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EVOLUTION OF THE WAR


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I

AFTERMATH OF THE DIEM COUP

First Half of 1964

1. The Inheritance From 1963

The top ruling body of the Government of Vietnam at the end of 1963 was a Military Revolutionary Council of twelve generals, under the chairmanship of the affable and popular but seak General Duong Van "Big" Minh. The Council governed through an all-civilian cabinet headed by Premier Tho, having forbade all military officers to engage in politics. A Council of Notables served as a pseudo-parliament, with a purely advisory role; it included well-known Vietnamese politicians, but could not claim support of a broad popular base or the main political forces in Vietnam. While Premier Tho's previous connection with the Diem government was now a political liability, there was a shortage of national figures who were not tarred with this brush one way or another. 1/

On the U.S. side, General Harkins; COMUSMACV, who had long been known to be pro-Diem, was clearly on his way out, although his departure was to be delayed until the middle of 1964. Ambassador Lodge had replaced Nolting just before the Diem coup, and was held in that cautious respect appropriate to the widespread belief among Vietnamese that he had engineered it.

In the last weeks of 1963, the U.S. government reassessed the progress of the counterinsurgency effort and the policy options. Plans for phased withdrawal of 1,000 U.S. advisers by end-1963 went through the motions by concentrating rotations home in December and letting strength rebound in the subsequent two months. A realistic appraisal by Secretary McNamara showed that the VC were continuing to gain steadily, especially in the Delta. 2/ U.S. policy continued to be to provide U.S. resources and personnel to the extent necessary. 3/

The tone of USG internal documents and of its dealings with GVN was that of a benevolent big brother anxious to see little brother make good on his own -- but with the benefit of extensive advice. U.S. pressure induced the GVN to break up the palace guard and to move coup-protection Ranger units out into the countryside, though it turned out that other units stayed near Saigon for this purpose. A proposal to put all ammunition stocks in Vietnam under U.S. control surfaced in November, only to sink without a trace. 4/ There was gentle pressure to persuade the GVN to allow USOM economics staffs to share the offices of their counterparts, and to let them get involved extensively in GVN budgeting. 5/ The USIS and Ambassador
The overall USG appraisal was that the GVN was weak and drifting at the top level, failing to set firm national policies and to issue detailed instructions, and that at lower levels it was in complete turmoil because of the turnover of personnel following the coup and because of the lack of firm national leadership. 7/ Whether to push the GVN harder was a subject of disagreement between State and Ambassador Lodge. The State view was that the GVN must prove its resolution to adopt economic, social and political measures to support the effort against the VC, and must move toward self-support. Moreover, State said:

"We will obscure the actual need for GVN adjustments if we yield too easily at this stage to GVN pressure for more commercial import aid." 8/

In contrast, Lodge said it was essential

"to provide some increase in overall level of economic aid...It is in my view politically unacceptable and psychologically impossible to tell Big Minh that he is going to get less than Diem." 9/

Besides wanting to go easy on the GVN on aid leverage, he opposed pressure for early elections. Lodge's position is clear from the Honolulu Conference (November 1963) Report, which stated:

"The Ambassador...considers it essential that the U.S. not press the new government unduly. He stated that they are in a most delicate state, and are not ready for a system which replaces governments by elective process rather than by violence; that this is beyond their horizon at this time and we should not seek to recreate in Vietnam our image of the democratic ideal."

Early in January, 1964, Lodge restated this view in a cable:

"It is obvious that [the Vietnamese generals] are all we have got and that we must try as hard to make them into successful politicians as we are trying to make them into successful military men." 10/

Behind these differences within the USG and between the USG and the GVN lay a certain lack of confidence in future behavior. Some in the U.S. were concerned that the GVN might drift toward a "neutralism" like that of Laos. 11/ At the same time, the GVN feared the U.S. would negotiate behind its back or force it to accept an unfavorable settlement. 12/ These concerns made it appropriate for the President to issue his New Year's greeting to the GVN:

2/
"As we enter the New Year of 1964, I want to wish you, your revolutionary government, and your people full success in the long and arduous war which you are waging so tenaciously and bravely against the Viet Cong forces directed and supported by the Communist regime in Hanoi. Our aims are, I know, identical with yours: to enable your government to protect its people from the acts of terror perpetrated by Communist insurgents from the North. As the forces of your government become increasingly capable of dealing with this aggression, American military personnel in South Viet-Nam can be progressively withdrawn.

"The United States Government shares the view of your government that 'neutralization' of South Viet-Nam is unacceptable. As long as the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam persists in its aggressive policy, neutralization of South Viet-Nam would only be another name for a Communist take-over. Peace will return to your country just as soon as the authorities in Hanoi cease and desist from their terrorist aggression."

In keeping with the attitude of concern but not alarm about the GVN's conduct of the war, SecState's cable transmitting the President's message directed Lodge to offer the following eleven points of confidential advice on behalf of the President:

"1. It is vitally important to act now to reverse the trend of the war as rapidly as possible.

2. We trust that personnel changes are now virtually complete and that both military commanders and province chiefs can now get down to the job at hand.

3. We hope that General Minh can designate a Chief of the Joint General Staff and a commander of the III Corps who will have no other responsibilities and can devote themselves exclusively to these mammoth tasks.

4. We assume that, as General Don promised Secretary McNamara, the GVN will make available sufficient troops in the six key provinces in the III Corps to give its forces the necessary numerical superiority.

5. We have been glad to learn of the stress which General Minh places on small-unit actions, particularly in the Mekong Delta. We hope that equal stress will be placed on night actions, both for ambushing Viet Cong and for relieving villages under attack. To win the support of the population it needs to be emphatically demonstrated that the Viet Cong are being beaten precisely at their own game.

6. We consider it extremely important that the necessary civil-military coordinating machinery for clear-and-hold operations
followed by an effective program to give the villages protection, and security be established in Saigon.

7. It is likewise extremely important that program directives be issued at an early stage by the central government to lower echelons for proper implementation of all aspects of the program for giving villagers protection.

8. We also urge early revitalization of the amnesty program.

9. We are encouraged by the exploratory talks which the Vietnamese Government has held with Cambodian Government officials for improving relations between the two countries. We hope that both Governments can proceed to actual negotiations for the settlement of their bilateral problems.

10. We accept with pleasure General Minh's invitation to set up an American brain-trust to work with his government and we are prepared to furnish any personnel needed for this purpose.

11. General Minh can also be sure that he has the complete support of the United States Government as the leader of Viet-Nam. We believe he can magnetically rally the Vietnamese people if he will really try to do so. He should be told leadership is an essential political ingredient of victory such as was the case with Magsaysay in the Philippines. 13/

In this overall context the U.S. had already moved discreetly toward greater involvement in Vietnamese administration at lower levels. Late in 1963, the USG and GVN agreed on a "Decentralization of Action" package. Using AID de facto control of AID commodities to the province level (even though they passed to Vietnamese ownership at the dock), U.S. advisers could assure that no AID commodities came out to the province without their consent. They could and did extend this control to cover releases of these commodities from province warehouses. U.S. officials controlled the distribution of AID commodities because they controlled all Saigon warehouses set aside for these commodities, even though the warehouses, like the commodities, belonged to the Vietnamese. 14/

Among the many problems that were to keep recurring was that of freedom of the press. Following an initial honeymoon period after the coup, trouble broke out between GVN and the U.S. press corps. This reached a climax with the temporary barring of the New York Times from Vietnamese distribution channels when it ran a story reporting dissension among the Vietnamese Generals. 15/ In general, Lodge sided with GVN on this issue, as shown in his reported views at the November, 1963, Honolulu Conference:

"The U.S. press should be induced to leave the new government alone. They have exerted great influence on
events in Vietnam in the past, and can be expected to do so again. Extensive press criticism, at this juncture, could be disastrous." 16/

On January 1, 1964, there were 15,914 U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam. Fewer than 2,000 of these were advisors to RVNAF, but the advisor structure extended down to ARVN line battalions, and advisors accompanied combat units on operations. 17/ The MAP budget for South Vietnam in FY 1964 was $175 million, although it was expected that an additional $12.5 million would be required before the end of the year. 18/

In summary, the USG's decisions near the end of 1963 started modest changes in our Vietnam programs. Program levels held even, and earlier hopes of immediate phasedown faded. The USG moved toward more involvement in Vietnamese day-to-day administration, particularly at the province level. The move was gentle, and stopped far short of a takeover; nothing of the sort was contemplated at that time. The USG was sceptical of GVN's leadership and administration at all levels, and continued to offer extensive and detailed advice, but had no drastic policy changes in mind.

2. The First Minh Government Goes Down, January, 1964

The year began with increasing Vietnamese criticism of the Minh government. It had done little to gain popularity in the country, and felt the sting of accusations of discrimination from both Buddhists and Catholics. Buddhists attacked Prime Minister Tho, who was Vice President under Diem. Catholics accused the GVN of having gone too far to placate the Buddhists in reaction to repressions under Diem. There were also accusations of secret negotiations with the French to neutralize South Vietnam. 19/

A spate of news stories about U.S. advisor disgust over ARVN's timid attitude toward combat provoked a cable from State to Saigon asking the Ambassador to prevent such stories in the future. (This standard phrase meant to tell the advisors to stop talking to the press.) Thus the Department aligned itself with Lodge's view of bad press stories, which emphasized news silence rather than corrective action. 20/

The Lodge idea of making politicians out of the members of the Military Revolutionary Council translated into a plan for them to send out carefully watched political action teams. (He also suggested ways for the generals to improve their speech-making style.) For example, he proposed there should be three teams of eight men each in each district of Long An Province. He pressed the MRC to produce a program along these lines with priority attention to security. "The workers would be technically government employees, but most of the work they will do would be what we would call political work." On the U.S. role, he said, "U.S. personnel should inspect, without looking as though they were doing it, and see to it that a very high standard is set." 21/
to make it clear that the USG had nothing to do with the coup. It also
directed Lodge.

29/ The next morning, right on schedule, Khanh took over.

3. The USG Accepts Khanh and Opens the Bidding Against the North,
February, 1964

Keeping Minh was to prove difficult. Khanh wanted to try four
arrested generals for conspiring with the French to neutralize SVN; and not
only were these officers Minh's close friends, but Khanh said Minh was a
party to the plot also. 30/ The affair was to drag on into September,
adding to the political uncertainties and thus to the paralysis of govern-
ment. 31/

To improve government stability, Khanh broadened his government to
make the cabinet more representative of all the political and religious
groups, and expanded the MRC to include 17 generals and 32 other officers.
(By the end of March the MRC had 53 members.) Partly at USOM urging, General
Minh travelled around the country and reportedly gained popularity. The
Council of Notables continued in its advisory role. 32/

Following the coup, the USG reopened the question of extending U.S.
advisors into the districts. On February 7, 1964, the State Department
told Saigon:

"Inasmuch as recently displaced government evidently
took no definitive position on extension U.S. advisory struc-
ture to subsector level...we believe the Ambassador and
General Harkins should raise this subject at early date with
General Khanh. It might be useful to point out to Khanh
that in addition reasons cited in our 1072, proposed exten-
sion U.S. advisory structure would represent expansion U.S.
commitment to support GVN in war against VC."

State anticipated that Khanh might object but believed the possible harm
would be more than counterbalanced by improved effectiveness of GVN opera-
tions in countryside:

"...if Khanh will not accept subsector advisors on scale
originally envisaged he should be urged to agree at least
to their establishment on experimental basis in few districts
in order to lay basis for determining whether there is any
substantial ill effect in political sense from their presence." 33/

Two weeks later COMUSMACV reported Vietnamese acceptance of district ad-
visors in 13 districts of central Delta provinces. MACV J-3 had casually
arranged it with General Khiem, apparently without any new top-level U.S./
GVN discussion. 34/

Khanh's government was as receptive at first to top-level U.S.
advice as it was to advisors at lower levels, although the "brain trust"
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advice as it was to advisors at lower levels, although the "brain trust"
idea dropped between the cracks. General Khanh made two requests for U.S. recommendations of Vietnamese persons to be members of his cabinet. Ambassador Lodge furnished a list from which a panel could be picked, but refused to make specific recommendations for particular positions. 35/ However, there was still no sign of effective GVN action, with or without U.S. advice. In mid-February JCS recommended a concentrated "counterinsurgency offensive" in Long An province to restore GVN control and to make that a model for other critical provinces. 36/ Deputy Ambassador Nes, in Lodge's absence, objected strongly; for he said such a proposal was based on the false assumptions that:

"(1) Indigenous Communist insurgency with full external support could be defeated by an 'offensive' of finite duration.

(2) GVN had adequate political cohesion, leadership, etc., to launch an offensive.

(3) The U.S. Mission had sufficient influence and control over GVN to persuade it to do so." 37/

A February 19 report from CESMAGV tells of continuing delay on pacification because the Dien Huang (or Dong Hien) had to be revalidated by the new government. A new plan was presented to General Khanh on the 17th and was to be called Chien Thang ("struggle for victory"). 38/

On February 21, 1964, Ambassador Lodge, Admiral Felt, and General Harkins saw Khanh with a proposal for creating a corps of civil administrators to take over the villages and hamlets as soon as pacification was complete. Khanh replied that he was just about to put into effect a program in the seven key provinces around Saigon which would provide the help of doctors, teachers, and government advisors from Saigon. 39/

The subject of funds for ARVN and para-military pay increases came up because counterpart and F.480 proceeds were U.S. contributions to the GVN budget. Washington requested additional facts and recommendations on how added U.S. input could best be channeled but advised that an outright U.S. grant would be highly undesirable. USOM and MAAG were told to analyze the situation and develop joint U.S./GVN action to meet the threat of inflation. 40/ Saigon replied that their analysis indicated (1) the budget deficits would probably be smaller than originally expected, and (2) the economic consequences were extremely difficult to predict. Economic Minister Oanh shunned any immediate "complex study" of the economic outlook because he was completely tied up with a series of important planning exercises for the government, and Oanh felt the potential cost of the pay raise (700 million piasters in 1964) could be absorbed within the present expenditure levels. 41/

The Embassy reported being informed on February 21 by the Minister of National Economy of a threatened Saigon rice shortage. He requested that
the U.S. stand ready to provide 40,000 tons under title II, PL 480 for distribution to the Armed Forces. No U.S. commitments were made. Talks were exploratory. 42/

Although the USG recognized the weaknesses of GVN, as noted at the end of Section I, these merely aroused concern at the highest levels, not alarm. An extreme example of the emphasis of this period is found in W.W. Rostow's memorandum to the Secretary of State dated February 13, 1964. In a context emphasizing the importance of success in Vietnam to U.S. interests everywhere, Rostow wrote only about the role of North Vietnam in the insurgency, relegating South Vietnam's governmental problems (and those of Laos) to a vague clause in one sentence:

"South Vietnam is in danger. The internal position in South Vietnam created by the systematic operations conducted from North Vietnam is precarious...although difficult tasks would still be faced in South Vietnam and Laos if North Vietnamese compliance with the 1962 agreement was enforced, we see no possibility of achieving short-run or long-run stability in the area until it is enforced."

In a cable to the President, Lodge expressed the same view. In addition, he compared the sanctions used against Diem with the sanctions being considered against the North, and thus by implication treated the fall of Diem as the end of the problem of good government in the South. 43/ Rightly or wrongly, the USG viewed North Vietnamese support and direction of the insurgency as the overriding problem, not merely in its public posture (as represented by President Johnson's new year's greeting to General Minh, quoted on page 3, above, and by the State White Paper, "Aggression From the North," issued February 27), but also in its internal policy discussions. Rostow's statement says that there is no way to achieve short-run or long-run stability in Southeast Asia without putting a stop to this support and direction, and gives short shrift to GVN reform. To the extent that this view was accepted, it tended to set the face of U.S. policy looking outward across South Vietnam's borders, putting South Vietnamese weaknesses in the background, mainly to be dealt with after the 1962 Agreement is enforced.

When the issue came up of the GVN's internal military and political failures, all agreed that these were serious, but there was seldom any action. Occasional references (e.g., Honolulu, 1964), and conversations with some of the principals, make it clear that the explanation for this lack of action was the fear that the GVN was a house of cards, which would collapse if we pushed too hard. This fear of GVN weakness proved to be a consistent source of strength to GVN in its negotiations with the Embassy and with the USG.

4. McNamara's March Trip and NSAM 288

For several days beginning on March 8, 1964, Secretary McNamara conferred with GVN leaders and with U.S. officials in Saigon. The trip
reinforced his pessimistic views of the previous December. In his trip report to the President, he said:

"C. The situation has unquestionably been growing worse, at least since September:

1. In terms of government control of the countryside, about 40% of the territory is under Viet Cong control or predominant influence.

2. Large groups of the population are now showing signs of apathy and indifference, and there are some signs of frustration within the U.S. contingent:

   a. The ARVN and paramilitary desertion rates, and particularly the latter, are high and increasing.

   b. Draft dodging is high while the Viet Cong are recruiting energetically and effectively.

   c. The morale of the hamlet militia and of the Self Defense Corps, on which the security of the hamlets depends, is poor and falling.

3. In the last 90 days the weakening of the government's position has been particularly noticeable.

4. The political control structure extending from Saigon down into the hamlets disappeared following the November coup. Of the 41 incumbent province chiefs on November 1, 35 have been replaced (nine provinces had three province chiefs in three months; one province had four). Scores of lesser officials were replaced. Almost all major military commands have changed hands twice since the November coup. The faith of the peasants has been shaken by the disruptions in experienced leadership and the loss of physical security. In many areas, power vacuums have developed causing confusion among the people, and a rising rate of rural disorders.

"D. The greatest weakness in the present situation is the uncertain viability of the Khanh government... After two coups, as was mentioned above, there has been a sharp drop in morale and organization, and Khanh has not yet been able to build these up satisfactorily. There is a constant threat of assassination or of another coup, which would drop morale and organization nearly to zero. Whether or not French nationals are actively encouraging such a coup, de Gaulle's position and the continuing pessimism and anti-Americanism of the French community in South Vietnam provide constant fuel to neutralist sentiment and the coup possibility. If a coup is set underway, the odds of our detecting and preventing it in the tactical sense are not high,
"E. On the positive side, we have found many reasons for encouragement in the performance of the Khanh government to date. Although its top layer is thin, it is highly responsive to U.S. advice, and with a good grasp of the basic elements of rooting out the Viet Cong. Opposition groups are fragmentary, and Khanh has brought in at least token representation from many key groups hitherto left out. He is keenly aware of the danger of assassination or coup and is taking resourceful steps to minimize these risks. All told, these evidences of energy, comprehension, and decision add up to a sufficiently strong chance of Khanh's really taking hold in the next few months for us to devote all possible energy and resources to his support." 44/

A memorandum of the conversation held at Joint General Staff (JGS) headquarters between Secretary McNamara and General Khanh, the Prime Minister, on March 12, shows that the U.S. pressed for a national service act. General Khanh agreeably assured the Secretary that the GVN was prepared to embark on a program of national mobilization. The principal question raised by the Vietnamese was the desirability of raising the Civil Guard to the same relative status as ARVN on such matter as salary, pensions, and survivor benefits at a total additional cost of 1 billion piasters. Mr. McNamara's reply that he thought this highly desirable was obviously interpreted by the Vietnamese as an agreement to underwrite much of the bill. 45/

After considering various options in his reports, McNamara recommended the following basic U.S. posture:

"1. The U.S. at all levels must continue to make it emphatically clear that we are prepared to furnish assistance and support for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.

"2. The U.S. at all levels should continue to make it clear that we fully support the Khanh government and are totally opposed to any further coups. The ambassador should instruct all elements, including the military advisors, to report intelligence information of possible coups promptly, with the decision to be made by the ambassador whether to report such information to Khanh....

"3. We should support fully the Pacification Plan now announced by Khanh...This so-called "oil spot" theory is excellent, and its acceptance is a major step forward. However, it is necessary to push hard to get specific instructions out to the provinces, so that there is real unity of effort at all levels....

Many of the actions described in succeeding paragraphs fit right into the framework of the Plan as announced by Khanh. Wherever possible, we should tie our urging of such actions to Khanh's own formulation of them, so that he will
be carrying out a Vietnamese plan and not one imposed by the U.S.

"4. To put the whole nation on a war footing... a new National Mobilization Plan (to include a National Service Law) should be urgently developed by the Country Team in collaboration with the Khanh Government....

"5. The strength of the Armed Forces (regular plus paramilitary) must be increased by at least 50,000 men....

"6. A Civil Administrative Corps is urgently required to work in the provincial capitals, the district towns, the villages, and the hamlets... The U.S. should work with the GVN urgently to devise the necessary recruiting plans, training facilities, financing methods, and organizational arrangements, and should furnish training personnel at once, under the auspices of the AID Mission....

"7. The paramilitary forces are now understrength and lacking in effectiveness. They must be improved and reorganized.

d. Additional U.S. personnel should be assigned to the training of all these paramilitary forces.

e. The National Police require special consideration. Their strength in the provinces should be substantially increased and consideration should be given to including them as part of an overall 'Popular Defense Force'....

"8. An offensive guerrilla force should be created to operate along the border and in areas where VC control is dominant...." 16/

He recommended more military equipment for ARVN, which along with the expansion recommendations above, added up to a total cost to the U.S. of some $50-60 million in the first year and $30-40 million thereafter. He reasoned:

"There were and are sound reasons for the limits imposed by present policy -- the South Vietnamese must win their own fight; U.S. intervention on a larger scale, and/or GVN actions against the North, would disturb key allies and other nations; etc. In any case, it is vital that we continue to take every reasonable measure to assure success in South Vietnam. The policy choice is not an 'either/or' between this course of action and possible pressures against the North; the former is essential without regard to our decision with respect to the latter. The latter can, at best, only reinforce the former."
"The following are the actions we believe can be taken in order to improve the situation both in the immediate future and over a longer term period. To emphasize that a new phase has begun, the measures to be taken by the Khanh government should be described by some term such as 'South Vietnam's Program for National Mobilization.'" 47/ 

Two courses of action that Secretary McNamara considered and rejected were destined to come up time and again. With respect to the suggestion that the U.S. furnish an American combat unit to secure Saigon, the Secretary reported "It is the universal opinion of our senior people in Saigon, with which we concur, that this action would now have serious adverse psychological consequences and should not be undertaken."

On U.S. assumption of command, he said:

"...the judgments of all senior people in Saigon, with which we concur, is that the possible military advantages of such action would be far outweighed by its adverse psychological impact. It would cut across the whole basic picture of the VN running their own war and lay us wide open to hostile propaganda both within SVN and outside. Moreover the present responsiveness of the GVN to our advice -- although it has not yet reduced military reaction time -- makes it less urgent. At the same time MACV is steadily taking actions to bring U.S. and GVN operating staff closer together at all levels, including joint operating rooms at key command levels." 48/ 

The President met with the National Security Council on March 17 and approved McNamara's recommendations; NSAM 288 of that date directed all agencies to execute the parts applying to them. To underline one point further, State cabled USOM Saigon on March 18 to make sure to report all rumors of coups heard by any U.S. personnel to the Ambassador at once; and it gave the Ambassador full reaction authority. 49/ Then the President summarized his view of the main thrust of the new policy, in a cable to Lodge on March 20:

"As we agreed in our previous messages to each other, judgment is reserved for the present on overt military action in view of the consensus from Saigon conversations of McNamara mission with General Khanh and you on judgment that movement against the North at the present would be premature. We here share General Khanh's judgment that the immediate and essential task is to strengthen the southern base. For this reason our planning for action against the North is on a contingency basis at present, and immediate problem in this area is to develop the strongest possible military and political base for possible later action." 50/ 

Anticipating great things, the White House announced Khanh's "mobilization plan" on March 17, and implied USG support for him.
"To meet the situation, General Khanh and his government are acting vigorously and effectively. They have produced a sound central plan. To carry out this plan, General Khanh has informed us that he proposes in the near future to put into effect a National Mobilization Plan...

"The policy should continue of withdrawing United States personnel where their roles can be assumed by South Vietnamese and of sending additional men if they are needed. It will remain the policy of the United States to furnish assistance and support to South Vietnam for as long as it is required...

"Secretary McNamara and General Taylor reported their overall conclusion that with continued vigorous leadership from General Khanh and his government, and the carrying out of these steps, the situation can be significantly improved in the coming months." 21/}

In a speech in Washington on March 26, Secretary McNamara more explicitly supported the Khanh government, and gave the accepted priorities of U.S. policy:

"...In early 1963, President Kennedy was able to report to the nation that the spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in South Vietnam. It was evident that the Government had seized the initiative in most areas from the insurgents. But this progress was interrupted in 1963 by the political crises arising from troubles between the Government and the Buddhists, students, and other non-Communist oppositionists. President Diem lost the confidence and loyalty of his people; there were accusations of maladministration and injustice. There were two changes of government within three months. The fabric of government was torn. The political control structure extending from Saigon down into the hamlets virtually disappeared. Of the 41 incumbent province chiefs on November 1 of last year, 35 were replaced. Nine provinces had three chiefs in three months; one province had four. Scores of lesser officials were replaced. Almost all major military commands changed hands twice. The confidence of the peasants was inevitably shaken by the disruptions in leadership and the loss of physical security...Much therefore depends on the new government under General Khanh, for which we have high hopes.

"Today the government of General Khanh is vigorously rebuilding the machinery of administration and reshaping plans to carry the war to the Viet Cong. He is an able and energetic leader. He has demonstrated his grasp of the basic elements—political, economic and psychological, as well as military—required to defeat the Viet Cong. He is planning a program of economic and social advances for the welfare of his people.
has brought into support of the government representatives of key groups previously excluded. He and his colleagues have developed plans for systematic liberation of areas now submissive to Viet Cong duress and for mobilization of all available Vietnamese resources in the defense of the homeland.

"At the same time, General Khanh has understood the need to improve South Vietnam's relations with its neighbors... In short, he has demonstrated the energy, comprehension, and decision required by the difficult circumstances that he faces....

"The third option before the President [after withdrawal and neutralization, both rejected] was initiation of military actions outside South Vietnam, particularly against North Vietnam, in order to supplement the counterinsurgency program in South Vietnam.

"This course of action -- its implications and ways of carrying it out -- has been carefully studied.

"What ever ultimate course of action may be forced upon us by the other side, it is clear that actions under this option would be only a supplement to, not a substitute for, progress within South Vietnam's own borders.

"The fourth course of action was to concentrate on helping the South Vietnamese win the battle in their own country. This, all agree, is essential no matter what else is done....

"We have reaffirmed U.S. support for South Vietnam's Government and pledged economic assistance and military training and logistical support for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.

"We will support the Government of South Vietnam in carrying out its Anti-Insurgency Plan...." 52/

The next day McNamara formally ended the hope of phased withdrawal, by stopping the lower-echelon joint planning activities that had aimed at replacing U.S. elements in Vietnam by Vietnamese. Although the Vietnamese knew that the "withdrawal" of 1000 men in December 1963 had been a pretense, his action now removed any remaining doubt about our intentions. The message was brief:

"Model Plan projection for phasedown of U.S. forces and GVN forces is superseded. Policy is as announced by White House on 17 March 64," 53/
5. Opening Bids on Advice, Leverage, and AID, April-May, 1964

Armed with our declaration of support and with the promised further material assistance, General Khanh signed a mobilization decree on April 4; at the time the decree satisfied the USG as meeting McNamara's recommendation on the subject. 54/ However, Khanh delayed signing implementing decrees for the mobilization decree indefinitely; and it has never become clear what it would have meant, if implemented. In May, Khanh purportedly broadened the draft to include older and younger men, and announced formation of a new "Civil Defense Corps"; but neither came to anything. On April 4, Khanh also abolished the Council of Notables. This latter step he did on his own, without prior discussion with Lodge. As noted in section 1, Lodge, who always believed in the need and importance of constitutional government in SVN, felt no urgency for creating a democratic form of government, although many in State may have wanted to object to Khanh's actions. 55/

Such actions without prior consultation were to become a sore point later on with both State and the Embassy. Thus, what the USG actually got for the recognition and material support it gave Khanh in March was the dissolution of the Council of Notables. 56/

During April, Lodge and State continued to debate how hard to push GVN using AID leverage. Lodge agreed with the general principle that the Commercial Import Program (CIP) should not be increased until increased GVN expenditures quickened the economy and drove imports up. However, he noted that GVN had been given to understand that they could expect at least the $35 million CIP in 1964 that they had in 1963, and that McNamara had said in Saigon and Washington that U.S. assistance to Vietnam would increase by about $50 million. These assurances had spurred Oanh, Minister of National Economy, to ask for specific increases in CIP. Lodge thought the time unpropitious for detailed joint planning and for austerity measures as conditions for the last increment of 1964 CIP. Oanh received credit for being too busy with pacification planning and other matters to discuss such matters. Therefore, Lodge proposed to use the planning of the CY 1965 program as the right place to apply leverage. 57/

State reacted sharply, questioning whether the USG should let GVN off the hook on its March commitments that easily. Nevertheless, State acknowledged that "formal negotiations may not be desirable at this time," and settled instead for "constant dialogue to keep GVN aware of U.S. adherence to the new approach and of firm desire to see it implemented." The desired GVN actions included drawdown of foreign exchange reserves, promotion of exports, import austerity, and an anti-inflationary domestic policy. 58/

USOM then talked to Oanh about the commitments on the two sides. USOM felt that Oanh understood that GVN was to move first and be backed up by the USG as needed, but thought that some segments of GVN were dragging their heels to avoid living up to their commitments. USOM estimated a $15-30 million drawdown of GVN foreign exchange reserves in 1964. 59/

In the last week of April, General Khanh asked Lodge for one American expert each in the fields of Finance-Economics, Foreign Affairs,
and Press relations to be assigned to him personally and to have offices, in "a convenient villa... We Vietnamese want the Americans to be respon-
sible with us and not merely as advisors." This request revived the "brain
trust" concept discussed with the Minh government around the first of the
year. Commenting, Lodge noted that he had opposed pushing Americans into
GVN because of Colonialist overtones; they would cause resentment, and
a lessening of effort by the GVN, placing the blame on the U.S. Therefore,
he had avoided raising the idea with Khanh. However, that Khanh
himself now proposed it removed that objection, and Lodge felt that the
U.S. should respond because it was an urgent necessity.

Late in the same meeting, Lodge told Khanh of a State Department
proposal for civil administrators on a crash basis in partially pacified
areas. His quick reply, "Yes...if you will accept losses."

Lodge recommended a Civil Administrative advisor to join the three
others mentioned above, but he advised against more. He said there was
no sense dumping several hundred advisors out there. In view of the "trail-
blazing" nature of the move, he requested a member of the White House staff,
possibly Forrestal, to come out for a conference. Ordinarily, it
would be surprising that Lodge would make such a big issue of Khanh's re-
vival of an idea that GVN had already advanced through Lodge and that the
President himself had approved. However, his effusive reaction in this
case merely underlines his oft-repeated reluctance to push GVN. Lodge
presented the first three advisors to Khanh on May 6.

On April 30, Lodge, Westmoreland, and USOM Director Brent met
with several top members of GVN to discuss GVN's failure to disburse operat-
ing funds to the provinces, sectors and divisions and to correct the man-
power shortage in ARVN and the paramilitary units. Lodge argued that the
McNamara program was failing, not because U.S. support lagged, but because
the necessary plaster support was missing. Moreover, he said, there was
no shortage of plasters available to GVN. In reply, Cao of the GVN said
they had inherited a bad system from the French, and that he was now trying
to implement new procedures. Khanh replied on the manpower problem that
to raise the strength would require an ultimatum to the Corps Commanders,
but then he also said that remedial moves were underway and were known to
MACV. Khanh countered the budgetary argument by saying that he had still
not received money from the U.S. to support increased pay for the para-
military; Lodge replied that if he went ahead with the increased pay, the
U.S. would meet the bill. Overall, the meeting was one of thrust and,
parry rather than of consultation. This meeting followed prodding
from McNamara and JCS in a cable sent April 29.

On May 4, Khanh told Lodge he wanted to declare war, bomb North
Vietnam with U.S. bombers, put the country on a war footing, including
"getting rid of the so-called politicians and having...a government of
technicians," and bring in 10,000 U.S. Army special forces to "cover the
whole Cambodian-Laotian frontier." Lodge was non-committal on U.S. forces,
but said that the war came first and that democratic forms could wait. However, Khanh publicly called for an election by October of a Constitutional
Assembly, apparently to bolster his public support; he had his share of
rumors and political infighting.
rather be listed as 'assistants' to the Vietnamese principals at the various levels of government...

"Americans should be integrated to all levels of the Vietnamese Government... Americans would be integrated into the Central Government to insure that decisions are taken, orders are issued and funds, supplies and personnel are made available for their implementation, and execution actually takes place. At the regional level Americans, both military and civilian, would also be introduced... Americans would likewise be brought into the government machinery at province and district level to insure that the counterinsurgency programs are actually executed at the level at which the people live.

"Aside from the command aspect which Americans would assume, the principal other new element in this concept would be the introduction of American civilians at the district level. Their purpose would be to insure that programs are put into effect at the village and hamlet level to gain the support of the people...

"Personnel at the district level would confront a maximum risk and casualties are virtually certain. Since the U.S. should take any feasible measure to assure their security, it is important that Vietnamese units of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, which operate at this level, be encadred with an adequate number of American military personnel to insure that they will operate effectively."

This DPM also proposed extensive reshuffling of the lines of authority in the GVN itself, including the elimination of divisions from the Vietnamese military structure and placing all authority for pacification, military and civilian, in the hands of the province chiefs under the corps commanders. 73/

The Vietnam Committee watered down this proposal immediately, however. On May 27, it went to four high-level addressees as a talking paper, with the second sentence of the above recommendation altered to say, "They should become more than advisors, but should not become an integral part of the chain of command." (Emphasis added.) Recognizing Vietnamese sensitivities and the GVN's political vulnerability, the revised paper recommended a gradual, phased approach. But even the watered-down version was termed "radical" in the cable putting it on the agenda for the upcoming Honolulu Conference. 73/

In the new advisory program already underway, MACV reported a big improvement by late May in the experimental districts with U.S. advisors. People rather than messages moved back and forth. Economic and social bonds were reported improved. Further extension of advisors to districts was put
on the agenda. In preliminary communications, General Taylor, Chairman of the JCS, assumed that their mission would be to supervise unit training, operational performance, and operational planning of para-military units in the districts; but he also suggested discussion of other ways in which military personnel could be used to advantage in forwarding the pacification program.

The month ended with a Rusk-Khanh meeting that re-emphasized the accepted priorities of U.S. policy, and unquestionably confirmed to the Vietnamese how far we were thinking of going. First, Rusk emphasized to Khanh the effect of Vietnamese quarreling on the U.S. and on other potential allies in the struggle. Second, they discussed immediate extensions of the war, such as attacking the Laotian corridor, and the various further extensions that might follow. Third, Khanh pushed hard on the idea, which as noted above had already been discussed in Washington, that he could not win without extending the war. Finally, Khanh pledged to keep all these matters secret until the U.S. agreed to overt statement or action.

The language of the cable reporting this meeting is candid and revealing:

"1. Solidarity Within South Vietnam

"...Secretary Rusk stated one of main problems President faces in justifying to American people whatever course of action may be necessary or indicated as matter of internal solidarity of SVN. Secretary noted that if struggle escalates, only U.S. will have the forces to cope with it.

"This basic reality means President has heavy responsibility of making vital decisions and leading American public opinion to accept them. Difficult to do this if SVN appears hopelessly divided and rent by internal quarrels.

"...Secretary said he was not thinking in terms of displaying solidarity so as to convince Paris that struggle could be won, but rather was thinking in terms of sustaining the faith in the possibilities of ultimate success of our Vietnamese effort among those nations we hoped 'would be in the foxholes with us' if escalation became necessary and if enemy forces reacted in strength. For example, UK, Australia, New Zealand. Solidarity and unit of purpose in SVN was keystone of whole effort. Was General Khanh doing all he could to bring about such national unity?

"Khanh replied affirmatively, saying he fully aware of importance of unity. His recent handling of the case of the arrested Generals showed this. His clemency showed he was primarily interested in protecting unity of Army. But there were many problems. Underlying structure and heritage of country was such that only Army could lead Nation in unity. Only
Army had the requisite organization, cadres, discipline, and sense of purpose. The intellectuals would never be able to adopt a common point of view unless it was imposed by a dictatorship—by a party as the Communists did, or a 'family dictatorship' such as Diem's. This situation was made worse because of disproportion between measure of political and civil liberties granted in wartime situation on one hand and lack of background and sense of responsibility of recipients on the other...He was aware he had perhaps given more freedom than really prudent handling of situation would have dictated, but he had to be mindful of proclaimed democratic goals of the Vietnamese revolution. All in all, this disunity would not be fatal because Army itself was united, and no potentially disruptive force could hope to oppose Army and overthrow GVN. (N.B. No reference to religious problems, sects, or labor under this heading.)


"Khanh dwelt at length on this, laying out some fairly precise ideas about the kind of action that might be taken.

"Basically, he said that despite the pacification plan and some individual successes he and his government were 'on the defensive' against the Viet Cong. He said pretty flatly that they could not win unless action was taken outside South Vietnam, and that this needed a firm U.S. decision for such action.

"...He then said that the 'immediate' response should be to clean out the Communists in Eastern Laos, who were the same kind of threat to him, and that we should not get bogged down in negotiations but act.

"...Secretary then noted we could never predict enemy reaction with certainty. How would SVN people react if NVA and China responded by attacking SVN? Khanh replied this would have even more favorable effect on SVN national unity and faith in victory, and would mobilize usual patriotic reactions in face of more clearcut external threat.

"3. Timing of Action Against the North and Necessary Prior Action Within South Vietnam.

"Khanh asked if Secretary and Ambassador believed he should proclaim state of war existed during next few days and now that Generals' case was settled. Both advised him to wait at least until after Honolulu Conference and in no case ever to take action on such matter without consulting. He agreed, and remarked that if he proclaimed state
of war, NVN would know this was preparatory to some form of escalation and he would never act unilaterally and thereby run risk of tipping America's hand. Although the matter was not specifically mentioned, Khanh appeared to accept as entirely natural that he would not necessarily know in advance if U.S. decided to strike outside VN.

"...Some question as to how enemy camp will react. At various points in conversation Khanh was obviously seeking some more definite statement of specific American intentions in immediate future. Secretary told him he could say nothing on this because he simply did not know. The Honolulu meeting would produce some firm recommendations to the President and some plans, but ultimately only President could decide. His decision would be influenced by consideration of all implications of escalation: On our forces, on our allies, and perhaps even on mankind itself if nuclear warfare should result. Only U.S. had the means to cope with problems escalation would pose, and only President could make the ultimate decisions.

"Nevertheless, Secretary said he wished to emphasize the following:

A. Since 1945 U.S. had taken 165,000 casualties in defense of free world against Communist encroachments, and most of these casualties were in Asia.

B. U.S. would never again get involved in a land war in Asia limited to conventional forces.

D. Regardless what decisions were reached at Honolulu, their implementation would require positioning of our forces. This would take time. Khanh must remember we had other responsibilities in Asia and must be able react anywhere we had forces or commitments. Not by chance
was this Conference being held at Honolulu; the combined headquarters of all American forces in Pacific was there.

"...6. Comment.

"As can be seen, the Secretary let Khanh develop his ideas fairly fully and do most of the talking.* Khanh talked firmly and effectively, and responded well to the Secretary's several points. He showed clearly that he was aware of the gravity of the decisions (though he did seem a touch cavalier about the political problems of hitting eastern Laos at once), and did not seem to want a firm U.S. answer the day after tomorrow. But it seemed clear that he did want it pretty soon, and was now convinced he could not win in South Vietnam without hitting other areas including the North. He was careful to point out that the pacification campaign was making gains and would continue to do so. Still, it was essentially defensive.

"On the timing, the Secretary said that any action would be preceded in any event by some period of time for force deployments. (He did not refer to diplomatic steps re Laos, the UN side, the U.S. Congressional problem, or other types of factors). Khanh understood this, and also accepted the Secretary's point that we would need to consult very closely with Khanh himself, try to bring the British and Australians aboard (the Secretary referred only to these two possible active participants), and generally synchronize and work out the whole plan with great care." 77/

Thus although the USG had pressed GVN on many details of economic policy, administration, and pacification, contacts at the highest level told GVN that if the Vietnamese leaders would only stick together to prosecute the war, and if we compelled the North Vietnamese to cease and desist, everything would be all right. Provided the GVN didn't embarrass the USG too much, there was no limit to how far we would go to support them; and apart from "unity" and a reasonable show of effort, there was no onus on them to deliver the goods. Khanh's claim that he could not win without extending the war, and that the Vietnamese were tired of the long dreary grind of pacification, met no U.S. objection.

7. The Honolulu Conference and Its Follow-Up, June, 1964

The Honolulu Conference met on short notice with an air of urgency; principals included McNamara, Rusk, Lodge, Taylor, and Westmoreland. Presentations of the current situation preceded consideration of additional measures to be taken. Lodge briefed those present on the political status. He said the situation could "jog along," but he thought that some external action would be a big lift to South Vietnamese morale. Lodge's prediction was more optimistic than later events. In August, proved justified; he said "if we bombed Tchepone or attacked the [RVN torpedo] boats and the Vietnamese people knew about it, this would...unify their efforts and reduce [their] quarreling." In reply to a question by Rusk, he opposed the idea of a more

*Comment: Nevertheless, as can be seen, the Secretary spoke freely.
formal joint USG/GVN organization at the top; McNamara hoped that a more formal organization would evolve. Lodge felt that the USG/GVN relationship was harmonious, and that GVN was responsive to advice. He, like the present methods of dealing with them, Westmoreland called the military picture "tenuous but not hopeless" and added that a few victories were badly needed.

Both were more optimistic than was the prevailing Washington view. All present agreed that the emergence of a hostile government or anarchy would be a major threat to the U.S. position. The fear of this threat undoubtedly helps explain the USG's persistent hesitancy to apply leverage to GVN.

Westmoreland circulated a working paper calling for moderate increases in U.S. personnel, both civilian and military, for eight critical provinces. He reported that the GVN had recently responded to massive advisory pressure by increasing the tempo of their military operations. He felt they would similarly respond to a continuing advisory program oriented toward pacification. Both Lodge and Westmoreland rejected, as both unwise and unacceptable to GVN, any major plan for "inter-larding" or "encadrement" which would move U.S. personnel directly into decision-making roles. Their opposition ended conference consideration of the proposals advanced by the Sullivan memorandum.

In a long draft memorandum, dated June 13, 1964, Sullivan added some further insight into US/GVN relations and into the views of Lodge and Westmoreland about national priorities, beyond what is shown in the CINCPAC record of the Conference.

"In attempting to accomplish many of these programs, we have encountered resistance both from the Vietnamese and from our own U.S. Mission. Ambassador Lodge...fears that the increased introduction of Americans would give a colonial coloration to our presence there and would cause the Vietnamese to depend more and more on our execution of their programs. The Vietnamese...have some fear of appearing to be American puppets...Finally, there is some indication that they are reluctant to associate themselves too closely with the Americans until they feel more confident of ultimate American intentions.

"At the current moment, there is great doubt and confusion in Vietnam about U.S. determination...As a leading Saigon newspaper said on June 12: 'We must be vigilant and we must be ready to meet any eventuality so as to avoid the possible shameful sacrifice and dishonor to our country as in the past.'

"Given this sort of atmosphere in South Vietnam, it is very difficult to persuade the Vietnamese to commit themselves to sharp military confrontations with the communists if they suspect that something in the way of a negotiated deal is being..."
"Both Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland, at the Honolulu Conference expressed the opinion that the situation in South Vietnam would 'jog along' at the current stale-mated pace unless some dramatic 'victory' could be introduced to put new steel and confidence into the Vietnamese leadership. General Westmoreland defined 'victory' as a determination to take some new vigorous military commitment, such as air strikes against Viet Cong installations in the Laos corridor. Ambassador Lodge defined 'victory' as a willingness to make punitive air strikes against North Vietnam. The significant fact about both suggestions was that they looked toward some American decision to undertake a commitment which the Vietnamese would interpret as a willingness to raise the military ante and energize negotiations begun from a position of weakness."

"While it is almost impossible to establish measurements of Vietnamese morale, we are able to say that there is not at the current moment a single galvanized national purpose, expressed in the government leadership and energizing all elements of the country with a simple sense of confidence." 80/

The selective Westmoreland plan offered hope and was sufficiently general to avoid specific opposition. The conference agreed that Saigon should complete the plan and work urgently on its implementation.

Several more minor decisions were made on unilateral matters. 'Qzar' powers for information were put in the hands of Zorthian. It was agreed that the DCM should be strengthened with a "truly executive man," and there was to be a clearing-of-decks on the military side in Saigon through reductions in social activities and cut-downs in dependents. None of these measures was expected to affect the dubious prognosis for the next 3-6 months. The best that could be hoped for was a slight gain by the end of the year.

There was serious discussion of military plans and intelligence estimates regarding wider actions outside South Vietnam. Subjects included the conduct of military operations in Laos, a major build-up of forces, and planning of possible air strikes against North Vietnam. The conclusion reached was that the somewhat less pessimistic estimate of the present situation afforded the opportunity to further refine these plans.

The conference concluded that the crucial actions for the immediate future were (1) to prosecute an urgent information effort in the United States toward dispelling the basic doubts of the value of Southeast Asia which were besetting key members of Congress and the public in the budding "great debate," and (2) to start diplomatic efforts with the Thais, Australians, New Zealanders, Philippines, and the French on matters within
their cognizance which impinged on our effort in South Vietnam.

Upon his return to Washington, the Secretary of State cabled Saigon a specific listing of the Washington understanding of the ten actions that were to be taken to expand U.S. and Vietnamese activities in the super-critical provinces. The gist of the actions is as follows:

1. Move in additional VN troops to assure numerical superiority over VC.
2. Assign control of all troops in province to province chief.
3. Develop and execute detailed hamlet by hamlet "oil spot" and "clear and hold" operations plans for each of the approximate 40 districts.
4. Introduce a system of population control (curfews, ID papers, intelligence network).
5. Increase the province police force.
6. Expand the information program.
7. Develop a special economic aid-program for each province.
8. Add additional U.S. personnel (initially from within SVN).

- 320 military province and district advisors
- 40 USOM province and district advisors
- 74 battalion advisors (2 from each of 37 battalions)
- 434

9. Transfer military personnel to fill existing and future USOM shortages.
10. Establish joint US/GVN teams to monitor the program at both national and provincial level.

The message concluded by asking Saigon to forward specific proposals to effect these decisions and a time schedule, "earliest." The plan to give province advisors a petty cash fund (above, p.19) received so little support that there is no mention of it in either the CINCPAC or the State Conference Record.

Upon his return to Saigon on June 4, Ambassador Lodge went straight from the airport to call on General Khanh. While Lodge mentions in his report that the subject of low ARVN strength was raised as a matter to be
improved upon, the main thrust of his talk with Khanh was to hint that the USG would in the immediate future be preparing U.S. public opinion for actions against North Vietnam. Khanh was reported to be eager to learn more about the details. 82/

On June 13, Saigon replied to the State request for specific proposals. A MACV study had been completed on point 1 and the RVNAF would be approached. On point 2, it was noted that RF and PF were already under the province chiefs; ARVN would be approached on province command of regulars. A wordy description of "concept" spoke to the remainder of State's ten points. 83/ It provoked a long series of specific questions from Washington about the 8 provinces, asking in short, "How soon can action be initiated?" 84/

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On June 25, Commander MACV sent his request to the JCS for an increase of 4,200 U.S. personnel to implement this expanded advisory effort. He viewed these as efforts to "influence the successful planning and execution of the National Pacification Plan." Subsector advisors were to be "an integral reinforcement of the pacification effort at district level." 85/ Consequently, the MACV terms of reference for subsector advisors were developed to provide that teams would extend the capabilities of USOM and USIS. Guidance was intentionally not specific.

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The same day General Westmoreland reported that, with the Ambassador's concurrence, he had called on General Khanh to discuss three military matters: (1) Augmentation of advisors at battalion level and extension of larger advisory teams to most districts; (2) The urgent need to coordinate pacification efforts in the provinces surrounding Saigon; and (3) The necessity of moving a regiment to Long An (the pacification show-case) as soon as possible. General Khanh's reply was very receptive and agreeable on all matters. 86/

On June 26, Lodge sent his last message as Ambassador reporting that he and General Westmoreland had that day met with General Khanh and had reached "general agreement" on the concept, scope, and organization set forth in the Saigon reply of June 13 (referred to above). 87/

Meanwhile the proposal for a province advisors' fund reappeared in a new form, and won quick approval. USOM agreed that AID should spend $200,000 from its contingency funds for direct purchase of piasters; to allocate to sector advisors for small expenditures (usually less than $25 at a time). The funds were to buy local materials and services for projects using AID commodities; and their use was to be coordinated with the Vietnamese Province Chief. 88/ By subsequent US/GVN agreement, all uses of these funds and commodities, and requisitions of the commodities from Saigon warehouses, required unanimous approval of a three-man ("troika") Provincial Coordinating Committee consisting of the Province Chief, the U.S. AID Provincial Representative and the MACV Sector Advisor. The troika sign-off had already applied to the commodities, as the means to the U.S. veto on their use mentioned above in Section 1. Except for a high-level agreement each year on the size and overall allocation of these resources,
Saigon allowed the Provinces' full freedom of action in their use. The intent of this arrangement was to permit prompt action on urgent projects, unaffected by the delays in the GVN administration that plagued regular GVN operations. It also interfered with corrupt misuse of the AID commodities and of purchase piasters.
AMBASSADOR TAYLOR'S FIRST SEVEN MONTHS:
Planning for "Bomb North" Amid Turbulence in the South

1. Ambassador Taylor's Initiation, July, 1964

Ambassador Taylor arrived in Saigon amid the start of planning to extend the war outside the borders of South Vietnam. Rusk had discussed the options with Khanh on June 1, and the participants of the Honolulu Conference had mulled them over further. Although there was no formal decision to recommend new operations in Laos or North Vietnam, there was an atmosphere of expectation. A joint State-Defense message on June 27 authorized joint planning with the Vietnamese Joint General Staff for cross border operations in Laos; on June 30, Westmoreland discussed it with General Khiem, who agreed to initiate joint planning. 1/

Taylor came with a letter of support from the President that cleared up any previous doubt about the Ambassador's control over MACV:

"I want you to have this formal expression not only of my confidence but of my desire that you have and exercise full responsibility for the effort of the United States in South Vietnam...I wish it clearly understood that this overall responsibility includes the whole military effort in South Vietnam and authorizes the degree of command and control that you consider appropriate." 2/

Either the letter was intended to prevent confusion of authority such as existed among Lodge, Felt, and Harkins, or the expectation of greater militarization of the war made it appropriate to appoint Taylor Ambassador and to give him unchallenged authority.

Taylor met Khanh and presented his credentials on July 8. Khanh promised him "the frank cooperation of a soldier." He said the U.S. should not merely advise, but should participate in making and implementing plans; in this he still held the view he had expressed to Taylor when he, Khanh, was still a Corps Commander. (By referring to Zorthian's contacts with the Minister of Information, Khanh made it clear he had the brain trust idea in mind.) However, he noted that this degree of involvement should be kept secret, because of the criticism it would attract if known. They discussed Minh's trips around the country, and agreed these were useful and constructive. Finally, Taylor stressed the importance of Vietnamese unity and resolve. 3/

The next day Taylor called on the three Vice Premiers, Hoan, Do Mau, and Oanh, and received the civilian point of view. Hoan did most.
of the talking, saying that civilian politicians like himself wanted the Army to be supported by the people, but that Khanh and the MRC were difficult to work with: The ruling generals control everything. He said the II Corps Commander lived like a playboy, and that the people were outraged; "ever since we came to power we have been telling population we are soon going to have change, but it never comes. The people are becoming impatient." Moreover, he said, something must be done to raise the standard of behavior of the armed forces toward the population. Taylor received these views diplomatically.

For a while there was a serious effort to go through with close meshing of USOM and GVN planning. On July 17 USOM met with Khanh, Hoan, Cenh and others as a group, which Khanh designated the National Security Council. They discussed joint planning and further meshing of US/GVN organizations, putting the stamp of approval on the arrangement in the Ministry of Information. On July 23 Taylor met Khanh and discussed a second meeting of the NSC. Khanh said the Vietnamese had some difficulty in adjusting their ministerial organization to the requirements of meshing with the U.S. mission subdivisions. Taylor responded that reciprocal adjustments were possible. Planning and discussion of cross-border operations continued actively. Offensive guerrilla operations in Laos were a major idea; small operations had already begun into North Vietnam, under OPLAN 34A. In the meeting on July 23, Khanh told Taylor he wanted to intensify the operations under 34A and to start air strikes against North Vietnam. He said again, as he had to Rusk on June 1, that he didn't like to look forward to the long, indecisive pull of the in-country pacification program, and doubted that the Army and the people would carry on indefinitely.

The events of July 19-23 made it clear that GVN was straining at the leash; it started public lobbying for cross-border operations. On July 19 Air Marshal Ky spilled the beans to reporters on plans for operations into Laos. Khanh committed a similar indiscretion at a "Unification Rally" on the 19th, and these were followed by GVN press releases and editorials in the Saigon press urging a "march to the North." All these leaks directly violated Khanh's promises to Rusk on June 1 (above, p. 24). Taylor spoke to Khanh sharply about them, and pointed out that they could be interpreted as a campaign to force the USG's hand. Khanh insisted that such a campaign was the furthest thing from his mind; and then confirmed that it was exactly what he had in mind. Following a long, eloquent repetition of his remarks of other occasions on Vietnamese war-weariness, he asked: Why does not the USG recognize that the appearance of North Vietnamese draftees among the prisoners taken in the I Corps meant that the war had entered a new phase and the USG and GVN must respond with new measures? He said Vietnamese spirits had been raised by President Johnson's firm statements earlier in the year (specifically, Los Angeles, January 21), but that following them nothing had happened. The effect was wearing off, and the communists would conclude they were only words. Then Khanh took the offensive and complained to Taylor that U.S. officials were contradicting him.
in public statements. For example, MACV had denied that there was
an invasion of I Corps by DRV units, as Khanh had claimed in a speech
at Danang. Zorthian soothed him by saying that MACV merely corrected
a misquotation of one of MACV's own officials; Taylor said no U.S.
official would knowingly contradict Khanh. 7/

Taylor took all this patiently, as he did an intelligence report
that said Khanh was trying to incite the USG to action against North
Vietnam. (The report also said that Ky was saying privately that the
GVN should go it alone, because the USG was stalling on account of the
U.S. election.) USOM conjectured that Goldwater's nomination had precipitated the "go North" movement. Moreover, within two hours after Khanh's
long meeting with Taylor, the Ministry of Defense let fly another press
release in the teeth of USOM disapproval, when Khanh ordered the Ministry to
defer Zorthian's suggested changes. The only explanation offered was that
GVN was extremely sensitive about appearing to be a U.S. puppet. 8/

In an analysis of these events, Taylor argued for tolerance and
patience with GVN, and showed no hint of a desire to get tough. He noted
that political sniping and maneuvering pressed Khanh to do something
dramatic to bolster his support. Taylor feared the GVN might get tired
and want to negotiate if they could not get the U.S. more involved. He
proposed joint contingency planning for bombing North Vietnam as a means
to cool GVN off and to reopen communications with them. 9/

In a long conversation on July 24 Khanh discussed his political
problems with Taylor and asked him point blank if he should resign.
Taylor flatly said no, that the USG still supported him and definitely
wanted no further change in GVN. Khanh then asked for a declaration of
support and for pressure on the generals to continue to support him;
Taylor agreed. (Comment: Much of Khanh's political problem still revolved
around Minh, who had long had good relations with Taylor. This relation­
ship may have worried Khanh, and led him to approach Taylor in this way.
However, it may have merely been a way to keep up the pressure on USG
on the matter of bombing North. A couple of days later Khanh was again
grumbling publicly about being a U.S. puppet.) 10/

In response to Taylor's discussion of GVN motives and of ways to
make them happy, State authorized him to tell Khanh the USG had considered
attacks on North Vietnam that might begin, for example, if the pressure
from dissident South Vietnamese factions became too great. He must keep
this confidential. It said to tell him that the USG position had not
changed, and that it never excluded the possibility of wider action. When
Taylor brought this matter to Khanh for discussion, they first agreed on a
GVN announcement of an increase in U.S. personnel and discussed the press
leaks on going North. Khanh then took the offensive, complaining to
Taylor about press stories suggesting the USG was negotiating with the
Chinese through the Pakistani Government, behind the back of GVN. Taylor
soothed him by saying that the USG was merely letting China know how firm
our policy was. When Taylor asked Khanh his views of U.S. policy, Khanh
said he wanted pressure on the North, meaning a bombing campaign. Taylor replied with the position that State had authorized on joint planning. Khanh acted pleased and surprised, promised to think it over, and promised to hold it tightly. He also said he wanted to reorganize GVN to strengthen his own position; Taylor asked for specifics, and urged him not to do anything drastic that would stir up trouble. 11/

2. The Tonkin Incidents and the Policy Prognoses, August, 1964

Within a week, North Vietnamese PT boats attacked the U.S. destroyer Maddox, in admitted retaliation for an attack by South Vietnamese boats on two North Vietnamese islands. Then a disputed further attack of North Vietnamese PT boats on the Maddox and the Turner Joy on August 4 provoked a U.S. retaliatory raid on the main North Vietnamese PT boat base and its support facilities. The raids lifted GVN's spirits, as expected, and encouraged Khanh to clamp down internally. On August 7, he proclaimed a state of emergency, the idea he had been discussing for some time with both Lodge and Taylor. He reimposed censorship and restricted movement; but he left politicians and potential coup-plotters alone. 12/ Also on August 7, the U.S. Congress in joint session passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

On August 8, Westmoreland discussed overall joint planning with Khanh; the question of combined command came up, and Westmoreland mentioned the example of Korea. Both agreed to postpone this issue. 13/

On August 14, State directed Saigon to avoid actions that could be called provocative, like the DESOTO patrols (which the Maddox and the Turner Joy had been doing when attacked) and 34A operations. State noted that the U.S. retaliatory raid's effect on GVN's morale would be temporary, and took a pessimistic view of the USOM reports:

"Mission's monthly report (Saigon 377) expresses hope of significant gains by end of year. But also says Khanh's chances of staying in power are only 50-50, that leadership... has symptoms defeatism and hates prospect of slugging it out within country, that there will be mounting pressures for wider action which, if resisted, will create frictions and irritations which could lead local politicians to serious consideration negotiated solution or local soldiers to military adventure without U.S. consent'...Our actions of last week lifted...morale temporarily, but also aroused expectations, and morale could easily sag back again if VC have successes and we do nothing further."

The cable went on to state that an essential element of U.S. policy was, to devise the best possible means of action -- minimum risks for maximum results in terms of SVN morale and pressure on DRV. In the context of a possible new Geneva conference on Laos, its prognosis was that pressure on the North would be the main vehicle for success.
"Basically solution in both South Vietnam and Laos will require combination military-pressure and some form of communication under which Hanoi (and Peking) eventually accept idea of getting out. Negotiation without continued military action will not achieve our objectives in foreseeable future. After, but only after, we have established clear pattern pressure hurting DRV and leaving no doubts in South Vietnam of our resolve, we could even accept conference broadened to include Vietnam issue." (Underlining in original.)

On the touchy aspect of US/GVN relations, it simply said:

"Joint US/GVN planning already covers possible actions against DRV and the Panhandle. It can be used in itself to maintain morale of GVN leadership, as well as to control and inhibit any unilateral GVN moves." 14/

The Taylor reply to the above message differed only in emphasis.

"...Underlying our analysis is the apparent assumption of DepTel 439 (which we believe is correct) that the present in-country pacification plan is not enough in itself to maintain National morale or to offer reasonable hope of eventual success. Something must be added in the coming months.

"Statement of the problem - A. The course which U.S. policy in South Vietnam should take during the coming months can be expressed in terms of four objectives. The first and most important objective is to gain time for the Khanh government to develop a certain stability and to give some firm evidence of viability. Since any of the courses of action considered in this cable carry a considerable measure of risk to the U.S., we should be slow to get too deeply involved in them until we have a better feel of the quality of our ally. In particular, if we can avoid it, we should not get involved militarily with North Vietnam and possibly with Red China if our base in South Vietnam is insecure and Khanh's Army is tied down everywhere by the VC insurgency. Hence, it is to our interest to gain sufficient time not only to allow Khanh to prove that he can govern, but also to free Saigon from the VC threat which presently rings it and assure that sufficient GVN ground forces will be available to provide a reasonable measure of defense against any DRV ground reaction which may develop in the execution of our program and thus avoid the possible requirement for a major U.S. ground force commitment.

"A second objective in this period is the maintenance of morale in South Vietnam, particularly within the Khanh government. This should not be difficult in the case of the government if we can give Khanh assurance of our readiness to bring added pressure on Hanoi if he provides evidence of ability
to do his part. Thirdly, while gaining time for Khanh, we must be able to hold the DRV in check and restrain a further buildup of Viet Cong strength by way of infiltration from the North. Finally, throughout this period, we should be developing a posture of maximum readiness for a deliberate escalation of pressure against North Vietnam, using January 1, 1965, as a target D-Day. We must always recognize, however, that events may force us to advance D-Day to a considerably earlier date..."

"In approaching the Khanh Government, we should express our willingness to Khanh to engage in planning and eventually to exert intense pressure on North Vietnam, providing certain conditions are met in advance. In the first place before we would agree to go all out against the DRV, he must stabilize his Government and make some progress in cleaning up his operational backyard. Specifically, he must execute the initial phases of the Hop Tac Plan successfully to the extent of pushing the Viet Cong from the doors of Saigon. The overall pacification program, including Hop Tac, should progress sufficiently to allow earmarking at least three division equivalents for the Defense in I Corps if the DRV step up military operations in that area.

"Finally, we should reach some fundamental understandings with Khanh and his Government concerning war aims. We must make clear that we will engage in action against North Vietnam only for the purpose of assuring the security and independence of South Vietnam within the territory assigned by the 1954 agreements; that we will not repeat not join in a crusade to unify the North and South; that we will not repeat not even seek to overthrow the Hanoi Regime provided the latter will cease its efforts to take over the South by subversive warfare.

"With these understandings reached, we would be ready to set in motion the following:

(1) Resume at once 34A (with emphasis on Marine operations) and Desoto patrols. These could start without awaiting outcome of discussions with Khanh.

(2) Resume U-2 overflights over all NVN.

(3) Initiate air and ground strikes in Laos against infiltration targets as soon as joint plans now being worked out with the Khanh Government are ready..."

"Before proceeding beyond this point, we should raise the level of precautionary military readiness (if not already done) by taking such visible measures as introducing U.S. hawk units to Danang and Saigon, landing a Marine force.
at Danang for defense of the airfield and beefing up MACV's support base. By this time (assumed to be late fall) we should have some reading on Khanh's performance.

"Assuming that his performance has been satisfactory and that Hanoi has failed to respond favorably, it will be time to embark on the final phase of course of action A, a carefully orchestrated bombing attack on NVN, directed primarily at infiltration and other military targets...

"Pros and cons of course of action -- A. If successful, course of action A will accomplish the objectives set forth at the outset as essential to the support of U.S. policy in South Vietnam. I will press the Khanh Government into doing its homework in pacification and will limit the diversion of interest to the out-of-country ventures... It gives adequate time for careful preparation estimated at several months, while doing sufficient at once to maintain internal morale. It also provides ample warning to Hanoi and Peking to allow them to adjust their conduct before becoming over-committed.

"On the other hand, course of action A relies heavily upon the durability of the Khanh Government. It assumes that there is little danger of its collapse without notice or of its possible replacement by a weaker or more unreliable successor... Also, because of the draw-out nature of the program, it is exposed to the danger of international political pressure to enter into negotiations before NVN is really hurting from the pressure directed against it.

"Statement of the Problem -- B. It may well be that the problem of U.S. policy in SVN is more urgent than that depicted in the foregoing statement. It is far from clear at the present moment that the Khanh Government can last until January 1, 1965, although the application of course of action A should have the effect of strengthening the Government internally and of silencing domestic squabbling. If we assume, however, that we do not have the time available which is implicit in course of action A (several months), we would have to restate the problem in the following terms. Our objective avoid the possible consequences of a collapse of National morale. To accomplish these purposes, we would have to open the campaign against the DRV without delay, seeking to force Hanoi as rapidly as possible to desist from aiding the VC and to convince the DRV that it must cooperate in calling off the VC insurgency.

"Course of action -- B. To meet this statement of the problem, we need an accelerated course of action, seeking to
obtain results faster than under course of action A. Such an accelerated program would include the following actions:

"Again we must inform Khanh of our intentions, this time expressing a willingness to begin military pressures against Hanoi at once providing that he will undertake to perform as in course of action A. However, U.S. action would not await evidence of performance.

"Again we may wish to communicate directly on this subject with Hanoi or awaiting effect of our military actions. The scenario of the ensuing events would be essentially the same as under Course A but the execution would await only the readiness of plans to expedite, relying almost exclusively on U.S. military means.

"Pros and cons of Course of Action B. This course of action asks virtually nothing from the Khanh Government, primarily because it is assumed that little can be expected from it. It avoids the consequence of the sudden collapse of the Khanh Government and gets underway with minimum delay the punitive actions against Hanoi. Thus, it lessens the chance of an interruption of the program by an international demand for negotiations by presenting a fait accompli to international critics. However, it increases the likelihood of U.S. involvement in ground action, since Khanh will have almost no available ground forces which can be released from pacification employment to mobile resistance of DRV attacks.

"Conclusion: It is concluded that Course of Action A offers the greater promised achievement of U.S. policy objectives in SVN during the coming months. However, we should always bear in mind the fragility of the Khanh Government and be prepared to shift quickly to Course of Action B if the situation requires. In either case, we must be militarily ready for any response which may be initiated by NVN or by CHICOMS.

"Miscellaneous: As indicated above, we believe that 34A operations should resume at once at maximum tempo, still on a covert basis; similarly, Decoto patrols should begin advance operating outside 12-mile limit. We concur that a number of VNAF pilots should be trained on B-57's between now and first of year. There should be no change now with regard to policy on evacuation of U.S. dependents.

"Recommendations: It is recommended that USG adopt Course of Action A while maintaining readiness to shift to Course of Action B."
withdrawn, and that the MRC would meet the next day to choose a new Chief of State and would then dissolve itself. 23/1

Taylor had made it clear to Minh, Khiem, Lam and Khanh that the U.S. favored retaining Khanh as head of the GVN. Both Tri Quang and Tam Chau, fearing a Dai Viet takeover, supported Khanh. Aligned against Khanh were elements of the military angered by Khanh's "down with military dictatorship" statement made from a truck top and the Dai Viet (including Khiem, Hoan and Minh) angered by his appeasement of the Buddhists. 24/

On August 26 and 27, the MRC met, while violence erupted in the streets of Saigon. The evening of the 27th they announced that a triumvirate consisting of Generals Khanh, Minh, and Khiem would rule as an interim government while they tried to form a new one. Khanh withdrew to Dalat, and Vice-Premier Canh became acting Prime Minister. Violence continued, and coup rumors became especially active. 25/

On August 29, a State Department official briefed the press, interpreting events. He said Buddhists and students interpreted the August 16 charter as a return to Diemism and repression; in meeting their demands the MRC had worried some Catholics, but balanced things out by creating the triumvirate with all views represented. He said the charter had not been the USG's idea, but that we had been consulted and had urged delay. The demonstrations did not contain appreciable anti-Americanism, he said, nor did they arise from differences between the "go North" feelings of the military and refugee Catholics, on the one hand, and neutralist sentiments of students and Buddhists, on the other. However, the cable reporting the press conference to the Embassy showed concern on both these latter points. 26/

4. GVN Acquires a Civilian Flavor, and the USG Reviews Priorities

On August 29th, Vietnamese paratroopers armed with bayonets restored order in Saigon. Khanh rested in Dalat; Taylor called on him on the 31st to try to persuade him to return to Saigon quickly to prove he was in charge. Westmoreland went to see Khanh the next day to urge him to keep ARVN on the offensive and to press on with HOP TAC and other pacification; in exchange for reassurances, Westmoreland revised a previous position and promised that U.S. advisors through MACV would alert Khanh to unusual troop movements. Westmoreland also obtained reassurances from General Khiem. Rusk suggested a letter from President Johnson urging Khanh to return to Saigon, and then cabled the text of such a letter. A Dai Viet coup attempt was blocked by the junior members of the MRC, who had now become powerful. Several Generals went to Dalat to persuade Khanh to return as Prime Minister, which he promised to do in a few days. Khanh did return to Saigon on September 4. 28/ Minh was to be chairman of the triumvirate, and would appoint a new High National Council to represent all elements in the population. The Council was to prepare a new constitution and return the government to civilian leadership within a month or so. Khanh was taking the line that he wanted to get the Army out of politics. When Taylor cautioned Khanh; just before the latter's return to Saigon, that an all-civilian government
would be too weak and would tend toward neutralism, Khánh replied that the Army would be vigilant. Taylor again advised Khánh to lay the groundwork better before any more changes in government structure. When the Triumvirate announced the creation of the NHC, they also ended the state of emergency and press censorship, which they had declared on September 6.

On the morning of September 6, as he was leaving for Washington, Taylor sent Rusk a full review of the crisis and of its effects on the Embassy-State military and political appraisal of mid-August. He said that the USG now had to give up on the idea of using a plan for pressures on the North as leverage to get the GVN to press on with pacification, and should go ahead with these pressures in the hope that they would raise Vietnamese morale enough to keep up their war effort:

"...While we must be disappointed by the political turmoil of recent days, we cannot consider it totally unexpected. The very nature of the social, political, and ethnic confusion in this country makes governmental turbulence of this type a factor which we will always have with us.

"What has emerged from these recent events is a definition within fairly broad limits of the degree to which perfectability in government can be pushed. It should be remembered that the recent fracas started when Khánh sought to make his broad and cumbersome government more tractable and more effective. His motives were of the best even though his methods were clumsy. But now, after this recent experience at government improvement we must accept the fact that an effective government, much beyond the capacity of that which has existed over the past several months, is unlikely to survive. We now have a better feel for the quality of our ally and for what we can expect from him in terms of ability to govern. Only the emergence of an exceptional leader could improve the situation and no George Washington is in sight.

"Consequently, we can and must anticipate for the future an instrument of government which will have definite limits of performance. At the very worst, it will continue to seek a broadened consensus involving and attempting to encompass all or most of the minority of popular front. This amalgam, if it takes form, may be expected in due course to become susceptible to an accommodation with the liberation front, which might eventually lead to a collapse of all political energy behind the pacification effort.

"At best, the emerging governmental structure might be capable of maintaining a holding operation against the Viet Cong. This level of effort could, with good luck and strenuous American efforts, be expanded to produce certain limited pacification successes, for example, in the territory covered by the Hop Tac plan. But the willingness and ability of such a government to exert itself or to attempt to execute an all-out
National pacification plan would be marginal. It would probably be incapable of galvanizing the people to the heightened level of unity and sacrifice necessary to carry forward the counter-insurgency program to final success. Instead, it would look increasingly to the United States to take the major responsibility for prying the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese off the backs of the South Vietnamese population. The politicians in Saigon and Hue feel today that the political hassle is their appropriate arena: The conflict with the VC belongs to the Americans.

"We may, therefore, expect to find ourselves faced with a choice of (A) passively watching the development of a popular front, knowing that this may in due course require the U.S. to leave Vietnam in failure; or (B) actively assuming increased responsibility for the outcome following a timeschedule consistent with our estimate of the limited viability of any South Vietnamese government.

"An examination of our total world responsibilities and the significance of Vietnam in relationship to them clearly rules out the option of accepting course (A). If we leave Vietnam with our tail between our legs, the consequences of this defeat in the rest of Asia, Africa and Latin America would be disastrous. We therefore would seem to have little choice left except to accept course (B).

"Our previous views on the right course of action to follow in South Vietnam are set forth in EMBTEL 465. The discussion in this present cable amounts to a recognition that course of action A repeat A of EMBTEL 465 no longer corresponds with the realities of the situation. Recent events have revealed the weakness of our ally and have convinced us of the improbability of attaining the level of governmental performance desired under course A before embarking on a campaign of pressure against the DRV. We are forced back on course of action B with certain revised views on timing."

He went on to recommend that escalating pressures on the DRV begin around December 1. 30/

Taylor brought with him General Westmoreland's assessment of the military situation; it included a look at the political situation from a completely different viewpoint from Taylor's:

"...1. In preparation for your trip to Washington, I thought it might be useful to give you my assessment of the military situation. In subsequent paragraphs I outline in some detail the rather substantial progress which we have
already made and, more importantly, the great potential for additional progress. I also describe military problem areas. These, as you know, are many; but all are susceptible to solution assuming that political stability can be achieved, and that armed forces, particularly the Army, remains intact and unified in its purpose. Under the present circumstances, however, the continued solidarity of the armed forces is in doubt. As all else depends on holding the armed forces together, I address this matter first.

"The Key Military Issue.

2. It seems to me there are certain conditions which must be met in order to preserve the structure and effectiveness of the RVNAF:

A. The officers of the RVNAF must be protected against purge, solely by reason of religious or political affiliation. The Commander in Chief, the officers of the Joint General Staff and commanders down the line, must be given some assurance that their careers and reputations will not be sacrificed, for political expediency to the ambitions or interests of political or religious blocs.

B. The Officers' Corps must be assured that its members will not be punished or expelled from the armed forces if they faithfully execute the orders of constituted authority in connection with the maintenance of law and order. They must be assured that their superiors will not accede to the arbitrary demands of pressure groups whose interest it is to destroy the discipline of the armed forces and to render ineffective the forces of law and order.

3. If I interpret correctly the events of the past two weeks, neither of these minimum conditions have been met. To the contrary, actions best calculated to destroy the morale, the unity, the pride and confidence of the armed forces have transpired in a manner which leads me to believe that a relative free hand has been given to those who aim to destroy the armed forces. The demands of the Buddhists for the resignation of the Commander in Chief, the Chief of Staff, Commander of II Corps, the Prefect of Saigon and the Director of National Police, to name a few, appear to be blows directed at the heart of the security forces which stand between the Viet Cong and victory. I cannot believe that it is in the interests of the Nation to accede to these demands. To the contrary, I am persuaded that acceptance is a formula for political and military disaster. While aware that the insurgency cannot be overcome by military means alone, I am equally aware that without a strong military foundation no program will ever achieve
victory. I am concerned that the Government of Vietnam has already moved some distance down the 'wrong road' in dealing with its Armed Forces. I do not know whether the Armed Forces will collapse or whether, finding the present course intolerable, they will make a desperate move to regain power. Neither course of action is compatible with the objective we seek. 31/

In Washington, Taylor, Rusk, McNamara and Wheeler reached a consensus that (1) Khanh and GVN were too exhausted to be thinking about moves against the North, (2) GVN needs reassurance, and (3) Khanh is likely to stay in control, but not to get much done on the pacification program. 32/ There followed NSAM 314, whose main point was that "first order of business at present is to take actions which will help strengthen the fabric of the GVN." 33/

5. The HNC Goes to Work Amid Further Turbulence

Helping strengthen the fabric of GVN proved to be easier said than done.

Another coup attempt on September 13 failed when Ky and Thi, along with other young officers, supported the existing government. The USG opposed the coup, and also opposed overt violence to suppress it; in particular, USG opposed VNAF bombing of Saigon, which was threatened at one point when the coup generals gained control of much of the city. 34/ When Khanh and Ky asked for U.S. Marines, the USG refused; State authorized a strong line in favor of the Triumvirate, and against internecine war:

"(A) It is imperative that there not be internecine war within VN Armed Forces.

(B) The picture of petty bickering among VN leaders has created an appalling impression abroad.

(C) The U.S. has not provided massive assistance to SVN, in military equipment, economic resources and personnel, in order to subsidize continuing quarrels among SVN leaders...

(G) Emphasize that VN leaders must not take the U.S. for granted.

"2. In line with above you should make it emphatically clear whenever useful, that we do not believe a Phat/Duc government can effectively govern the country or command the necessary popular support to carry forward the effort against the VC. U.S. support for the GVN is based on the triumvirate and its efforts to bring about a broadly based and effective government satisfactorily reflecting the interests and concerns of all groups." 35/
After the coup failed, the Embassy pressed Khanh to exile the coup leaders quietly; and in the upshot they were acquitted of the charges against them. 36/

A fresh problem blew up on September 20 when Rhaedes tribesmen in four CIDG camps advised by U.S. Special Forces revolted against Saigon's authority. It arose from a long-festering mistrust and contempt between the Montagnards, encouraged by the VC, and the lowland Vietnamese. This problem also vexed US/GVN relations, because the U.S. Special Forces advisors generally got along well with the tribesmen, and some may have sympathized with them; and in particular, it added to Khanh's suspicions of U.S. intentions. Two or three Rhaedes had become officers in ARVN, and Westmoreland suggested using them as intermediaries with the rebelling units; but Khanh turned the idea down flat. He also declined to make concessions to Montagnard discontent. Then Taylor sent General DePuy as his intermediary to tell the Rhaedes they were off the payroll until they submitted to GVN authority. This move produced a temporary settlement, but trouble continued to boil up for another two or three weeks. 37/

The High National Council began its deliberations on September 24; Taylor took the occasion to comment that Khanh conceded too much to organized pressure groups. Noting that GVN effectiveness and morale had virtually collapsed, he disliked the purely civilian makeup of the Council, and hoped that it would take its time about writing a permanent constitution. GVN set a deadline of October 27 for this exercise. 38/ Watching on the sidelines, here as at other times, Taylor opposed unsettling change, and opposed excessive civilian influence because of their presumed factionalism and lack of fervor in prosecuting the war.

6. The HNC Installs Civilian Leadership, October, 1964

The view that bombing the North was the key to success received a fresh airing, this time in a public revelation of what USG was thinking. Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy said in a speech delivered in Tokyo on September 30 that such bombing would cut down the threat to GVN in a matter of months.

Early in October, Khanh succeeded in exiling General Khiem, a member of the triumvirate, whom he had suspected of instigating the September 13 coup attempt; Khiem became Ambassador to the U.S. 39/

As the HNC deliberated, State sent Taylor its guidance on the USG position during the formation of the new government-to-be:

"1. We concur that we must...avoid any public espousal of charter or people, although we will undoubtedly be charged in any event with considerable responsibility for the selection of the form and personnel of any new government...We cannot privately disclaim any preference for individuals or form of government because of our intense interest in seeing a new government having sound organization, able members, and broad basis of popular support. We also
The new cabinet froze out Minh, no doubt to improve the palatability of the new government to the dominant group in the MRC. Minh then packed up and went abroad on a "good will" tour. Taylor found the cash cost to the U.S. running high, but recommended paying it. 47/ In his overall assessment of the balance of power in the new government, Taylor thought that the MRC had allowed civilians to get power (as promised in August) because the MRC feared mob violence, and thought it expedient to let the civilians make a mess of it so that military rule would again become acceptable. That is, he hoped and expected that a military return to power would become widely acceptable. Taylor thought the overall political prospects were "faintly encouraging." Commenting in reply, State once again emphasized the accepted links between U.S. commitment and GVN morale and efforts:

"A key element in either the immediate program or the long-range course of action will be the nature of our discussions with the GVN. Sullivan has impressed on us the seriousness of SVN doubts as to U.S. intentions... More basically, we believe no course of action can succeed unless we are able to stiffen GVN to set its house in order and take every possible measure for political stability and to push forward the pacification program." 48/

These links received a full airing between Taylor and State and between Ruong and Taylor. To State, Taylor said:

"We have had a great deal of discussion here as to the minimum level of government required to justify mounting military pressure against the North. I would describe that minimum government as one capable of maintaining law and order in the urban areas, of securing vital military bases from VC attacks, and giving its efforts with those of U.S. As Reference B indicates we do not expect such a government for 3 to 4 months...perhaps not then if the current attempts to chip away at the Huong government continue...However, if the government falters and gives good reason to believe that it will never attain the desired level of performance, I would favor going against the North anyway. The purpose of such an attack would be to give palliative treatment for a government in extremis and to make sure that the DRV does not get off unscathed in any final settlement." 49/

In his conversation with Ruong, the latter requested:

"That I obtain a reaffirmation of U.S. policy toward VN. Ruong referred to U.S. action in Gulf of Tonkin and the lift in morale VN had received at this display of determination by the U.S. to strike against the North. Subsequently, however, U.S. had appeared to emphasize almost exclusively necessity considering war within SVN."
itself. I responded that reciprocal responsibilities were involved. On the GVN side it was essential that a stable government be established capable of directing affairs of the Nation and particularly of directing the national pacification effort. Should his government demonstrate it was capable of achieving satisfactory degree of government stability and effectiveness a wider range of possibilities would undoubtedly be open for discussion. Huong indicated his complete understanding of the situation."

At this time another case of non-consultation blew up. RVNAF reorganization plans had passed back and forth between the MRC and MACV since July. Then, on November 10, the MRC produced a plan that differed materially from the last one MACV had seen, Huong signed it, and it was published on November 11 before MACV could review it. Westmoreland and Taylor both protested to their respective contacts in the strongest terms; the decrees were withdrawn, changed to MACV's satisfaction, and reissued.

On November 26, Westmoreland squelched an apparent coup planned by Ky. He heard of unusual activity at VNRF headquarters and asked Ky to his office. Ky bluntly stated a case for a change of leadership. Westmoreland said:

"After patiently listening to the foregoing, I informed Ky in no uncertain terms that the U.S. government would not support a change of command by other than orderly and legal process. (This statement was cleared in advance with Ambassador Johnson.) Ky was obviously impressed by my statement and said that he would not take action for three months, but if the situation continued to deteriorate he would be constrained to act in national interest."

This episode was the first sign of Young Turk action against the new government, and the first recorded sign of Ky's own ambitions. The U.S. reaction underlined the USG's opposition to sudden change without broad support, even though it was expected that the military would return to power eventually.

8. A Lecture And a Program For GVN

NSAM 31½, September 10, which had called for actions to strengthen GVN, had set wheels in motion toward spelling out a U.S. program within SVN to complement the contemplated actions against the North. Taylor returned to Washington for consultations at the end of November. In the NSC, he argued that a strong message to GVN about its problems would most likely produce the optimum response. He said a threat by the U.S. to withdraw unless they improve would be too much of a gamble. There was no discussion of intermediate leverage or sanctions between this extreme threat and none at all. The discussion also highlighted the fear that GVN might collapse or be replaced by neutralists who would ask the U.S. to withdraw; all agreed that neutralism could not be accepted, and that
the U.S. should minimize this risk by full backing of the existing GVN. 53/

Taylor returned to Saigon with an approved statement and program for GVN that embodied his principal recommendations. Its public aspect was an across the board increase in the approved strengths of all elements of RVNAF and the paramilitary, in support of the Hop Tac pacification plan and its outgrowths that had been in the works since July. Its unannounced aspect included a rationale showing a clear shift of emphasis from the views at the highest levels that had developed in the first half of the year. As presented to GVN, it said:

"It was the clear conclusion of the recent review in Washington of the situation in South Vietnam that the unsatisfactory progress being made in the Pacification Program was the result of two primary causes from which many secondary causes stem. The primary cause has been the governmental instability in Saigon, and the second the continued reinforcement and direction of the Viet Cong by the Government of North Vietnam. It was recognized that to change the downward trend of events, it will be necessary to deal adequately with both of these factors.

"However it was the clear view that these factors are not of equal importance. First and above all, there must be a stable, effective Vietnamese Government able to conduct a successful campaign against the Viet Cong even if the aid from North Vietnam for the Viet Cong should end. It was the view that, while the elimination of North Vietnam intervention would raise morale on our side and make it easier for the Government of Vietnam to function, it would not in itself bring an end to Viet Cong insurgency. It would rather be an important contributory factor to the creation of conditions favoring a successful campaign against the Viet Cong within South Vietnam.

"Thus, since action against North Vietnam would only be contributory and not central to winning the war against the Viet Cong, it would not be prudent to incur the risks which are inherent in an expansion of hostilities until there were a government in Saigon capable of handling the serious problems inevitably involved in such an expansion, and capable of promptly and fully exploiting the favorable effects which may be anticipated if we are successful in terminating the support and direction of the Viet Cong by North Vietnam."

Then it went to the point:

"...In the view of the United States, there is a certain minimum condition to be brought about in South Vietnam before new measures against North Vietnam would be either justified or practicable. At the minimum, the Government in Saigon
should be able to speak for and to its people who will need special guidance and leadership throughout the coming critical period. The Government should be capable of maintaining law and order in the principal centers of population, assuring their effective execution by military and police forces completely responsive to its authority. The Government must have at its disposal means to cope promptly and effectively with enemy reactions which must be expected to result from any change in the pattern of our operations.

"To bring about this condition will require a demonstration of far greater national unity against the Communist enemy at this critical time than exists at present. It is a matter of greatest difficulty for the United States Government to require great sacrifices by American citizens on behalf of South Vietnam when reports from Saigon repeatedly give evidence of heedless self-interest and shortsightedness among so many major political groups. As a quid pro quo, it said:

"...While the Government of Vietnam is making progress toward achieving the goals set forth above, the United States Government would be willing to strike harder at infiltration routes in Laos and at sea. With respect to Laos, the United States Government is prepared, in conjunction with the Royal Laos Government, to add United States air power as needed to restrict the use of Laotian territory as a route of infiltration into South Vietnam. With respect to the sea, the United States Government would favor an intensification of those covert maritime operations which have proved their usefulness in harassing the enemy. The United States would regard the combination of these operations in Laos and at sea as constituting Phase I of a measured increase of military pressures directed toward reducing infiltration and warning the Government of North Vietnam of the risks it is running.

"...If the Government of Vietnam is able to demonstrate its effectiveness and capability of achieving the minimum conditions set forth above, the United States Government is prepared to consider a program of direct military pressure on North Vietnam as Phase II...

"As contemplated by the United States Government, Phase II would, in general terms, constitute a series of air attacks on North Vietnam progressively mounting in scope and intensity for the purpose of convincing the leaders of North Vietnam that it is to their interest to cease aid to the Viet Cong and respect the independence and security of South Vietnam."
GVN promised the shock to more energy and effectiveness; then when such
energy and effectiveness actually became visible, the U.S. promised, the
U.S. would begin bombing North Vietnam.

The program included the following areas in which progress would
aid pacification and would measure the GVN's effectiveness:

1. and 2. Increasing RVNAF, paramilitary, and police to and
above existing authorized strengths.


4. Speeding up budgetary procedures and spending in the
provinces.

5. Strengthening the province chiefs.


7. More vigor in Hop Tac.

8. After a delay, "review cases of political prisoners
from previous regimes." 22/

To leave no doubt about what it wanted, the program said:

"Better performance in the prosecution of the war against
the Viet Cong needs to be accompanied by actions to convince
the people of the interest of their government in their well-
being. Better performance in itself is perhaps the most con-
vincing evidence but can be supplemented by such actions as
frequent visits by officials and ranking military officers
to the provinces for personal orientation and "trouble shoot-
ing." The available information media offer a channel of
communication with the people which could be strengthened
and more efficiently employed. The physical appearance of
the cities, particularly of Saigon, shows a let-down in civic
pride which, if corrected, would convey a message of govern-
mental effectiveness to their inhabitants. Similarly, in
the country an expanded rural development program could
carry the government's presence into every reasonably secure
village and hamlet.

"If governmental performance and popular appeal are
significantly improved, there will be little difficulty in
establishing confidence in the government. However, this
confidence should be expressed, not merely implied. It is
particularly important that the military leaders continue
to express public confidence in the government and the firm
intention to uphold it. While not giving an impression of
submitting to pressure, the government might explore honorable