d. An effort to mobilize international pressure against the United States and a suggestion of some willingness to accommodate U.S./GVN views in order to bring about a new conference.

The SNIE suggests that it is unlikely that Hanoi and Peiping would undertake large-scale Chinese Communist ground or air intervention in view of Communist China's desire to avoid a full-scale war with the United States. However, they do not—and in the nature of things cannot--rule out this possibility categorically.

Nor can we prudently do so in designing a South Vietnamese policy in view of the magnitude of the costs if we are wrong.

As of the time this is written (October 4, 1964), there does not appear to be full unanimity in the Intelligence Community as to the emphasis to be placed on the alternative possibilities that Hanoi might react to sustained U.S. air attack by (a) temporarily slowing down or suspending of Viet Cong action or (b) reinforcing and accelerating the South Vietnamese insurgency. If Hanoi were, in fact, to introduce additional forces into South Viet Nam and achieve conspicuous Viet Cong successes, we should be faced with substantial pressure for the United States to move from air attacks against North Viet Nam to a direct involvement of American forces against the insurgency.

Certainly
Certainly the conclusions of the SNIE—tentative as they are—underline the fragility of the governmental structure in the South and suggest clearly the hazards of a quantum jump in United States military involvement through an air offensive, at a time when the legitimacy of our presence could be destroyed overnight by the emergence of a neutralist government in Saigon.

Certainly, if, following the institution of an air offensive, Hanoi were to begin serious agitation to summon an international conference to halt "U.S. aggression," we should have to respond quickly before the Saigon Government crumbled beneath us and world opinion coalesced against us.

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

Any negotiation that followed an air offensive would probably take place in the framework of a large international conference. Hanoi and the Communist Bloc nations could be expected to seek such a conference and we should be under great pressure from neutral countries to acquiesce.

We should not assume that our posture in such a conference would be very good. We would already have taken the fateful step of recasting our Southeast Asian role. No longer could we succeed in
in presenting ourselves as a great power engaged in helping a beleaguered small power at the small power’s request. In the eyes of a great part of the world we would appear as the leading Free World power utilizing modern weapons of destruction to destroy the economic life of a defenseless small nation. Certainly this would be the thrust of Communist propaganda. It would be reenforced by gloomy headshaking in Paris. We would be cast in an aggressive role as never before in the post-war world.

Let me reiterate once more that Indochina is not Korea. In bombing North Viet Nam we would not be seeking to stop massive and overt aggression south of the Yalu river on behalf of the UN. We would appear instead to be a great power raining destruction on a small power because we accused that small power of instigating what much of the world would quite wrongly regard as an indigenous rebellion.

Under these circumstances our position at the conference table would be awkward—in spite of our best efforts to portray America’s role in its true light. Certainly we could expect both the Communists and non-aligned powers to insist—as an indispensable prerequisite in any settlement—that the United States withdraw its
its military presence from Southeast Asia. We would expect also a ceasefire, which the United States would necessarily obey but which in the nature of the insurgency, would be very hard to police.

It is hard to foretell how the conference would deal with the insurgency itself. Most of the member nations would instinctively seek some kind of reconciliation of the Vietnamese and Viet Cong elements through an enlargement of the governmental base. But, as will be pointed out, we should be able to achieve that result quite as easily—and in a better international climate—if we went to a conference that had not been preceded by an air offensive.

It may be contended that the scenario I have outlined is not one that the United States need follow. Instead of agreeing to a big conference could we not undertake to pursue a negotiating track through direct or indirect approaches to Hanoi and try to bring about a political settlement that would not bog us down as happened in Geneva in 1962?

I seriously question the possibility that we could avoid a big conference. Once we had launched an air offensive we would find ourselves under great world pressure to stop the shooting and move to a conference table in the presence of other nations.
The war, in effect, would have become everybody's business. We should have lost the option of quiet negotiation—and indeed a good deal of our ability to influence the choice of forum.

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

(a) First of all we could expect the condition precedent to the beginning of negotiations to be an agreement for a ceasefire.

(b) As part of the settlement regular U.S. forces would almost certainly have to be withdrawn. This withdrawal, however, might be phased. It would commence only when the ceasefire was fully effective and provision might be made for the return of US forces (at the request of the Saigon Government) if the ceasefire were violated.

(c) The base of the Saigon Government would have to be broadened to include Viet Cong elements.

(d) Depending upon the format of the negotiation the independence of South Viet-Nam might be guaranteed by other signatory powers with possible provision for a control commission or some other kind of international presence to police the security provisions of the agreement.

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

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

We are presently in South Viet-Nam because the South Vietnamese people, speaking through their Government, have asked us to help them resist Communist aggression. We have repeatedly stated that we will continue in South Viet Nam "so long as the Vietnamese people wish us to help." We have tried to make clear to the world that we are prepared to assist any nation that asks our aid in defending its freedom against Communist attack.

The qualifying words "so long as the Vietnamese people wish us to help" assumes two things:

(a) That there is in fact a widespread desire on the part of the Vietnamese people to avoid a Communist take-over and that they are prepared to continue to risk their lives in a sustained struggle to achieve this end; and

(b) That
(b) That South Viet-Nam has an effective government that can speak for the South Vietnamese people and can conduct the struggle on their behalf.

At the moment, both of these points are in doubt.

Intelligence information discloses substantial war-weariness among the South Vietnamese people. This is backed up by a rising curve of desertions and the Government's increasing difficulty in filling the rolls through enlistment.

The fact that there is no effective South Vietnamese Government that can adequately direct the affairs of the country in the present war crisis hardly needs argument. Almost every substantive cable from Saigon underlines this point.

As a first step in preparing the ground for a political solution at minimum cost, we should make clear to the world how the juridical and political basis for continued American effort relates to the existing state of facts in South Viet-Nam.

In specific terms, this would involve the following steps:

(a) We should clearly and emphatically reiterate the basis for our involvement in South Viet-Nam, emphasizing the qualifying phrase "so long as the South Vietnamese wish us to help". We should put other governments on notice that we do not intend to remain in South Viet-Nam, once it develops that the
Vietnamese people, speaking through their Government, no longer desire our help. We should, so far as possible, seek to make a virtue out of this position, emphasizing that, unlike the Communists, we never seek to impose our will on another country.

(b) We might, at the same time, serve notice on the South Vietnamese Council that we are determined to continue the struggle and have the capability to do so but that this is possible only if they achieve a unity of purpose in Saigon, clearly express that unity, and create a Government free from factionalism and capable of carrying on the affairs of the country.

(c) If properly managed, this notice should signal to whatever responsible elements remain in Saigon that they must declare themselves. It might be expected to have one of three effects:

(1) Hopefully—but not probably—it might result in pulling together the responsible elements in the country and lead to the creation of a unified government.

(2) It might
(2) It might free the capitulationists and neutralist elements to organize a government on neutralist principles.

(3) In spite of the fact that we had emphasized United States determination equally with the condition precedent, there would probably be a strong tendency in Saigon to regard this as a warning of ultimate United States disengagement. The most likely overt reaction would be ambiguous. But we would almost certainly accelerate existing covert probing of the possibilities of a deal with Viet Cong elements. (See SNIE 53-2-64, par. 10).

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

It would probably be better for us to encourage a period of ambiguity than to seek immediate negotiation. The main argument on the other side is that the Viet Cong now have no prominent leader to represent them. In time they might gain one. But this factor seems more than offset by the arguments for a period of maneuver. A U.S. effort to force an abrupt showdown would increase the chances that the South Vietnamese would blame us for whatever ensued. A period of delay would permit the various
various sectors of Vietnamese opinion to adjust to the possibility of a political solution. Such a period would also permit the personalities who might otherwise be the victims of retaliation to make their own personal arrangements. And, by allowing a period of wheeling and dealing, the United States itself might play a more effective role in influencing the selection of a transitional government and affect the shape of the negotiations.

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

The Governments that should be considered include:

(a) The United Kingdom
(b) Canada
(c) The Philippines
(d) Poland and India (through the I.C.C.)

I do not suggest that we approach the French Government. Certainly De Gaulle's policy will be to try to bring about United States disengagement at maximum, rather than minimum, cost to United States prestige. It is important that we design our plan of action in such a manner as to avoid having it appear as a French diplomatic victory.

I am
I am not prepared at this point to suggest the manner in which the good offices of other governments might be used, since this will require a study of the problem and the definition of a more precise course of policy.

FRAMEWORK FOR A SETTLEMENT

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

   (a) The first is a localized negotiation between a neutralist south Viet-Nam Government and the National Liberation Front. This would probably not lead to the reunification of Viet Nam—at least not immediately—but merely to the creation of a government of national union. In reality, of course, the National Liberation Front would be speaking under the tutelage of the Hanoi Government, but the negotiations would have the appearance of a local reshuffling of the various elements involved in the internal South Vietnamese struggle.

   Localized in this way the settlement would not contemplate any third power guarantees—at least initially.

   (b) The second possibility is a negotiation between the Saigon Government and the Government in Hanoi. A settlement
reached in this manner would be likely to lead to the reunification of Viet Nam under a government largely dominated by Communists.

c. The third possibility is a large-scale approach to the "neutralization" of South Viet-Nam with third-power guarantees. The effect of such a settlement would be to extend the Laos formula to South Viet-Nam. In view of present power relationships, the settlement would almost certainly mean the withdrawal of American forces.

d. The fourth possibility is a large-scale approach to the neutralization of all of Indochina (and even of Southeast Asia) under third-power guarantees.

This is essentially what General De Gaulle is proposing. He advocates a conference in which "many powers would participate." This means at least the fourteen powers that participated in developing the Geneva Accords. The outcome would presumably be a revision of the Geneva Accords so as to apply something akin to the Laos formula to the whole of Indochina.

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

A strong argument can be made in favor of the first option—a local settlement. Such a settlement, worked out within South Viet-Nam,
Viet-Nam, would mean the incorporation of National Liberation Front elements in the governmental base. But that government would also include elements drawn from the religious sects, the Army, and other factors of Vietnamese life. The result might well be an uneasy coalition in which the Communists would presumably be the most aggressive and dominant component. But the full effect of a Communist take-over would be diffused and postponed for a substantial period of time.

By making it possible for the South Vietnamese to work out a settlement among themselves--without the direct and overt interference of Hanoi--we would obscure and confuse the Communist victory by injecting elements that suggested the resolution of an internal revolt.

Such an approach would have the additional advantage that it would not directly involve Peking. As a consequence the settlement would not appear as the overt extension of Chinese power further into Southeast Asia. If--as is often argued--the Viet Minh do not wish to have Red China playing too large a role in their affairs, this form of settlement might help them to resist Chinese domination. To that extent it could serve the purposes.
purposes of the West.

We may be driven to this result and—if so—we should be prepared to minimize the breakage. But it is not a solution which we should seek as an object of policy.

Nor is a negotiation within the second framework. While the matter certainly deserves more intensive study than I have been able to give it, I can see definite disadvantages in a direct negotiation between Saigon and Hanoi in which no other powers would be present. There is a danger that such a negotiation would involve a satellite status for South Viet-Nam if it did not result in an actual reunification.

Certainly, a large-scale conference on the 1962 Geneva pattern would seem preferable to a direct Saigon-Hanoi negotiation. By providing for a continuing third party involvement—plus some kind of a national control mechanism—the great powers would continue to exercise some restraint against overt Communist moves in the country.

As General de Gaulle has suggested, a large conference would tend to dilute the nature of the direct confrontation between the Bloc and the Free World. It should result in a settlement that would provide at least some protection for non-Communist elements in the population.

General
General de Gaulle proposes that such a conference should not be limited to the problem of South Viet-Nam but should extend at least to all the territory of the old French Indochina. He has even indicated the possibility of extending it to all of Southeast Asia.

To accept the principle of a large conference does not necessarily mean acceptance of all de Gaulle’s assumptions. The virtues General de Gaulle sees in a large conference are that it would last a long time - a year or even two years - and that during this period the Viet Cong would maintain a cease-fire.

A maintenance of a cease-fire, however - particularly in the case of an insurgency such as that in South Viet-Nam where there are no well-defined battle-lines - does not seem a very realistic possibility in view of our other experiences with the Communists. In the 1954 Geneva Conference the Viet Minh used military pressure throughout the conference to influence the political result - including the siege of Dien Bien Phu.

General de Gaulle also puts great emphasis on another assumption, that Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese Government have
have inherited the ancient Indochinese determination to resist Chinese domination. This tendency, however, might be better served by a localized conference than by a conference in which China played a dominant role. Certainly it is hard to accept General de Gaulle’s thesis that the Red Chinese Government is not expansionist, that it is preoccupied with domestic problems, and that for at least the next 10-15 years Peiping will be content to leave Southeast Asia alone—so long as it is not menaced by an American presence in that peninsula.

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

The main difficulty with a conference solution is that experience shows that ad hoc machinery, usually constituted on a Troika basis, is ineffective in policing the settlement and in enforcing the safeguards established for neutrality.

An alternative would appear to be U.N. involvement. With all its defects, U.N. intervention in the Middle East, the Congo, and even in Cyprus has given us advantages that would not have been present in a situation of direct national involvement.

Of course, there are a number of obvious objections. U Thant, for example, has said that the situation in Viet-Nam would
would be beyond the capacity of the organization. Moreover, the interests of Red China and North Viet-Nam, two non-members, are very directly involved.

The balance that should be struck among these and other factors affecting the use of the U.N. cannot be confidently determined without further intensive study. Nevertheless, in the past months we have already taken some tentative steps looking towards U.N. involvement in Indochina. I am convinced that this path should not be abandoned without further intensive exploration and that this exploration should be undertaken at once.

I would certainly see grave disadvantages in extending the scope of the conference beyond Indochina. The question whether it should include all of Indochina--North Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia in addition to South Viet-Nam--is a tactical one to which we should give careful study. Certainly we have already dealt with Laos in the context of such a conference, and we have expended a good deal of capital in trying to prevent a conference in the case of Cambodia. But we should, I think, take a further look at this whole question within the context of our Southeast Asia policy.
I offer this memorandum not as a definitive document but as a challenge to the assumptions of our current Viet-Nam policy. I have tried to suggest areas of exploration that could lead to other options.

It may be observed that I have dwelt at length on the probable reaction of other countries to alternative lines of action. This is not because I believe that in formulating our foreign policy we should be unduly preoccupied with what others want us to do or that we should be continually looking over our shoulder. But our present line of policy has been justified primarily on political grounds. It has been defended on the proposition that America cannot afford to promote a settlement in South Viet-Nam without first demonstrating the superiority of its own military power—or, in other words, giving the North Vietnamese a bloody nose. To do otherwise would enormously diminish American prestige around the world and cause others to lose faith in the tenacity of our purpose and the integrity of our promises.

I have,
I have, therefore, sought to meet this thesis head-on by discussing the effect on governments and public opinion in other nations.

There are conspicuous lacunae in this very preliminary paper. I have not attempted, for example, to discuss the defense arrangements that we would have to make with Thailand or the possible need to reinforce British assurances with regard to Malaysia. I think it likely that the development of a political solution (whether or not preceded by an air offensive) might administer extreme injury to SEATO. But that is all a matter for further study.