Even before the Pleiku reprisals the development of US policy on Vietnam had reached a stage at which basic decisions concerning the nature and level of US actions in the RVN and against NVN could no longer be postponed. The decision for reprisal in early February, although significant, was an interim decision, the precursor but not the prototype of more vital decisions that lay in the offing. The direction that US policy would now take depended on a number of difficult judgments. These judgments involved, among others, the real gravity of the military and political situations in the RVN, the capabilities and intentions of the enemy in the RVN and in NVN, and the consequences to the US national interest of success or failure in Vietnam. In a broader context the United States would also have to judge the effect of its military and political actions in Southeast Asia upon its relations with its allies, with its potential enemies, and with neutral or uncommitted nations throughout the world.

Although President Johnson was resolved to prevent the seizure of the RVN by the communists, he believed that he needed more information and better answers to certain important questions before making these final judgments and the decisions that would logically follow. In early February, therefore, he sent a party headed by Mr. McGeorge Bundy, one of his most trusted advisors, to the RVN to talk with Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland. Bundy had been a prime mover in formulating such policy as had emerged from the November-December meetings in Washington. Bundy's instructions from the President called for a broad-ranging inquiry to evaluate relative capabilities and prospects of enemy and friendly forces, the effectiveness and progress of present US programs, the political situation in the RVN, and the actions that the United States might take outside of the RVN to influence the war favorably. With specific reference to actions against NVN, Bundy was to examine the feasibility of initial shallow penetrations by air into NVN, followed by actual attacks on targets, and to determine how this action should begin and what preliminary actions would be required.

Bundy's investigation had been carried out in RVN before the VC attack on Pleiku. He and the party returned to the United States immediately after this attack.
The Bundy Report-7 February 1965

Upon his return, Mr. Bundy gave the President advice which appears to have had significant effect on the President's decisions in the next few weeks and months.

Initially, Bundy gave his advice in a memorandum, telling the President the same things the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been telling him for several months—unless the United States did something soon, it was going to lose in Vietnam and it could not afford to lose. "The international prestige of the United States and a substantial part of our influence, are directly at risk in Vietnam," Bundy said. There was no way of unloading the burden on the Vietnamese or of negotiating a way out at present. A negotiated withdrawal would mean surrender "on the installment plan."

Bundy had found great uncertainty among both Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam. The Vietnamese were nervous about the sincerity of the United States; their political leaders were fearful, and their military leaders wary. The rank and file Vietnamese displayed a general lassitude and a lack of commitment or purpose. As to the Americans, the morale of junior officers was sustained by their demanding tasks and dedication. The senior officials, on the other hand, bore heavy responsibilities and Bundy noted "one can sense the inner doubts of men whose outward behavior remains determined." Bundy took some heart in a slowly rising effectiveness of the RVNAF and in the resilience of the Vietnamese people who, though war-weary, were anxious not to fall under communist domination.

He had, in spite of a careful examination of the political scene, come away with mixed judgments. In the short run, the current interim government was strong enough to allow the United States to take its immediate military reprisals and other actions. At a longer range, to support broader and more meaningful programs to unify the country, a stronger government would have to be created. Ambassador Taylor and Mission

personnel felt that Khanh was dangerous, could not be trusted, and would fail eventually. They believed also that the Buddhists were dangerous and would have to be faced down, if necessary militarily. The Buddhists, if they kept their power, would unseat any government that did not bow to their demands. Bundy said of these views, "We tend to differ with the mission on both counts." Bundy saw no one else than Khanh in sight who could combine military authority with some sense of politics. The Buddhists would have to be incorporated in the affairs of the GVN rather than be eliminated.

If, by reprisals, the immediate situation in RVN could be saved, the most important order of business for the United States would be the establishment of an improved and broadened pacification program, particularly the nonmilitary elements. Bundy felt that, because of the predominant role of the US military, "and because of the generous spirit and broad mind" of General Westmoreland, military units, particularly Special Forces, might play a much more important role in pacification than in the past.

"The prospect of Vietnam is grim," Mr. Bundy warned the President. "The energy and persistence of the Viet Cong are astonishing. They can appear anywhere—and at almost any time. They have accepted extraordinary losses and they come back for more. They show skill in their sneak attacks and ferocity when cornered. Yet the weary country does not want them to win." The United States must take every chance to convince the Vietnamese people of the firmness of its commitment to them. For this "overriding reason" Mr. Bundy now recommended a policy of sustained reprisal against NVN. "Once such a policy is put in force, we shall be able to speak in Vietnam on many topics and in many ways, with growing force and effectiveness," Bundy said.

He warned that the struggle would be long and that it was important to make this clear to the people of the United States and to the people of the RVN. "Too often in the past we have conveyed the impression that we expect an early solution when those who live with this war know that no early solution is possible," he said.

Mr. Bundy, speaking for the group who had accompanied him to RVN as well as himself, then told the President that the best available way of increasing the United States' chances of success in Vietnam was to carry out a policy of "sustained reprisal" against NVN by launching air and naval
attacks against that nation. He pointed out that it would be costly and risky to follow this course, but costs and risk could be accepted. The United States might have to attack the whole air defense system of NVN. "US casualties would be higher--and more visible to American feelings--than those sustained in the struggle in South Vietnam," he added. When compared to the costs to the United States of being defeated in RVN, however, the program would be cheap. It was not sure-fire. It might fail. But in Bundy's view the United States should make the effort. 2

These reprisals should be carried out in partnership with the GVN, keyed initially to specific acts of violence such as the Pleiku incident. Once the program was launched, however, it could be continued without relating it to any specific enemy act. It must be made clear to Hanoi and to the world that the United States was not out to destroy or conquer NVN. Reprisals would stop when provocation stopped. The program should be preceded by worldwide explanation of its purpose, but once bombing began publicity should be kept to a minimum.

The bombing of NVN should begin at a low level, increasing only gradually, indeed, decreasing if the VC seemed to be responding by reducing their terrorism in the RVN. The object was not to "win" the war against Hanoi, but to influence favorably the war in the RVN. This course of action bore with it, however, a risk of greatly increased VC terrorism and possibly greater involvement by Hanoi and Communist China.

Bundy also stated that the attack against Pleiku had created an ideal opportunity for the prompt development and execution of sustained reprisals. Among the "major necessary steps" he suggested to the President were: 1) complete the evacuation of dependents, 2) deploy necessary supporting forces for contingency plans, 3) initiate joint planning with GVN on both civil and military level, 4) take necessary diplomatic steps, 5) publicly renew US commitment to its programs in RVN.

The Eight Week Program

At a meeting at the White House on 8 February, Bundy discussed his proposals with the President and his other chief advisors. All present, including the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, agreed that the United States should now embark on a program of sustained actions against lower risk targets in the southern part of NVN. Mr. Bundy put it in terms of starting off with what looked like reprisals and then expanding the program as appropriate. The President approved this approach. After the meeting, however, the Secretary of Defense told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there was some "leeway" in the Presidential approval and that what was now needed was a program with specific bombing actions that the President could approve.

He asked for a program covering eight weeks, designed as reprisal actions against NVN/VC provocations, with two or three attacks scheduled each week. The Secretary also stipulated that he be given a list of those types of provocative incidents that could be used as reasons for initiating the program, that large-scale air deployments be made to PACOM to support the program or its aftermath, that the security of RVN bases be taken into account, and that plans be made to counter any NVN/CHICOM ground intervention. Only in case of NVN/CHICOM air intervention would attacks be made against the communist MIG base at Phuc Yen. He also directed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff plan for VNAF participation in the attacks on NVN.

In readying their proposals the JCS used the detailed, in-depth plans, including target lists, that had been under preparation for months within the Joint Staff and at CINCPAC's headquarters. They considered also the views of Ambassador Taylor, who had been clearly heartened by the reprisals of 7-8 February and had immediately asked for more. Ambassador Taylor, who agreed with Bundy that the current reprisals had established a good foundation for other bombing, told the Secretary of State on 9 February that the bombing should be part of a measured and controlled series of actions against NVN, taken in reprisal for its intervention in the RVN with the objective of forcing an end to such intervention. He wanted VNAF pilots to participate with US flyers in attacks.

3. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-100-65 to SecDef, 11 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/169), JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).
against purely military targets. In line with Bundy's recommendation, Taylor suggested that "reprisals" could be mounted against any general catalog or package of VC/NVN acts in the RVN and not necessarily in response to some particularly grave act. Taylor considered that the US response would be tantamount to the "so-called Phase II escalation" but "justified on the basis of retaliation."4

Taylor concluded by saying "... I believe a Phase II program based largely on graduated reprisals offers the best available means of exerting increased pressure on the DRV leaders to induce them to cease their intervention in SVN, while at the same time being more manageable in terms of domestic and international opinion and with our friends. I recommend that we proceed along this track."

In developing the eight week program the Joint Staff progressed swiftly because of the work already accomplished on targeting, deployments, and other support requirements. Some differences arose over the deployments necessary to support the eight week program. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force originally proposed to deploy 15 additional squadrons to the Western Pacific. The Chief of Staff of the Army considered this an excessive number, inconsistent with the NVN/CHICOM threat and the scope of air operations visualized for the first eight weeks of operations. There were, said General Johnson, already 865 US aircraft in the western Pacific and the USAF was capable of deploying very rapidly if the need arose. He believed, therefore, that an additional nine squadrons would be sufficient to the mission at hand. The Chief of Staff of the Army did not agree either that the concurrent ground force deployments being proposed would be adequate. One US infantry division was required in northeast Thailand, as a minimum, with a second division in the same area advisable.5

4. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2445 to State, 9 Feb 65, JCS IN 19338.
5. (TS-GP 1) CSAM-58-65 to JCS, 10 Feb 65; (TS) Army flimsy, unnumbered, n.d., tabled by CSA, 10 Feb 65, 1400; JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).
Compromise solutions were worked out on these points, and at their meeting on 10 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the eight week program prepared by the Joint Staff. The program of military actions which the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary in a memorandum on 11 February was primarily a plan of air strikes, but it also provided for naval gunfire bombardment, continuation of covert operations, resumption of DESOTO Patrols, and cross-border ground operations into Laos.

**The Air Strikes**

The bombings in NVN which the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed were against targets located south of the 19th Parallel. They also proposed, however, armed reconnaissance of Route 7 in NVN close to the Laotian border. These air attacks were scheduled for the first eight weeks at the rate of four fixed targets per week. Armed reconnaissance would be flown over two road segments each week. All targets proposed were military in nature and were taken from the JCS 94 Target List. The estimated number of sorties required for each target, either with tactical or strategic bombers, was also provided Secretary McNamara. Fixed targets were barracks or storage depots and areas, with a few LOC targets, such as bridges, included.

In order to support these attacks, to provide security for strike forces, to deter aggression by NVN or CHICOM forces, and to improve US readiness to "cope with possible escalation," the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the immediate deployment of the following:

1. 9 additional Tactical Fighter Squadrons (TFS) from the CONUS to WESTPAC
2. 30 B-52 bombers from CONUS to Guam
3. one Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) consisting

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6. (TS-GP 1) Briefing Sheet, J-3 for CJCS "JCS 2339/169-Courses of Action Southeast Asia - First Eight Weeks (S)"; (TS-GP 1) SM-140-65 to JCS, 11 Feb 65; (TS-GP 1) Dec On Rpt, J-3 to JCS "Courses of Action Southeast Asia - First Eight Weeks (S)," 12 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/169); JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65) secs 1 and 2.
7. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-100-65 to SecDef, (derived from JCS 2339/169) 11 Feb 65, JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).
of a Regimental Landing Team (RLT) and a Marine Air Group (MAG) from Okinawa and Japan to Da Nang; 4) one US Army Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii to Thailand; 5) a fourth CVA to the Western Pacific; 6) one MEB from Hawaii to WESTPAC; 7) the necessary combat support and service support units outlined in CINCPAC 39-65 to support the above forces. At the same time a US Army Airborne Brigade, the 173d, should be alerted for shipment to Vietnam. The 3d MEF (-) and the 25th Infantry Division (-) should be kept in an advanced state of readiness with the necessary amphibious and sealift prepositioned and airlift alerted. Remaining forces contained in CINCPAC plans 32-64 and 39-65 should also be alerted.

The Chief of Staff of the Army agreed with the recommended deployments as far as they went. But he wanted additional ground forces—--at least one US infantry division and, preferably, two,--moved to northeast Thailand. General Wheeler supported the strike program and the recommended deployment. But he was not sure that the deployment problem had been examined carefully enough, and proposed that, once the forces recommended had reached their stations, additional deployments should be studied as a matter of priority. The Secretary of Defense was informed that such a study was already taking place.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff listed in detail the forces which should be deployed, as a minimum, in the event a large-scale intervention by NVN or CHICOM forces took place. These were the forces called for in CINCPAC contingency plans. In conjunction with the military actions recommended in the current eight week program, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that operations already taking place should be continued and, where feasible, intensified:

They told Mr. McNamara that their proposals would demonstrate to NVN that it had better mend its ways or face "more serious punishment." And they suggested that if Hanoi did not show some inclination to lessen its support of the VC and the PL even after being bombed, the United States should extend its bombing north of the 19th Parallel, intensifying the bombing if necessary.8

8. Ibid.
While making the point that the program would be initiated in response to enemy activities of a provocative nature, the Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that the need for such justification would lessen. "As this program continues," they told the Secretary of Defense, "the realistic need for precise event-association in this reprisal context will progressively diminish." They did however include the list of examples of provocative acts which might trigger the program since he had asked for it specifically.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff predicted that Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow would "make every effort through propaganda and diplomatic moves to halt the US attacks." Hanoi would do everything possible to defend itself, perhaps even launching overt attacks against RVN and Laos. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not foresee any immediate lessening of VC attacks. But if the United States were able to resist the almost certain international pressures and to ignore communist threats of escalation, chances would improve that Hanoi would reduce its support of the VC. US attacks on NVN would probably cause Communist China reluctantly to take some dramatic action such as sending in "volunteers," a la Korea 1950. The Soviets, in addition to strong diplomatic and propaganda efforts, would almost certainly provide NVN some form of military support such as antiaircraft artillery and radars. There was an even chance that Russia would send in SAM's (SA-2) along with "technicians." If China and Russia went further and started open aggressive action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assured Secretary McNamara that "the United States and its allies can deal with them adequately."

These recommendations of 11 February by the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not exceed, but merely reinforced, the strong recommendations they had made in November for action against NVN. In certain respects, such as targeting, these latest proposals were more specific; in other respects--bombing of Phuc Yen and weight of effort, for example--less comprehensive. Their proposals were not approved at once or in detail, but, complementing as they did the proposals by Bundy and Taylor, were reflected both in short-range and longer-range actions directed by the President in the days and weeks that followed.

Commenting on the need for a stronger and more positive military program against NVN, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed CINCPAC on the same day the JCS memorandum went forward to the Secretary that he did not like the impression being created generally that the
United States was responding only to VC "spectaculars" against Americans. He was opposed to letting the intermittent attacks against NVN slip into the "tit-for-tat" pattern. Any concept which limited the United States to a particular type of retaliatory action or in the timing and location of strikes, would automatically hand the initiative to Hanoi and color world opinion against the United States. "Our objective," he told Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland on 11 February, "is to move to a concept of 'sustained reprisals' which will permit us to apply military pressures in the manner and at times and places of our choosing. We must build a bridge between 'tit-for-tat,' and 'sustained reprisal.'" This bridge was already being built and was the path by which the United States crossed from Pleiku and Qui Nhon to ROLLING THUNDER.9

ROLLING THUNDER

On 12 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to develop "as a matter of urgency" reprisal plans which had three attack options: Option I - Vu Con Barracks, Quang Khe Naval Base, Xom Bang Ammo Depot; Option II - Option I plus Phu Van Supply Depot, Vinh Son Supply Depot, Phu Qui Ammo Depot; Option III - Option II plus Thanh Hoa Bridge, Thien Linh Dong Support, Phu Van Ammo Depot E. Certain weather-alternate targets included radar sites, barracks and an airfield. On 16 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved for planning purposes a somewhat different group of options covering generally the same targets but in a different order of priority.10 Slightly later on the same day the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to CINCPAC the "illustrative 8-week program of military action against low risk targets in North Vietnam," which they said was being "discussed at the highest levels."

This was the air strike program that they had recommended to the Secretary of Defense on 11 February. Admitting that this program was intended only as a guide and could well be drastically revised, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that they were interested in interdicting the Hanoi-Vinh railway, roads, highway bridges, ferries and radar and telecommunication facilities. "From our preliminary analysis," they said, "we

10. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5095 to CINCPAC, 12 Feb 65; 5332, 16 Feb 65.
have concluded that the LOC net should not be attacked until we are authorized to go to the 20th Parallel, but the program on this category of target should be initiated early before AA defenses increase." They wanted no piecemeal attacks on the radars and telecommunications, but a complete, systematic and integrated attack.11

On 13 February the Department of State informed Ambassador Taylor that the President had approved a program of "measured and limited" air actions to be carried out jointly with the GVN against selected military targets in NVN. For the time being these targets would all be located south of the 19th Parallel. It was expected that these attacks would take place only once or twice a week with two or three targets being hit on each day of operations.12

Concurrent with US bombing of the North an approach would be made to the United Nations to make clear that Hanoi was the aggressor and that the United States was "ready and eager" for talks to bring the aggression in RVN to an end. Ambassador Taylor was instructed to go at once to the GVN and seek its agreement to the US program. Anticipating, perhaps, some reluctance on the part of the GVN to come out publicly in favor of negotiating an end to the war, the State Department reminded Taylor to assure the RVN that this was actually for the purposes of putting the GVN/US side in a stronger diplomatic position than would be the case if they waited for a third party to urge them to the conference table. He could tell the GVN that the United States was determined to continue with its military actions regardless of any Security Council deliberations or ensuing "talks" unless and until Hanoi brought its aggression to an end. "Our demand will be that they cease infiltration and all forms of support and also the activity they are directing in the South," the Department of State explained.

ROLLING THUNDER Falters

In direct extension of the planning message calling for reprisal strikes that had gone to CINCPAC on 16 February, the

11. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5349 to CINCPAC, 16 Feb 65.
Joint Chiefs of Staff on 18 February sent him an execute order directing US air strikes on 20 February against Quang Khe Naval Base and, if weather forced a transfer of targets, against Vinh Linh and Vit Thu Barracks. The RVNAF with US support would strike Vu Con Barracks or, if weathered out, Dong Hoi airfield. The nickname of this reprisal strike was to be ROLLING THUNDER I (RT I).

A coup d'etat against the GVN began at 1300 Saigon time on 19 February. Among the developments connected with this abortive attempt to seize power, General Ky, standing by General Khanh for the moment, threatened to use the RVNAF to bomb Tan Son Nhut airbase where rebel forces were concentrated. General Westmoreland prevailed upon Ky in "the strongest terms" to "put aside such nonsense." Although the coup fell through and the RVNAF did not bomb its own fields, it was obvious that bombing NVN on 20 February was now out of the question. Admiral Sharp called Washington on 19 February and recommended the postponement of ROLLING THUNDER I. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with his recommendation and the Joint Chiefs of Staff called off RT I on the same day.

Because of the postponement General Wheeler asked CINCPAC if he felt the operation had been compromised and whether or not targets for US strikes should be changed. CINCPAC, however, considered it highly unlikely that US targets had been compromised by the delay.

The strikes were rescheduled for Monday, 22 February, and a warning order for RT II was sent to CINCPAC on 20 February. On the next day RT II was slipped back to 23 February. One day later, because the effects of the coup still lingered, RT II was postponed to 24 February.

14. (S) Msgs, Saigon 2654 and 2671 to State, 19 Feb 65;
(TS-GP 3) JCS 5572 to CINCPAC, 19 Feb 65.
15. (TS) NMCC Telecon, Wheeler to Sharp and Westmoreland,
item 004, 191542Z Feb 65.
17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5700 to CINCPAC, 22 Feb 65.
learned that the RVNAF was still on alert. His air staff notified him that the VNAF pilots were not in acceptable physical condition to fly in RT II and recommended a 24 hour postponement. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, upon being advised by General Westmoreland, changed the execution date again to 25 February.

On 24 February RT II was cancelled and a new mission, RT III, substituted for execution on 26 February. This mission was in turn, cancelled and RT IV directed on the same date. These two cancellations stemmed from bad weather conditions over the target area. A modification to the RT IV warning order was directed on 26 February with strikes set for 27 February. With dreary monotony a further change in the date of RT IV was directed on 26 February and the air strikes ordered for Sunday, 28 February.

On 27 February General Wheeler notified Admiral Sharp that at a meeting with the President on the evening of 26 February it had been recognized that RT IV probably could not be executed on 27 February because of bad weather. However, the bombings would take place on 28 February or as soon thereafter as weather permitted. On the same day he told Admiral Sharp that he would be receiving shortly a new warning order for a strike to be executed at first daylight on 1 March. He did not believe that the strike would take place because higher authority would cancel it owing to a communist conclave to begin in Moscow on that same day. It could well be postponed to 2 or 3 March. The Chairman noted also that "... we propose to use B-52's against U.S. primary target, Xom Bang Ammo depot." On 28 February still more changes took place with the date of the attack being changed to 1 March and, later in the day, to 2 March. The designation of the operation was changed.

18. (TS-GP 3) NMCC Telecon, COMUSMACV to JCS, 230945Z Feb 65; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5711 to CINCPAC, 23 Feb 65.
21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6048 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 64.
to RT V and the primary US target changed from Quang Khe Naval Base to Xom Bang Ammo Depot. The VNAF was assigned the naval base as a primary target.23

Aerial reconnaissance in support of the proposed ROLLING THUNDER program was authorized for planning purposes on 26 February under the nickname BLUE TREE. CINCPAC was told that he should start plans for conducting medium level reconnaissance using six aircraft, mainly along key transportation routes south of the 19th Parallel in NVN. On the next day authorization to execute the reconnaissance flights concurrently and in conjunction with RT IV was sent to CINCPAC by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This authority was extended to RT V.24

The execute order for the first RT strike actually conducted against NVN, RT V, was issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 March. CINCPAC was authorized to strike the designated targets on 2 March "during daylight hours . . . if, but only if, US and VNAF primary targets can both be struck." If weathered out, "execute strikes against primary or alternate targets during daylight" on the following day. CINCSAC was at the same time advised that his B-52 forces would not take part in the strikes against NVN but that rather the PACOM forces, USAF planes from Thailand bases, would be used. The operations from these fields would be coordinated with the US Ambassador in Thailand. Optional ordnance, excluding napalm, would be used against the ammunition depot and the naval base.25

The first ROLLING THUNDER strike was carried out successfully on 2 March with 111 USAF planes and 19 VNAF planes attacking Xom Bang Ammo Depot and Quang Khe Naval Base respectively. The US strikes destroyed at least 75 percent of the depot with the VNAF strikes accounting for at least two gunboats at the naval base. Both forces encountered heavy antiaircraft fire. The VNAF lost 1 A-1H while the USAF lost two F-100s and three F-105s.26

23. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 6069 and 6075 to CINCPAC, 28 Feb 65.
24. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5959 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 65; JCS 6043, 27 Feb 65; JCS 6071, 28 Feb 65.
26. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 49-65 and 50-65, 2 and 3 Mar 65.
Command and Relationship Problems

The complex nature of what Admiral Sharp had called a "joint and combined operation" posed many problems for US planners, not the least of which was the special relationship of COMUSMACV with the VNAF. In recognition of this, General Westmoreland, on the eve of RT V, had posed some interesting, speculative questions to General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp, more by way of bringing the problem to their attention than in expectation of any quick or easy solution. He pointed out for example that it would be most difficult to continue the "pretext of partnership" with the GVN if target selection, attack timing and force levels for the VNAF were decided in Washington. It was essential that the GVN have a sense of substantive participation in the attack planning and that there be a mutual spirit of trust between the respective planners and commanders. "How can one rationalize a Washington decision that the VNAF will be limited to 16 strike aircraft on a given target when General judges 24 the proper number?" General Westmoreland asked.

He wanted to know also how much authority he had to disclose strike information to the VNAF commanders through the 2d Air Division and for telling the VNAF of warning orders with respect to US plans and intentions. He pointed out that the VNAF had some things to do themselves before taking off on strikes. They should be notified at least 24 hours in advance of TOT as a minimum and, more desirable yet, they should be given planning details 48 hours in advance. GVN planners should have a comprehensive picture of the entire operation of which they were to be a part within not less than 24 hours.

On the matter of cancellations of strike because of weather, a very important factor in view of the heavy rains common to Vietnam during the monsoon season, General Westmoreland wanted to be granted the authority to go or not to go locally. Washington decisions on weather, which was many thousands of miles away and which could change more swiftly than communications could keep up with it, seemed to him wasteful and sometimes dangerous. He also asked if there

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were some way "in which procedures and delegation of authority can be combined" to reduce the fatigue factor for highly placed commanders in Vietnam. Under current rules these men had to be constantly on the alert, which was nonproductive over the long pull. "At this end of the line," he said, "this situation inhibits vital trips to the field by myself and my key staff, repeatedly interrupts other equally essential work on pacification and counterinsurgency matters, and induces an unnecessary degree of stress on senior officials here who on one hand want to leave no stone unturned in preparation for reprisals, and on the other, want to minimize nonproductive preparations in operational units occasioned by changing plans."

COMUSMACV asked also what possible initiative he might have in Saigon with respect to "orchestrating" the graduated reprisal program with the actions being taken against NVN in other programs such as BARREL ROLL and OPLAN 34A actions. In these latter programs the decision to take actions was made in Washington or Honolulu with the "how" being left to COMUSMACV. "Experience indicates that the more remote the authority which directs how a mission is to be accomplished, the more we are vulnerable to mishaps resulting from such things as incomplete briefings and preparation, loss of tactical flexibility and lack of tactical coordination."

General Wheeler made a personal, immediate reply to Westmoreland, telling him that "we here recognize the policy and procedural difficulties" imposed on COMUSMACV and on the GVN by the "close control of ROLLING THUNDER exercised by Washington." For this reason General Wheeler did not intend to try to answer the several questions but to address the whole range of problems by assuring Westmoreland that the JCS and the Secretary of Defense were doing their best to clear away the hindrances and restrictions. He wanted COMUSMACV to be very clear on the point that there were "sizable and vexing" domestic and international political problems inherent in US military operations against NVN. Washington authorities were having to steer a careful course which would lead to the greatest possible effect on the enemy both in and out of RVN while keeping at a minimum the chances of bringing the Chinese Communist into open battle. The weather, Mr. Kosygin's visit to Hanoi, and the international communist conference taking place in Moscow had increased the difficulty of the existing...
political problems and had adversely affected the ROLLING THUNDER program. 28

As to the future, General Wheeler reminded General Westmoreland that when BARREL ROLL and YANKEE TEAM had first started they too were subjected to over-restrictive caveats. But as time went on many of these restrictions were lifted. The JCS were working toward setting up for ROLLING THUNDER a procedure similar to that employed in BARREL ROLL and YANKEE TEAM, with a previously approved bank of targets from which commanders in the field, using their own special knowledge of weather and operational factors could choose targets to strike. "In this connection," the Chairman stated, "it is most important to get off this next ROLLING THUNDER to break what seems to be a psychological/political log jam."

Use of Napalm

In the early missions against NVN napalm was not authorized. Even before the first RT strike was authorized, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force objected, on 17 February, that this restriction deprived US airmen of a very useful and legitimate weapon. He pointed out that US planes would be safest coming in at low altitudes and that in this situation, napalm was extremely effective. It could reduce the number of sorties needed to destroy "soft" targets such as parked aircraft, buildings, vehicles, unprotected personnel, fuel storage areas and radar-directed antiaircraft sites. Napalm was already being used against the VC in RVN and he felt that it should be used against targets in NVN. 29

The State Department was known to oppose the use of napalm in Southeast Asia, basing its opposition on the idea that napalm was a terror weapon and that adverse reaction resulted from both friendly and neutral governments because of its use. For example, napalm was not being used in Laos, largely at the behest of the British Government. The Chief of Staff of the Army suggested, however, that the time was appropriate to raise the issue of the use of napalm in NVN with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. 30

29. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM-B-80-65 to JCS 17 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/526, JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).
30. (TS-GP 1) CSAM 66-65 to JCS, 12 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/526, same file.

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In a memorandum embracing much of the information furnished them by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force on the use of napalm, its qualities and the techniques of its employment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 25 February recommended to the Secretary of Defense that napalm be used against NVN. When CINCPAC determined that napalm would increase the effectiveness of the strike force and/or result in a lower probability of friendly losses, or that targets were so located that collateral damage to noncombatant life and property would be minimized, or that targets were particularly vulnerable to napalm, he should be authorized to use it.31

Secretary of Defense McNamara supported the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and on 9 March President Johnson approved the use of napalm in ROLLING THUNDER strikes against NVN.32

ROLLING THUNDER-Relaxation of Restrictions

From confused and modest beginnings ROLLING THUNDER, the controlled and selective bombing of military and military-associated targets in NVN, grew into one of the keystones of the US strategy for winning the war in Vietnam. It was to become also one of the prime issues in later acrimonious debate over US policy in Vietnam. Regardless of the precedent set by the Tonkin Gulf, Pleiku, and Qui Nhon reprisals, deliberate bombing, without waiting for a specific provocation, marked a definite change in US policy. Whether NVN leaders "got the message" that the United States was determined to stop their support of the insurgencies was not discernible from their reactions. Those who expected spectacular political reaction did not see it at once. During March the United States continued to bomb limited military targets in NVN. Hanoi did not quit, RVN did not join ranks behind its leaders, Red China did not intervene, Moscow did not sever relations with the United States, and the American public gave little sign that it appreciated the depth of the latest change in policy. Although tight restrictions remained a burden to

31. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-127-65 to SecDef, 25 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/526-1), JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).
32. (TS) Memo to SecDef from ASD(ISA) "Use of Napalm Against North Vietnamese Targets (S)," 9 Mar 65, w/marginal notation by SecDef, Att to JCS 2343/526-1, JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).
ROLLING THUNDER, the trend toward gradual relaxation of the rules wherever possible became apparent early in the program.

On 9 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to carry out RT 6 during daylight on 11 March. The primary US target was the Phu Qui Ammo Depot (#40) north of the 19th Parallel, the primary VNAF target the military barracks at Vit Thu Lu (#36). Two US weather alternates, three VNAF weather alternates were established. Weather interfered and RT 6 was set back to 13 March. Because General Ky said that his pilots were "not in operational posture" the bombing did not actually take place until 14 March. However, US planes took part only in support of the VNAF strikes since the US primary target was weathered out and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had, in the meantime, ordered US commanders not to strike their alternate targets. On 15 March, US planes finally bombed their primary target, Phu Qui Ammunition Depot.

By this time it was fairly apparent to everyone, including the enemy, that the US bombing program was controlled and that it was intended to be systematic. But it was proving to be far from a dynamic and stunning blow to the enemy. A combination of bad luck, an erratic ally, and long-range control had resulted in the expenditure of a great deal of effort and expense with only marginal results.

On 13 March Ambassador Taylor in a cable to the State Department criticized the decision to hold back the US effort on RT 6 until the primary target could be struck. He said "... we may be attaching too much importance to striking Target 40 because of its intrinsic military value as a target. If we support the thesis (as I do) that the really important target is the will of the leaders in Hanoi, virtually any target north of the 19th parallel will convey the necessary message at this juncture as well as Target 40. Meanwhile, through repeated delays we are failing to give the mounting crescendo to ROLLING THUNDER which is necessary to get the desired results."35

34. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7025 to CINCPAC, 13 Mar 65; (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 7035 and 7042, to CINCAL et al., 15 Mar 65.
35. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2949 to State, 13 Mar 65.
On the next day, the Chief of Staff of the Army, who had just returned from an inspection tour in RVN, told the Secretary of Defense "To date the tempo of punitive air strikes has been inadequate to convey a clear sense of U.S. purpose to the DRV." He called for an increase in the scope and tempo of US air strikes against NVN. He admitted that such action could escalate and broaden the war but it could also achieve the US objective of causing Hanoi to cease its support and direction of the VC.3

He also took action to secure the removal of some of the "self-imposed restrictions" on ROLLING THUNDER. He noted that these restrictions had severely reduced the effectiveness of air strikes and had made it impossible to approach the goal of four missions each week. The particular restrictions that he recommended be removed at once were:

1) the requirement that a US strike be conducted concurrently with a VNAF strike;
2) the requirement that US planes strike only the primary target;
3) the ban on use of classified ammunition;
4) the narrow geographical limits imposed on target selection;
5) the requirement to obtain specific Washington approval before striking alternate targets when primary targets were not available because of weather or other local conditions. The President, on 15 March, approved removal of these restrictions. However, the ban on classified ammunition was not automatically removed; each specific request from CINCPAC for use of classified ammunition would be reviewed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.37

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed CINCPAC on 16 March that during the meeting with the President the day before it was "announced" that at present the United States would avoid operations in NVN that would be likely to result in air clashes with MiGs in the Hanoi area. General Wheeler interpreted this to mean that, for the time being, air strikes must not be mounted north of the 20th Parallel. On 16 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff modified BLUE TREE instructions to read: "Conduct daily BLUE TREE type reconnaissance over NVN south of the 20th Parallel." They authorized combat air patrol (CAP) for these missions but directed


that if MIG aircraft were sighted the mission would withdraw. Escorting fighters would engage the MIGs only if necessary to protect the reconnaissance planes. 38

On 16 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to carry out the next block of ROLLING THUNDER strikes, RT 7, during daylight hours between 19 and 25 March. This marked a new feature of the program with strikes authorized on a weekly basis so that bombings could be executed any time during the seven day period during daylight. Another innovation introduced with RT 7 was the inclusion of authority for US and VNAF planes to perform armed route reconnaissance along selected, limited segments of Route 1 in NVN as well as striking designated primary or alternate fixed targets. 39

General Johnson's return from RVN, his recommendations for improvement of the situation there, and the top-level meeting with the President on 15 March, gave a new impetus to ROLLING THUNDER planning. On 17 March the Chief of Staff of the Air Force pointed out that the President had expressed an "urgent desire" to reverse the trend of events in Southeast Asia. General McConnell took the position that this could be accomplished only by the immediate and more forceful application of US military power against NVN. He believed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff must come up with a method for attacking and destroying the "source of DRV strength," and he presented them with a plan developed by the USAF staff which would, he believed, accomplish this. This plan was basically an air and naval offensive to destroy vulnerable resources of the enemy outside RVN and a stepped up campaign in the RVN to destroy his strength there. Concentrated air-strikes would begin immediately in the southern part of NVN, then move northward at intervals of 2-6 days until Hanoi itself would be bombed. As these were taking place other forces would be deployed to Southeast Asia to secure the necessary logistic facilities and to support the ARVN in its counterinsurgency operations. 40


40. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-78-65 to JCS, 17 Mar 65, JCS 2343/549, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).
Before action could be taken on the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's memorandum, the Secretary of Defense, in discussion with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 20 March, asked that a 12 week air-strike program be developed for his consideration. He directed that air attacks on NVN be planned to avoid heavily populated areas and that they avoid direct attacks against airfields in NVN. The J-3 developed such a program and briefed the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and visiting Admiral Sharp, on 22 March.

After studying the proposed 12 week program at greater length, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 27 March that they did not subscribe to all of the Joint Staff's recommendations. The initial phase of the proposed program called for three weeks of interdiction of NVN LOCs south of the 20th Parallel, including the destruction of key bridges and intense armed reconnaissance. The second phase called for interdiction strikes north of the 20th Parallel, including strikes against radar and LOC targets in depth throughout NVN north of the 20th Parallel.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary that, while they were willing to recommend the staff's proposals for bombing NVN LOCs south of the 20th Parallel during the third, fourth and fifth week of the on-going program, they had definite reservations for the remaining weeks in which US planes would strike more deeply into NVN. They had instead directed a study of alternatives for a follow-on bombing program beginning with the sixth week.

Reflecting COMUSMACV's views on the need for better procedures and greater delegation of authority, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary of Defense that they believed the operational commander must have "flexibility in the execution of this military program in order to achieve a high degree of effectiveness." They affirmed that it was important that the field commander be able to detect and exploit targets of opportunity through frequent random reconnaissance operations.41

Earlier, the JCS had agreed that the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's concept for bombing NVN should be referred

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41. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-221-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/551), JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).
to the Service planners for consideration during the development of a proposed program of "optimum military actions" against NVN to follow the completion of the current remaining five weeks of bombing NVN. The J-3 should also consider the paper in his consideration of alternatives for a "follow-on program of air strikes" beginning with the 6th week of ROLLING THUNDER.\(^4^2\)

In extension of this planning the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked CINCPAC for his views on 27 March. On 3 April, Admiral Sharp recommended a wide-ranging armed reconnaissance program sustained at the maximum feasible level of sorties, as well as strikes against important and varied types of targets south of 20° N. Further, he proposed that after completion of this program, operations be extended north against meaningful military targets, but avoiding the Hanoi and Haiphong areas.\(^4^3\)

His views were considered along with those of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force in the preparation of a proposed memorandum for the Secretary of Defense. The draft memorandum by the Joint Staff included a proposal for a four week program of increasing intensity that would have moved the air strike effort north of the 20° N by 30 April and would include an attack on the important POL storage areas at Haiphong.

The Chief of Staff of the Army, however, took strong exception to the memorandum. While he agreed that the scope and intensity of US air strikes should increase, he wanted more gradual increases and particularly did not want strikes moved above 20° N "during this time period." Too little time had gone by to evaluate properly the results and effects of ROLLING THUNDER. And he was more than a little concerned over the possibilities of invoking Chinese intervention by operations close to the Chinese border. "I believe that frequent and random day and night armed reconnaissance below the 20th Parallel designed to insure maximum interdiction and disruption of the LOC into Laos and RVN should be the key element of the air strike

\(^4^2\) (TS) Amended Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/549 - Concept for North Viet Nam (U)," 26 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

\(^4^3\) (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/551-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65). (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040304Z Apr 65, JCS IN 91149.
program," the Chief of Staff of the Army declared. The Joint Chiefs of Staff referred the staff report to the J-3 as an input for further studies and did not send the proposed memorandum to the Secretary of Defense.\footnote{Top Secret 44. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/551-1, 14 Apr 65; 1st N/H of JCS 2343/551-1, 20 Apr 65; JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).}

The USAF and USN attacks against primary targets in RT 7 were launched as scheduled on 19 March with other attacks by the VNAF and the route armed reconnaissance taking place in the ensuing week.

US planners turned their attention to the enemy's radar systems in RT 8, which was scheduled for the period 26 March-1 April. The primary targets that CINCPAC was authorized on 24 March comprised a package of radar sites to be struck by US aircraft. Destruction of enemy radar systems and installations could pave the way for expanded bombing at lower cost. The VNAF was assigned barracks and an airfield as targets. Additionally, US pilots were authorized to carry out armed reconnaissance against NVN patrol craft along the coast of NVN and around the offshore islands of Hon Matt and Ile du Tigre. VNAF armed reconnaissance was authorized along a portion of Route 12.\footnote{Top Secret 45. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7672 to CINCPAC, 24 Mar 65. 46. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 7599 to CINCPAC, 24 Mar 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 251321Z Mar 65; JCS 7787 to CINCPAC, 25 Mar 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 240900Z Mar 65.}

CINCPAC made an effort to improve the efficiency of the scheduled VNAF strikes by requesting authority to send reconnaissance planes over VNAF targets before the strikes. The Joint Chiefs of Staff lacked authority to give him this permission. They therefore turned down his request but assured him that they would attempt to secure such approval in future RT programs. On the other hand, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had secured authority for low-level reconnaissance of the radar targets to be struck by US planes and had passed it on to CINCPAC.\footnote{Top Secret 47. (TS-NOPORN) NMCC OPSUMs 28-31 Mar 65.}

The strikes against the radar sites continued over a period of several days and, after only limited success in the first strikes, succeeded in destroying part of the enemy's radar system. The VNAF made a highly successful strike against Dong Hoi airfield in their part of RT 8. US pilots accompanying the VNAF in a support role took occasion on the flight back from the target area to sink several NVN boats.\footnote{Top Secret 18-24}
Ambassador Taylor, who visited Washington, D. C. in the last few days of March, observed to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the tempo of ROLLING THUNDER had now reached a "good" level. He believed that target detection should move north and work back and forth across the various target systems. He stated that a program of low-level reconnaissance should be started to build up a bank of current intelligence in advance of the strikes. The Ambassador also said that Haiphong harbor should be mined by the VNAF at an early date. He also wanted a "prestige" bridge at Thanh Hoa destroyed by bombing, with other bridges connecting NVN with Communist China also being struck eventually. He did not believe that MIGs at Phuc Yen had the capability to interfere with ROLLING THUNDER to the extent that had been estimated. Secretary of Defense McNamara agreed with Ambassador Taylor on the need for low-level reconnaissance and directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to collaborate with his office in developing a blanket request for CINCPAC to conduct unescorted, low-level reconnaissance anywhere in NVN. Among the guidelines which he furnished was the dictum that the reconnaissance planes must avoid the MIG patrol areas, Hanoi, and Haiphong. He agreed that in about 4 to 12 weeks the mining of Haiphong harbor should have become "politically feasible," and in about 12 weeks he hoped to secure agreement on bombing the two main bridges connecting NVN with China. He felt that this would bring very strong pressure on NVN.

In a general assessment of ROLLING THUNDER, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Secretary of Defense on 6 April that these air strikes had not reduced the overall military capabilities of NVN in "any major way." The attacks had destroyed some Army supplies and ammunition stocks but had not inflicted any critical loss on the NVN capability for military operations. General Wheeler believed that the most damaging blow had been the destruction of the bridges at Thanh Hoa, Dong Phuong, and Dong Hoi, which slowed down logistical support of the southern portion of NVN. He felt that further strikes against LOCs leading south of the 29th Parallel would cause a "serious stricture" to NVN logistical support to the south, including that sent into RVN and Laos.

The enemy in NVN was building up his air defense, thereby increasing his costs in manpower and detracting from his economy. Outwardly, however, the NVN government appeared to be uninfluenced by US/VNAF air strikes. "In summary," General Wheeler told the Secretary of Defense, "I think it is fair to state that our strikes to date, while damaging, have not curtailed DRV military capabilities in any major way. The same is true as regards the North Vietnamese economy. The North Vietnamese people exhibit an understandable degree of apprehension for the future. The Hanoi Government continues to maintain, at least publicly, stoical determination."

49. (TS) CM-534-65 to SecDef, 6 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3
(3 Apr 65).