memo to the SecDef to the effect that it was not "militarily desirable" to commit U.S. forces to South Vietnam at the time, and that if required at a later date the forces in the existing CINCPAC plan were those best suited.[1]

112. At their meeting on 10 May, however, the JCS approved a different memo, recommending that U.S. forces be deployed immediately to South Vietnam, "assuming that the political decision is to hold Southeast Asia outside the Communist sphere."[1] The memo stated that the question of deploying forces to South Vietnam should be considered in terms of the overall critical situation in Southeast Asia, of which Laos was the "focal point;" that forces should be deployed to South Vietnam to prevent the South Vietnamese from being subjected to the same situation as existed in Laos, which would then require the U.S. to intervene in an "already existing combat situation." The forces committed should be sufficient to constitute a visible deterrent to DRV/Chinese action, to release South Vietnam troops from forward and static defense positions, to assist in training, to serve as a nucleus for additional U.S. or SEATO operations in the general area, and to indicate the firmness of U.S. intent to all Asians. Details of size and composition should include the views of CINCPAC and ChMAAG, which were not yet available. To maintain U.S. flexibility in PACOM, however, some or all of the forces should be sent from the U.S.[2]

---

[1] JCS 1992/983, 10 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

[2] At the time, a reinforced PACOM brigade task force of 5000 to 6000 men had been alerted and prepositioned for possible deployment to Thailand. JCS 1992/981, 9 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

113. CINCPAC was informed of the JCS recommendation and asked for his views on the size and composition of forces for the purposes envisaged by the JCS.[1] He replied that if troops were sent, ground forces should consist of a U.S. Army infantry division, reinforced with Army aviation units, engineers, artillery, and a tailored logistical command. He recommended that coastal patrol remain a GVN reponsibility, with minimal U.S. assistance from the Seventh Fleet. For air tasks he suggested eight B-57's, four F-102's, and possibly two or three reconnaissance aircraft.[2]

114. On 12 May the question of U.S. troops was discussed by the Vice-President with Diem in Saigon, with somewhat ambiguous results. The Ambassador, who was present, subsequently reported to Washington that Diem desired U.S. forces only in the event of overt aggression, but he would welcome additional U.S. military personnel immediately as trainers and advisors. ChMAAG, who also attended the talks, reported that while Diem did not want U.S. forces for fighting the VC, he would accept U.S. "combat forces" as trainers.[3] The Vice-President's memo to the President (on 23 May) summarizing the results of his mission to South Vietnam and other countries in Asia merely reported that Asian leaders did not want U.S. "troops" at this time; the probability of open attack seemed scant, and U.S. forces were neither required nor desirable.[4]

---

[1]JCS to CINCPAC 111802Z May 1961, TOP SECRET.

[2]CINCPAC to JCS 120544Z May 1961, TOP SECRET.

[3]Memo for DepSecDef from Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations, "U.S. Combat Forces for Vietnam," 18 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

[4]Memo to the President from the Vice-President, "Mission to Southeast Asia, India, and Pakistan," 23 May 1961, SECRET.

115. Some confusion on this issue apparently persisted. On 18 May, summarizing for the DepSecDef the status of the question of possible deployment of U.S. combat forces to South Vietnam, the Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations stated that Diem had not yet requested the U.S. forces. He mentioned the ambiguity in the reports by the Ambassador and ChMAAG on the Vice-President's talks with Diem, and suggested that since Diem was sending his Defense deputy to Washington to discuss his "definitive military needs" the precise definition of the use of U.S. forces be explored with him. Referring to the question of size and composition, the Assistant to the SecDef passed along CINCPAC's "tentative views" on ground, naval, and air elements, as given in CINCPAC's 11 May message to the JCS, with recommendations as to where they might be stationed in South Vietnam. The latter recommendations had been made in a personal memo to him written by the former ChMAAG.[1]

116. Despite the uncertainty about whether Diem was willing to request U.S. combat forces, the JCS again urged their commitment, in another attempt to influence developments with respect to Laos. On 20 May, commenting on a concept for a divided Laos, they recommended a "decision now" to deploy U.S. forces to South Vietnam (and Thailand), as a stabilizing influence in Southeast Asia, and as a nucleus for possible future U.S./SEATO operations in Laos.[2] The memo for the SecDef informed him that the JCS believed that existing CINCPAC and SEATO plans must be used, at least for initial operations. "Military plans for overseas operations

[1]Memo for the DepSecDef from Assistant to the SecDef for special operations, "U.S. Combat Forces for Vietnam," 18 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

[2]JCS 1992/995, 20 May 1961, TOP SECRET.

of the magnitude envisaged must be prepared in a deliberate manner, if unacceptable risks are to be avoided." They recommended that the military advice of the JCS be utilized "from the outset" in preparing plans for military operations.

117. What, if anything, came of this second JCS initiative is not revealed in the documents on South Vietnam that were examined. However, the concept of U.S. combat forces for training continued to be discussed for several months.

118. ChMAAG, forwarding on 18 May a study on GVN force requirements, recommended the deployment of a U.S. brigade task force (two battle groups to establish two training centers, as suggested in the 6 May DepSecDef Task Force report) to assist in activating and training additional GVN divisions. If the GVN "demurred" on combat forces, he recommended the substitution of "training forces." Under either the brigade task force or the training force concepts, which would differ in total U.S. personnel requirements (some 16,000 for the former, 10,000 for the latter), ChMAAG recommended some 8000 men in U.S. logistical units to support the GVN forces until they were trained.[1]

119. On 14 June, Diem's Defense deputy delivered Diem's letter to the President on his needs (which he said had been reviewed with ChMAAG and his staff). In the letter, Diem asked for a considerable expansion of the MAAG, in the form of "selected elements" to establish training centers, to serve the dual purpose of expressing U.S. determination to halt Communist aggression and of helping prepare GVN forces

[1]Fact Sheet, "Augmentation RVNAF," undated, ISA/FER files; JCS 2343, 12 June 1961, TOP SECRET.

in the minimum time.[1] Washington apparently interpreted this as a rejection of the brigade task force concept.[2]

120. A month later, on 20 July, ChMAAG reported that the deployment of U.S. combat forces to South Vietnam was not acceptable to the GVN at the time.[3] According to the Washington Task Force, Diem had concluded that the introduction of a U.S. combat brigade as trainers was not now desirable; the JCS, CINCPAC, and ChMAAG were therefore studying whether expanded MAAG training might be substituted for the original idea of combat troops.[4] There the issue rested, insofar as the first Presidential Program of Action was concerned.

THE ISSUE OF GVN FORCE LEVELS

121. The question of GVN force levels also took several months to resolve. Because of the political and economic, as well as the military, aspects of the question, considerable interagency and Washington field activity was involved in arriving at a decision.

122. As noted above, the President on 28 January had approved military assistance to support an increase in GVN forces from 150,000 to 170,000, as called for in the CIP.

---

[1]Letter to the President from Diem, 9 June 1961, ISA/FER files.

[2]Fact Sheet, "Augmentation RVNAF," undated, ISA/FER files. Diem was extremely sensitive to the Communist charge that his was a puppet regime of the U.S., and he prized his image as an independent nationalist. He was most interested in greater U.S. aid, and in guarantees of U.S. intervention if the survival of his regime was threatened, but he preferred to run his own show, if possible. When he wavered on the question of U.S. forces, which he did several times during 1961, it was either because he wanted more than verbal reassurances from the U.S., after Laos (a desire which could be satisfied by a largely symbolic commitment of forces) or because his situation had become so acute that Diem was not confident he could handle it.

[3]ChMAAG to CINCPAC, 200915Z July 1961, SECRET.

[4]JCS 2343/3, 21 July 1961, SECRET.

The DepSecDef Task Force did not question the adequacy of the 170,000 level in its first draft report of 26 April, but apparently changed its mind, and on 28 April issued an addendum to the report recommending another increase in GVN forces to provide two additional divisions, in view of the Laos situation. This change may have been influenced by ChMAAG, who argued in Task Force meetings that the 170,000-level was predicated on the existing levels of insurgency; that any increase in the threat or in the difficulty of sealing the Laos border would require larger forces; and that GVN forces should be expanded to 200,000.[1]

123. The final draft of the Task Force report on 6 May carried the recommendation in modified form, asking for an assessment of the military utility, as well as the political/fiscal implications, of a further increase in GVN forces to 200,000. The President approved it in this form in the 11 May NSC meeting. On 13 May ISA requested the JCS to initiate the required assessment; the JCS in turn asked for CINCPAC's views.[2]

124. State concurrently asked the Country Team to examine the political and fiscal implications of the increase. The Embassy promptly reported that it was politically desirable to support the increase if requested by the GVN, and that since the GVN was capable of increasing its contribution to the military budget the increase was also economically feasible.[3]

---

[1]Memo for Record, Pacific Branch, J-3, 27 April 1961, TOP SECRET.

[2]JCS 1992/990, 14 May 1961, TOP SECRET; JCS to CINCPAC 181613Z May 1961, TOP SECRET.

[3]Saigon to State 1786, 23 May 1961, SECRET; Saigon to State 1837, 2 June 1961, SECRET.

125. Meanwhile, however, at the direct request of the CJCS, made during a visit to South Vietnam on 1 to 3 May, ChMAAG had undertaken a detailed study of the forces necessary to insure the integrity of South Vietnam "under current conditions." He forwarded the study on 19 May.[1] His main conclusion was that authorized forces were inadequate to carry out the JCS missions, which were to handle the current insurgency and simultaneously, in the event of overt attack, provide sufficient resistance to enable effective U.S./SEATO intervention. He recommended immediate expansion to a 9-division force of 200,000, and eventual expansion to a 15-division force of 280,000.

126. The 280,000 level was about what the GVN had in mind. Diem's letter to the President on 9 June, which responded to the Vice-President's invitation to submit his "defensive military needs," asked for a 100,000-man expansion to 270,000, with two new divisions as soon as possible to counter the threat from southern Laos. Diem stated in the latter that his conclusions had been reviewed with ChMAAG and the MAAG staff, and modified at their suggestion; but he presented them as the conclusions of himself and his generals.[2]

127. When CINCPAC finally replied to the JCS query on the 200,000 level, on 9 June, he also commented on the 280,000 level recommended by ChMAAG.[3] He said he concurred in the concept of a force level adequate for counterinsurgency and for initial resistance to external attack, but disagreed on

---

[1] ChMAAG letter to CINCPAC, Serial No. 008059, "First Twelve Months Report of Chief MAAG, Vietnam," 1 September 1961, SECRET; Fact Sheet, "Augmentation RVNAF," undated, ISA/FER files, SECRET.

[2] Letter to the President from Diem, 9 June 1961, ISA/FER files.

[3] CINCPAC letter to JCS, Serial No. 000138, 9 June 1961, TOP SECRET.

the need for a 15-division force, "assuming SEATO/U.S. forces are committed promptly." He did, however, concur "in principle" with the two-division, 30,000-man expansion to 200,000, to be initiated in January 1962, provided that in the interim the GVN demonstrated the ability to administer, train, and maintain increased forces. He proposed that ChMAAG devote his priority effort to the rotation and retraining of existing forces, and to organizing/training/equipping the recently authorized 20,000-man increase, the CG, and the SDC. He should work out detailed plans for the 30,000-man increase, but any implementation should be subject to prior assessment of GVN capabilities and performance.

128. On 21 June, the JCS informed the SecDef that they approved of the expansion to a 9-division, 200,000-man force, to be initiated in January 1962, subject to prior assessment of GVN progress; meanwhile priority efforts should be devoted to improving presently authorized forces.[1] The J-5 paper supporting this position noted the "steady deterioration" in Southeast Asia, the possible intervention of Chinese forces, and the increased possibility of U.S. contingency operations in the area. These made it imperative to achieve an effective combination of local forces and U.S. plans and assistance; the GVN must have the capability to hold back the aggressor until help could be provided, as well as to carry the burden of defense against subversion, insurrection, and guerrilla warfare. While the proposed 30,000-man increase was justifiable for these reasons, however, there were serious training, support, and assimilation problems involved. The phasing of such an

[1] JCS 2339/6, 23 June 1961, TOP SECRET.

increase would have to be undertaken in a manner and at a rate commensurate with the GVN's limited administrative, logistical, and other capabilities.

129. The Acting SecDef passed these views to State on 3 July, as the Defense assessment called for by NSAM 52. He stated that the U.S. should support the 30,000 increase to the 200,000 level, but that the increase should not be initiated until the 20,000 increase already authorized was properly amalgamated into the GVN force structure. We should proceed only as rapidly as the GVN was able to receive, support, administer, train, and maintain additional forces.[1]

130. Neither the JCS nor the Acting SecDef had commented on Diem's request for support of a 100,000-man increase to 270,000; they were now asked to do so. On 10 July ISA requested the JCS to study the military utility of such an increase as an ultimate objective.[2] The JCS replied on 3 August, reiterating their previous recommendations on the 200,000 level. They stated that a 9-division equivalent force of 200,000 was adequate to conduct counterinsurgency operations and concurrently be prepared to meet overt aggression, but that they would continue to assess the question and would be prepared to recommend increases if required.[3] On 22 August the DepSecDef wrote to the SecState that Defense considered the 200,000 level adequate for the foreseeable future but would recommend adjustments should circumstances change.[4]

---

[1] N/H of JCS 2339/6, 10 July 1961, TOP SECRET.
[2] Enclosure to JCS 2343/2, 12 July 1961, TOP SECRET.
[3] JCS 2343/5, 3 August 1961, TOP SECRET.
[4] N/H of JCS 2343/5, 3 August 1961, TOP SECRET.

131. By this time the issue of GVN force levels had gone before the President, as a result of the submission of the report of the fiscal/economic experts sent to South Vietnam to work on fiscal/economic aspects of the Program (as recommended by the DepSecDef Task Force, subsequently approved by the President, and arranged for with the GVN by the Vice-President). The Special Financial Group, as it was called, consisted of officials from State, Treasury, and ICA, chaired by an outside economist from the Stanford Research Institute who was a well-known specialist on community development problems in underdeveloped areas. The Group went to South Vietnam on 16 June, on the understanding that it would not "negotiate" with the GVN but would conduct a study with GVN counterparts and obtain "agreement on the facts."[1] It spent nearly a month in South Vietnam. Its members worked with GVN officials as an integrated committee to prepare a joint report, which was addressed to both Presidents.

132. The Group's report addressed the question of force levels in the course of analyzing financial costs of the Program.[2] It stated that the Group did not consider itself competent to recommend desired military force levels for the GVN, but had consulted with "military authorities." In fact, the views of the Group were remarkably similar to those expressed by ChMAAG and the GVN. The Group pointed out that Laos developments indicated an "urgent requirement" for a further increase in GVN forces, beyond the 170,000 level expected to be reached by the end of 1961. There was

[1]Minutes of Meeting, Task Force on Vietnam, 15 June 1961, SECRET.

[2]Enclosure to JCS 2343/7, 27 July 1961, SECRET.

an immediate requirement for two more divisions to bolster the forces adjoining Laos, and an ultimate requirement for expanding to the 278,000 level. The Group had therefore adopted, "for planning purposes," alternative strength figures of 200,000 and 278,000. The first was based on the assumption that VC insurgency continued at prevailing levels and Laos retained sufficient independence to deny "authority" for the transit of DRV or Chinese troops; the second was based on the assumption that the VC insurgency increased in intensity and the Communists obtained de facto control of Laos.

133. On 26 July the DepSecDef forwarded the Group's report to the JCS for their comments and recommendations.[1] He stated that the report was already under active consideration in the White House and State, and that he would appreciate comments not later than 3 August. The J-5 report prepared for the JCS stated that in the circumstances and especially in view of time limitations, JCS consideration must be limited to the military aspects, which concerned GVN force levels. The paper noted the 21 June recommendations of the JCS on the 200,000 level, and pointed out that a second report, concluding that the 200,000 level was adequate and the 270,000 level not required, was under JCS consideration. It also noted a 29 July message from ChMAAG requesting immediate approval of the 200,000 level as essential to preserve continuity in induction and training, and to allow MAAG/GVN planning to be finalized. ChMAAG added that progress in the expansion to 170,000 disclosed no reason why expansion to 200,000 should not or could not proceed.[2]

---

[1] JCS 2343/7, 27 July 1961, SECRET.
[2] JCS 2343/9, 2 August 1961, TOP SECRET.

134. On 2 August the JCS approved a memo concurring in general with the "military portion" of the proposed program. They recommended, as they had on 21 June, increasing GVN forces to the 200,000 level, immediate approval to permit MAAG/GVN planning to be finalized and to permit funds to be programmed in sufficient time to allow the increase to begin in January 1962, and periodic assessments during the buildup to ascertain the requirements for these additional forces.[1]

135. Another note was added to this discussion of force levels before it was resolved. The question of the extent to which the GVN was fulfilling its end of the bargain and implementing the CIP was reopened, and became associated with the final decision on the 200,000 level.

136. This was another eruption of old and fundamental issues -- Diem's responsiveness to U.S. pressure and advice, his political shortcomings, his management of the war. The fact that these issues were again raised during the protracted discussions on GVN force levels indicated a continuation of dissatisfaction with the performance of the GVN; it indicated the existence of doubts as to the success of the actions and inducements associated with the Presidential Program (the Vice-President's trip, the fresh approach to Diem, the increased aid) in effecting any basic changes in the situation; and it indicated that the effort to hammer out a comprehensive, unified program and to raise to a high level the degree of interagency coordination and cooperation had not prevented the recurrence of disagreements that were quite basic.

---

[1]JCS 2343/9, 2 August 1961, TOP SECRET.

137. It is not clear by whom the issues were raised, but they were raised in Washington rather than in the field. On 7 July the JCS asked CINCPAC for a "summary of principles, planned phases, and status" of the "military operational plan" of the GVN for "systematically clearing" the VC from South Vietnam.[1] The extent to which the GVN had adopted and was implementing military concepts of the CIP, the message stated, was not clear in Washington. On 10 July, State also asked for the Ambassador's personal judgment on the situation. ChMAAG subsequently reported, in a personal letter alluding to the State message (State to Saigon 35, 10 July, not sighted in the research conducted for this study), that he was disturbed by the "tone" of the questions raised by State. He said they were reminiscent of the general attitude which prevailed in Saigon prior to the arrival of the new Ambassador, and reflected an impatience for immediate and spectacular results. The GVN military reorganization and military redeployments for counterinsurgency had been completed only recently; the new chain of command was still gaining experience; and GVN forces still had a long way to go in gaining proficiency. State must understand that counterinsurgency was a time-consuming mission and must not expect sensational results.[2]

138. In response to the JCS query, CINCPAC, after consulting ChMAAG, said that the GVN had not yet published a national level military operations plan, responsive to the CIP, for systematically clearing the VC from South Vietnam. He said Diem's decrees and instructions were in consonance with the CIP and provided intermediate command levels with

[1] JCS to CINCPAC 072155Z, July 1961, SECRET.
[2] ChMAAG letter to Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations, 20 July 1961, SECRET.

guidance on counterinsurgency functions, responsibilities, and operational doctrine, but this had not yet been fully coordinated on a nationwide basis. There had been significant progress in improving the military chain of command along CIP lines, since early May; the field command had been assigned the counterinsurgency mission in clear terms, and was carrying it out through corps and division commanders; each of the latter was responsible for counterinsurgency operations within a tactical zone, although for small operations the PC's would be in control as subsector commanders (MAAG was watching the PC relationship carefully). Now that field command was operational, MAAG efforts to obtain a comprehensive plan should prove productive. However, effective implementation of all military aspects of the CIP would necessarily take time, and would be contingent on the rate of mobilization of additional forces.[1]

139. In a subsequent comment on CINCPAC's message, ChMAAG said he appreciated CINCPAC's continued support. He added that he recognized the advantages of having a detailed operations plan for the counterinsurgency campaign, especially for use in discussions with "other departments" in Washington, as an "exhibit" to convince "nonprofessional critics" of the GVN's intent and ability to clean up the VC insurgency. However, he considered it premature to insist on a "stereotyped rigid plan in the conventional sense," fixing the detailed phasing and timing of operations; it was necessary to remain flexible and responsive to the changing tactical situation. He would continue to work with GVN military authorities on developing overall

[1]CINCPAC to JCS 220007Z July 1961, TOP SECRET.

counterinsurgency doctrine and concepts leading to the operations plan that all desired, but it was important that "civilian nonprofessionals" fully understood that, due to unpredictable changes in the situation in South Vietnam, an operations plan should not be treated as a "rigid timetable" for liquidating the insurgency.[1]

140. Record of the Ambassador's parallel response to State is not available, but it apparently echoed similar views in support of the GVN's performance. ChMAAG, mentioning the Ambassador's reply in the 20 July letter cited above, said he was encouraged by the Ambassador's unqualified support of Diem. He felt that the Ambassador's "adjudication" in the situation was sound, and that the Ambassador's confidence represented a "refreshingly new approach." ChMAAG said he shared the Ambassador's optimism, and agreed with the Ambassador that "we are on the right track."[2]

141. Some of the specific misgivings in Washington during this period are indicated in a set of questions raised by the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs in a meeting with the DepSecDef on 26 July. He asked whether it was indeed a fact that GVN forces were 90 percent committed to counterinsurgency; whether Diem had a plan for using the extra 30,000 troops; whether he had sufficient manpower to sustain a 200,000-man force; and whether Diem was taking all feasible steps to carry out essential administrative/organizational reforms. The memo replying to these questions was prepared by a colonel in the office of the Assistant to the SecDef for Special

[1] ChMAAG to CINCPAC, 290931Z July 1961, SECRET.

[2] ChMAAG letter to Assistant to the SecDef for Special Operations, 20 July 1961, SECRET.

Operations. It stated that ChMAAG confirmed that 90 percent of GVN forces were committed to counterinsurgency; order of battle maps showed how dispersed the forces were; and everything the author had seen during extensive travels and conversations in South Vietnam led him to believe the picture was reasonably accurate. The memo further stated that Diem intended to use the extra troops to activate two more divisions, to meet the increased threat from Laos, which included stepped-up infiltration and the possibility that GVN forces in the north could be outflanked by attacks through Communist-controlled areas in Laos; Diem had only two regiments in reserve against the latter contingency. From the manpower standpoint, a 200,000 level was entirely feasible. On the question of Diem's implementation of administrative/organizational reforms, the memo cited CINCPAC's 22 July message to the JCS describing the steps taken by the GVN since May, as an "affirmative response," and added that the effectiveness of these steps was borne out by successful and fairly large-scale military operations conducted in the previous several weeks.[1]

142. It is noteworthy that the JCS memos commenting on the force level issue -- the 21 June assessment of the military utility of the increase to 200,000, the 2 August review of the report of the Special Financial Group, and the 3 August evaluation of the 270,000 request from Diem -- based contingent approval of the 200,000 level upon doubts about the GVN's ability to sustain added forces, without relating it to the CIP issue. Nor did the JCS, at least in the formal

[1] Memo for Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, "Situation in South Vietnam," 27 July 1961, CONFIDENTIAL.

papers examined, bring up the question of committing U.S. forces to South Vietnam as an alternative or supplement to expanding GVN forces, although they continued to assert the view that GVN forces were over-extended and the situation resulting from Laos was critical.

143. The President's decision on 4 August made U.S. approval of the 200,000 level contingent upon satisfactory GVN performance in implementing the CIP, as the central factor. The decision, made in the course of approving the recommendations of the Special Financial Group, was reported by State to the field on 3 August,[1] and was formalized in an NSAM (No. 65) issued on 11 August.[2] The U.S. would support the 200,000 level; but before the 170,000 level was reached and the increase could proceed, the U.S. and the GVN were to satisfy themselves that (a) a mutually agreed, geographically phased strategic plan existed, (b) there was an understanding on the training and utilization of the extra 30,000 troops, based on the plan, and (c) the rate of increase would be regulated to permit efficient absorption and utilization of the extra forces. Decision on any increase beyond 200,000 was postponed until 1962, when the question would be re-examined, but equipment and training of the CG and SDC would be expedited.

144. Since the 170,000 level was not expected to be reached until the end of 1961, the President's action in effect postponed the decision until then. Meanwhile the action permitted the MAAG and the GVN to make plans and preparations for the increase, presumably on a no-commitment basis, and

[1]State to Saigon 140, 3 August 1961, TOP SECRET.
[2]Enclosure to JCS 2343/13, 14 August 1961, SECRET.

forced the Country Team to maintain pressure on the GVN to develop and adopt a military operations plan for defeating the VC.

THE SPECIAL FINANCIAL GROUP REPORT

145. In addition to providing the occasion for the President's decision on GVN force levels, the Special Financial Group report, and the President's 4 August decisions on its recommendations, although anticlimatic, served to complete the items in the Presidential Program of Action for South Vietnam.

146. As recommended by the DepSecDef Task Force and approved by the President on 11 May, the Group was directed to work in the field with GVN counterparts, to prepare a joint financial plan to support the increased joint effort, to recommend specific short-range aid projects, and to develop a long-range economic development program. The recommended measures would, if approved, provide the economic supplement to the Presidential Program.

147. The Group's report began by stating that the warfare in South Vietnam could be brought to a successful conclusion only by the prompt application of effective military power coupled with large-scale economic/social action reaching every part of the country.[1] It recognized that military/internal security requirements must for the time being have first call on GVN manpower and resources and on U.S. aid; but that the degree to which military/internal security operations achieved lasting success would depend on the speed and effectiveness of economic/social programs.

[1]Undated, Enclosure to JCS 2343/7, 27 July 1961, SECRET.

148. The report warned that it would be far less costly to provide fully adequate resources today than to attempt to match the Communists with just enough strength to meet each new threat, "as the war drags on, year after year." It therefore recommended a Joint Action Program, designed not just to "hold the line" but to achieve a real "breakthrough," surpass the "critical threshold" of enemy resistance, and make a "decisive impact" on the economic/social/ideological front.

149. For the period July 1961 to December 1962, the report recommended a $13.5 million program of emergency economic/social action, and a $30 million program of longer range development projects, in addition to aid already programmed. It also recommended $42 million more in the military/security area, for civic action, to enable GVN forces to contribute to a crash program of economic/social development, strengthen popular support, and instill confidence in the GVN.

150. Emergency actions included accelerating programs to improve the radio broadcasting system, supporting the GVN "Agroville" (rural resettlement) and land development projects, and expanding rural medical programs. The development program included improving agricultural productivity, increasing economic and social services to the rural population, creating a stronger industrial base, preparing an integrated development plan, and encouraging private investment. The program for military civic action included rehabilitating roads, railroads, and bridges; repairing civic facilities like schools, markets, and hospitals; and aiding the civil administration in distributing food and clothing, caring for civilian casualties, providing engineering advice and assistance, and training local administrators.

151. In order to cover the increased local currency costs of the program, the report recommended that the GVN carry out tax and exchange reforms and initiate a savings and victory bond campaign.

152. To implement the program, and to improve and adapt it as the situation might require, the report recommended the establishment of parallel Country Team-GVN committees, to meet from time to time.

153. As indicated above, the JCS was asked to comment on the Special Financial Group's report on 26 July. In their reply on 2 August their comments were confined to the force level question, and reiterated the previous JCS contingent approval of the 200,000-man level.

154. The President formally reviewed the report on 4 August. His decisions were: (a) he agreed with the basic tenets on which the Joint Action Program was based; (b) the U.S. would support the 200,000 level, subject to U.S.-GVN agreement on a "strategic plan," on training and use of the additional 30,000 troops, and on regulation of the rate of increase; (c) he postponed decision on any increase above 200,000 until 1962, when the question would be reexamined; (d) the U.S. would provide the external resources for the Program; (e) the GVN would be strongly urged to generate local currency according to the Program; (f) the GVN would be urged to carry out tax reforms and establish a realistic exchange rate; (g) the Ambassador would make it clear to Diem that agreement on criteria for commercial imports and the exchange rate was indispensable, and that the U.S. contribution would be related to GVN action in these respects; (h) ICA would review the Program's proposals

for emergency economic/social action; (i) the GVN would be urged to establish economic planning machinery and to develop long-range economic plans; (j) the Ambassador would make clear to Diem that he needed to make a greater political effort; he would continue to try to persuade Diem to engage the non-Communist opposition in the civic action program; (k) there should be maximum delegation of responsibility to the parallel Country Team-GVN committees to assure follow-up action; it was emphasized that the chief responsibility for planning and executing the U.S. share rested more than ever with the Ambassador and, under his direction, MAAG and USOM; (l) the President would be informed of Joint Action Program matters requiring his attention, so that they might receive immediate consideration.[1]

155. NSAM No. 65, embodying the above decisions, was issued on 11 August as a supplement to NSAM 52 of 11 May, which incorporated the President's decisions based on the DepSecDef Task Force report.

156. On 11 September, following the procedure utilized for monitoring the 11 May decisions, the Task Force issued a list of specific projects derived from NSAM 65, as supplementary items 34 to 44 in the Presidential Program, which would henceforth be covered in Task Force status reports.[2] The items are listed in Table III, in abbreviated form.

157. The addition of these 11 items based on the 4 August decisions completed the Presidential Program. This turned out to be only Phase I, however. By the fall of 1961

[1] N/H of 2343/12, 15 September 1961, TOP SECRET.

[2] N/H of 2343/12, 15 September 1961, enclosing letter from Director, Task Force on Vietnam to the SecDef, 11 September 1961, SECRET.

events set in train another top-level reexamination of the South Vietnam problem and another attempt to formulate a comprehensive set of actions to solve it. This attempt, which eventuated in a Second Presidential Program, will be covered in a subsequent paper.

TABLE III. Supplement to Presidential Program for Vietnam, 11 September 1961

34. Provide support for a 200,000 force level, provided that before the 170,000 level is reached the U.S. and the GVN agree on a geographically phased strategic plan, on the training and utilization of the additional 30,000 troops, and on regulating the rate of increase.

35. Postpone decision on increases above 200,000 to 1962 and reexamine the situation then; expedite the buildup of the CG and SDC.

36. Provide the external resources for the Joint Action Program.

37. Urge the GVN to generate local currency as outlined in the Joint Action Program.

38. Urge the GVN to adopt tax reforms and a realistic exchange rate.

39. Make it clear to Diem that the U.S. contribution will be related to GVN action.

40. ICA to review the new proposals for emergency social action.

41. Urge the GVN to establish planning machinery and develop a long-range economic plan.

42. Urge Diem to make a greater political effort, and to involve non-Communist opponents in the civic action program.

43. Delegate authority to the parallel U.S.-GVN committees to assure follow-up action.

44. Inform the President of Joint Action Program matters requiring his attention so that they may receive immediate consideration.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY AND COMMENTS

158. This paper has sought to describe, as much as possible from the perspective of the Joint Staff, the development of a

broad U.S. program of political/military/economic action to deal with the South Vietnam situation during the first half of 1961.

159. The principal features of that situation were the following: it was a guerrilla war; Communist-inspired, directed, and supported, with active hostilities largely confined to South Vietnam and conducted by Communists indigenous to the area. It was an attack on a U.S.-sponsored and supported government, in an area of secondary strategic importance, in which the U.S. had, however, developed a deep involvement and a defense commitment, and in which the implications of U.S. moves had acquired a significance out of proportion to the immediate stakes. It occurred as a serious escalation of a long-standing campaign rather than as a sudden crisis. Communist victory did not seem imminent, but by early 1961 the situation had suffered considerable deterioration, and threatened to become even worse should the Communists exploit their advantages in Laos.

160. The GVN did not appear to possess the necessary resources, or, more importantly, the political and military effectiveness, to turn the tide. It had a strong will to win, but its confidence was badly shaken, both by its domestic situation and by anxieties stemming from the course of events in Laos, where the U.S. had agreed to negotiate for a "neutral" solution rather than intervene militarily. This morale problem combined with the military threat to give the situation a critical character, and to add a sense of urgency to U.S. decisions and actions.

161. From the initial study by CINCPAC in April 1960 through the development of the U.S. action program during

1961, the U.S. analysis of the situation was relatively consistent in stressing the "spectrum" nature of the insurgency, and the requirement for well-coordinated political, economic, and military measures to counter it. It was treated as an interagency problem throughout, cutting across the traditional responsibilities of all U.S. agencies involved in overseas operations, and requiring considerable interagency cooperation, in Washington and in the field.

162. The U.S. analysis was also relatively consistent in stressing the political and organizational weaknesses of the GVN itself, in enlisting popular support, mobilizing available resources, and conducting a comprehensive national campaign. The essential task seemed to be to get the GVN to take corrective action, and to get it to mount a vigorous and systematic counterinsurgency effort that the U.S. could back.

163. What the U.S. generally saw as weaknesses, however, were deeply embedded characteristics of the GVN regime which rested on a narrow political base, remote from the mass of the population; which employed authoritarian, highly centralized, and essentially conspiratorial methods of control; and which was extremely reluctant to delegate authority and to establish a clear chain of operational command, particularly in the politically sensitive internal security area.

164. The basic U.S. strategy was to work with the GVN regime, counting upon the leverage of increased U.S. economic and military aid, strong political approaches, and the critical nature of the situation to persuade the GVN to alter its image, its methods of operation, and its efforts.

Most of the difficult U.S. decisions were concerned with what the elements of the U.S.-GVN bargain should be, i.e., what the U.S. should offer and what it should expect of the GVN in return; with whether the bargain was being kept and, if not, what to do about it.

165. In general, this meant that measures proposed for adoption, including the military ones, were not considered on their merits alone. There was a tendency to turn proposed measures into inducements, and to evaluate them in terms of their utility as inducements. There was also a tendency to favor or oppose such measures according to judgments about the bargain itself, and whether the GVN was or was not meeting its terms.

166. We have seen that three major decision periods occurred, in January/February, April/May, and July/August, at which questions of this sort were raised, and carried up to the Presidential level for decision.

167. The first of these was the culmination of a strong 1960 initiative by CINCPAC, supported by the JCS and OSD, to develop an interagency plan to harness U.S. efforts behind a comprehensive GVN counterinsurgency campaign. It took eight months to develop the CIP, but it happened to be ready for decision when a new administration, inclined to step up the tempo of action in foreign affairs, came into office. The new administration quickly approved the CIP.

168. In this case, the decision process virtually bypassed the Joint Staff, at least in terms of formal procedures. The CIP was forwarded from Saigon to State on 4-9 January, was taken under review by State and ISA, but not furnished to the Joint Staff (J-3) until 31 January. The President

approved funds for the CIP on 28 January; the Joint Staff was informed of this on 2 February. On 1 February, apparently not aware of the Presidential decision, J-3 recommended deferral of JCS approval, pending CINCPAC comments and ISA conclusions on fund sources. On 3 February, noting the Presidential decision and a State-proposed message to approve the CIP, J-3 recommended expeditious approval. The JCS approved the CIP in principle on 6 February, three days after a joint State-Defense message approving the CIP was sent, and without benefit of review and comments by the Services.

169. It is clear from the above that even if informal communications were at work, there was insufficient time for anything like a full review of the CIP in the Joint Staff, or for complete staffing of the CIP within the military establishment. It is also clear that the precipitating factor in the timing was not the requirement for an emergency action but the fact that the CIP was already before the President, and he wished to act quickly on it.

170. A similar situation prevailed during the April/May decision period, when the DepSecDef Task Force was formed to recommend a comprehensive program of actions to prevent the Communist domination of South Vietnam. The request was made on 20 April for a report by 27 April. The first draft was produced on 26 April, with an addendum on 28 April. The JCS met on 28 April and concurred with the military actions, which were approved by the President the next day. Again, the Task Force's revised final report was issued 6 May, sent to the JCS on 8 May, with comments requested by 9 May, prior to an NSC meeting on 11 May. The JCS approval, without

benefit of comments by ChMAAG and CINCPAC, was on 9 May. This was the day the Vice-President left for Saigon, almost certainly with the President's 11 May decision in hand.

171. In the July/August period, the Joint Staff received the Special Financial Group report on 26 July with a note that it was already under active consideration in the White House and State and a request for comments by 3 August. The JCS decision, on 2 August, confined itself to the force level question (which had, however, been under consideration in the Joint Staff as a result of other actions). State reported the President's approval of the report to Saigon on 3 August, and the President formally approved it on 4 August as an NSC action.

172. In each of these instances the JCS confined their comments to the "military" actions, in view of the limited time available. What is "military" and "nonmilitary" in the field of counterinsurgency is, of course, open to widely differing interpretations, but in these instances the JCS comments reflected a narrow rather than a broad interpretation of the JCS role. In commenting on the Special Financial Group report, for example, which included a program for military civic action, the comments were confined to the force level question.

173. In approving the CIP and the Task Force proposals the JCS noted the possible requirement for subsequent revision after further review. The information canvassed does not, however, reveal any actual steps to conduct reviews for this purpose, once the President's decisions were made.

174. In arriving at these decisions, it is not known whether the President was deliberately resorting to a short

deadline technique in order to force the various agencies into fuller agreement than might otherwise have obtained. If so, however, the record shows that important differences remained and reappeared as major issues.

175. The CIP, for example, was prepared under an interagency directive, completed as a Country Team plan, and finally approved by the President, but this did not eliminate all interagency differences over its provisions. The Ambassador and ChMAAG, who disagreed on whether the GVN was devoting sufficient effort to internal security requirements (as against external aggression), also disagreed on whether the requisite emphasis was reflected in the CIP force structure. The Ambassador's judgment on this military question was also echoed in State, which reopened the issue after the CIP was approved.

176. The Ambassador and ChMAAG also differed on the requirement for political reforms in the GVN, and on whether the GVN had agreed, by mid-April, on enough of the CIP for the U.S. to proceed with supporting actions. In this case the GVN aggravated the differences on the U.S. side, by proving unresponsive, hesitant, and ambiguous with respect to the political and organizational measures in the CIP.

177. The first part of the Presidential Program, developed by a high-level interagency Task Force and monitored by a continuing, although lower level Task Force, also glossed over rather than eliminated some major interagency differences. During the extended discussions on the GVN force level issue, which was a question left for further examination, some of these differences reappeared in the form of controversy over whether the GVN was adequately

fulfilling its commitments under the CIP; in the end, the President made his decision on GVN force levels contingent upon this. Interagency controversy also arose during the consideration of deploying U.S. forces to South Vietnam.

178. In general, to judge from the decisions and the positions taken, it appears that the White House and State continued to be concerned with the question of political reform of the GVN, but finally retreated on the issue. Even after the GVN's failure to accept the "liberalization" measures of the CIP, it was apparently felt that the GVN might be induced to enact some reforms if the U.S. made a fresh approach, including high-level overtures, a new Ambassador on Diem's wavelength, and increased aid. However, the Vice-President, who was to obtain as specific an understanding on reforms as possible, merely got a statement that political and economic action was as important as military action, hedged by Diem's proviso that such action be suited to circumstances in South Vietnam. It was left to the Ambassador to work out whatever he could with Diem; and no particular deadlines or conditions were imposed. The issue did not disappear, but in the end the outstanding condition tied to increased U.S. aid was the development of an agreed military operations plan.

179. It also appears that much of the concern with South Vietnam was directly related to concern about the political and military implications of possible U.S. policy failures in Laos. This was even true of the JCS, when they recommended deploying U.S. combat forces to South Vietnam, largely for psychological purposes.

180. It may be noted, finally, that although the deployment of U.S. combat forces to South Vietnam was seriously considered, at no time during this period did the U.S. appear close to executing the existing contingency plan for insurgency in South Vietnam. U.S. forces were considered for a large variety of purposes other than combat (although they might have become involved in combat as a consequence), including training the Vietnamese, releasing them from defensive positions, deterring or resisting further Communist action, rallying morale in South Vietnam, and bolstering confidence in the U.S.