October 5, 1964

Dear Dean, Bob, and Mac:

I am enclosing my sceptical thoughts on the assumptions of our Viet-Nam policy. This amplifies our conversation a week ago as I promised to do.

The paper has the obvious limitations of a personal effort drafted mostly late at night and without benefit of staffing. I offer it as a focus for discussion and as an incitement to a broad study of the problem.

Only five copies of this document have been prepared. I am sending one each to the three of you and am retaining two in my safe. I think you will agree that it should not be discussed outside the four of us until we have had a chance to talk about it.

Yours ever,

George W. Ball

The Honorable
Dean Rusk,
Secretary of State.

TOP SECRET
INDEX

HOW VALID ARE THE ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING OUR VIET-NAM POLICIES?

FORWARD

I. Purpose of Memorandum ................. 1
II. How to Approach the Problem ............. 5
   1. Primacy of the Political Purpose ........ 5
   2. South Viet-Nam is not Korea ......... 6
   3. The Present Situation ................ 8
   4. How to Formulate the Problem ......... 9

PART ONE - AN EXAMINATION OF THE PREMISES OF A POLICY OF MILITARY ACTION AGAINST NORTH VIET-NAM

A. Conditions Necessary for Sustained Air Action Against the North ............. 11
   1. Is our base in South Viet-Nam sufficiently secure to justify the undertaking of sustained air action against the North? .... 11
   2. Would action against North Viet-Nam increase political cohesiveness and improve morale in South Viet-Nam so as to strengthen the governmental base? ................. 12

B. What is the Most Favorable Result we Could Hope to Achieve by Military Action Against North Viet-Nam? ................. 16
   1. Can we, by military pressure against North Viet-Nam, persuade the Hanoi Government to stop Viet Cong action in the South or at least reduce that action to the point where the Viet Cong insurgency becomes manageable? ................. 16
2. Would the Peiping Government permit the North Vietnamese Government to stop the Viet Cong insurgency without its intervening directly on a limited or total basis?............ 21

3. Would it be possible for the United States to control the process of escalation so as to achieve the requisite improvement in its bargaining position without danger of triggering the kind of North Vietnamese or Chinese action envisaged by paragraphs 1 and 27? ............ 24

D. Need for U.S. Ground Forces............ 26

1. Would it be possible to repel a heightened ground effort by North Vietnamese forces against South Viet-Nam without substantial U.S. land forces?........ 26

2. Could substantial U.S. combat forces be committed to South Viet-Nam without substantially altering the relationship of the United States to the war?.... 26

3. Could additional forces needed for security against the consequences of escalation in Southeast Asia be provided without large-scale U.S. mobilization? How fast could the United States move to carry out such mobilization?.... 27
E. Pressure for Use of Atomic Weapons

1. If the conflict stalemated on land—and particularly if the Chinese intervened—would the United States be likely to resort to the use of at least tactical nuclear weapons? ....... 28

2. Could nuclear weapons be used without substantial political costs to our world position? ....... 28

F. Possibility of Soviet Intervention

1. What are the chances that the Soviet Union might intervene before or after the intervention of China and what form would Soviet intervention be likely to take? ....... 33

G. The Relative Political Costs of Escalation

1. Would the clear evidence of our intention to carry out our commitments increase United States prestige around the world? ....... 34

2. How would countries in Southeast Asia react to these courses of action? ....... 37

3. How would this affect our position in Japan and elsewhere in Asia? ....... 38
PART TWO - THE PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF A POLITICAL SOLUTION

A. The Thrust of the Analysis

B. What Political Solution?

C. Clearing the Air for a Negotiated Solution

1. Is it realistic to think we can improve our negotiating position by an air offensive?

D. What Provisions should we Seek to Have Included in a Negotiated Settlement?

E. What Kind of Political Settlement Might we Reasonably Hope to Achieve by Negotiation Following Sustained Military Pressure on North?
1. How would we move from sustained air attack to the conference table? .................. 48

2. How strong a position would America have in a conference that followed a sustained air offensive? .................. 50

3. What can we reasonably hope to achieve by a negotiation not preceded by direct military action against the North? ............. 53

F. The Possibility of a Diplomatic Settlement not Preceded by an Air Offensive .................. 54

1. What preliminary steps should we take to minimize the cost to American prestige of a negotiated solution not preceded by military action? .................. 54

2. Should we seek immediate negotiations or a period of maneuver? .. 57

3. What other Governments might be helpfully enlisted in setting the stage for a negotiated solution? .................. 58

G. Framework for a Settlement .................. 59

TOP SECRET
1. What kinds of framework might be utilized for achieving a negotiated settlement?.............. 59

2. What type of framework would result in the best outcome for American interests?.............. 60

3. Does the U.N. offer a possible alternative framework for a political solution?.............. 64

CONCLUSION ............................................. 65
II.

HOW TO APPROACH THE PROBLEM

1. Primacy of the Political Purpose

The maintenance of a non-Communist South Viet-Nam is of considerable strategic value to the United States. Secretary McNamara has said of Southeast Asia:

"Its location across east-west air and sea lanes flanks the Indian sub-continent on one side and Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines on the other, and dominates the gateway between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In Communist hands, this area would pose a most serious threat to the security of the U.S. and to the family of Free World nations to which we belong. To defend Southeast Asia, we must meet the challenge in South Viet-Nam."

But, in spite of the strategic importance of the real estate involved, our primary motive in supporting the Government of South Viet-Nam is unquestionably political. It is to make clear to the whole Free World that we will assist any nation that asks us our help in defending itself against Communist aggression.

For the purposes of this memorandum I have assumed that the political objective should be the principal frame of reference in assessing the cost of changing our present relations with South
South Viet-Nam either by directly involving the U. S. in an attack on the North or by the deliberate search for a political solution. That cost must be primarily measured by the political impact on other nations - the consequences for U. S. prestige and the credibility of our commitments elsewhere, the erosive effect on our alliances, and the impact on the will of other nations to continue to resist Communist aggression.

2. South Viet-Nam is not Korea.

In approaching this problem, I want to emphasize one key point at the outset: The problem of South Viet-Nam is sui generis. South Viet-Nam is not Korea and in making fundamental decisions it would be a mistake for us to rely too heavily on the Korean analogy. There are at least five principal differences between the present position of the U. S. in South Viet-Nam and our situation in South Korea in 1951:

a. We were in South Korea under a clear UN mandate.

Our presence in South Viet-Nam depends upon the continuing request of the GVN plus the SEATO protocol.

b. At their peak, UN forces in South Korea (other than ours and the ROK) included 53,000 infantrymen and 1,000 other troops provided by fifty-three nations.

In Viet-Nam we are going it alone with no substantial help from any other country.

c. In
c. In 1950 the Korean Government under Syngman Rhee was stable. It had the general support of the principal elements in the country. There was little factional fighting and jockeying for power.

In South Viet-Nam we face governmental chaos.

d. The Korean War started only two years after Korean independence. The Korean people were still excited by their new-found freedom; they were fresh for the war.

In contrast, the people of Indo-China have been fighting for almost twenty years—first against the French, then for the last ten years against the NVN. All evidence points to the fact that they are tired of conflict.

e. Finally, the Korean War started with a massive land invasion by 100,000 troops. This was a classical type of invasion across an established border. It was so reported within twelve hours by the UN Commission on the spot. It gave us an unassailable political and legal base for counter-action.

In South Viet-Nam there has been no invasion—only a slow infiltration. Insurgency is by its nature ambiguous. The Viet Cong insurgency does have substantial indigenous support. Americans know that the insurgency is actively directed and supported by Hanoi, but the rest of the world is not so sure.

The testimony
The testimony of the ICC has been fuzzy on this point—and we have been unable to disclose our most solid evidence for fear of compromising intelligence sources.

As a result, many nations remain unpersuaded that Hanoi is the principal source of the revolt. And, as the weakness of the Saigon Government becomes more and more evident, an increasing number of governments will be inclined to believe that the Viet Cong insurgency is, in fact, an internal rebellion.

3. The Present Situation

The feeble condition of the Saigon Government is well understood. Perhaps the clearest appraisal of present conditions is in SNIE 53-2-64 unanimously approved by the United States Intelligence Board last Thursday:

"Since our estimate of 8 September 1964 the situation in South Viet-Nam has continued to deteriorate. A coup by disgruntled South Viet Nam military figures could occur at any time. In any case, we believe that the conditions favor a further decay of GVN will and effectiveness. The likely pattern of this decay will be increasing defeatism, paralysis of leadership, friction with Americans, exploration of possible lines of political accommodation with the other side, and a general-petering out of the war effort. It is possible that the civilian government-promised for the end of October could improve GVN esprit and effectiveness, but on the basis of present indications, this is unlikely."

4. How
4. How to Formulate the Problem

Confronted by this deterioration we find ourselves in a difficult dilemma:

Should we move toward escalation because of the weakness of the governmental base in Saigon in the hope that escalation will tend to restore strength to that base; or can we risk escalation without a secure base and run the risk that our position may at any time be undermined?

So far we have focused our attention almost entirely on how we can (a) clean up the insurgency by actions in South Viet-Nam and (b) bring pressure on Hanoi to stop or materially reduce the insurgency. We have proceeded on the assumption that once having undertaken a program of military action in South Viet-Nam, we must pursue it until we achieve military success. We have assumed that without military success a negotiated solution could be achieved only at an unacceptable cost to the United States.

What we must now do, in view of the present precarious situation, is to undertake a rigorous balancing of accounts. We must examine the range of possible costs that might result from the widening of the war and the enlargement of the United States.
States military commitment and balance those costs against the costs of a carefully devised course of action designed to lead to a political solution under the best conditions obtainable.

The purpose of this memorandum is to examine the assumptions that support each course of action. It is divided into two major parts:

Part One is an examination of the basic premises that underlie the case for achieving a solution through the application of additional military force.

Part Two is an examination of possible alternative courses of action for developing a political solution without the investment of further military force and at minimum cost to U.S. interests.

Part One
PART ONE

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PREMISES OF A POLICY OF MILITARY ACTION AGAINST NORTH VIET-NAM

A.

Conditions Necessary for Sustained Air Action Against the North

1. Is our base in South Viet-Nam sufficiently secure to justify the undertaking of sustained air action against the North?

The dangers of undertaking such air action without a secure base are at least two in number:

a. General Taylor has stated on more than one occasion that we should not become involved militarily with North Viet-Nam, and possibly with China, if our base in South Viet-Nam is insecure. (See Saigon's 465 and 972). If the political situation in Saigon should continue to crumble, air action against North Viet-Nam could at best bring a Pyrrhic victory. Even with diminished North Vietnamese support for the Viet Cong, a disorganized South Vietnamese Government would be unable to eliminate the insurgency.
b. The launching of an air offensive would involve a substantial additional United States commitment in South Viet-Nam. There is serious question whether such a commitment should be made so long as we are vulnerable to the risk that we may be asked to leave the country if a neutralist government emerges in Saigon.

2. Would action against North Viet-Nam increase political cohesiveness and improve morale in South Viet-Nam so as to strengthen the governmental base?

This contention deserves the verdict known in the Scottish law, of "not proven".

Our objectives are not fully congruent with the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people. We are considering air action against the North as the means to a limited objective—the improvement of our bargaining position with the North Vietnamese. At the same time we are sending signals to the North Vietnamese that our limited purpose is to persuade them to stop harassing their neighbors, that we do not seek to bring down the Hanoi regime or to interfere with the independence of Hanoi.

When General Khanh temporarily raised the level of morale in July, he did so by promising the South Vietnamese people to lead...
to lead them North in order to effect the reunification of Viet-Nam. "Certainly," he said on July 19, "our National Liberation Revolution will achieve success, and thus our beloved Vietnamese fatherland will become free, independent, and reunified." (FBIS 41) Only such statements, he felt, could help the "national war weariness." (See Saigon's 212 and 232).

Reunification, however, is not a U.S. objective, nor can it be if we are to maintain a juridical posture acceptable to the rest of the world. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that the South Vietnamese would have their hearts lifted merely by watching the North Vietnamese suffer a sustained aerial bombardment. Most have families or at least friends in the North.

The following CIA report of the reaction in Saigon to our August bombings casts doubt on the easy assumption that air action against the North would necessarily improve South Vietnamese morale: (Field Report No. FVS 10,577, August 8).

"1. On 6 August an American who speaks Vietnamese got the reactions of 20 or 25 Vietnamese of various walks of life in Saigon on the matter of the 5 August bombing
bombing of North Vietnamese installations by United States aircraft. It should be noted here that some of the Vietnamese were engaged in conversation among themselves and did not realize that the American nearby understood Vietnamese. Of these 20 to 25 individuals only one registered unequivocal support for the U.S. action. All other Vietnamese registered mild dissatisfaction to strong disapproval.

"2. The one Vietnamese to declare support for the U.S. action was a sergeant in the airborne brigade who said he had been in the United States twice and considered himself more American than Vietnamese. On the other hand, none of the other Vietnamese of this small sample even indicated any particular disapproval of the North Vietnamese attacks on American ships. About four of the individuals mentioned that they had been listening to Radio Hanoi and that Hanoi's version was different from the American. As a result they were not sure of the facts of the matter.

"3. In almost all the cases the principal reason given for disapproval of the bombing action was that the Americans were now unilaterally killing Vietnamese, while in the past the Americans were merely helping Vietnamese to kill Vietnamese. Another main reason for their disapproval was fear that the conflict would spread and more directly affect them."

The available evidence leads to the tentative cautionary conclusion that if air bombardment is not followed by the fact--or even the promise--of a military invasion of North Viet-Nam, there is no assurance that it would improve South Vietnamese morale over any significant period. We did bomb North Vietnamese targets on August 5. But since then there has been
been an abortive coup, a Montagnard revolt, further factional fighting, a weakening of Khanh's position and general deterioration.

It may be argued, of course, that the observable effects of an isolated attack such as that of August 5 are not a fair indication of what might be the consequences of a sustained program of military pressure against the North. That is true. But to the extent that military action would invite significantly increased reprisals or would raise the specter of Chinese involvement, any momentary euphoria might well be replaced by demoralization. An air attack on Saigon, for example, would probably have nothing but a cohesive effect on the population. On the contrary it might incite further factionalism, contribute to war exhaustion, and lead to the destruction of the present weak governmental structure.

In sum, I find no assurance that morale can be improved by a U.S. air offensive against North Viet-Nam. Morale depends instead on effective political leadership and an improvement of the conditions of life. The increase in casualties that would result from escalation would be unlikely to appeal to a war-weary people.
What is the Most Favorable Result We Could Hope to Achieve by Military Action Against North Viet-Nam?

1. Can we, by military pressure against North Viet-Nam,
persuade the Hanoi Government to stop Viet Cong action in the South or at least reduce that action to the point where the Viet Cong insurgency becomes manageable?

The Hanoi Government has been deeply committed to its present course of policy for many years. (See the documented analysis in "A Threat to the Peace," Department of State Publication 7308). It is not likely to give up its objectives easily.

At the moment Hanoi believes that it is close to a victory in South Viet-Nam. So long as the situation in South Viet Nam does not materially improve—so long as the Saigon Government continues in a state of ineffectiveness or disintegration—Hanoi will cling to the hope of ultimate victory.

So long as it believes victory is near, it will probably be willing to accept very substantial costs from United States air action. Its public posture, at home and abroad, and its private behavior, both diplomatic and military, support this hypothesis.
Not only will North Viet-Nam continue to have the will to support the insurgency but it will continue to have the ability.

Sigma II, conducted by the Joint War Games Agency, Cold War Division, Joint Chiefs of Staff, from September 8-11, 1964, revealed that exhausting the 1964 target list presently proposed for airstrikes would not cripple Hanoi's capability for increasing its support of the Viet Cong, much less force suspension of present support levels on purely logistical grounds.

2. Assuming that we might, through military pressure, persuade the Hanoi Government that it was paying more for the Viet Cong insurgency than it was gaining, would that Government in fact have the capability to stop or materially reduce the Viet Cong action to the point where it became manageable?

In principle, the answer should probably be in the affirmative. But what is far more likely is that the Government in Hanoi would publicly disclaim further connection with the Viet Cong insurgency while in fact continuing to supply
supply covert help. As stated in "Alternatives for Imposition of Measured Pressures against North Viet-Nam". (Policy Planning paper, March 1, 1964, Tab 2, page 4):

"...Probably the most that could be expected in the best of circumstances, would be that the DRV would ultimately slacken and ostensibly cease its support of the VC, while pressing for a cease-fire in the South, ordering the VC to regroup and lie low, and covertly preparing to resume the insurrection as soon as the DRV thought it could get away with it. We can, of course, have no assurance that such 'best of circumstances' would obtain, even if considerable damage had been done the DRV. ...

3. If a complete military victory is not possible, can we, by military pressure against North Viet-Nam, at least improve our bargaining position to the point where an acceptable negotiated solution might be achieved?

This question cannot be answered categorically. So far, the only kind of bargain Hanoi has been interested in is one that would contemplate the withdrawal of the United States forces. The mere fact that we have levied destruction on North Viet-Nam would not lay the basis for a viable negotiated settlement unless at the same time three conditions had been met:

a. An
a. An effective government had been established in Saigon.

b. The Viet Cong insurgency had been reduced to a level where it could not eliminate a South Vietnamese Government deprived of U.S. support.

c. Effective international arrangements had been established to prevent further infiltration of supplies and material by the North Vietnamese Government.

4. If, in fact, the United States, by direct employment of military power, did succeed in softening up the Hanoi Government would this improve the climate for a negotiation that would be likely to include other Asian and neutral powers?

The fundamental premise that it would be easier to deal with North Viet-Nam after an air offensive is, in my view, based on a wrong assessment of the political impact of such a course world-wide and its effect on our bargaining strength. These issues will be examined more fully in a later section.

C. Possible
C.

Possible Consequences of U.S.-Initiated Escalation

1. Would the Hanoi Government yield to the pressure generated by our air offensive without first undertaking a major invasion of South Viet-Nam by North Vietnamese forces?

In reacting to our air offensive the North Vietnamese Government would be likely to follow the principle that each party would choose to fight the kind of war best adapted to its resources. If we were to escalate by employing air power—a type of offensive capability in which we have the unquestioned advantage—the North Vietnamese would be clearly tempted to retaliate by using ground forces, which they possess in overwhelming numbers. As stated in the October 3 draft SNIE (which the Intelligence Board is considering today) "...there would be a substantial danger that they would increase the pressure of the insurgency in South Viet-Nam, introducing additional forces to speed the collapse of the CVN and thus cut the base from under the US position before North Viet Nam had suffered unacceptable damage."

At the least we could expect Hanoi to make a larger infiltration effort. It is estimated that within two months
an additional two divisions could be covertly introduced through Laos and across the DMZ.

Hanoi might also increase terror and sabotage in the south, including terror attacks on American personnel in Saigon and even the bombing of Saigon and other urban centers to induce demoralization.

Nor can we rule out the possibility that Hanoi would undertake an overt invasion. By directly bombing North Vietnam we would have removed the political inhibition against overt use of force. It is estimated that in two months time, it could put six divisions (roughly 60,000 men) across the zone and through the Phu Hiandale. (See Sigma II-64 Fact Book, Tab G). This could not, of course, be done without expense. It would expose the North Vietnamese forces to counterblows from the air, especially against lines of communication and supply.

2. Would the Peiping Government permit the North Vietnamese Government to stop the Viet Cong insurgency without its intervening directly on a limited or total basis?

China has substantial interests that would be jeopardized by United States air strikes against North Viet-Nam.
a. Its first interest is to avoid the loss of face that it would suffer if it did not come to the assistance of a Communist neighbor against a United States attack. Peiping has, since our strike of August 5, repeatedly proclaimed at the most authoritative levels that "aggression against the DRV is aggression against China." It has also conducted continuous propaganda campaigns to prepare its military and civilian populace for helping North Viet-Nam. On the other side of the coin, Hanoi's posture in the Sino-Soviet dispute has persistently supported Peiping's positions and attacked those adopted by Moscow, at least since June 1963, and fear of subservience to Peiping does not seem to have materially affected Hanoi's course of action in confronting either Moscow or Washington.

b. A second Chinese interest is to safeguard its own security, which would be menaced by United States action directed at the establishment of Southeast Asia as a permanent base of threatening United States power. This seems clearly to have been the Chinese motivation in attacking when we approached the Yalu River.

c. A
c. A third interest is Chinese concern for the main rail line linking coastal Kwangtung with inner Yunnan Province. This line transits North Viet-Nam and is vital to the security of South China.

Already Communist China has involved itself in the air defense of North Viet-Nam by deploying Chinese pilots and aircraft to Phuc Yen and in the installation of joint Sino-Vietnamese air warning systems.

Of course, the question of possible Chinese involvement cannot be answered categorically one way or another. The October 3 draft SNIE concludes that in the face of sustained U.S. air attacks on North Viet-Nam, "a large-scale Chinese Communist ground or air intervention would be unlikely". But we would be imprudent to undertake escalation without assuming that there was a fair chance that China would intervene. We made a contrary assumption in Korea in October of 1950 with highly unfortunate consequences. Let us recall the circumstances.

"In your opinion," President Truman asked General MacArthur, "is there any chance that the Chinese might enter the war on the side of North Korea?"

MacArthur shook his head. "I'd say there's very little chance of that happening. They have several hundred thousand men north of the Yalu, but they haven't..."
haven't any air force. If they tried to cross the river our air force would slaughter them. At the most perhaps 60,000 troops would make it. Our infantry could easily contain them. I expect the actual fighting in North Korea to end by Thanksgiving. We should have our men home, or at least in Japan, by Christmas."

"At the very moment that President Truman and General MacArthur were talking, there were already more than 100,000 Chinese Communist troops in North Korea, and another 200,000 were ready to cross the Yalu. By mid-November at least 300,000 Chinese would be poised to strike--and the ROK, American and other UN forces would not even be aware of their presence. Before the war was over, the Chinese Communist armies in Korea would reach a peak strength of more than a million men." (Lawson's "The United States in the Korean War", pg. 79).

3. Would it be possible for the United States to control the process of escalation so as to achieve the requisite improvement in its bargaining position without danger of triggering the kind of North Vietnamese or Chinese action envisaged by paragraphs 1 and 2?

This question goes to the heart of the premise upon which the proposals of military pressure against North Viet-Nam are based—that we can take offensive action while controlling the risks and that we can halt the process of escalation whenever we feel we have accomplished our objective or the enemy is about to respond with unacceptable force.

I find
I find this premise of doubtful validity. As we mount the scale of progressively more intensive air attacks on North Viet-Nam, either Hanoi will respond, or it won't. Either Peiping will respond or it won't. (And I assume that what is wanted is not a preventive war with China.)

If neither responds we shall be led to continue our attacks until there is some indication by Hanoi that it is ready to negotiate. But once Hanoi or Peiping does respond, our own counteraction will have to be measured by the character of that response.

It is in the nature of escalation that each move passes the option to the other side, while at the same time the party which seems to be losing will be tempted to keep raising the ante. To the extent that the response to a move can be controlled, that move is probably ineffective. If the move is effective, it may not be possible to control—or accurately anticipate—the response.

Once on the tiger's back we cannot be sure of picking the place to dismount.
D.

Need for U.S. Ground Forces

1. Would it be possible to repel a heightened ground effort by North Vietnamese forces against South Viet-Nam without substantial U.S. land forces?

   The answer to this question is clearly "no".

   In the case of an invasion it is obvious.

   But even substantially increased infiltration from North Viet Nam would require substantial American ground units to defend our bases from attacks by the North.

   We cannot counter ground forces by air power alone, as we quickly learned in Korea.

   And we should remember that in South Viet-Nam the nature of the terrain reduces the premium on modern firepower and logistic equipment even more than it did in Korea.

2. Could substantial U.S. combat forces be committed to South Viet-Nam without substantially altering the relationship of the United States to the war?

   Up to now we have maintained in the eyes of the world that our forces were in South Viet-Nam solely to advise and train South Vietnamese forces and assist them with logistics.

   The injection
The injection of substantial United States combat forces would necessarily change our relationship to the management of the war. Such forces would be assuming conspicuous combat roles under a direct United States chain of command.

At the same time the presence of United States combat troops would necessarily mean a progressive taking-over of many of the functions now exercised by the South Vietnamese.

The French would take the lead in pointing out that we had now clearly put ourselves in the position of France, in the early 1950's—with all the disastrous political connotations of such a posture. Asians would not miss the point.

The repercussions of this action would also be substantial on the home front. Americans would feel, for the first time, that they had again been committed by their leaders to an Asian war. The frustrations and anxieties that marked the latter phases of the Korean struggle would be recalled and revived—and multiplied in intensity.

3. Could additional forces needed for security against the consequences of escalation in Southeast Asia be provided without large-scale U.S. mobilization? How fast could the United States move to carry out such mobilization?

(The answer to this question has not yet been developed.)
Pressure for Use of Atomic Weapons

1. If the conflict stalemated on land--and particularly if the Chinese intervened--would the United States be likely to resort to the use of at least tactical nuclear weapons?

If ground fighting should drag on for a sustained period the U.S. forces would begin to take substantial casualties.

At this point, we should certainly expect mounting pressure for the use of at least tactical nuclear weapons. The American people would not again accept the frustrations and anxieties that result from our abstention from nuclear combat in Korea.

The rationalization of a departure from the self-denying ordinance of Korea would be that we did not have battlefield nuclear weapons in 1950--yet we do have them today.

At the same time we must recognize that, in the eyes of the world, and of Americans--the distinction between tactical and strategic nuclear weapons carries little conviction.

2. Could nuclear weapons be used without substantial political costs to our world position?
Our employment of the first tactical nuclear weapon would inevitably be met by a Communist accusation that we use nuclear weapons only against yellow men (or colored men). It is Communist dogma that this is the reason that we used atomic bombs against Japan but not against Germany in World War II. There would be a profound shock around the world not merely in Japan but also among the non-white nations on every continent.

In this connection we should recall the reactions in December 1950 when President Truman even suggested the possibility of using atomic bombs in the Korean War—not at a time when we still had the nuclear monopoly.

As stated by Fehrenbach, in *This Kind of War*:

"Within three hours, there was resulting explosion.

"The Times of 1 December remarked: The President's mention of an atom bomb caused consternation and alarm in Britain and brought from France official disapproval. Most U.N. delegates were agreed that it would be politically disastrous to use the bomb in Asia.

"Nothing so awakened the French Assembly as mention of the bomb. To the fear of the bomb lately has been added a fear of General MacArthur, who is regarded as impulsive and reckless in his reported desire to bomb Manchuria and risk extending the war."
"A headline read: Britons dismayed by Truman’s talk -- Atlee will fly to Washington to discuss crisis with President.

"The London Times editorialized: 'Truman' touched upon the most sensitive fears and doubts of this age...

"Winston Churchill, in Commons, warned the West against involvement in Asia at the expense of Europe. The House cheered Prime Minister Atlee’s announced flight to Washington.

"In Melbourne, Australia, where there were few friends of Red China, newspapers expressed the hope that diplomatic skill would avert a conflict with Communist China. The Melbourne Herald wrote: The Chinese can no longer be despised militarily. Their revolutionary leaders obviously command unity and loyalty which Chiang never attained.

"Italian Communists and anti-Communists alike expressed deep fears of general war.

"And papers all over the world stated that MacArthur should have halted the U.N. armies no farther north than the middle of North Korea, leaving a buffer between them and Manchuria."

The Communists would certainly point out that we were in the only nation that had ever employed nuclear weapons in anger. And the Soviet Union would emphasize its position of relative virtue in having a nuclear arsenal which it had never used.

At the
At the same time, our action would liberate the Soviet Union from inhibitions that world sentiment has imposed on it. It would upset the fragile balance of terror on which much of the world has come to depend for the maintenance of peace. Whether or not the Soviet Union actually used nuclear weapons against other nations the very fact that we had provided a justification for their use would create a new wave of fear.

The consequences of all this cannot be overstated. For the past four years we have been making slow but perceptible progress toward a new era of relations between the two centers of power in this mid-20th Century world. But the first use of the bomb by the United States would destroy all this. It would set us back to the tense and suspicious days before the Cuban missile crisis. Prospects for disarmament and other measures for lowering the general level of world anxiety would be destroyed.

Moreover, we would feel the effects deeply at home. The first firing of a nuclear weapon (whether tactical or strategic, it makes no difference) would revive a real but latent guilt sense in many Americans. It would create discouragement and

TOP SECRET
a profound sense of disquiet. It would generate resentment against a Government that had gotten America in a position where we had again been forced to use nuclear power to our own world discredit.

F. Possibility
Possibility of Soviet Intervention

1. What are the chances that the Soviet Union might intervene before or after the intervention of China and what form would Soviet intervention be likely to take?

There is no reason to expect Soviet military intervention at an early stage of a U.S. air offensive against North Viet Nam. But the Soviet Union would certainly be expected to lead a propaganda attack against U.S. imperialism and to support the political demands of Hanoi. This is an imperative of Soviet policy that derives from its competition with Red China for domination of the Communist parties around the world.

If Red China should decide at some stage in the struggle to intervene directly by the interjection of its own land forces, this would, of course, present a new situation. Peiping could then put great pressure on the Soviet Union to provide assistance -- at least in materiel. This would probably have the effect of narrowing the schism between Moscow and Peiping, for we should have provided both sides with a common enemy.

Finally,
Finally, our expenditure of even a single nuclear weapon would impose the ultimate test for the integrity of international Communism. While no one can be certain, the best judgment is that the Soviet Union could not sit by and let nuclear weapons be used against China.

G.

The Relative Political Costs of Escalation

1. Would the clear evidence of our intention to carry out our commitments increase United States prestige around the world?

The assumption which has governed our planning with respect to South Viet-Nam has been that the United States must successfully stop the extension of Communist power into South Viet-Nam if its promises are to have credence. It is argued that failing such an effort our Allies around the world would be inclined to doubt our promises and to feel that they could no longer safely rely upon American power against Communist aggressive ambitions.

We have by our own public statements contributed to such a reaction. (See, for example, Attorney General Kennedy's comment in Germany that if Americans did not stop Communism in South Viet-Nam how could people believe that they would stop it in Berlin.)
Against these concerns one must balance the view of many of our Allies that we are engaged in a fruitless struggle in South Viet-Nam -- a struggle we are bound to lose.

They fear that, as we become too deeply involved in a war on the land mass of Asia, we will tend to lose interest in their problems. They believe that we would be foolish to risk bogging ourselves down in the Indo-China jungle. They fear a general loss of confidence in American judgment that could result if we pursued a course which many regarded as neither prudent nor necessary.

What we might gain by establishing the steadfastness of our commitments we could lose by an erosion of confidence in our judgment.

Obviously the balance of these two considerations would vary widely from country to country depending on the specific national interest and national experience of each nation involved.

The balance would also be affected by the depth of the American involvement on the one hand and the manner in which we might propose to achieve a political solution without direct military
military involvement on the other.

One point, however, is clear. We cannot assume that an escalation of the war in South Viet Nam involving a more profound American engagement would be universally applauded by our friends and Allies or that it would necessarily operate to increase our prestige or the confidence placed in us.

2. How would countries in Southeast Asia react to these courses of action?

The Philippines and Thailand would have an initial preference for escalation over any immediate move for a political solution. They might be prepared at the outset of escalation to offer material help in the form of bases and perhaps technical personnel. But this initial reaction would last only so long as our actions showed unequivocal signs of success in halting North Vietnamese aggression in South Vietnam and produced no serious threat of Red China's involvement. Should Red China come to North Vietnam's defense, Thailand, at least, would be alarmed at the dangers of an overland thrust from the north.

It is possible that the move for a political solution might create a crisis of confidence on the part of Thailand. Yet with their usual pragmatism and realism, the Thais would be unlikely
unlikely to blame the U.S. were Saigon simply to give up the fight. So much would depend upon the sequence of developments, the final settlement, and what we were prepared to offer as a guarantee of our willingness to assist Thailand against aggression, that I cannot now make a more precise prediction.

Suspicious or hostile neutrals -- Burma, Cambodia, and Indonesia -- would have mixed feeling about either course. But they would no doubt be happier with a political solution out of a simple desire to see the "mess" in South Viet-Nam disappear. A U.S. air offensive against North Viet Nam would be publicly condemned in both Cambodia and Indonesia, but only Cambodia might be likely to give marginal help to the Communists.

3. How would this affect our position in Japan and elsewhere in Asia?

Japanese views have not yet crystallized on the importance to Japan's security of Southeast Asia, much less South Viet-Nam. Tokyo seems to have little faith, at present, that South Viet Nam can long resist the Viet Cong. Under these circumstances, a carefully worked out political solution would presumably be preferred to escalation, especially were escalation to bring in

Red China
Red China. This latter contingency would prove embarrassing for the government if any use were made of our bases or our forces in Japan.

Of all Asian countries the Republic of China and the Republic of Korea would probably have the strongest preference for escalation and most determined opposition to a political solution. For Taiwan, the stakes would be nothing less than recovery of the mainland as opposed to an expansion of Red Chinese power. Seoul would interpret our willingness to remain committed in Asia in one direction or the other, depending upon how we handled these courses of action.

4. What would be the effect on the United States' position in the other less-developed countries?

The general attitude of the less-developed countries is not hard to predict. In my view a carefully worked out political arrangement would cost the United States little with most of the less-developed countries, particularly if it appeared that in joining in developing such arrangement we were responding to the wish of the South Vietnamese people to bring a halt to the war. The loss of face to the United States under these circumstances should not be at all substantial.
On the other hand, the opinion of the less-developed countries would strongly oppose an air offensive against North Viet-Nam. The element of race would have a strong influence, as well as the disparity in strength and size between ourselves and the Vietnamese. We could not avoid a reaction in many of the less-developed countries that we had substituted ourselves for the French in the continuation of a colonial war.

Our loss of prestige in the non-aligned countries, or even in most of those less-developed countries allied with us in defense arrangements, would, of course, be enormously magnified if we were led to use even one nuclear weapon.

5. What would be the effect on the United States' position in Europe?

Most of our European allies would, I think, applaud a move on our part to cut our losses and bring about a political solution. Opinion in France is, of course, clear on this question. But opinion in other European countries would also be against any escalation of the war that might conceivably lead to the involvement of European combat forces on the Asian Mainland.

As has repeatedly been pointed out in this memorandum, the issues in Indochina are not clearly defined, as they were in Korea. Even during the Korean war our allies grew unhappy with
the extent of our involvement as the war dragged on—even those who had applauded our demonstration of steadfastness at the beginning.

I discussed this general problem of European reactions to Viet-Nam with Secretary-General Brosio the other night. In Italy, he said, public opinion was not sympathetic with the American efforts in South Viet-Nam—even though our position was understood by some of the leaders at the top level of the Government. In Germany he had observed a willingness to accept America's present Southeast Asia policies "as a matter of correctness", but Germans would certainly feel deep concern if they ever thought we were becoming involved on the Asian land mass to the point where we might begin to reduce our defense efforts in Europe.

The British are, of course, a special case because of their own interests in Malaysia. I cannot, however, believe that any British Government—particularly a Labor Government—would be happy if our air offensive should continue for any length of time against a small Asian country.

In final essence, our influence in Europe depends not merely on the defense efforts we are making, but on European confidence in
in our judgment and restraint. If we were to take any action that might be regarded as demonstrating either a lack of judgment or a lack of restraint we would greatly undermine our European position.

The French are already busily promoting rumors that the United States is so involved in Southeast Asia that it can no longer be depended upon to concern itself with Europe. Once we mounted an air offensive that might lead to substantial escalation, this rumor would begin to find a willing audience in several European countries.
PART TWO

THE PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF A POLITICAL SOLUTION

A.

The Thrust of the Analysis

The analysis contained in Part One suggests the following:

1. Unless the political base in Saigon can be made secure the mounting of military pressure against the North would involve unacceptable risks.

2. To persuade the North Vietnamese Government to leave South Viet Nam alone, military pressure against Hanoi would have to be substantial and sustained.

3. Even with substantial and sustained military pressure it is improbable that Hanoi would permanently abandon its aggressive tendencies against South Viet Nam so long as the governmental structure in South Viet-Nam remained weak and incapable of rallying the full support of the South Vietnamese people.

4. The United States cannot substitute its own presence for an effective South Vietnamese Government and maintain a free South Viet-Nam over a sustained period of time.

5. We
5. We must be clear as to the profound consequences of a United States move to apply sustained and substantial military pressure against North Viet-Nam. The response to that move—or even the deployments required by prudence in anticipation of a response—would radically change the character of the war and the United States' relation to the war. The war would become a direct conflict between the United States and the Asian Communists (North Viet-Nam cum Red China).

6. Once the United States had actively committed itself to direct conflict with the North Vietnamese and Hanoi had responded, we could not be certain of controlling the scope and extent of escalation. We cannot ignore the danger—slight though some believe it to be—that we might set in train a series of events leading, at the end of the road, to the direct intervention of China and nuclear war.

7. Finally, it remains to be proved that, in terms of U.S. prestige and our world position, we would risk less or gain more through enlarging the war than through searching for an immediate political solution that would avoid deeper U.S. involvement.

B. What
B.

What Political Solution?

The analysis in Part One logically raises the question as to what is meant by political solution. How could this be achieved at minimum cost and maximum security?

I can set down no more than a sketch outline of the possibilities. For quite obvious reasons, we have so far not undertaken any intensive expert study of this question.

We have spent months of concentrated effort trying to devise ways and means to advance the present policy of winning the war in the South.

We have spent weeks trying to devise an effective strategy for applying increasing military pressure against the North.

But we have given almost no attention to the possible political means of finding a way out without further enlargement of the war.

If we are to make informed decisions on the range of critical issues that now confront us--decisions that would reflect the evidence and arguments on more than one side of the case--we should undertake
undertake a searching study of this question without further delay.

As a preliminary contribution to such a study I suggest consideration of the following issues—among others.

C.

Clearing the Air for a Negotiated Solution

1. Is it realistic to think we can improve our negotiating position by an air offensive?

Most of those who argue for applying sustained military pressure against the North disclaim the objective of total military victory. They contend instead that such military pressure is necessary in order to improve the bargaining position of the United States—or, in other words, in order to enable us to bargain from strength.

This contention presupposes that it will be possible to achieve a political solution that will satisfy the major requirements of American policy—but only after the war has been transformed from its present character of a conflict between North Viet-Nam (cum Red China) and South Viet-Nam (cum the United States) into a clear demonstration of the superiority of U.S. to Asian power and determination.

It is
I reject this thesis. In my view the transformation of the war in this manner would create enormous risks for the United States and impose costs incommensurate with the possible benefits. But at the same time I would challenge also the thesis that a negotiation arrived at after sustained military pressure would necessarily result in a more favorable political solution—than a negotiation that was not preceded by such pressure—even assuming that we were able to avoid a major war in the process.

The position I am urging becomes clear, I think, when we examine the elements that would constitute a solution adequate to our political requirements.

D.

What Provisions should we seek to have included in a Negotiated Settlement?

Ideally a negotiated settlement of the problem of South Viet-Nam should include the following provisions:

(a) The effective commitment of North Viet-Nam to stop the insurgency in the South;

(b) The establishment of an independent government in Saigon capable of cleaning up the remaining elements of insurgency.
insurgency once Hanoi has ceased its direct support;

(c) Recognition that the Saigon Government remains free to call on the United States or any other friendly power for help if it should again need assistance; and

(d) Enforceable guarantees of the continued independence of the Saigon Government by other signatory powers.

E.

What Kind of Political Settlement Might we Reasonably Hope to Achieve by Negotiation Following Sustained Military Pressure on North?

1. How would we move from sustained air attack to the conference table?

The draft SNIE 10-3-64 entitled "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible U.S./GVN Courses of Action" indicates that the range of Communist reactions to a U.S. air offensive might include:

a. Retaliatory military moves on the ground;

b. A temporary suspension of Viet-Cong action;

c. A drive to increase the insurgency in South Viet-Nam by the introduction of additional forces "to speed the collapse of the GVN and thus cut the base from under the U.S. position before North Viet Nam had suffered unacceptable damage;"

d. An