

Yawing Toward Charybdis: Intelligence Influence on Johnson Administration Cold War Policy
in 1964-5

by

Scott Edward McIntosh

B.A., University of Kansas, 1994
M.A., Naval Postgraduate School, 2004

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2025

Abstract

This work analyzes the Johnson Administration's decision-making in U.S.-Soviet relations during 1964 and 1965—specifically the period between the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf Incident and Premier Aleksei Kosygin's visit to Hanoi in February of 1965. Following relatively closely behind both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and within the context of a burgeoning U.S. commitment to Southeast Asia, this period was perilous, making the administration's decision process regarding its principal Cold War adversary worthy of analysis. However, instead of employing the world's most robust intelligence apparatus to inform its decision making, the Johnson White House used it to justify policy choices it had made.

To explore this phenomenon, there are two important questions that this work seeks to address. First, were senior decision-makers at the National Security Council (NSC) receiving accurate intelligence on Soviet attitudes toward these major events? Second, did it undergo alteration before these decision-makers pondered available courses of action? The findings will allow an investigation of the Johnson administration's decision process and the influence that observations from both information collectors and analysts had on that process.

While much analysis has occurred regarding the Intelligence Cycle, as well as intelligence's influence on foreign policy, this study will, by parsing the model into its components, derive where the cycle succeeded or failed to influence policymaking during three crises in 1964 and 1965 that shaped U.S.-Soviet relations and the Johnson Administration's decision to begin a full-scale intervention in South Vietnam. In these three crises, U.S. policymakers succeeded in preventing a direct conflict with the Soviet Union and/or the People's Republic of China, which was important. However, in Vietnam, as these chapters will elucidate,

the Intelligence Cycle failed to influence policy: the policy was already in place, and the Intelligence Cycle was disregarded if its products failed to support the policy; or it was twisted to provide narrow results that validated predetermined policies. At the strategic level, the United States possessed excellent intelligence, and policy-makers accepted and acted upon it, as this work will elucidate in its narrative on the U.S.-Soviet bilateral relationship during this period. Simultaneously, however, in its policy toward Vietnam, the administration focused its attention on tactical over operational intelligence products; the intelligence apparatus—beginning at the Tonkin Gulf Incident—served more as a cheerleader for the policy in place, and not to provide guidance to American policy-makers.

The Kennedy and Johnson Administrations' Basic National Security Policy (BNSP), drawn up by Walt Rostow, provided the broad outline for the administrations' perception of the Soviet Union, as well as the doctrine for coping with it. Rostow's document offers a guide for how the United States government intended to respond to difficult Cold War questions, including: How the U.S. should answer Soviet attempts to influence formerly colonized states; how to deal with growing tensions between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the USSR; and under what circumstances the government would risk American troops in another land war inside Asia. Understanding the BNSP that the Johnson administration inherited and preserved is critical to deriving the influence of available intelligence reporting and analysis on the actions that occurred within the scope of this work.

Yawing Toward Charybdis: Intelligence Influence on Johnson Administration Cold War Policy
in 1964-5

by

Scott Edward McIntosh

B.A., University of Kansas, 1994
M.A., Naval Postgraduate School, 2004

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2025

Approved by:

Major Professor
Andrew Orr

Copyright

© Scott Edward McIntosh 2025.

Abstract

This work analyzes the Johnson Administration's decision-making in U.S.-Soviet relations during 1964 and 1965—specifically the period between the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf Incident and Premier Aleksei Kosygin's visit to Hanoi in February of 1965. Following relatively closely behind both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and within the context of a burgeoning U.S. commitment to Southeast Asia, this period was perilous, making the administration's decision process regarding its principal Cold War adversary worthy of analysis. However, instead of employing the world's most robust intelligence apparatus to inform its decision making, the Johnson White House used it to justify policy choices it had made.

To explore this phenomenon, there are two important questions that this work seeks to address. First, were senior decision-makers at the National Security Council (NSC) receiving accurate intelligence on Soviet attitudes toward these major events? Second, did it undergo alteration before these decision-makers pondered available courses of action? The findings will allow an investigation of the Johnson administration's decision process and the influence that observations from both information collectors and analysts had on that process.

While much analysis has occurred regarding the Intelligence Cycle, as well as intelligence's influence on foreign policy, this study will, by parsing the model into its components, derive where the cycle succeeded or failed to influence policymaking during three crises in 1964 and 1965 that shaped U.S.-Soviet relations and the Johnson Administration's decision to begin a full-scale intervention in South Vietnam. In these three crises, U.S. policymakers succeeded in preventing a direct conflict with the Soviet Union and/or the People's Republic of China, which was important. However, in Vietnam, as these chapters will elucidate,

the Intelligence Cycle failed to influence policy: the policy was already in place, and the Intelligence Cycle was disregarded if its products failed to support the policy; or it was twisted to provide narrow results that validated predetermined policies. At the strategic level, the United States possessed excellent intelligence, and policy-makers accepted and acted upon it, as this work will elucidate in its narrative on the U.S.-Soviet bilateral relationship during this period. Simultaneously, however, in its policy toward Vietnam, the administration focused its attention on tactical over operational intelligence products; the intelligence apparatus—beginning at the Tonkin Gulf Incident—served more as a cheerleader for the policy in place, and not to provide guidance to American policy-makers.

The Kennedy and Johnson Administrations' Basic National Security Policy (BNSP), drawn up by Walt Rostow, provided the broad outline for the administrations' perception of the Soviet Union, as well as the doctrine for coping with it. Rostow's document offers a guide for how the United States government intended to respond to difficult Cold War questions, including: How the U.S. should answer Soviet attempts to influence formerly colonized states; how to deal with growing tensions between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the USSR; and under what circumstances the government would risk American troops in another land war inside Asia. Understanding the BNSP that the Johnson administration inherited and preserved is critical to deriving the influence of available intelligence reporting and analysis on the actions that occurred within the scope of this work.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	ix
Acknowledgements.....	x
Dedication	xiii
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 - U.S. Cold War Policy and the Intelligence Cycle in 1964.....	33
Chapter 3 - The Tonkin Gulf Incident	83
Chapter 4 - Khrushchev's Fall	122
Chapter 5 - Kosygin's Hanoi Visit.....	150
Chapter 6 - Conclusion	221
Bibliography	222

List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Military Concept of the Intelligence Cycle	61, 93, 108, 163,
--	-------------------

Acknowledgements

We are all products of training, education, experience, and mentoring. Any project this voluminous confirms that.

In 2020 I was behind the podium at a small private university, teaching management, communications, and business intelligence, in an environment with dwindling opportunity for growth or mentorship. In a funk, I consulted three of my previous mentors—Drs. Les Grau at Fort Leavenworth’s Foreign Military Studies Office, Rick Newton at the Irregular Warfare Center, and Ron Dains at the Air Command and Staff College—and independently received the same guidance from all three vectors. You have the GI Bill in your pocket, they said, and four separate wars worth of personal history. Maybe it’s time to apply for a doctoral program.

During a break from a class I was attending at the Las Vegas Metro Police Department I called Dr. David Graff at Kansas State, who encouraged me to take the GRE again and submit an application. Soon, in my fifth decade, I was in class at with other military officers—active and retired—pulling drafts from the font of knowledge in courses taught by Drs. Andrew Orr, Don Mrozek, Brent Maner, Jeff Pickering, Heather McCrea, Phil Tiemeyer, and others. I drew on my experiences in air support, peacekeeping, and intelligence analysis to try to keep up in class and—most importantly—to contribute.

We as writers fight for feedback. Full stop. Dr. Andrew Orr, as my principal adviser, has vigorously and repeatedly applied it, supporting multiple re-writes, outlines, and diverse avenues of research for each submitted draft. I have also leaned upon one of my favorite Kansas writers—the late Andrew Porter Brown, alongside his muse and in-house editor Patricia Newton Brown, who offered consistent encouragement from their Baltimore cottage; as well as one of

my oldest friends Dr. Kaye Monk-Morgan, who now presides over the Kansas Leadership Center in Wichita and consistently reminds me to “trust the process” when I get cranky. My colleagues at the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies—RADM Matthew Bell (USCG, Ret.), BG Dieter Bareihs (USAF, Ret.), and Dr. Christine Duprow—have also added their support to this endeavor, as well as provision of consistent occasions to present before and to click back into my old community of national security educators and practitioners.

The sorties to both the Eisenhower and LBJ Libraries in, respectively, Abilene and Austin, were supported by Kansas State University’s James C. Carey Research and Travel Award, Leroy E. and Mary Sullivan Page Fund for Graduate Students in History; as well as the Anne S. Higham Memorial History Award. On these research journeys I was introduced to the superlative public servants at the National Archives and Records Administration, and I’d like to especially voice my thanks to Jenna De Graffenried at the LBJ and Kristyn Crossley at the Eisenhower Libraries, as well as their respective staffs. We do not pay them enough, in my opinion, to preserve and provide access to the archival gems they keep on behalf of the American public.

I recently read that what we do on a Sunday defines us, and my opportunities to volunteer the gift of time have also influenced the work you hold in your hands. I had initially signed on with the *Air Commando Journal* in 2013 to assist in getting the small USAF Special Operations community’s war stories into print; between the declassification process and the stark fact that we are losing more of these heroes every day, I was challenged and enthused to support the ACJ’s mission, and still am. Writing and editing articles for the journal—every issue of which is now housed in the Library of Congress Newspaper and Periodical Reading Room—has been one of the enduring joys in my life.

I would also like to thank Mike Noller and Kristin Martin at Wichita's Museum of World Treasures, who set me loose to build exhibits and thus convey the stories around artifacts from the bridge of the *USS Maddox* and the infirmary at Dachau. Researching the Tonkin Gulf Incident and the allied liberation of the concentration camps was exhausting and grim work, but putting it into an educational format for the public was time well spent. Our museums are no less valuable than our archives, and deserve our fervent support.

In short, no one takes on an enterprise like this one without robust encouragement and guidance, not to mention constant reflection upon one's own training, education, experience, and mentoring. I have been blessed with all that, and I hope these pages convey it.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first of all to my wife, Shana, who since 1995 has shared this journey and taken on new roles as mom, aesthetic nurse, and crossfit coach. I also dedicate it to our three children—Reese, Evann, and Sami Jo. Through each long-distance move (from San Angelo to Olsbrücken) and deployment (from Mont-de-Marsan to Al-Asad), these four people have been marvelous examples of adaptation and resilience. Again, the old man is aware of his blessings.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This work analyzes the Johnson Administration's decision-making in U.S.-Soviet relations during 1964 and 1965—specifically the period between the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf Incident and Premier Aleksei Kosygin's visit to Hanoi in February of 1965. Following relatively closely behind both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and within the context of a burgeoning U.S. commitment to Southeast Asia, this period was perilous, making the administration's decision process regarding its principal Cold War adversary worthy of analysis. However, instead of employing the world's most robust intelligence apparatus to inform its decision making, the Johnson White House used it to justify policy choices it had made.

To explore this phenomenon, there are two important questions that this work seeks to address. First, were senior decision-makers at the National Security Council (NSC) receiving accurate intelligence on Soviet attitudes toward these major events? Second, did it undergo alteration before these decision-makers pondered available courses of action? The findings will allow an investigation of the Johnson administration's decision process and the influence that observations from both information collectors and analysts had on that process.

While much analysis has occurred regarding the Intelligence Cycle, as well as intelligence's influence on foreign policy, this study will, by parsing the model into its components, derive where the cycle succeeded or failed to influence policymaking during three crises in 1964 and 1965 that shaped U.S.-Soviet relations and the Johnson Administration's decision to begin a full-scale intervention in South Vietnam. In these three crises, U.S. policymakers succeeded in preventing a direct conflict with the Soviet Union and/or the People's Republic of China, which was important. However, in Vietnam, as these chapters will elucidate,

the Intelligence Cycle failed to influence policy: the policy was already in place, and the Intelligence Cycle was disregarded if its products failed to support the policy; or it was twisted to provide narrow results that validated predetermined policies. At the strategic level, the United States possessed excellent intelligence, and policy-makers accepted and acted upon it, as this work will elucidate in its narrative on the U.S.-Soviet bilateral relationship during this period. Simultaneously, however, in its policy toward Vietnam, the administration focused its attention on tactical over operational intelligence products; the intelligence apparatus—beginning with the Tonkin Gulf Incident—served more as a cheerleader for the policy in place, and not to provide guidance to American policy-makers.

The Kennedy and Johnson Administrations' Basic National Security Policy (BNSP), drawn up by Walt Rostow, provided the broad outline for the administrations' perception of the Soviet Union, as well as the doctrine for coping with it. Rostow's document offers a guide for how the United States government intended to respond to difficult Cold War questions, including: How the U.S. should answer Soviet attempts to influence formerly colonized states; how to deal with growing tensions between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the USSR; and under what circumstances the government would risk American troops in another land war inside Asia. Understanding the BNSP that the Johnson administration inherited and preserved is critical to deriving the influence of available intelligence reporting and analysis on the actions that occurred within the scope of this work.

Understanding the process of applying the BNSP requires exploring the ideal and actual relationship between intelligence consumers and producers—defined by the Intelligence Cycle. If, for example, decision-makers gleaned information that should have steered policy away from adverse action, and they did not act upon that information, the Intelligence Cycle provides a

useful model for tracing the origin of the disfunction. At what step in the ideal process did it fail? Were all the steps in the model completed? Moreover, if the intelligence enterprise performed the necessary steps, and the intelligence delivered was accurate and timely, did the administration act upon its recommendations to either seize opportunity or avoid risk? The case studies in the third, fourth, and fifth chapters will address these queries and reveal that the LBJ administration did not.

An extensive historiography examines the Tonkin Gulf Incident, the subsequent resolution, and the administration's internal debates, much of which draws upon the Pentagon Papers.¹ Most of the available analysis, though, concentrates upon the Johnson White House and the domestic politics that shaped the policy toward Vietnam after the attack on the *USS Maddox* in August of 1964. Considering the possibility of another Asian war involving the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, analyzing the Soviet impressions from the event would widen the aperture on the discussion of intelligence shaping pertinent U.S. policy, and this work aims to do so. The Tonkin Gulf case argues that the Johnson White House prosecuted a clear intelligence cycle, but one demanding support for an existing policy decision—to justify an undeclared war in Southeast Asia and the augmented American forces needed to prosecute it.

After President Johnson pushed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution through Congress, a second event that could have heated up the Cold War occurred in October of 1964, when the Politburo in Moscow removed Nikita Khrushchev from his post at the pinnacle of Soviet power. Any transition of authority in a nation can cause great instability and even violence. The USSR had only recently brandished its nuclear capability in the western hemisphere, and several people who acted to remove Khrushchev blamed him for relinquishing that opportunity in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Khrushchev's ouster was an event that carried great peril for world

peace. In a closed society like the Soviet Union, it was difficult to gather intelligence on this development, and the White House certainly needed it. This study will both elucidate the sources that provided the ground truth on this new regime halfway across the world and trace how that intelligence was used, ignored, or misused in the Johnson Administration. After all, if President Johnson picked up the newly-installed hotline to Moscow, it would be best to know who would answer the phone on the other end. Given the other events demanding the president's attention in this period, however, exacerbating the situation in the Kremlin would have acted to counter both the status quo and the national security policy in place since the previous administration; LBJ therefore used derived intelligence to monitor the power struggle in Moscow, but not to seize advantage in the Cold War.

Once that new regime was in place, though, and the air campaign against North Vietnam was activated, a third pertinent event imperiled the two superpowers, and it comprises the final case study in this work. A triumvirate emerged to lead the USSR after Khrushchev's expulsion—composed of Leonid Brezhnev, Nikolai Podgorny, and Aleksei Kosygin—and in February of 1965 Kosygin was performing a state visit to Hanoi when American aircraft bombed North Vietnam. The Soviet leader survived the attack, but if he had not, then the cascading effects could have easily pushed U.S.-Soviet relations again toward war. The intelligence apparatus had, however, advised the White House of Kosygin's presence in North Vietnam's capital in advance; the airstrike was launched, regardless. This final case study will serve to explicate the available intelligence and its influence on the decision to prosecute the attack in support of the developing U.S. policy of escalation in Vietnam.

The three case studies will further demonstrate that the U.S. intelligence enterprise performed the Intelligence Cycle (which the Church Committee confirmed in 1975 was

enshrined in intelligence policy during the scope of this study),² and the intelligence was delivered in an accurate and timely manner. But did the administration *act upon its recommendations* to either seize opportunity or avoid risk? The final chapter will examine external influences, in both the bureaucratic and human dynamics of decision-making at the highest levels, which explain why the Johnson administration disregarded the intelligence enterprise's recommendations and analysis. To support this effort, the work will utilize analyses from the field of intelligence studies which delve deeply into the human elements of the Intelligence Cycle—specifically those from political scientists and international relations scholars Robert Jervis and Richard K. Betts.³

Jervis, in *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*,⁴ described a number of the most important influences upon foreign policy. He posed a model in which two systems compete for position in formulating that policy. System 1 is characterized as “rapid, filled with shortcuts, and largely unconscious... the default mode because of its speed and ease.”⁵ System 2 represents the intellectual heavy lifting in foreign policy formation, which “is so costly in terms of mental energy [that] we engage it only under prompting, and we overestimate the degree to which thinking of this type rules our lives.”⁶ Jervis implied here that given information inputs to formulate policy, one system is generated in the heart or the gut, while the second is more cerebral, and that the competition between them was worthy of analysis. “System 1 is intuitive, but because our intuitions are not schooled by careful methodology, it is overimpressed by evidence that is first-hand and vivid, mistakes correlation for causation, develops simple stories, and is prone to exaggerate the influence of personal characteristics and underplay external factors in explaining others’ behavior.”⁷ The intelligence community has, again, derived a process to at least equalize the influence of the two systems—the aforementioned Intelligence

Cycle, in which a decisionmaker or customer seeks information and the intelligence apparatus produces it.

Betts, a staffer on the Church Committee and international relations expert, posited that three “enemies of intelligence” categories cause intelligence failures—the adversarial, foreign *outside* enemies; the *innocent* enemies within one’s own system who “dismayed by U.S. intelligence failures that so often appear egregious and avoidable in hindsight,” focus upon failures enabled through negligence, turf wars, inefficiency, etc., who actually impede intelligence by seeking to improve it;⁸ and, finally, the *inherent* enemies:

These enemies are a collection of mental limitations, dilemmas, contradictory imperatives, paradoxical interactions, and trade-offs among objectives in the intelligence process itself that often block proper assessment and judgment and make it difficult to fix one source of failure without creating another... This motley third set of enemies is less evident to observers outside the intelligence system, and it is reinforced by the outside enemies whose initiatives feed and exploit misjudgment. Inherent enemies pervade the process no matter who is involved, and they intrude time and again. Although not immune to defeat, they are extraordinarily resistant.⁹

The Intelligence Cycle, by mapping the process and defining each of its stages, seeks to mitigate this phenomenon, but it is one that fits snugly into Jervis’s System 2.

The case studies will evaluate the components of each event’s Intelligence Cycle and which intuitive, human influences characterized in the Jervis and Betts models may affect that critical link between intelligence inputs and policy formation in the Johnson White House. Fortunately, there is adequate material for evaluating each of these critical events encompassed between the summers of 1964 and 1965.

Though Russia’s archives are now mostly closed to Western researchers, the recorded impressions of Soviet diplomats like Kosygin¹⁰ and Anatoly Dobrynin¹¹ describe Soviet perceptions of the major events in 1964 and 1965. This is buttressed by the recorded experiences

of American diplomats stationed at U.S. Embassy Moscow—i.e., Llewelyn Thompson¹² and Charles Bohlen¹³--as well as declassified memoranda, cables, and intelligence estimates now available in U.S. institutions, that serve to elucidate the Johnson Administration's deliberations on pertinent foreign policy decisions. Collecting, collating, and connecting these estimates, however, is not enough to broaden the aperture. The analyses themselves require analysis, in the context of the decisions they influenced, to derive their effects on policy.

Pertinent Historiography

After LBJ voluntarily removed himself from the presidency in 1968, there occurred, as R.B. Smith described it, “a significant transformation of American attitudes towards politics and international affairs” due to congressional hearings on Tonkin (i.e., the Fulbright Hearings), which drove the “public and political scientists alike [to] call into question the credibility of a government system whose inner workings they had previously taken for granted.” Smith argued that the 1971 publication of the Pentagon Papers “also went a long way towards shaping subsequent interpretations of the origins of the war. It was the Watergate scandal, he argued, and the subsequent Freedom of Information Act, that made “the 1970s a veritable ‘age of revelations’ in American public life.”¹⁴

The road was open for candid analysis of the previous decade, and archival materials from both the Kennedy and Johnson presidential libraries facilitated a large body of work on the Vietnam War. In broad terms, the subsequent works on the conflict can be sorted into “Good War” and “Bad War” camps.¹⁵ They are further divided into three perspectives: liberal, radical, and conservative.¹⁶

The liberal perspective was least cynical about American goals and aspirations for Vietnam. Historian George Hopkins described it as “good anti-communist intentions gone

awry.” Building upon the Truman Doctrine and the Domino Theory, JFK and LBJ fell prey to the two immediately preceding administrations’ hubris, and inadvertently led America down the “‘slippery slope’ into the ‘quagmire’ of Vietnam.”¹⁷ Within this perspective, however, Hopkins also identified a darker interpretation in which, fearing a second McCarthy Red Scare (this time the charge would be losing Southeast Asia rather than China), both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations invested increasing amounts of American blood and treasure into the theater in the hope of avoiding “severe conservative criticism at home... [or disappointing the] opposition to the spread of communism abroad.”¹⁸ They were, in effect, caught between the monolithic Communist adversary and a congressional chorus screaming “Appeasement!” from the gallery. Avoiding these two hazards thus compelled the two Democratic administrations to orient toward “deepening US involvement in Vietnam... [though] the chances for success were not good.”¹⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger’s 1967 work *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1966*²⁰ and David Halberstam’s 1972 work *The Best and the Brightest*²¹ are exemplary of this liberal perspective.²²

Like Schlesinger, Halberstam explored the policy-making process within the JFK and LBJ White Houses, taking into account factors such as: the White House staff ignoring Department of State advice that did not match administration aims; a military leadership unprepared to prosecute a long-term counterinsurgency; fear of Chinese forces intervening as they had in Korea; and President Johnson’s balancing act between the war and his top priority, the “Great Society” domestic programs. Again, the perspective depicts the successive administrations increasingly investing American resources in Vietnam, their initial intentions being morally sound, but unable to slow or stop those resources, even as advice to do so increased both inside and outside Washington. There are numerous other histories fitting the

liberal perspective, for example George Herring's 1979 work *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*²³ and, by extension, Robert McNamara's *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*²⁴ (1995), in which he agreed with Herring's assessment that the two administrations' massive resource expenditure in the theater did little to actually halt the spread of Communism.

The radical perspective, in response, believed that the U.S. pursuit of global hegemony in the Cold War drove it into the region. Moreover, especially during the Cold War, the U.S. had forged an empire with economic demands that forced it to attack any Third World nationalist revolution revealing any tinge of either anti-capitalism or pro-communism. This perspective is exemplified by works such as Gabriel Kolko's 1985 publication, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*, in which he depicts the Vietnam War as a huge expenditure of money and firepower, with little chance of success within the internal and external dynamics of Southeast Asia before, during, and after U.S. participation.²⁵ Similarly, Marilyn Young's *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990* (1987)²⁶ and 1989's *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After* by Thomas J. McCormick fit within the radical category, with similar focuses upon macroeconomics and the concept of hegemony in the context of American post-war foreign policy aims.²⁷ There is an old adage that journalism is the first rough draft of history, though, and the radical perspective had emerged as a response to the liberal perspective, one dominated by former government officials and journalists who were closest to the events.

Finally, the more conservative, revisionist perspective in Vietnam War historiography surfaced around the time that Ronald Reagan took office in the early 1980s, when American culture was looking deeply into the United States's role in both the Cold War and foreign policy

at large—“a reaffirmation of pride, patriotism, and militant anti-communism. As part of this conservative resurgence, the Vietnam War has been elevated, in the president’s words, to ‘a noble cause.’”²⁸

On the heels of the failed Iranian hostage rescue and the Soviet Union’s recent invasion of Afghanistan, as well as popular Vietnam films like “Apocalypse Now” and “The Deer Hunter,” some historians and retired military officers began to push a new perspective into the historiography, one that asserted the war was necessary, and that the U.S. could have saved South Vietnam if Washington had stayed the course. Whether or not South Vietnam held any concrete strategic value for the United States, the conflict, according to this perspective, was necessary. Both U.S. military and diplomatic credibility were being questioned, and the world was watching. This narrative further proposes that the U.S. domestic audience grew increasingly divided as the conflict grew increasingly expensive; leaving Vietnam was thus necessary to preserve political consensus and keep the U.S. in the global competition against Communism. Therefore, Vietnam is perceived as a lost battle within the overarching Cold War. Political scientist Guenter Lewy’s *America in Vietnam*,²⁹ published in 1980, is exemplary. In the book’s introduction, Lewy defended the war as both moral and legal,³⁰ and in subsequent pages asserted that it was the operations and tactics used to prosecute the war that were flawed. A series of military officers offered similar perspectives afterward, for example Harry G. Summers, who in his 1982 work *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*,³¹ placed responsibility for the war’s outcome upon (other) professional military officers, who he asserted had ceded strategic decision-making to civilian officials like Robert McNamara. Former U.S. Army Chief of Staff Bruce Palmer two years later published *The 25-Year War: America’s Military Role in*

Vietnam,³² and these two works are often mentioned in the same paragraph when discussing the revisionist perspective.³³

Contrasting with the other perspectives, this perspective departed from the foundational assumptions such as “illusions of anti-communism, ignorance of Vietnamese culture and history, and the arrogance of power.” The revisionists instead “defended U.S. intervention, exculpated American warfare of any wrongdoing, and judged the military effort a success,” and sometimes hinted at “a ‘stab in the back’ by the media, Congress, or critics of the war.”³⁴ Summers and Palmer, though, deviated from the conservative-revisionist standard, putting “responsibility for failure on both the nation’s civilian *and* military leadership (italics added).”³⁵ They argued that the U.S. military could have succeeded in Vietnam, but for “deficiency of preintervention military planning and advice, the failure to issue a declaration of war, the ineffectiveness of Westmoreland’s strategy, and the potential success of strategic alternatives.”³⁶ As time passed, though, documents were declassified, and participants retired from military service, there was thus more room for introspective officers to add to the historiography and discussion of the war.

In 1997, an *active-duty* U.S. Army officer, H.R. McMaster, though, turned the Ph.D. thesis he wrote at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill into *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam*.³⁷ Like Summers and Palmer, he avoided blaming the media or the antiwar movement. Like exemplars of Hopkins’s liberal perspective, though, he also emphasized LBJ’s fear of being labeled another Neville Chamberlain,³⁸ and the possibility of China intervening in Vietnam as it had in the Korean War.³⁹ As in any model, morphing and bleeding between these perspectives is inevitable, and it is likely that all three will continue to provide insight into the Kennedy and

Johnson administrations' decisions to incorporate a small, unconventional war on the other side of the Pacific into their strategic calculations.

In 1985, in the introduction to *An International History of the Vietnam War*, R.B. Smith lamented that access to intelligence archives was limited to historians, a condition making it “impossible to assess with any degree of confidence the extent to which the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies truly understood the strategy and tactics of their ‘enemy’—whether in the Vietnamese jungles or in the Kremlin and Peking.” Nor did he believe there was access at the time to the type of archival documents needed for deriving “the wider diplomatic context,” particularly “United States diplomacy in relation to the Soviet Union and China.”⁴⁰ By the 1990s, though, as the U.S. Government began to de-classify more documents pertinent to the Johnson White House's decisions during this period, the scholarship had arguably emerged more objective and nuanced. The fact that it is increasingly performed by historians that were not actual participants in either the government, the military, or the press has predictably curtailed the emotion and partisan perspective within the historiography of the Vietnam War. This represents a certain paradox, though. As declassification makes more documentation available and thus decreases the mystery regarding such a topic, its participants are decreasingly available to comment on it. Essential and fresh perspectives on events described in this dissertation—from Halberstam, Neil Sheehan, Rostow, McNamara, etc.—would be most welcome, but these eyewitnesses have passed on.

As early as 1983, there were signs that historians were evolving from these three perspectives and their emphasis on whom was to blame for the catastrophe. At the time, British School of Oriental and Asian Studies scholar R.B. Smith, in the second of his three-volume history of the war, described the Gelb Thesis, in which “everything the Americans did in

Vietnam down to 1968 followed logically and remorselessly from President Truman's commitment to assist the French against the Viet-Minh in 1950." *The Pentagon Papers* source material, Smith argued, was based mostly on the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Vietnam, so that "any consideration of the wider context of relations with China and the Soviet Union, or of the struggle for South-East Asia, was automatically excluded from the enquiry."⁴¹ Indeed, the study of this segment of the Cold War demands a scrutiny of available source materials beyond that bilateral relationship, and American historians would be remiss if they avoid it. There is, for example, today an effort to look more closely at available Vietnamese sources. While this dissertation does not disregard this beneficial turn in recent scholarship, it does seek to build upon U.S. decision-makers' recollections and memoranda, while integrating culled Soviet source material to approach the more nuanced (and international) analysis that Smith espouses.

By the turn of the century, meanwhile, there were newer wars for American scholars to analyze, and successes in Panama, Desert Storm, and Kosovo had all provided much for historians to ponder about new American ways of war;⁴² in light of these conflicts, the United States had reportedly overcome many of the problems it encountered in Vietnam through application of joint/combined arms, precision-guided munitions, and maneuver warfare. In the latter two conflicts, multinational forces had applied these innovations against Soviet-style tactics, doctrine, and equipment, led by American generals who had fought as company grade officers in Vietnam. As national security scholars began to focus on the more conventional way forward, the historiography appears to have followed the trend at this time in professional military education: the lessons learned from Vietnam allegedly had been studied and remedied.

Not only were contemporary scholars advocating for the sort of war to which the U.S. could apply its strengths (i.e., *not* Vietnam), but there also emerged an emphasis on avoiding Vietnams in the future. Debate upon the utility of the doctrine Colin Powell (one of the aforementioned company-grade officers deployed to Vietnam) borrowed (and built upon) from his former boss, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, for instance, continues.⁴³ Powell's amended checklist posits eight separate conditions for commitment of U.S. military force: a vital threat to national security, a clear obtainable objective, rigorous cost and risk analysis; exhaustion of non-violent policy means to deal with the threat; an exit strategy; consideration of consequences to military action; popular support from the American electorate; and broad international support.⁴⁴ The concept was debated often, for example, during of the George H.W. Bush administration and later during the 2003 Iraq invasion. Most recently, in 2016, Eliot Cohen critiqued each of Weinberger's foundational six rules for clarity, veracity, and historic contradictions. "His attempt to codify rules for the use of military power," Cohen concluded, "has lingered, and after the painful experience of Iraq in particular has reemerged. And surely some general guidelines—less prescriptive than Weinberger's and more along the lines of the reality of warfare—make sense."⁴⁵

Powell had modified the concept and presented it in the early 1990s.⁴⁶ Throughout the decade, after the dissolution of the USSR and a string of recent military successes, however, scholars appeared to embrace the discussion of new missions for the remaining superpower. Even works on Somalia and Rwanda implied that applying conventional force to local disputes inside inhospitable terrain would be a non-starter in the future. This short hiatus lasted until 9/11, when a decidedly unconventional enemy struck the United States and both

counterinsurgency and its application in the Vietnam War, alongside new examinations of France's war there, began to emerge.

Perhaps the most recent iteration of Vietnam War analysis occurs in David Petraeus's and Andrew Roberts's *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine*. With wars occurring simultaneously in Afghanistan and Iraq, General Petraeus and his team had met at Fort Leavenworth in 2006 to compose U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*,⁴⁷ and they culled classic historiography of counterinsurgency—Roger Trinquier,⁴⁸ Alistair Horne,⁴⁹ David Galula,⁵⁰ and even Mao⁵¹—to derive lessons learned from the slow erosion of European empires in the 1950s and 1960s

Conflict identifies the damage wrought by employing the wrong success metrics—"the altar of numerology... enemy killed, miles trekked, villages 'pacified'," and failures in strategic leadership, but perhaps its most damning critique is the implication that in Vietnam the U.S. leadership both in Saigon and Washington had been slow to learn. Somewhere in the process of ingesting data, interpreting it correctly, and acting upon these inputs, events outpaced the planning, and the initiative passed to the Communists. "It took more than twelve years for [American] leaders to recognize the shortcomings of the big ideas being implemented and to remedy them. By the time General Abrams (who replaced Westmoreland at the top of Military Assistance Command Vietnam shortly after 1968's Tet Offensive) did so, the pressure for withdrawal of US forces had become so great that his ability to execute the new big ideas properly was increasingly constrained."⁵² The image of a ship caught in a maelstrom, with a strong current pulling it into tighter circles, would be appropriate for the authors' depiction of the war as "one of the most tragic cases of successive strategic leaders" failing to perform "strategic leadership" and escape the situation.⁵³

The juxtaposition of radical, liberal, and conservative perspectives to describe this failure has thus not abated—asking questions like how the U.S. ended up in the war and posing counterfactuals like how the U.S. could have won—but as American forces again deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s, Vietnam veterans at lower ranks and positions increasingly published accounts of how they survived the experience. Combat memoirs from highly-decorated junior soldiers began to emerge again,⁵⁴ as did accounts of how Vietnam affected society on the home front.⁵⁵ The war's legacy is not as confined as General Abrams's options, it seems; neither time nor geography appears to constrain its appeal to historians, journalists, or military professionals.

Regarding the function of U.S. intelligence in the 1960s at large, available historiography reveals that the United States's enterprise was successfully coping with the Cold War—especially at the strategic level. There were exceptions—for example the CIA's advice to Kennedy during the Bay of Pigs catastrophe—an acknowledged failure. Accounts of this event, though, argue that the intelligence function was corrupted toward an existing policy decision, with Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles and his Deputy Director of Plans Richard Bissell advocating for launching the failed invasion, and supporting a list of false assumptions with unsubstantiated data to do so.⁵⁶ For the most part, however, at the strategic level U.S. intelligence was adequately assessing and reporting solid information for the Kennedy White House, especially after JFK fired Dulles and Bissell in the wake of the debacle.

The intelligence endeavor that led to OPLAN 34A (which weighs heavily upon the Tonkin Gulf chapter) was operational—in that it was initially prosecuted by the CIA's operators (rather than analysts) and figured into the operational (versus strategic) level within the Southeast Asian theater, nested within Pacific Command's area of responsibility. In the attempt

to disrupt two centers of gravity inside North Vietnam—security/stability and logistics—the operators recruited and parachuted agents into it; most of them were captured and forced to transmit deceptive information back to their handlers.⁵⁷ By the time Military Assistance Command Vietnam Special Operations Group (MACV-SOG) took it over from CIA at the end of 1963, this program was rife with its own security and logistics problems. While the seaborne sabotage and raid operations were deemed more successful, there is a clear difference between blowing up infrastructure and culling actionable intelligence.

Robert McNamara's July 1962 decision to absorb this enterprise into MACV-SOG, and OPLAN 34A, testifies to that conclusion. Intelligence collection would henceforth "be gathered through the insertion of agents or spies, as well as by communications, signals, and electronic intelligence." The other four objectives, also snatched up by Department of Defense assets, were psychological operations, political pressure by means of sabotage, building a North Vietnamese resistance movement, and raids—all, again, more operational than intelligence functions.⁵⁸

Other Vietnam War intelligence initiatives deemed unsuccessful include the use of dubious "body count" success metrics and trusting acoustic sensors dropped onto the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Operation IGLOO WHITE;⁵⁹ but these occurred later, both arguably contributing to the surprise jolt of 1968's Tet Offensive, which serves as the other bookend for the decade's American intelligence failures in theater. Don Oberdorfer, in his analysis of the Tet Offensive, described "abundant signs of coming trouble" collected at the tactical level before the event.

Many of these signs were noted and reported, but few Americans in Vietnam believed that anything truly powerful, extensive and traumatic was ahead... Considering the high costs and risks involved, the idea of nationwide urban attacks for political and psychological gains seemed implausible... [but the] inertial force of habit and of bureaucracy overpowered the evidence at hand.

In fact, Military Assistance Command—Vietnam (MACV) “was in the process of *reducing* its published estimate of Communist strength in the South Vietnam as part of the campaign to show that ‘we are winning’ (italics in original).”⁶⁰ This tactical intelligence failure, one could argue, rose to the strategic level when Lyndon Johnson chose to end his own presidency in the wake of it.

The Vietnam War would not have occurred in this way without the focal events of 1964-65; further, the influence of the U.S. intelligence enterprise on these calculations is certain to provide further illumination into the Johnson administration’s decision to enter the war. Scholars have both directly and obliquely examined intelligence and policy in the national security apparatus as the United States ramped up its efforts in Vietnam in the early 1960s, above and beyond works like McMaster’s.

In his 2013 work, Fredrik Logevall, for example, argued that even though Kennedy ran on a platform of innovation and imagination vis-à-vis his predecessor’s administration, this did not apply to policy regarding Vietnam.

The Kennedy team, no doubt mindful of the fact that they had come in with the slimmest electoral majority of the twentieth century, undertook no wide-ranging discussion of the involvement they had inherited in Southeast Asia, no comprehensive review of options, no major analysis of the struggle’s importance to America’s national security.” The status quo would hold fast, it seemed. “The given was that Ho Chi Minh could not be allowed to prevail in Vietnam, that the Saigon government must survive, that failure to thwart the Communists here would only make the task harder the next time.”⁶¹

Certainly, Logevall argued, Kennedy could have ordered such an analysis made, and intelligence would have been an essential contributor to the endeavor.

The examination of intelligence apparatus (not just the U.S. intelligence community and its analysis, but the ideal Intelligence Cycle it employed, which is explored throughout this work) influence on the decision to enter this conflict—by those outside the U.S. government—had

begun, though, almost immediately. Already in 1965, seven years before *The Best and the Brightest*, Halberstam, just returned from *The New York Times* desk in Saigon, was already evaluating the CIA's performance there in print. One of its many problems, Halberstam wrote, lay in the fact that intelligence enterprises are composed of individual performers, and that

no man, once his prestige and career are committed to working for the success of a policy—and once he has told his superiors that such a policy will work—retains his objectivity. From then on, to justify his participation, he is apt to do his utmost to *make* the policy work, regardless of the consequences... Events and indices tending to show that the policy is not working are shrugged off in favor of those which show that it is; agents or individuals who consistently report to the contrary are disregarded in favor of those who are committed to the same vision. Consciously or subconsciously, intelligence becomes tailored to fit the policy (*italics in original*).⁶²

The overarching conclusion emerges thusly—and it has been applied to Pearl Harbor,⁶³ to China's entry in the Korean War,⁶⁴ and other twentieth-century American intelligence “failures”: to avert catastrophe, the top officials must both *want* intelligence assessment, and *be amenable* to altering policy based upon its revelations. Most of this literature also opines that intelligence untainted or *not* bent to conform with existing policy was good intelligence. It is often success metrics such as the notorious “body counts”⁶⁵ and “suspected truck parks,”⁶⁶ which had entered the lexicon for aggressive ground and air operations in after-action reports, that are cited in arguments that Washington used intelligence analysis to justify its actions rather than to improve them in Vietnam.

It is, therefore, this focal period between the Cuban Missile Crisis—in which the U.S. intelligence apparatus influenced policy toward an obviously successful outcome—and the clear escalation of ground and air combat operations in Vietnam that spotlights this evolution within the relationship. Regarding Vietnam, President Johnson would consult with many of the same individuals that Kennedy had during the missile crisis, to include Kennedy's Joint Chiefs of

Staff. The situation that encompassed the entire U.S. government at this point on the timeline, though (as well as Cuba and Southeast Asia)—to include legislation, diplomacy, and military power—was the overarching Cold War. To understand and stay abreast of the major rival in the competition, the U.S. national security apparatus needed timely and accurate intelligence—not just regarding the Soviet Union’s actions around the world, but within its Kremlin.

Fortunately, the Vietnam War historiography shares a development with the historiography of the Cold War at large. When scholars like Ilya Gaiduk, Qiang Zhai, and Serhii Plokhyy culled archives in Russia, China, and Ukraine, respectively, they were able to build upon the perspective from the other side. Neither the Vietnam nor the Cold War is confined within the limits of “U.S.” history, and access to material from behind the Iron Curtain can only serve to augment our understanding of both conflicts. The United States and its allies did not, after all, act in a vacuum. Senior decision-makers within these comparatively closed adversarial societies were by nature vigorous and decisive, and as time passes they are likely to disclose even more documentation, correspondence, and journals from personalities like Ho, General Giap, and their subordinates acting in command and intelligence positions.

The historiography on Nikita Khrushchev’s fall is also well-developed, though most of it emerged from Kremlinologists (Soviet political and policy analysts) and Sovietologists (who broadened the analysis to the entire Communist world). It displays several common assertions. Firstly, Khrushchev is depicted as a shaky leader, consistently hampered in his actions by either Soviet institutions or his relationships with peers at the top of the hierarchy. The second assertion describes him as an individual whose poor judgment of both politics and his political environment produced his ejection from power. The men around him, per the third assertion, punished him for either lack of leadership ability or his adherence to unpopular policies (e.g., his

Virgin Lands initiative, where waterways were diverted to irrigate deserts for agricultural projects). Finally, pertinent historians have described Khrushchev's regime as more authoritarian than Marxist-Leninist.⁶⁷ Certainly, he was making decisions within the system built by the Soviet leaders before him; Khrushchev was, however, often at odds with the more collective decision-making aspects of it, and often perceived as a maverick by his peers.

Works examining U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War are numerous. John Lewis Gaddis's *The Cold War: A New History* provided an easily-digestible overview into the perturbations both sides encountered during the period. His more detailed work *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, however, concentrated upon U.S. efforts, through eight presidential administrations, arguing that "by the end of the Cold War, the successes of containment had clearly outweighed its failures." The two superpowers, he pointed out, never went to war, and there occurred "no appeasement either, as there had been twice with Germany and once with Japan between 1914 and 1945."⁶⁸ Norwegian historian Odd Arne Westad's *The Cold War: A World History*, also acknowledged that nuclear war was averted, but his approach is still critical of both sides, fitting the conflict into a wider "war against US-led capitalism in the twentieth century," begun by the Axis powers in World War Two, but no less intense in its prosecution due to "the centrality of its ideologies and the intensity of its adherents."⁶⁹

It is axiomatic that a hot war would have employed the nuclear weaponry that both sides held in readiness. Works such as Richard Rhodes's *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*⁷⁰ and Neil Sheehan's *A Fiery Peace in a Cold War: Bernard Shriever and the Ultimate Weapon*⁷¹ explore the evolution of these weapons from Los Alamos to the fall of the

Soviet Union, as both explosive power and delivery systems for it developed to the point where victory in such a conflict grew increasingly hard to imagine.

One should not forget, however, that the Johnson administration was confronted by foreign policy questions seemingly peripheral to the Cold War. In *The End of Ambition: The United States and the Third World in the Vietnam Era*, Mark Atwood Lawrence argued that, while the BNSP was available for confronting principal Cold War adversaries, “the Kennedy administration conceived no consistent or coherent approach to the Third World generally or to specific challenges that arose on its watch. When LBJ gained the presidency, he inherited a muddled set of policies that offered no blueprint for the future.”⁷² Lawrence examined U.S. policy toward Brazil, India, Iran, Indonesia, and Southern Africa to assert that U.S. Third World policy did not change by much between the Kennedy and Nixon White Houses.⁷³ With the cacophony of Vietnam in the background, seemingly peripheral Third World conflicts could and did draw U.S. attention and resources. The U.S., after all, invaded the Dominican Republic in September 1966 and sent the Sixth Fleet to counter the Soviet Navy in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Six Day War in June of 1967.⁷⁴ The Soviets, of course, had been encouraging “the dream of world revolution” in these implicitly tangential zones since the establishment of the Comintern in 1919, so the LBJ White House was compelled to acknowledge and cope with them in support of its Cold War policies and decisions.⁷⁵

These decisions, though, have also garnered quite a bit of analysis in the last five decades. A research psychologist at Yale, Irving Janis, used three pertinent case studies—the Bay of Pigs catastrophe, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the escalation in Vietnam to study his concept *groupthink*—“a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures” or “a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are

deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action."⁷⁶ Janis's three events comprise a continuum in which the Kennedy cabinet experienced a foreign policy catastrophe, a victory in which the threats of Soviet nuclear weaponry and thermonuclear war were removed from the Western hemisphere, and, in the LBJ administration, the gradual slide into the Vietnam War.

To evaluate the effects of historical analogy on high-level decisions, Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May in their 1986 book *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers*, evaluated the Johnson administration in several instances to examine Devil's Advocacy, disruption of the status quo, and other pertinent phenomena. There were, in LBJ's Vietnam decisions

historical considerations... For instance, can Americans accomplish what the French could not? Or for another instance, will Truman's fate befall the Democrat who "loses" South Vietnam? Those, in short, are judgments of the future as a product of the past affected by presumptions about the present.⁷⁷

These presumptions, they argued, were worth examining within the decision-making process, for their roles: in defining situations; assisting in establishing "concerns, and with a sense of how concerns evolved, shape definitions of aims [and] concrete objectives;" and, finally, influencing "options and choices among them."⁷⁸ Presumptions, however, can be adapted by the developments and facts with which they collide. Neustadt and May acknowledged the analysis and collection intelligence functions in modern governments, implying a linear model, but it is the intelligence cycle that packages and evaluates new information to counter these analogies and presumptions so that decisions can develop alongside critical events. These intelligence inputs and the ways in which they are received (or they are not received) thus enable agility in

choosing courses of action; this quality in turn ensures that a decision-maker is not functioning at a pace lagging behind evolving critical events.

It is here that this study offers something novel in the approach to this short but important segment of history. Historians on both sides of the Iron Curtain have compiled works examining it, as have political scientists, journalists, psychologists, and American military officers. The Johnson administration's foreign policy has been evaluated beneath the lenses of international relations and organizational behavior, employing personal interviews with those at its nexus as well as rigorous archival research. What is for the most part missing is an examination of what the national intelligence apparatus provided the LBJ White House and how this product was employed (or not) in conjunction with established Cold War policy.

There is an initiative in Intelligence Studies to pull away from the mystique of secrecy and exclusive meetings of elite bureaucrats to “a fully fledged cultural turn” in analyzing the sorts of intelligence inputs and consequent national policies enacted. In effect, an intelligence enterprise—like politics—is neither external to nor independent of the society it serves.⁷⁹ Part and parcel of this approach is the perspective that to view “intelligence agencies as enmeshed in a complex ecosystem of political, social and cultural phenomena, can only augment the discipline and extend the reach and significance of its conclusions.”⁸⁰

While this work will provide a chapter on the Intelligence Cycle ideal, it also integrates Intelligence scholar Simon Wilmetts's perspective that views individuals as both the producers and consumers within this ideal model. Wilmetts asks, for instance, “Was it possible for American intelligence analysts to think outside of the framework of anti-communism in their intelligence assessments of foreign threats and the motives of enemy leaders?” Equally pertinent: could the analysis *consumers* think outside theirs? If the consumers' policy decisions

were already locked in place due to other influences and presumptions—for example their wartime experiences and other conclusions derived from recent major historical events—could intelligence products influence the policy?

Wilmetts also pointed out that “Cold War orthodoxy cast the Soviets as irrational and dogmatically ideological, which [its adherents] contrasted with American pragmatism and intellectual freedom. Our understanding of the respective intelligence communities during the Cold War has largely followed this framework—the KGB were straitjacketed into reaching conclusions that fit Soviet dogma, whilst the CIA were free to pursue objective truth, and at times speak truth to power.” He called for examining “western intelligence officials not as cloistered scientists, objectively interpreting fixed truths about the world, but as cultural and social beings, profoundly shaped by their ‘inventories of mental equipment.’”⁸¹ This work will show, again, that the intelligence customers’ ideology and experience profoundly shaped the relationship between intelligence and policy; further, in striving to remain valuable to those customers, the other human actors and institutions within the Intelligence Cycle appropriately shaped the product to fit both the consumers’ ideology and experience.

Scholars have, of course, previously examined intelligence issues—specifically, the quality of analysis and the ways in which it was put to use in historic events. The late John Keegan, for example, compiled a series of case studies for *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to al-Qaeda*, to conclude that intelligence, while helpful, is not a decisive factor in conflict; instead it is the consequence of “willpower... [which] always counts for more than foreknowledge.”⁸²

Keegan’s concluding chapter (“The Value of Military Intelligence”) begins with “War is ultimately about doing, not thinking,”⁸³ an assertion that Jervis would likely have perceived as

advocacy for his own more intuitive System 1 model. “War,” Keegan continues, “is not an intellectual activity, but a brutally physical one.”⁸⁴ The bomber crews transiting the Baltic to hit Peenemünde or the New Zealanders watching German paratroops’ chutes popping open over Crete would likely agree with him. At the policy-making level, though, where famously action-oriented Winston Churchill demanded the best available intelligence for each of these examples, war is about thinking; like Churchill, Lyndon Johnson depended upon a cabinet comprised of the best intellectuals and planners culled from academia, government, and industry.

“As operations and tactics are the instruments of military strategy,” wrote Colin Gray in his 1999 work *Modern Strategy*, “so strategy should serve policy goals which are instrumental in relation to a polity’s broad vision of the desirable.”⁸⁵ Scholars and statesmen alike have been compelled in the decades since Truman authorized the Hiroshima mission to consider subsequent events, and the fact that given “the historical novelty of the nuclear challenge, the superpowers, their nuclear-armed allies, and other nuclear-weapon states have done well to reach this time of writing without triggering a nuclear war.”⁸⁶ Most historians agree that Lyndon Johnson throughout his career monitored the American “polity’s broad vision of the desirable;” it is the integration of intelligence inputs into his Cold War strategy that arguably demands more scrutiny.

Fortunately, LBJ’s historiography is copious. Robert Caro, for instance, has written four volumes on Lyndon Johnson’s political career—the first three covering his work in the Senate,⁸⁷ and the fourth his time as Vice President; five volumes are reportedly planned, with the fifth—unreleased—to chronicle the final ten years of his life.⁸⁸ Historian Robert Dallek has written two volumes on LBJ’s life—1991’s *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and his Times, 1908–1960*⁸⁹ and 1998’s *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and his Times, 1961–1973*;⁹⁰ as well as

Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President in 2004.⁹¹ These works are extremely useful for plumbing the man's background and the events that shaped his approach to problem-solving. Caro argued that the "way to gain insight into any form of power is to observe it during its moments of deepest crisis, during its most intense struggles, when, under maximum stress, its every resource must be brought to bear—with the undiluted pragmatism born of absolute necessity—if the challenges facing it are to be met."⁹² Lyndon Johnson's years as a legislator had made him a masterful political operative, and this is what he brought to the presidency when he was unexpectedly called to it. These moments of *sturm und drang* in LBJ's life leading up to the 1960 election formed his style and attitudes toward decision-making, and he carried them forward into his presidency.

Putting such a life into a single volume is evidently difficult. Doris Kearns Goodwin's first book, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (1976)⁹³ appeared to do so, but her most recent—after she penned several other histories of American presidents—provided more detail on LBJ's presidency. With the assistance of her late husband Richard Goodwin—a speech-writer and staffer for both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson (and Robert Kennedy, too)—she compiled and published 2024's *An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960s*.⁹⁴ As both husband and wife spent hours meeting with LBJ, these books are particularly useful for deriving Lyndon Johnson's personal predilections, presumptions, and professional habits.

Unlike Harry Truman, when fate placed him in the White House, LBJ kept most of his predecessor's cabinet; Richard Goodwin was thus one of several who stayed on after the assassination.⁹⁵ The principal strategic event that took place during Johnson's *vice-presidency*, though, provides great insight into the historiography of intelligence influence on that group's policy-making. Many of the officials in Kennedy's cabinet who had advised him during the

Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 were still in place when LBJ chose to avoid running for another term in 1968.

Sources

The public often gets access to intelligence material because somebody leaks it during a scandal, it is released because it was central to a crisis, or if it is assimilated into public estimates.⁹⁶ Since the end of the Cold War, though, previously classified material has provided new perspectives on many events during the Iran-Contra Affair, the Cambridge Five, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Operation Desert One, and the alleged bomber and missile gaps of the 1950s and 1960s.

There is much to be gained by looking at the timelines, reporting, and decisions made within the scope of this work. At the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin, for instance, there are de-classified National Security Council meeting minutes, intra-cabinet memoranda on a number of pertinent topics, State Department Cables between Foggy Bottom and embassies around the world, and CIA National Intelligence Estimates. The Central Intelligence Agency has also issued, in redacted format, Presidential Daily Briefs from the period. The State Department's Office of the Historian has made pertinent Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) documents available online, and the series provides an excellent resource for scholars investigating this exciting moment of Cold War history. These government archival sources have proven essential to examining both intra- and inter-departmental information flows pertinent to this study; the information within also enables scholars to assess what information was both requested by and provided to the Oval Office in 1964 and 1965.

Again, while the current historiography provides a large body of material useful in investigating U.S. national security policy and Soviet responses to it within this short period, as

well as the decline and fall of Khrushchev, *intelligence's influence* on LBJ's Cold War policies is less rigorously examined in existing sources. This work seeks to alleviate that discrepancy.

While the historical record from the other camp is incomplete, using its available accounts to compare and contrast with the Oval Office's perceptions of these events illuminates both failures and successes in matching the Johnson Administration's perceptions to the realities in any of the three case studies. In the 1990s, the Yeltsin government made selected Soviet Politburo and KGB documents available to researchers. This dissertation draws heavily from the work of Ilya Gaiduk, for instance, whose work was grounded in these disclosed papers. Between 2001 and 2003, though, a large volume of material—protocols and minutes of the Presidium of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev era—was declassified by the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, and published by historian Aleksandr Fursenko into *Presidium TsK KPCC: 1954-1964*.⁹⁷ Its revelations about the high-level Kremlin meetings regarding Hungary, Suez, Berlin, and Cuba, have facilitated more in-depth Western scholarship on the Cold War, to include events within the scope of this work.

September 11 and the subsequent Global War on Terror, though, created a renewed interest in counterinsurgency, and with it emerged an enlivened debate on the Indochina and Vietnam Wars. Demand grew for re-examinations of the Indochina War from *non-French* historians, with an emphasis on not only the U.S. role supporting France, but how events set the stage for the U.S. to take the baton from her in the decade before Kennedy's presidency.⁹⁸

Methodology

The analysis will show, using three pivotal events occurring between August 1964 and February 1965, that the LBJ administration emphasized predetermined policy over intelligence in its approach to the Cold War. The kind of intelligence which administration officials focused

upon helps to reveal their approach to decision making. When debating perspective policies, they relied heavily upon strategic-level intelligence while focusing on tactical or operational intelligence when a policy had already been decided; in this case they were merely debating whether to move forward with the chosen policy at that particular moment. Further, this work will examine reasons why this occurred. After a synopsis of the ideal intelligence cycle, this work will then explore how other factors such as ideology, the 1964 presidential election, confirmation bias, and the advisors themselves served to twist the intelligence cycle and to distort incoming information towards predetermined policies.

To evaluate the Johnson Administration's decision process, the dissertation will, in the next chapter, describe the Intelligence Cycle, a model useful for further examining the administration's actions vis-à-vis inputs received from observers and analysts. This work will then employ the model to examine how information was used to facilitate policies of competition with the Soviet Union. It will also examine possible processes that hindered available intelligence's influence upon the administration's policy.

In the concluding chapter, this dissertation will demonstrate that, due to a series of human factors, the Johnson administration consistently chose predetermined, policy-driven action when confronted with intelligence that argued for either a pause for further analysis or a change in direction. Hot war between the Soviet Union and the U.S. never occurred—a clear strategic foreign policy success—but simultaneously Vietnam simmered, and the subsequent massive investment of American blood and treasure concluded a decade later with the fall of Saigon. It is therefore important to derive the reasons only one policy succeeded; intelligence was accordingly provided to both, but its influence in each case was clearly divergent.

To derive how this occurred, the dissertation will draw upon Robert Jervis's *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (1976), in which he describes "how the idiosyncrasies of human cognition can shape international outcomes... especially how the principle of 'availability'—the dominant beliefs of the moment—shapes the way actors interpret and respond to information about unfolding events."⁹⁹ The work's comprehensive analysis of "the impact of human cognition on intelligence analysis and dissemination, key elements of the intelligence cycle," enables the evaluation of that cycle's influence on the Johnson administration's policy decisions within the scope of this dissertation. In subsequent sections, this analysis will delve further into the intelligence cycle, in order to understand the Johnson Administration's decision process within the Tonkin Gulf Incident, Khrushchev's expulsion from power, and the U.S. airstrike that imperiled the Soviet Premier in Hanoi.

It is then imperative to hold each of these case studies up to the light of not only Jervis's findings, but those of his colleague Richard K. Betts who, in *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in National Security* (2007), placed phenomena such as the influence of ideology on intelligence and policy into the category of *inherent enemies* of intelligence—which "reside in the nature of human physiology and consciousness, organizational routine, and the complexity of modern government."¹⁰⁰ In contrast to his other two categories, *outside enemies* (adversarial governments and groups) and *innocent enemies* (within the society intelligence serves, critics for example "simply protecting public interests more important than strategic intelligence"¹⁰¹), *inherent enemies* "are the contradictions and trade-offs inherent in dealing with uncertainty and complexity, and in working at the nexus of empirical assessment and political decision."¹⁰²

This analysis will assert that during these crises between the summer of 1964 and the spring of 1965 intelligence agencies provided the Johnson administration pertinent intelligence

that should have driven its officials to question their approach to Vietnam and U.S.-Soviet relations, but in each case that intelligence failed to pause or check actions in support of established foreign policy. To state it another way, LBJ and his principal advisors knew what they wished to accomplish, and if the provided intelligence analysis did not support these aspirations it was either ignored or suppressed in favor of analysis that did so. While foreign adversaries and well-meaning government officials indeed were functioning within Betts's *Enemies of Intelligence* framework, it is the human idiosyncrasies nested within his *inherent enemies* category—the sort of phenomena upon which Jervis elaborates in his work—that enabled these decisions in the Johnson White House.

This work proves that President Johnson and his cabinet received high-quality, useful analysis from the American intelligence apparatus during this period. The initial products in all three case studies reveal professionalism, objectivity, and an adherence to the Intelligence Cycle ideal. It is, however, not a straight line between the request for information and desired answers; it is a cycle, at the end of which the decision-maker customer evaluates the product and often initiates a new cycle to fill in the unknowns. This analysis will demonstrate that as the cycles progressed, at the sub-strategic levels pertinent to Vietnam, the requests for information more resembled requests for support for the Johnson administration's existing policy decisions.

Chapter 2 - U.S. Cold War Policy and the Intelligence Cycle in 1964

In the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, Lyndon Johnson inherited many of his predecessor's key national security officials—for example Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy—and there is thus overlap with the national security policies of the previous administration. Examining the changes John F. Kennedy made when he was inaugurated as 35th President of the United States, on January 20, 1961, is therefore appropriate to this analysis.

Kennedy, eager to distinguish his administration from Eisenhower's in the new decade, pushed for a more flexible national security apparatus, curtailing the NSC staff, establishing direct lines of communications to departmental secretaries, and appointing task forces. Kennedy had, as John Lewis Gaddis writes, viewed the previous apparatus as “bloated and unwieldy,” generating papers and dragging them through a ponderous bureaucracy before clearing them for the President's perusal. “The new system,” Gaddis writes, “might sacrifice something in orderliness of procedure, but Kennedy thought that the advantages in terms of responsiveness and flexibility would be worth it.”¹

In *The Limits of Intervention*, Townsend Hoopes expanded upon this from his perspective as both Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs and, later, Undersecretary of the Air Force in the Johnson administration. Hoopes wrote that Kennedy, at the behest of Walt Rostow and McGeorge Bundy, pushed the NSC structure aside in favor of “small groups of flexible composition that were given responsibility for both *policy formulation* and *execution* with respect to particular countries (italics in original),” with Bundy calling these meetings at the White House—and the Secretaries of Defense and State; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs; the Director of Central Intelligence; and the Attorney General participating in them.

“It was, then, this somewhat amorphous set of arrangements for foreign policy formulation, coordination, and control that President Johnson inherited.”² Hoopes added that the State Department Policy Planning Staff’s influence—already in decline during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations—fell even more sharply under LBJ, and that the White House in the 1960s became “a post primarily of action and reaction... not an ideal place for reflective thought on difficult, long-term problems.”³

One of Kennedy’s men who remained was Walt Whitman Rostow, who early in the Kennedy administration moved from the National Security Council Staff to the chairmanship of the State Department’s Policy Planning Council. Gaddis calls Rostow’s “Basic National Security Policy,” drafted in July 1962, “the most comprehensive guide to what the administration was trying to do in world affairs;” and it is this policy that remained in place when Johnson moved into the Oval Office. It also provides a window into the perceptions, concerns, and aspirations that both administrations’ senior foreign policy advisors brought with them to work each day. This was, after all, more than two decades before the Goldwater-Nichols Act (1983) required the Executive Branch to periodically report its strategic vision to audiences in the U.S. government, domestic electorate, and other nations—both allies and adversaries—in a National Security Strategy (NSS). The Rostow document serves now, in the absence of the later NSS, to do so. Whether or not Hoopes’s assertion that State’s Policy Planning Staff held less clout in Johnson administration policy deliberations, the BNSP document’s influence appears, by contrast, to have held steady.

It is in section IV, “Relations with Communist Regimes,” that Rostow laid out the policy for dealing with the Soviets for the next decade. In the first paragraph, he made tacit acknowledgement that within Cold War competition there was room for cooperation, with

Rostow's recommendation to "seek opportunities to deal with Communist nations constructively in terms of limited areas in which our national interests overlap with theirs, rather than only in terms of reaction to their aggressive enterprises."⁴

Walt Rostow, whom Gaddis described as a man with "awesome abilities as a rapid synthesizer of complex information,"⁵ was also both a respected academic and public servant when Kennedy took office. Having matriculated at Yale and Oxford, at the time of Pearl Harbor he was teaching economics at Columbia University. His subsequent work for the Office of Strategic Services, the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, and the Economic Commission for Europe would have only enhanced his grasp of international relations; his professorships at Cambridge and MIT certainly further primed him for responsibilities as Deputy National Security Advisor and Director of Policy Planning.

To avoid and manage possible crises involving the USSR, his BNSP recommended minimizing chances for Communist expansion in the developing world; clearly communicating U.S. intentions to Moscow; constructing the ground rules within the superpower competition; and "preventing situations arising in which either a Soviet or an American ally may try to inflame a given situation and thus engage to its own benefit the prestige of the two major powers."⁶ This recognized the danger of other entities within the two camps pulling one or both superpowers into a local dispute. Positing that "crisis-mongering [is] deeply built into Communist ideology and working habits," the Basic National Security Policy stated that "when" (not "if") these crises occurred, "our purposes in them should be to avoid any net loss for our interests and use the crisis, if possible, for increasing our power position vis-à-vis the Communists and to close out the crisis as quickly and with as little violence" as possible.⁷

SITREP: Day One

By the time Lyndon Johnson took the oath of office aboard Air Force One at Love Field, the situation in the Caribbean had stabilized somewhat. By the mid-60s, though, the entire Cold War global situation had grown more complex. The military balance in Central Europe had solidified along with NATO, and the hazard of sudden, sharp hostilities had decreased accordingly as both sides contemplated the possibility of rapidly escalating toward nuclear war. Under NATO's aegis, the allied nations in two decades had emerged "strong, prosperous, and almost confident."⁸

Meanwhile, however, within the other camp, especially after Stalin, the ideological glue was straining at the seams between the nations the USSR had absorbed into its own shield, eroded by the entropy of "schism, territorial dispute, the aging process, and the effects of affluence."⁹ The Marxist-Leninist revolution was thus vulnerable to a second revolution from within, as the Soviet Union coped with an evolving postwar world in which nations were shaking off the European colonial yoke; seeking assistance in forging their own states with newly-acquired independence; and sending agents to both camps to see what economic, military, and ideological support each had to offer. To put it another way, the Communist revolution's westward movement from Moscow had bogged down, impeded by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Marshall Plan. Communism's opportunities, and competitions, now lay to the south and east in the newly decolonizing areas of Asia and Africa, which soon became battlegrounds for Soviet and American influence.¹⁰

Noting this phenomenon, in April of 1961, as CIA-sponsored guerillas were pouring forth from landing craft at the Bay of Pigs, Khrushchev's KGB chief Aleksandr Shelepin had proposed a Soviet Third World strategy, which the Politburo subsequently approved, aiming "to suck the U.S. into far-flung struggles and discredit it on the world stage... a global war, a clash

between the debris of Europe's empires and fought by two empires in all but name..."¹¹ KGB files that Vasili Mitrokhin smuggled out of the archives in 1992 reveal that in 1961 Khrushchev had already endorsed Shelepin's program "for the use of national liberation movements and the forces of anti-imperialism in an aggressive new grand strategy against 'the Main Adversary' (the United States) in the Third World."¹² This enterprise, Shelepin elaborated in late July of 1961, would facilitate "a situation in various areas of the world that would favor dispersion of attention and forces by the United States and their satellites, and would tie them down during the settlement of the question of a German peace treaty and West Berlin" and "show the ruling circles of Western powers that unleashing a military conflict over West Berlin could lead to the loss of their position not only in Europe but also in a number of Latin American, Asian, and African countries."¹³

Certainly, Lyndon Johnson's worldview inadvertently enabled Shelepin's plan, as the president perceived "every conflict in which one of the warring parties fought under the ideological banner of Communism [as] part of the continuing battle for domination of the future... [and] wars among the people within a single nation as, in reality, an aspect of international aggression. In every such war, Johnson believed, the enemy is the agent of an alien force that is invading the home of an ally."¹⁴ Even as chief executive, though, he was not the sole decision-maker.

Hoopes described Johnson's "principal foreign policy advisors" as men heavily influenced by the Second World War's lessons of aggression and appeasement,¹⁵ zealous advocates of the Truman Doctrine's "commitment to global struggle against Revolutionary Communism." Here there was little enthusiasm for subtlety or nuance regarding international competition. "None as yet perceived the necessity—or the possibility—for redefining U.S.

interests or the U.S. role in the world in ways that would permit the drawing of more careful distinctions between those commitments and interventions that are in fact vital to our national security, and those that spring more or less from our deeply held view of what the world ‘ought’ to be and how it ‘ought’ to be organized—that is, from our reforming zeal and our desire for wish fulfillment. To the President’s men in early 1965, there seemed to be no logical stopping point between isolationism and globalism.”¹⁶

Hoopes explicitly stated that Rostow and Secretary of State Dean Rusk held a common perspective that “Vietnam was for Communism a global testing of the liberation-war doctrine, and therefore had to become for the U.S. the war to end all wars of national liberation. Within that context it was vital to disabuse Asian Communists, once and for all, of any notion that the United States was indecisive or unwilling to make a total effort to defeat them, at any time or place.”¹⁷ Indeed, when Soviet Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Dobrynin appeared at the State Department on 30 November 1963 to hand off his embassy’s file on Lee Harvey Oswald, Rusk identified “three critical situations that could lead to war between the United States and the Soviet Union: (1) Germany and Berlin; (2) Cuba; and (3) China.” The Soviet diplomat appeared surprised that China was on Rusk’s list, and asked why. “The Secretary said that if China were to pursue a policy of militancy involving countries in the Far East to which we had commitments, this might bring about a confrontation between us which could ultimately lead to war.”¹⁸

Was the Secretary of State implying that Taiwan, which the PRC clearly wanted to reintegrate into its mainland territory and regime, could spark a hot war if the Soviets failed to manage China’s belligerent aspirations? Or was Rusk referring to the growing China-sponsored insurgencies in places like Laos and South Vietnam? Regardless, according to the record,

Dobrynin said he understood and left—likely to return to the embassy and file his own recollection of the meeting. Interestingly, when Dobrynin met with LBJ’s National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy a week before Christmas 1963, they spent two hours discussing Berlin, Cuba, trade between the two nations, and Johnson himself, but neither China nor Vietnam.¹⁹

Rostow, in his assumptions regarding the new administration’s national security challenges, was “convinced that the future struggle between communism and capitalism would take the form of contests to demonstrate the relevance of each ideology to the development process in the Third World.”²⁰ Undersecretary of State George Ball, in his 1982 memoir, explicitly stated that “[p]ostwar diplomacy had largely rested on the assumption that the United States in the latter twentieth century was a *status quo* power, while the Soviet Union was essentially a revolutionary power, and that the United States would benefit by encouraging stability; the Soviet Union, by exploiting turbulence... The Kennedy Doctrine frontally challenged this approach (*italics in original*).”²¹ The United States, Ball wrote, a nation born by means of revolution, was thus presented with a conditional proposition, and a prescription for success in the struggle between the two camps: “If America failed to encourage the young revolutionaries in the new countries, they would inevitably turn toward the Soviet Union. America should, therefore, stop trying to sustain traditional societies and ally itself with the side of revolution.”²² The competition for influence in the postcolonial world would, indeed, endure through the end of the Cold War, but the chance for that competition to intensify and thus draw in either side’s conventional forces and, perhaps, the world’s most devastating weaponry, demanded some sort of relationship and communication between the superpowers in order to mitigate the risk.

The BNSP recognized room for cooperation with the USSR in a world where both sides now possessed nuclear arsenals, and in which real or imagined shortfalls in U.S. delivery systems had recently proven influential in both domestic and foreign policy. Periods of détente, it suggests, should serve to “build up the habit of meaningful U.S.-Soviet communications [and to] dampen outstanding crises” while preparing “the free community” for the long-term struggle against the “Soviet *and* Chinese Communist systems” (*italics added*).²³ Linking the two systems with “and” was significant, as it acknowledged that the other camp was not a monolithic entity, and it paved the way for the later section of the BNSP addressing the aforementioned Sino-Soviet Split.

There were, of course, pertinent reasons to fear a monolithic red threat from Eurasia. Odd Arne Westad lists them in the introduction to *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1945-1963*:

[It] was the greatest antisystemic power assembled so far during the capitalist era and probably the greatest power to challenge the political supremacy of the Western capitals since the final expansion of the Ottoman empire in the sixteenth century. The geographical space of the alliance covered nearly a quarter of the earth’s landmass, and the size of its population made it dominant on two continents. It was intended to be and served as a threat that could not be ignored. With Cold War tensions already running high in Western capitals, the signing of the alliance set off acute alarms.²⁴

The Communist bloc cooperated to at least hold the line in Korea, and subsequently to establish and hold another line dividing Indochina at the 1954 Geneva conference. Indochina, however, was not going to remain static for long. In the same way that China held revanchist aspirations toward Taiwan, Hanoi was holding onto the dream of establishing one Communist Vietnam—with or without assistance from either the PRC or the Soviet Union.

Foreign policy analyst Constantine Pleshakov wrote that Josip Broz Tito’s pulling Yugoslavia away from the Soviet orbit in the early 1950s revealed the first crack in the red

monolith, “demonstrating that communism was not a universal phenomenon, remaining the same in any country wherever applied. Yugoslavia’s independent survival proved that communism could be national, taking into account local specifics and also becoming independent from the center of world communism: Moscow.” This departure from the fold, he wrote, threatened Khrushchev’s position both within the USSR and around the globe.²⁵

In June 1960 Khrushchev himself appeared at the Romanian Workers’ Party Congress in Bucharest and publicly chastised the Chinese delegation for continuously assailing the “peaceful coexistence” concept and rigidly adhering to Lenin’s observations on imperialism from a bygone era to do so; he further heatedly attacked the absent Mao as “an ultra-leftist, an ultra-dogmatist, indeed, a left revisionist.”²⁶ The next month, Moscow pulled its technicians and advisors from the People’s Republic of China.²⁷

In February of 1962 the CIA had published a staff study, “The New Stage of the Sino-Soviet Dispute,” clarifying the widening chasm between Soviet and Chinese aims, especially regarding relations with the other camp and the competition to lead the revolution in the developing world. It stated that as “the Soviet Party had continued to favor an opportunistic strategy of softening Western resistance by peaceful gestures while exploiting indigenous political movements in non-Communist countries primarily by non-military means,” China “continued to advocate a more militant revolutionary program for the world movement on all fronts, particularly in the underdeveloped areas.” Further, “Moscow contended that the bloc should not accept serious risks of world war, while Peiping argued that a more militant program would not increase the existing risk. Moscow spoke of the danger of expansion of local wars and implied a need for caution in supporting ‘liberation’ wars and popular uprisings, whereas Peiping minimized the dangers of local wars and called for much stronger support...” China, it

continued, disparaged the Soviet concept of peaceful coexistence for “retarding the world revolution...”²⁸ In the document’s concluding section, it stated that “[b]y some definitions, the USSR and Communist China have already broken, breached, ruptured, rived, split, or whatever.”²⁹

The monolith model, prevalent amongst Kennedy’s advisors, was therefore eroding, and the U.S. intelligence enterprise was reporting this development up the chain of command. As Hoopes described it, though, to that circle, “the ‘Communist Bloc’ remained an essentially cohesive international conspiracy manifesting itself primarily in military and paramilitary assaults against that other comprehensible entity, the ‘Free World.’ An important corollary was the belief that an accretion of ‘communist’ influence *anywhere* must redound to the direct benefit of the main power centers in Moscow and Peking, for from this flowed the logic that counterthrusts in kind were everywhere and almost automatically necessary; otherwise a progressive, irreversible, unacceptable erosion of the world power balance could not be averted (*italics in original*).”³⁰ The foreign policy experts consistently meeting with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were exemplars of this zero-sum mentality.

Pleshakov also implied that after the Korea armistice, China and the Soviet Union could have preserved the partnership by cobbling together a shared plan for securing and expanding socialism in east Asia, but that they missed the opportunity.

Shared ideological values by themselves could not hold the alliance together. An alliance void of any concrete strategic cooperation soon becomes very fragile. Such strategic hollowness also raises the question whether so-called shared values are genuinely shared. Khrushchev was right in trying to fill the alliance with concrete cooperation. But his means for doing so turned out to be disastrous.³¹

One of the earliest such opportunities that Khrushchev himself identified in his memoirs (composed in the late 1960s) occurred on the eve of the aforementioned 1954 Geneva

Conference, a moment in which the Soviets “had the very best relations with Vietnam and the same kind of relations with the Chinese Communist Party.”³² As he describes it, while preparing for the conference in Moscow with China’s Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, Ho Chi Minh, and Ho’s Deputy Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, the Viet Minh delegates believed their guerrilla forces were “on the verge of collapse” and had decided to “retreat to the Chinese border, so that China can move its troops in, as it did earlier in North Korea, and help the Vietnamese people drive the French out of Vietnam.” According to the account, Zhou pulled Khrushchev aside and advised him that the Chinese forces themselves were exhausted from their earlier intervention in North Korea.³³ Khrushchev was thus firmly seated in the position of both benefactor and trusted advisor to both parties. When, however, as all the delegates were sitting down in Geneva in May of 1954, and French forces surrendered at Dien Bien Phu, Khrushchev implied in the memoir that he had reached the apogee of influence with both Ho and Mao, as their desperation had also begun appropriately and quickly to wane.

Especially after the open break with China in the wake of the aforementioned 1960 Bucharest meeting, the pro-China faction in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam’s (DRV) leadership “carried on their work against the Soviet Union and against our policies at the same time that we were doing everything we could to help Vietnam. The pro-Chinese elements in Vietnam have done everything they could to start a quarrel, to turn Vietnam away from the Soviet Union, and to set our two parties fighting against each other.”³⁴

In his own memoirs, U.S. Ambassador to the USSR Charles E. “Chip” Bohlen, who was serving in the post at the time, placed the start of the rift in March of 1954, when Deputy Premier Georgy Malenkov, speaking in the periodic “charade of campaigning for seats in the Supreme Soviet,” publicly deviated from “the previous Soviet line that nuclear war would bring about the

downfall of capitalism, but not communist countries,” with his assertion that all of civilization would be eradicated in the event. Integral to the *old* doctrine was the pronouncement that war is the midwife of revolution and therefore inevitable. Bohlen affirmed that within a month Malenkov was recanting this statement, but that when Khrushchev became premier in 1958 the new doctrinal line that war was in fact *not* inevitable had been clearly established. “This change in doctrine,” Bohlen argues, “became one of the chief targets of the Chinese attack on the Soviets as revisionists who lost their revolutionary fervor.”³⁵

When Secretary of State John Foster Dulles represented the United States at Geneva two months later, Bohlen by telegram advised him that the Soviets were likely to value the status quo in Europe and Korea, but that Indochina was “considerably more uncertain in view of the interposition of Communist China and our lack of knowledge as to the degree of Soviet control or influence over China’s policies.”³⁶ He counseled that the Soviet Union was not likely to risk military engagement over an area so remote from both Soviet borders and interest. Further, “domestic programs of new leadership in the agricultural, economic, and other fields and propaganda concerning the general improvement of the standard of living and emphasis on the need for peace do not constitute psychological preparation of a government anticipating serious military involvement,” and that “the present attempt at collective dictatorship, whatever its durability may be under any circumstances, is certainly not suited for great emergencies.”

Bohlen did, however, caution that these were “considerations which affect the Soviet Union alone and may be modified or even vitiated by the complexities of Soviet-Chinese relations.”³⁷ Bohlen, who was not at the negotiations, and far more sensitive to Moscow’s concerns than Beijing’s, sensed the interests of the two Communist powers could diverge over Indochina in May 1954. Throughout his recollections, though, he recalled offering similar

observations to Dulles out of loyalty to U.S. diplomacy, and not because he was confident that the secretary of state would place any value upon the provided assessment. “Dulles... never understood Soviet policy. He was overattentive to the purely ideological aspects, not grasping the subtle relationship with Soviet national interests, [and] this view of the world in black-and-white terms... was a serious impediment to his performance as Secretary of State.”³⁸

The juxtaposition of fervent ideology and black-and-white perspective, however, was not peculiar to the Eisenhower administration, and both phenomena served—at least through Johnson’s presidency—to impede recognition of the Sino-Soviet split as an opportunity for U.S. exploitation in its Cold War policy. While America’s involvement in Indochina intensified, ironically, so did the rift between the USSR and the PRC.

Westad’s description of the increasingly irreconcilable differences splitting Soviet and Chinese communism is applicable to the ways in which each partner applied its assistance to Hanoi within the emerging conflict adjacent the 17th parallel: “Where the system of beliefs of Stalin and his successors underlined state construction, social order, and Marxist laws of development, Mao’s thinking always returned to issues of individual will, human capabilities, and mass action. Where the Soviets wanted a state that first of all provided equality and social justice, Mao sought to create social instruments in which the creative abilities of man were released, often prompted by anger at tradition or foreign oppression.”³⁹

Later, when Soviet-manufactured patrol boats began pushing out into the Tonkin Gulf and Chinese-trained cadres were exerting most of the influence in Ho Chi Minh’s wartime administration, the competing systems were more obviously applied within the DRV. To state it differently, the Soviets provided advanced equipment and the training to utilize it, while China provided advice on how to best use DRV human capital to stay in the fight and eventually

reunite the two Vietnams. However the rift began, it was definitely in place by the time of Kennedy's inauguration, and the American intelligence apparatus was studying it. One is left to ponder why U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union was apparently not overtly adapting at this point to the phenomenon and perhaps exploiting it.

Perhaps this was because the split represented, as Gaddis wrote, not only a departure from the Eisenhower Administration's perspective on the communist world,⁴⁰ but from Rostow's own:

Rostow seemed to expect all communists to act alike when tempted by opportunities to exploit modernization stresses in the "third world." Communists might quarrel with one another but, so far as global stability was concerned, their interests collectively were fundamentally hostile to those in the West... Rostow never worked out this contradiction, which had the United States trying to counter-balance a mythical monolith. His own confusion on this point reflected that of the administration as a whole.⁴¹

Rostow's policy suggestions regarding the "mythical monolith" in the BNSP were thus indicative of a mind adapting to a more complicated global struggle:

We should avoid actions which might have the effect of healing the Sino-Soviet split. We should be prepared to encourage Khrushchev's preference for negotiation and peaceful settlements when Khrushchev acts in terms of that enunciated preference. We should make clear that any contrary Chinese view, if put to the test, is likely to prove unrewarding, and that *we will take whatever action necessary to help South Vietnam maintain its independence* (italics added).⁴²

Clearly, Rostow was not only acknowledging here that the Cold War was more than previously believed, but that there was an opportunity to exploit this fissure in Southeast Asia.

It is unlikely, though, that a man like Walt Whitman Rostow would seize it.

An inductive thinker, he constructed theories—often with perception and ingenuity—but once the pattern of his belief was established, some automatic mental filter thereafter accepted only reinforcing data, while systematically and totally rejecting all contrary evidence no matter how compelling. In debate he showed a rare capacity for "instant rationalization" (as one colleague put it), which amounted to a compulsion for buttressing his views by a rapid culling of

the evidence immediately at hand; it didn't matter whether the support that such evidence could provide was frail or nonexistent. His insensitivity to others was legendary.⁴³

President Kennedy, according to Hoopes, once said to one of McGeorge Bundy's aides, Michael Forrestal, that Rostow "is a fountain of ideas; perhaps one in ten of them is absolutely brilliant. Unfortunately six or seven are not merely unsound, but dangerously so."⁴⁴

It is safe to assume that Kennedy kept him on due to the "absolutely brilliant" ideas the president had "lapped up" in Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth*, a treatise describing five stages of societal development, where at the fundamental stage—The Traditional Society—the economic historian argued that susceptibility to communism was highest.⁴⁵ As time passes, the society's investment, consumption, and social trends develop to the highest stage, Rostow's Age of High Mass Consumption, within which one can find full industrial development in the model, as well as most of the Western nations—in reality—in 1960.

Historically, he contended, many underdeveloped areas had benefited from the intrusion of more advanced societies, which disrupted stagnant social relations and provided innovation. But Rostow worried that poor nations were now subject to a different kind of intrusion—a communist variant that, by promising a false route to progress, threatened to knock immature societies off the upward pathway towards prosperity and political stability... [N]ations would become invulnerable once they had achieved sufficient progress. But in the short term, the risks were grave.⁴⁶

It is easy to conflate Traditional Societies in Rostow's model with those which had recently divested themselves of European colonists in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is not, however, so easy to argue for a belligerent and bold response to the communist threat at the lower end of Rostow's model when, after 1949, at its upper levels that monolithic threat also brandished atomic weaponry.

The BNSP's advocacy for communication with the USSR was thus an oblique recognition that the contest for influence in developing societies at the low end of Rostow's scale could intensify into a much more violent and destructive contest between the two camps. Communications would enable the process of negotiation, in which Rostow advised tamping down on expectations of success or possible negative outcomes of failure; to remain businesslike in their conduct; to avoid summit meetings whenever possible; and, significantly, "to develop further informal contacts and exchanges between the President and the Soviet leadership."⁴⁷

To exploit the "Long-Term Trends," the document advocated expanding "exchange of persons," enabling "the flow of information;" pressing for "cooperative ventures" in science—to include space exploration and nuclear energy; and acknowledging the USSR's superpower status. If, the section concluded, the Soviet Union wanted to constructively participate in "the community of free nations," then there was room within U.S. interests for that.⁴⁸ Indeed, though Gaddis pointed out that Kennedy quickly altered course from many of his predecessor's defense and economic policies, JFK held onto and developed Eisenhower's policy of "seeking negotiations with the Soviet Union to relax tensions"⁴⁹ between the two superpowers. This arguably served to both augment bilateral communications and to bleed off pressure in Berlin, in talks to curtail nuclear weapons tests, and, "most clearly" in bilateral communications during and after the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In 1963 this enterprise was further enabled by agreements to establish a direct line between Washington and Moscow, banning nuclear tests in space, and the sale of U.S. wheat surplus to the USSR.⁵⁰ Hence, by the abrupt end of Kennedy's presidency, he had incorporated lessons learned from the previous decade in interactions with the Kremlin, but also the aspirations of an administration seeking to break away from reliance on nuclear weaponry to

influence that fragile relationship. Again, it fell to Rostow to elucidate this complex policy in writing.

...full of zeal for a larger U.S. commitment...

In late October 1961 President Kennedy dispatched Rostow, along with (recently-recalled to active duty) General Maxwell D. Taylor, on a fact-finding mission to Saigon, after South Vietnam's President Diem asked to increase the number of American advisors beyond the approximately 700 that were stipulated in the Geneva Accords. The response to the Taylor-Rostow Report, filed in early November, provides an aperture into both the advisors surrounding the Oval Office, and subsequent events covered in this narrative.

The report advocated for the U.S. military force to deploy around 8000 troops to Vietnam for non-combat purposes like disaster relief, logistic support, and "to raise national morale," with an emphasis on defense and security missions.⁵¹ If the DRV did not respond favorably, the report pointed out that nation's assumed susceptibility to manipulation through bombing.

On November 4, 1961, a Saturday, George Ball was called to a meeting with Robert McNamara, McNamara's Deputy Roswell Gilpatric, and others, to discuss the report. As they awaited General Taylor's arrival, Ball aired his concerns:

I was, I said, appalled at the report's recommendations; we must not commit forces to South Vietnam or we would find ourselves in a protracted conflict more serious than Korea... and there was always a danger of provoking Chinese intervention as we had in Korea. Moreover, I said, unlike Korea, the Vietnam problem was not one of repelling overt invasion but of mixing ourselves up in a revolutionary situation with strong anticolonialist overtones. To my dismay, I found no sympathy for my views. Both McNamara and Gilpatric seemed preoccupied with a single question, How can the United States stop South Vietnam from a Viet Cong takeover? How did I propose to avoid it? The "falling domino" theory was a brooding omnipresence.

Three days later, Ball wrote, he brought his concerns to the President himself, and was "abruptly" rebuffed. The next day, November 8, McNamara advised Kennedy that "he,

Gilpatric, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had reached conclusions essentially supporting the Taylor-Rostow recommendations.”⁵²

McNamara referred to this document as “a brief, hastily-prepared memorandum” for the president.

I observed that the Taylor-Rostow Report raised two fundamental questions: Would the United States commit itself to the objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism? And would we support this commitment by moving more military personnel to South Vietnam immediately while preparing to add reinforcements later, should they prove necessary? I concluded by saying we were “inclined to recommend” we should accept both the objective and the means of pursuing it.⁵³

Here one detects not only the Dulles Domino Theory, but a Defense Department ignoring pertinent questions about an evolving foreign policy decision. McNamara, 30 years later, in his book *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, admitted that this advice to President Kennedy may have been “hasty,” and that he knew it as soon as he dispatched the memo. “For the next couple of days,” he writes, “I dug deeper into the Vietnam problem. The more I probed, the more the complexity of the situation and the uncertainties of our ability to deal with it by military means became apparent.” On 11 November he and the Secretary of State sent a joint memo to the Oval Office, describing the dilemma for deployment of U.S. forces to South Vietnam, absent Communist Bloc escalation: “[I]f there is a strong South Viet-Nameese [sic] effort, [more U.S. forces] may not be needed; if there is not such an effort, United States Forces could not accomplish their mission in the midst of an apathetic or hostile population.”⁵⁴

On the same day, Rostow sent the president a memo arguing for immediate deployment of 5,000 U.S. or SEATO forces to the demilitarized zone separating South Vietnam from the DRV. “Mr. Rusk will table this morning a proposal for action in Viet Nam that stops short of installing U.S. forces now, but commits us—in our minds—to a full scale U.S. effort to save that

country.” The issue here appears to be *the speed* with which conventional forces could be dispatched to the 17th Parallel to man defenses proximate to North Vietnamese forces.

“Without the troop commitment,” Rostow advised, “the Communists (who have been reading of our fears of white men in Asia...) will believe they still have plenty of room for maneuver and to continue infiltration. An ambiguous signal to them is dangerous; and, whatever the rhetoric, they will interpret our policy by deeds, not words.”⁵⁵

While Ball admitted that Rostow’s memo was a warning that he should keep advice about military matters to himself, Ball also speculated that President Kennedy believed that subsequent escalation was unlikely.⁵⁶ In wrestling with these important foreign policy decisions, the President and the Defense Department would listen attentively to Taylor (whom Kennedy brought back from retirement within a year to Chair the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and whom Johnson would appoint Ambassador to South Vietnam in July of 1964) and Rostow.

Stanley Karnow, in his history of the Vietnam War, reminded the reader that Rostow had a reputation in the Kennedy White House as “an effervescent idea man,” and that it is Rostow that coined the phrase “New Frontier” for the administration’s slogan. Rostow, he writes, on his return from the Vietnam mission with Taylor, was “full of zeal for a larger U.S. commitment, asserting that the conflict in Southeast Asia ‘might be the last great confrontation’ with Communism.”⁵⁷ Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, aware of his aggression and enthusiasm, had often “worked to curb”⁵⁸ these qualities.

Like Rostow, though, each of these men—Kennedy, McNamara, even Ball—had served in the Second World War:

that shattering transformation of historical conditions which created an America, not only powerful but supreme, faced with the alternative of accepting international responsibilities or abandoning the map... to the intentions—whatever they were—of that only other significant power, the Soviet Union.

Those felt responsibilities, emerging more from circumstances than from choice—and the ensuing confrontation... were given their distinctive form by the lessons of the war that had just ended—or by what was then almost universally accepted as an accurate analysis of how the war had begun and why the forces of darkness had achieved so much, and had come so perilously close to a decisive conquest.⁵⁹

When Lyndon Johnson inherited the Oval Office, Doris Kearns Goodwin pointed out, he also inherited the world view of these men closest to Kennedy—“the so-called foreign policy establishment [that had] developed, applied, and believed in the entire mode of reasoning that had dominated and given continuity to American foreign policy,” one which included “criteria of American responsibility, principles of action, necessities of leadership, established standards for determining threats to American freedom and to our greatness as a nation.”⁶⁰ The influence of World War Two was heavy upon them, as were the subsequent lessons learned in the intervening years as a superpower.

Investigating this phenomenon, though, is not confined to the study of history. Jervis, in his work, argued that major wars can alter cognitive predispositions in policymakers. On the same page that he mentioned “the Munich analogy” (i.e., if the world had not appeased Hitler in 1938...) Jervis went into greater detail on possible downstream effects of these “traumatic” experiences.

A new policy or general orientation forms in reaction to a traumatic event, usually a war or a dramatic failure of the old views. The new policy and underlying beliefs receive support not only from those in power but also from those younger people who will govern 20 years later. Indeed the latter group has learned the lessons especially well, but because of the flawed nature of the way they will have learned, the lessons will be oversimplified and overgeneralized and therefore will be likely to be applied to inappropriate situations. And because their perceptual predispositions will have been so strongly affected, these people will be very slow to abandon their views. This will insure that, when the lessons are misapplied, the failure of the policy will be important and dramatic and so will set a new generation on its course.⁶¹

It is these men around JFK and LBJ who had witnessed the effects of appeasement at Munich: modern societies prosecuting total war in multiple theaters, each victorious nation eventually paying a massive butcher's bill in blood and treasure to attain unconditional surrender from an apparent totalitarian monolith. Here, twenty years later and in middle age, these perceptual predispositions were very much in play in these officials, an "insistent drawing on the past as the basis for meeting problems that were radically different, that presented themselves in unlike circumstances, and that involved a quite dissimilar degree of U.S. national interest..."⁶²

Goodwin pointed out that this establishment's influence was even greater because, while Lyndon Johnson was proficient at domestic politics, "with foreign policy... he was insecure, fearful, his touch unsure... [and he] felt dependent on the wise experts of established reputation in foreign policy."⁶³ Since 1945, however, these experts had also watched how the Truman and Eisenhower administrations had coped with Korea. George Ball, in his memoir, listed several differences between South Korea and South Vietnam, but the fact that he believed it necessary to do so reveals that the people around him were making that comparison in October of 1964 when considering intensification of the commitment to Southeast Asia.⁶⁴

Korea was, to these men, the last war. "The only thing," explains Jervis, "as important for a nation as its revolution is its last major war. Because of the dramatic and pervasive nature of a war and its consequences, the experiences associated with it—the diplomacy that preceded it, the methods of fighting it, the alliances that were formed, and the way the war was terminated—will deeply influence the perceptual predispositions of most citizens."⁶⁵ World War Two, he argues, "contributed to a perpetual sensitivity to all-out attack," and it is important to remember here that the Soviets also experienced a Pearl Harbor moment in June of 1941 when

the Wehrmacht's tanks were overrunning its outposts and stabbing eastward toward Moscow, Kyiv, and Leningrad.

“Perceptual thresholds were altered,” though, “by the Korean War, which led to the expectation that limited wars would probably recur and would resemble Korea in their causes and military manifestations... And many military officers not only felt that the armies of our Asian allies should be trained to repel conventional attacks but held to this view in the face of mounting guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam.”⁶⁶

Jervis acknowledged that an adult's first-hand experiences with big events affecting the self and the nation hold both great impact and valuable information for perceptual predispositions. Three linked issues, though, can occur when applying these predispositions to major decisions: 1. These analogy-providing major events do not always make the best guides for what happens subsequently; 2. Details of causation are not often fully understood, while lessons learned are often superficial and overgeneralized; and 3. Recent and dramatic events take priority in the decision-maker's mind, so alternative, possibly more pertinent models, are discarded.⁶⁷

To Kennedy's/Johnson's senior advisors, however, the Cuban Missile Crisis represented the most recent big national conflict event. Gaddis cited an interview with President Kennedy in December 1962, when he told the media that the real danger of the crisis lay in upsetting the balance of power—the *status quo* that the United States had labored to produce around the globe (e.g., Korea and Berlin) since 1945: “This, in a nutshell, was the threat: that having committed itself to maintaining the existing distribution of power in the world, the United States could not allow challenges to that distribution even to *appear* to succeed against its will, because perceptions of power could be as important as the real thing (*italics in original*).” The Kennedy

administration had “worked itself into a universal obligation to maintain a status quo which, if it did not precisely resemble the United States, was at least one that familiarity had made comfortable.”⁶⁸

Rostow penned a memorandum to Secretary of State Rusk, after the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and the change of leadership in Moscow, in November of 1964, advocating deployment of ground forces and strike aircraft to the Pacific—“massive forces to deal with any escalatory response, including forces evidently aimed at China as well as North Viet Nam, should the Chinese Communists enter the game.”⁶⁹ But hardware and fast-deployable soldiers would not be enough, in Rostow’s perception.

Here their judgment will depend not merely on our use of force and force dispositions but also on the posture of the President, including commitments he makes to our own people and therefore the world, and on our follow-through... They will not actually accept a setback until they are absolutely sure that we really mean it. They will be as searching in this matter as Khrushchev was before he abandoned the effort to break our hold on Berlin and as Khrushchev was in searching us out on the Turkish missiles before he finally dismantled and removed his missiles from Cuba. Initial rhetoric and military moves will not be enough to convince them.⁷⁰

Citing two recent instances in which President Kennedy had shown both a disposition and posture that successfully kept the other camp contained, Rostow was indeed advocating for LBJ to continue this successful method of Presidential “determination... commitment and staying power”⁷¹ in confronting the inevitable Cold War challenges of 1965.

Rusk had for more than two decades provided similar hawkish advice to the highest levels of the U.S. national security apparatus. While at State’s Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs in 1950, Rusk, along with John Foster Dulles and Dulles’s protégé John Allison, for example, advocated for pushing UN forces north of Korea’s 38th parallel in a memo to the Director of the Policy Planning Staff, Paul Nitze. In it, failure to unify the entire Korean peninsula is depicted

as “a policy of appeasement... a timid, half hearted policy designed not to provoke the Soviets into war,” because Rusk and Allison deemed conflict with both the USSR and PRC inevitable. Stopping short of the line would “compromise with clear moral principles and [comprise] a shirking of our duty to make clear once and for all that aggression does not pay—that he who violates the decent opinions of mankind must take the consequences and that he who takes the sword will perish by the sword... When all legal and moral right is on our side why should we hesitate?”⁷²

Interestingly, the document warns against returning to a *status quo ante bellum*, one in which “the real aggressor, the Soviet Union, would presumably go unpunished in any way whatsoever.”⁷³ It was not therefore acceptable to rest and rebuild, having restored sovereignty to South Korea. The United States was legally and morally obligated to avoid appeasing the communist monolith—and evidently all roads led to Stalin in this aggressive war—and to teach it a lesson from the Gospel of Matthew. The following year, Secretary of State Dean Acheson forced Rusk to resign after Rusk delivered a speech at the China institute in Washington DC that not only pushed for reunifying Korea, but also removing Mao Zedong from power.

This worldview had almost certainly survived and thrived in the following decade, when Rusk served as president of the Rockefeller Foundation, before Kennedy enticed him back to Washington to serve as his Secretary of State. The irony is that this champion of pushing past the *status quo* was now in a White House that wanted to preserve it in the Cold War.

The Kennedy Status Quo

The Kennedy administration presented a new strategy to the American electorate for preserving and protecting that international *modus vivendi*, whether against China or the Soviet Union. The Eisenhower administration’s reliance on the nation’s nuclear arsenal had not proven

ideal for supporting American interests in the 1950s; the choices available under its Massive Retaliation strategy were apparently either to increase the level of violence with city-killing weapons, or to do nothing. Recent experiences in South Vietnam, Indonesia, Algeria, Malaya, and a variety of other former colonies had revealed a need for more subtle instruments of national power than the nuclear triad, and the Kennedy administration would be compelled both “to arouse and to educate” the American public into supporting that more subtle strategy with soldiers and revenue.⁷⁴

Hence “Flexible Response,” a policy for carefully controlling any international conflict by means of multilevel capability to act along the spectrum, from diplomacy all the way up to nuclear launch—with a more robust arsenal of both conventional and nonconventional (guerrilla and covert operations) capability in between.

Ball was certainly convinced of its utility in the global circumstances of the early 1960s:

That meant we had to be prepared to fight limited wars—or at least assist Third World nations to fight them—a view that directly collided with Dulles’s theory of “massive retaliation.” To the extent that that theory was ever rationally articulated (Dulles wrapped it in opaque rhetoric), it meant that whenever America faced even a marginal challenge in any part of the world, we would threaten to use our nuclear arsenal... The real concern was that the Soviets would test us in areas where our interests were too marginal to justify a suicidal response.

While Ball was working for Adlai Stevenson’s presidential campaigns in the 1950s,⁷⁵ he had followed Dien Bien Phu, the Hungarian Uprising, and the Suez Crisis from afar—all watershed events in which the Eisenhower era nuclear arsenal had proven an unrealistic option for countering Communist actions and threats. He had thus had time and incentive to study how a subsequent administration might expand its national security options to cope with the new decade, a “capability for quick flexible response—which the Eisenhower Administration had permitted to fall into disarray.” Ball later argued that “the Soviet Union had announced that it

would encourage ‘wars of national liberation’ to establish its increasing hegemony over Third World areas. But such wars, by their nature, would tend to remain limited—threatening to evolve into Armageddon struggles only if the territory in question were of major strategic significance, whether because of geography or the possession of a vital resource...”⁷⁶ Thus, when the Kennedy presidency was abruptly ended, there was a strategy in place for dealing with whatever “tests” the other camp might concoct in the international arena and, like other Kennedy initiatives, Lyndon Johnson saw no reason to immediately change it when he grasped the baton.

LBJ also saw no reason to switch out the advisors closest to the Oval Office—as Truman had done under similar circumstances; nor did he cast aside Kennedy’s legislative proposals. He presented himself, wrote Doris Goodwin, as executor of John F. Kennedy’s legacy, but “began to create the impression that he, the doer, might succeed where the thinker had failed.”⁷⁷ Johnson’s strengths, cultivated in both houses of Congress in the previous three decades, lay in securing domestic policies and this is what he wanted to accomplish as president. His first day at his desk in the Oval Office would offer alternatives, conditions, and the opportunity to execute important decisions. He was fortunate, and he knew it, to have both a plan in place for coping with the Soviet Union, and a coterie of thinkers around him to assist him with their understanding of—and skills in—executing it. He was also fortunate in his access to one of history’s most sophisticated and technologically advanced intelligence apparatuses to provide him the information to make decisions in wielding that plan.

Again, examining the U.S. intelligence community’s influence on Johnson’s policy decisions is essential to this work, but it is also essential first to examine how such an apparatus ideally supports decisionmakers.

The Intelligence Cycle

The body of knowledge on intelligence and counterintelligence practice is vast, and theoretical approaches to the processes have evolved since the beginning of the modern period. How does one, for instance, sift through the modern deluge of available information to extract the gems of valuable intelligence? How does one filter and fuse multiple findings into a product that decision-makers can act upon in a timely manner? How can intelligence organizations protect and conceal those jewels from diligent and interested adversaries?

Peter Jackson and Jennifer Siegel argued that “there is little agreement as to what exactly intelligence is and what it is for.” They did, however, offer two approaches to grasping its nature and roles. The first is to regard it as “information provided to decision makers in order to reduce their uncertainty and to allow them to make well-informed choices.”⁷⁸ This approach, focused on acquisition, analysis, and delivery, they add, is the one favored by historians. The second approach perceives intelligence as a process or cycle, and it is favored by social scientists.

Former British intelligence officer Michael Herman subscribed to the latter approach, and to explain the cycle, he used the terminology and model issued by the Church Committee in its 1976 report; the fact that the committee was investigating intelligence activities during both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations makes the briefed model appropriate to this study as well, as the hearings highlighted the model’s use within the U.S. intelligence community in the 1960s.⁷⁹

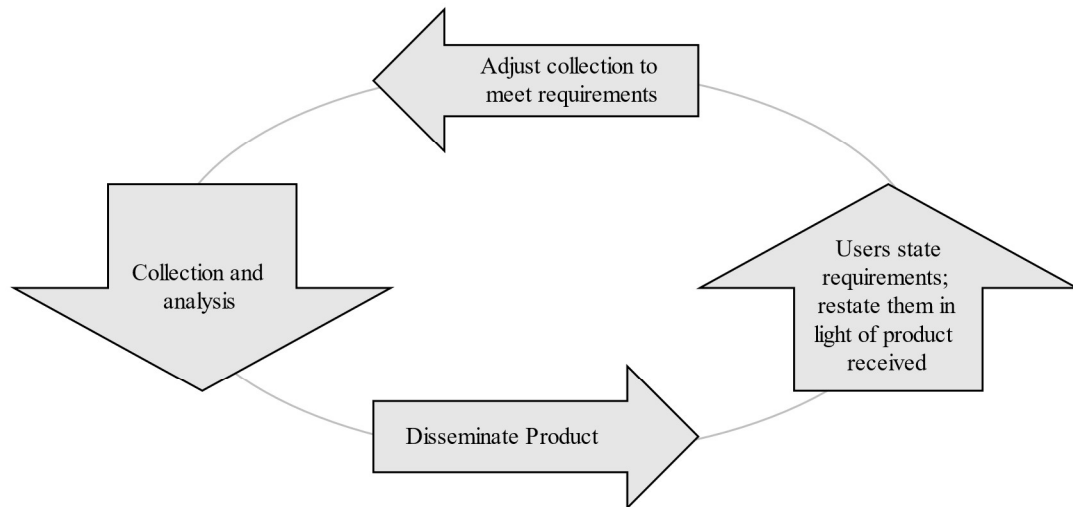
Former intelligence officer Robert M. Clark, in *Intelligence Analysis: A Target Centric Approach*, argued that the cycle originated with Henry Ford’s 1913 Model T assembly line, in which he delineated the process into eighty-four specific and sequential stages. “Each worker was trained to do just one of these steps. So you had interchangeable parts, division of labor, and

a continuous flow of a standard product.”⁸⁰ The process was so successful that industry embraced it.

The Church Committee’s 1976 report, which investigated alleged U.S. intelligence abuses, certainly looked into events falling within the scope of this analysis. Its report, published in 1976, devoted multiple pages to the Intelligence Cycle,⁸¹ revealing that Secretary of Defense McNamara was neither the first nor most recent senior government official to employ the cycle in the attempt to synthesize information into recommendations for senior decision-makers.

The cycle begins with the intelligence consumers—the officials who use it to make decisions—describing the information needed. Intelligence managers then convert the consumers’ requests into requirements, which both serve to assist managers in allocating resources to intelligence collectors, and to guide the collectors themselves toward successfully gathering information—raw intelligence—to answer those requirements. Analysts organize and assemble this information into a form tailored to the consumer—the finished intelligence. It is, again, a cycle; the consumer will return to the intelligence manager to “state new needs, define new requirements, and make necessary adjustments” for the manager to take to collectors.⁸² Hence, the cycle by design serves decision-makers in a progressively effective (accurate and on-time) and efficient (minimum cost in resources—e.g., time, money, energy) manner as it is repeated.

Figure 1. Military concept of the intelligence cycle⁸³



In this first case study, the Oval Office received information it needed to pursue the policy eventually enabled by the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which passed both houses of the 88th Congress on 7 August; President Johnson signed it three days later. Undersecretary of State Ball, in his memoirs, described the three days between the second incident and the resolution's passage, and claims Johnson himself was unconvinced by the "intelligence":

[T]here was some evidence that the commanders might have misread the radar blips; if the destroyers were in danger, it could have been because they were firing at one another. Within the next two or three days, even President Johnson began to doubt the occurrence of a second attack. With disgust, he said to me at one point, "Hell, those dumb, stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish!"⁸⁴

Indeed, at 1:27p.m. EST on 4 August the *Maddox* dispatched the aforementioned report (later read aloud at the Fulbright hearings) doubting "reported contacts and torpedoes" and recommending a pause to evaluate the situation before resuming further action. This message

arrived at the National Military Command Center two hours hence, precipitating a meeting between McNamara, his Deputy Secretary Cyrus Vance, and the Joint Chiefs “to marshal the evidence to overcome lack of a clear and convincing showing that an attack on the destroyers had in fact occurred.”⁸⁵ They concluded that “an attack had taken place,” and at 5:19p.m. the Joint Chiefs sent CINCPAC an order for a retaliatory strike against five DRV coastal sites and “any PT boats [lingering] beyond the three mile limit.”⁸⁶ Soon H.J. Res. 1145 was on its way to the House of Representatives for passage (416-0), then the Senate (88-2), and eventually to President Johnson’s desk.⁸⁷

HUMINT later derived from pertinent captured DRV naval personnel, it turned out, did *not* corroborate the 4 August attack narrative. The U.S. Navy engaged and sank three DRV PT boats in the Gulf of Tonkin later, in 1966, capturing 19 sailors, one of which was a senior commander. Again, during McNamara’s testimony before the Fulbright Hearings, this interrogation report was brought forth in queries about the second Tonkin Gulf engagement.

The senior officer had been interrogated for more than a hundred hours. He was described as cooperative and reliable—not particularly unusual qualities among prisoners undergoing interrogation. When the question of the August, 1964, incidents came up, the officer proved to know all about the action against the *Maddox* on August 2. He said he had written the subsequent action report. He also gave the Navy information that enabled it to destroy a number of North Vietnamese patrol boats in their bases.⁸⁸

Thus was established not only this DRV officer’s credibility, through testimony from the first engagement, but his reliability, as he subsequently provided actionable intelligence for successful U.S. combat operations against his own nation’s naval forces.

Fulbright read McNamara an excerpt from the interrogation report. The prisoner “obviously has traveled in higher circles and has proved himself exceptionally knowledgeable on almost every naval subject and event of interest. *Yet he specifically and strongly denies that any attack took place*” on August 4. (italics in original)⁸⁹

McNamara, in response, asked that everyone present without a top-level security clearance leave the room so he could read aloud more SIGINT intercepts he brought. After seven hours of testimony, though, they adjourned, and committee member Senator Albert Gore, Sr. (D-TN) declared to the outgoing Secretary of Defense (McNamara was moving soon to his new position presiding over the World Bank) that “there is more question now than when you came.”⁹⁰

McNamara wrote later that “evidence of the first attack is indisputable. The second attack appears probable but not certain.” Further, he concluded that subsequent retaliatory strikes were “probably” justified; a resolution would have gone to congress, he argues, without the Tonkin Gulf Incident, “within a matter of weeks, and very likely it would have passed. But the resolution would have faced far more extensive debate, and there would have been attempts to limit the president’s authority.”⁹¹

First, Retaliation, then the Resolution

Before sending the resolution’s draft to Congress, however, the White House had initiated another intelligence cycle—to find DRV targets against which the *Ticonderoga* and the now on-station carrier *Constellation* (it had left Hong Kong the night of 3 August)⁹² could launch retaliatory airstrikes. The JCS in response provided a list of four patrol boat bases and an oil depot. It is likely McNamara took this list into the NSC meeting at 6:15p.m. EST, where he “outlined the evidence supporting our conclusion and presented our proposed response. On the morning of 5 August naval aviators flew sixty-four sorties against these targets, in which two American aircraft were lost, and a pilot—the *Constellation*’s Lieutenant (j.g.) Everett Alvarez, Jr., was shot down near Hongay, northeast of Hanoi.”⁹³ James Stockdale, as commander of Fighter Squadron 51 on the *Ticonderoga*, participated in the attack on the oil tank farm at Vinh.

As President Johnson went on national television shortly before midnight in Washington to announce the in-progress strikes, his military was initiating another intelligence cycle—a bomb damage assessment, which soon reported all targets “severely” struck, with an estimated 25 North Vietnamese vessels listed as damaged or destroyed. One can assume these intelligence cycles—producing target lists and folders, complete with overhead imagery, maps, and evaluations of local anti-aircraft threats; as well as tasking reconnaissance assets to later overfly and photograph struck targets for analysts to assess effects of these retaliatory strikes for dispatch to Washington—were performed with excellence, effectiveness, and efficiency, in support of the administration’s retaliatory policy.⁹⁴

The Central Intelligence Agency, meanwhile, was publishing its own solid Cold War analyses. After the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy replaced Allen Dulles as Director of Central Intelligence with John McCone, a former Chair of the Atomic Energy Commission and Undersecretary of the Air Force, who held more expertise in industry than the intelligence field. McCone quickly began reforms, arguing that “covert operations had been given too much emphasis by his predecessors; he wanted to boost the intelligence community’s analytical contribution to policy formation.”⁹⁵ One way to do so was devoting resources to production and dissemination of National Intelligence (NIE) and Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIE), culling together contributions from the National Intelligence Board (i.e., information from Defense, NSA, and the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research) to present assessments and future scenarios regarding highest national security issues to the highest stratum of the U.S. government.

Six decades of hindsight reveal a remarkable prescience in many of these big-picture assessments. The June 1964 NIE regarding the Communist world, for instance, evaluated

opportunities for and threats to the non-Communist nations regarding each of the globe's Communist powers, to include the DRV. The analysts at CIA's Office of National Assessment, in organizing the report, divided "The Other Communist Powers" into "The Soviet Camp" and "The Chinese Bloc," and, within weeks of the Tonkin Gulf Incident, placed the DRV in the latter category.

From the beginning, North Vietnam has struggled to stay neutral in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and has found it more and more difficult to do so. Proximity to China and the pressures of the war in South Vietnam impel the North Vietnamese party toward China's side. It now espouses Chinese views on most doctrinal issues in the dispute. However, its stand is somewhat less extreme than North Korea's, and it continues to trade with and to receive aid from the USSR and the East European Satellites. Ho Chi Minh has tried to prevent a formal Sino-Soviet split, probably because he fears that such a split would result in his coming under Chinese control. We believe that North Vietnam will continue to side with the Chinese on most issues, but that Hanoi will seek to maintain its ties with Moscow and to avoid too close a Chinese embrace.⁹⁶

While the report explicitly cast the DRV into China's orbit, the analysis for North Vietnam was shrewd. As an entity balanced between the two great Communist powers, Ho's government was lumped with others into the General Implications conclusion to the estimate.

Those parties which commit their allegiance either to Moscow or to Peiping will be exposed to reprisals, intrigues, and disruptive action by the other side. The result will be that a number of parties will be torn by internal struggle, and much energy will be devoted to attacking and destroying factional rivals... On the other hand, some Communist parties will benefit from the breakup of a disciplined international movement. They will have a wider range of choice in adopting the particular coloration they believe most politically effective in their own national environments. They will have the opportunity to disavow the USSR or China on specific occasions, and they may gain a new respectability in their own countries by ceasing to be the mere instruments of a foreign power.⁹⁷

The same month, LBJ formally tasked the agency to address repercussions for the rest of the region if North Vietnam seized both Laos and South Vietnam. The report generated in response, according to *The Pentagon Papers*, argued against The Domino Theory. The analysis said this outcome would damage U.S. standing in the region and raise China's status as leader of

the world revolution “at the expense of a more moderate Soviet Union.”⁹⁸ The U.S. could maintain its leverage, though, by holding onto Pacific Island bases—e.g., Japan, the Philippines, and Guam—to deter further PRC and DRV aggression in Southeast Asia.

The prevailing anxiety held, however, amongst officials closest to the Oval Office, wherein “all of the countries of Southeast Asia, from Cambodia to Malaysia, would tumble automatically into the Communist camp if the linchpin, South Vietnam, were knocked out, and that the United States position in the rest of the Far East, from Indonesia through the Philippines to Japan and Korea, would also be irrevocably harmed.”⁹⁹ Accordingly, when George Ball in October sent a 67-page memo to Rusk, McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy forecasting possible Chinese intervention and nuclear conflict in the event of escalation, Rostow doubled down.

Send American troops to Vietnam promptly, he asserted, and the Communists would understand that “we are prepared to face down any form of escalation” they might mount. “Massive” U.S. air and naval forces should be deployed in the Pacific to strike at North Vietnam and even China should either or both react. Only a stupendous display of American muscle would drive the Communists into submission. “They will not actually accept a setback until they are sure that we mean it,” Rostow affirmed, and they had to be told bluntly that “they now confront an LBJ who has made up his mind.”¹⁰⁰

Thus, again, Walt Rostow seized the opportunity to predict the adversary’s response to “American muscle” when espousing his policy decisions.

It is often said, however, that the enemy gets a vote, and after the Tonkin Gulf Incident, Hanoi’s relationship to the Soviet Union evolved in important ways. The nature and image, according to Douglas Pike, morphed “from bare-footed Viet Cong with their homemade shotguns to Vietnamese Communist armies equipped with the best weapons the Communist world could produce.” In 1964, cutting-edge weaponry for use against American strike aircraft was *not* manufactured in the People’s Republic of China. “Technology was making the USSR

more important to Hanoi [as the] North Vietnamese High Command was devising a new kind of strategy that attempted to match U.S. technology in terms of weapons and firepower.”¹⁰¹

The Soviet Union’s immediate response to Tonkin, however, mostly occurred in its press, and Khrushchev did send a formal letter to President Johnson airing concerns about war in the region.¹⁰² Ilya Gaiduk argued that at this point, “although not averse to a Communist victory in the region, the Kremlin ascribed to Indochina no geostrategic importance and did not want the crisis there to be an impediment to the process of détente with the United States and its allies... Soviet leaders were eager to delegate the primary responsibility for the fledgling Communist state in North Vietnam to their Chinese allies, thus making the Chinese their agents in Asia.”¹⁰³

Whatever role Rostow and others ascribed to the USSR in the summer of 1964, its interests were not congruent with either Mao’s or Ho’s regarding war in Vietnam. The coterie of principal advisors around President Johnson, however, were still deeply committed to both the monolithic Communist camp model—in which the Soviets, Mao, and Hanoi were united and locked into an existential struggle with the rest of the world—and The Domino Theory. Rostow, in the BNSP, had described one of four major missions of U.S. force as “To supplement allied and friendly forces in deterring or countering Communist non-nuclear attacks on the free community or in sea areas or on lines of communication vital to its survival.”¹⁰⁴ When he submitted the draft document in 1962, Rostow may not have had the Gulf of Tonkin (or the Ho Chi Minh Trail) in mind here; by August of 1964, though, DESOTO and MACV-SOG operations were certainly working this mission description against Communist forces in Southeast Asia.

The previous May, the CIA released SNIE 50-2-64: *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, evaluating predominantly air and naval actions

proposed “to induce the DRV to bring about a major reduction of Viet Cong insurrectionary activity in South Vietnam and to respect the 1962 Geneva agreement on Laos”¹⁰⁵ (i.e., Laotian neutrality and freedom from foreign military forces within its borders). The estimate concluded that, in retaliation, “Hanoi could agitate world opinion against the US, hoping that a new Geneva conference or UN action would result, and [would] bring a cessation of attacks.” However: “We think that North Vietnam, while taking various precautionary measures, would order the Viet Cong... to refrain from dramatic new attacks, and might reduce the level of the insurrections for the moment. Communist China and the USSR would both support these courses.” The report advocated attaining breathing room and time for the Saigon government to deal with the counterinsurgency on its territory, but to manage expectations, it forecasted that the adversary’s overarching intention “would be to preserve Communist gains and assets in these two countries (South Vietnam and Laos, where the Ho Chi Minh Trail had been supplying the Viet Cong insurgency since 1959) and to resume the insurrectionary campaigns at a later date.”¹⁰⁶

In later paragraphs, analysts argued that when these campaigns resumed, deployed American forces would confront the same methods used against the French a decade earlier, the PRC would keep its forces out of the hostilities, and the Soviet Union would offer propaganda, diplomacy, and weaponry to aid the DRV. Any ambiguity in stated U.S. support or failures would not only weaken governments in South Vietnam and Laos, but the morale and discipline “deterioration would be felt generally through non-Communist Asia.”¹⁰⁷

Two weeks later, on 9 June, the Board of National Estimates dispatched a memo to DCI McCone, regarding a possible domino effect occurring with the loss of South Vietnam and Laos. Losing these two non-communist nations would, it argued, “lead almost inevitably to the communization of other states in the area, and perhaps beyond... [and] would be profoundly

damaging to the US position in the Far East, most especially because the US has committed itself persistently, emphatically, and publicly to preventing Communist takeover of the two countries.”¹⁰⁸ It forecast that Cambodia would likely follow them, and Thailand would move toward neutrality. While Indonesia could be emboldened to move on Malaysia, however, the assessment argued that the U.S.’s island bases in the Western Pacific—Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines—would endure. U.S. influence on the Asian mainland, and relations with British and Australian SEATO allies (both of which depended on U.S. guarantees to Malaysia) would likely be damaged with the loss of South Vietnam and Laos.¹⁰⁹ In the Manichaean perspective on the Cold War, the free world would lose; China and, to a lesser extent, the USSR, would therefore win.

McNamara in his memoir wrote of disagreement within the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding the efficacy of influencing events in South Vietnam by bombing the DRV. The JCS at his request had, regardless, produced the “Ninety-Four Targets List,” an air campaign proposal emphasizing DRV airfields, supply lines, and industrial facilities. “They considered attacks on these targets necessary to prevent the collapse of America’s position in Southeast Asia... The study did not mention that many of these strikes would have to be launched from airfields in South Vietnam, or that U.S. combat troops would be needed to keep the airfields safe.”¹¹⁰ Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson argued with his peers that the insurgency was in South Vietnam, where the Vietcong operated, and even if the U.S. obliterated the DRV’s war-making potential, that insurgency could only be defeated below the 17th parallel. McNamara later reported that General Johnson’s argument was not included in the “talking paper” JCS presented to him and General Maxwell D. Taylor, the newly appointed U.S. ambassador to Saigon, on 8 September.¹¹¹

A week later, the Joint Chiefs executed a war game, Sigma II-64, specifically to evaluate effects of both “Massive Deployments” and “Response to Air Strikes,” among other issues regarding U.S. posture in Southeast Asia. Evaluating the latter exercise component reveals not only the Joint Chiefs’ priorities, but how far they were willing to go to safeguard the region from communist influence.

Would Ho order the suppression or the stopping of Viet Cong operations? Would the Viet Cong respond to Ho’s direction if told to cease operations in SVN? Would industrial bombing of NVN (North Vietnam) have real effect on a primarily rural agrarian population? Would North Vietnam be politically stable after a bombing campaign? Would the regime gain or lose support from the people, including the armed forces? (Historic examples: ex-Germany, Italy and Japan in WWII.) Would US air attacks against Communist China, if accompanied by public statements that no effort would be made to overthrow the communist government of the country, result in USSR support for the Chicoms? If so, what form would this support take? Material only? Troops and material? Nuclear?¹¹²

Indeed, the words “USSR,” “Chicom,” and “Nuclear,” not to mention the allusion to the most recent war in which victors demanded unconditional surrender, reveal much about the scope of this “politico-military game involving a crisis situation in Southeast Asia.”¹¹³

The exercise Blue Team, representing U.S. and South Vietnamese governments, “less the highest executive authorities,”¹¹⁴ employed a strategy of “political, economic and military measures against” their notional counterparts from the DRV and PRC—the Red Team—to undertake punitive strikes on military and industrial targets in NVN to cause the NVN to make a political decision to cease support of the insurgency in Laos and SVN.”¹¹⁵ The Blue Team vigorously prosecuted an air campaign, aurally mining North Vietnam’s ports, and supporting the Saigon government with an augmented counterinsurgency program. “All these efforts had failed to halt VC insurgency, and the DRV was stated to be infiltrating major PAVN (People’s Army of Vietnam) units into SVN. SIGMA II confronted Blue [Team] with the question of what

to do since escalation of the war into NVN had failed to achieve desired results in SVN, and the enemy appeared to be raising the ante toward major ground warfare.”¹¹⁶ McNamara, in his memoir, referred to Sigma-II 64 as the “closest I came to getting a straight answer to my inquiry about [economic and military effects of striking] the ninety-four targets.”¹¹⁷

Regardless, the Communist monolith, the Domino Theory, and the CIA’s estimates enabled escalating U.S. commitment to South Vietnam. Another, 1 October’s SNIE 53-2-64, described a trend of expanding decay in South Vietnam’s society—characterized by “increasing defeatism, paralysis of leadership, friction with Americans, exploration of possible lines of political accommodation with the other side, and a general petering out of the war effort”—and accelerating erosion of the government’s “will and effectiveness.” Though premature by about four months, its warning that a “coup by disgruntled South Vietnam military figures could occur at any time”¹¹⁸ was prescient. As the autumn of 1964 progressed, though, events there began to accelerate and test all these intelligence assessments and assumptions.

The Viet Cong Reacts: Bien Hoa

The retaliatory U.S. airstrikes against DRV naval capability precipitated further violent action in South Vietnam; this in turn affected both superpowers’ policies toward the blossoming proxy war.

The U.S. had been training South Vietnamese pilots to fly the Martin B-57 Canberra bomber in the Philippines, at Clark Airbase. While there was no decision to turn these 1950s-era trainers over to South Vietnam’s air force (VNAF), the USAF had opted shortly after the Tonkin Gulf Incident to move the training and aircraft to Bien Hoa airbase, 20 miles from Saigon. Though comprising a violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords’ stipulation against introduction of combat jets into South Vietnam, the squadron moved anyway and bedded down at Bien Hoa.¹¹⁹

On 1 November, days before the U.S. presidential election, Viet Cong sappers inserted a mortar team into the base's fence line. In a 30-minute barrage, the U.S. and South Vietnamese air forces lost multiple aircraft and personnel, as well as several base infrastructure buildings.¹²⁰ Though Ambassador Taylor in Saigon advocated for immediate reprisal airstrikes against North Vietnam, LBJ chose to wait until after the election. On 6 November, though, Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky launched a retaliatory mission with 32 VNAF propeller-driven strike aircraft against a Viet Cong facility in War Zone D (approximately 30 miles north of the air base, within South Vietnamese territory).¹²¹

Townsend Hoopes argues in his memoir that "the Bien Hoa attack crystallized official U.S. determination for intervention. The doctrine of deterrence, which had been applied with success against Russians in Europe, had proved no inhibition to the primitive North Vietnamese who were determined to finish a civil war by unifying the country on their own harsh terms."¹²² Recognitions that a doctrine that worked against the Soviets was not applicable to the DRV, and that the Cold War in Southeast Asia was not congruent with the one in Central Europe, represent progress; the president's advisors' continuing attitude toward the conflict as international (between the Vietnams that were created at Geneva), rather than a civil war in South Vietnam, however, represents a glaring error.

For the Soviets, though, Bien Hoa was also a crystallizing development. In November of 1964, historian Ilya Gaiduk wrote, their influence with North Vietnam's military was waning, while China's was rising. The DRV general staff informed the Soviet military attaché in Hanoi that its views on strategy and tactics diverged from the USSR's, and "the DRV Ministry of Defense informed the attaché that there was no longer any need for the Soviet military experts in their country, and as soon as their term of business ended, they should leave. No replacements

would be requested.”¹²³ The DRV had, after all, perceived Soviet reaction to the Tonkin Gulf—a simple condemnation of the U.S. actions and another call for “peaceful reunification”—as inadequate. This appeal occurred yet again when Hanoi sent Communist Party Secretary Le Duan to Moscow in the middle of August, and Ho Chi Minh’s biographer William Duiker asserted that Soviet officials “compounded the problem by procrastinating on a request from the NLF [the National Liberation Front—a.k.a. the Viet Cong] for formal diplomatic recognition as the sole legal government of South Vietnam.”¹²⁴ There is thus a case to be made that rather than viewing the conflict as one between two nations, the Soviet hierarchy understood a civil war was brewing in South Vietnam between a guerrilla organization and a teetering government imposed by outsiders at Geneva. The fact that Ky conducted airstrikes against his own territory after the Bien Hoa attack supports it.

In the Autumn of 1964, however, an insurrection was also percolating in the Kremlin.

Chapter 3 - The Tonkin Gulf Incident

Setting the Stage: The U.S. Intelligence Apparatus in Southeast Asia

In the 1950s U.S. intelligence de-emphasized HUMINT, as the Soviet Bloc's security measures and counterintelligence increasingly proved impermeable to Western agents. As James Bamford argued, though, in his history of the National Security Agency, "while the Communist governments of Eastern Europe and Asia could draw impenetrable iron curtains around their countries, hiding such things as the development of nuclear weapons and missile technology, they could not build roofs over them. Nor could their armed guards halt the continuous streams of invisible signals escaping across their borders."¹ More technical methods were needed to harvest this information: SIGINT, but also imagery intelligence (IMINT, such as high-altitude photographs U-2 cameras were snapping over Cuba and the Soviet Union), and intelligence through electronic means (ELINT) from signals not directly used in communications—radar or foreign missile guidance systems' emissions.

Since 1960, for example, the U.S. had established SIGINT posts in Korea and throughout the Western Pacific, and based a C-47 Rose Bowl collection aircraft in Thailand to monitor regional communications. In 1961, the Pacific Air Forces dispatched a ground-based SIGINT unit to South Vietnam, to a site near Da Nang known as Monkey Mountain. To provide tactical intelligence to friendly air operations, the 6924th Security Squadron turned antennas northward toward the Tonkin Gulf to collect and interpret VHF communications from Communist aircraft; but "the Monkey Mountain installation was soon intercepting transmissions not picked up elsewhere"² in its vicinity, from sources besides airplanes. There was, thus, an expanding, sophisticated blanket of U.S. intelligence capability covering Southeast Asia well before 1964.

There were areas in the Southern Hemisphere, though, as the 1960s began, that land-based listening posts and airborne platforms could *not* cover—due to range or access limitations, so the U.S. Navy placed eavesdropping antennas on ships; Bamford called this the “Sigint navy,”³ tasked to patrol off coasts to collect information for JFK’s intelligence requirements. The U.S. apparatus thus comprised all necessary tools to knit a blanket of intelligence to throw over any looming crisis across the globe by 1964; this awareness ideally would facilitate quick and informed decisions within the national command authority. This chapter will demonstrate, however, that in the wake of the Tonkin Gulf Incident, the intelligence cycle was distorted to justify the Johnson Administration’s policy and escalation into Vietnam.

This section also steps away temporarily from the U.S.-USSR bilateral relationship, tightening the aperture to the growing American interest in Vietnam and further to the watershed moment in the Gulf of Tonkin. The events of early August 1964 that occurred there, and the subsequent congressional approval to amp up American investment in the war between North and South Vietnams, reveal a policy already in place before the *USS Maddox* arrived on-station in the gulf. The subsequent investigation of 2 and 4 August may be the starkest example of the Johnson Administration ignoring intelligence analysis if that analysis failed to support existing policy choices. Again, here, in its evolving policy toward Vietnam, the administration focused its attention on tactical over operational intelligence products; the intelligence apparatus in effect served more as a cheerleader for that in-place policy, and not to provide guidance to American policy-makers.

In the summer of 1964 President Johnson was quietly engaging with the conflict. “Rejecting proposals to expand the war into North Vietnam or to introduce combat troops in the South, Johnson believed that he was, for now, left with only one choice: incremental and covert

escalation of military pressure, designed to convince Hanoi that the United States was serious and to reassure Saigon.” Like Khrushchev, though, in the spring of 1964, he had doubts about the regime he was assisting, as “in the next few months, the situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate and the Saigon regime was shaken by one crisis after another.”⁴

Analysts at both the State and Defense Departments pointed out inherent dangers in taking action against the DRV with a U.S. air campaign—for example the possibility of killing Soviet advisors at either military airfields or surface-to-air missile sites, and thus risking expanded war with the other superpower. Instead, it was deemed safer and more appropriate to apply “low-level pressures” to ratchet up Hanoi’s costs for supporting the Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam.

The pressures would rise, slowly but inexorably, to a “crescendo,” whose exact nature was left undefined, since the hope was that the North Vietnamese, realizing what they were up against, would disengage from the struggle before it became necessary for the United States to decide how far to go in punishing Hanoi. Abandoned by the North, the Vietcong would be reduced to a manageable problem for the American-supported Saigon regime, whose mettle and morale would be vastly enhanced in consequence... Late in 1963, the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), then Admiral Harry D. Felt, translated the initial phase of the “crescendo” concept into a plan for covert military pressure...

This plan was delivered to MACV, and “refined” into OPLAN 34A.⁵

The effort included covert military activities, to include airdropping South Vietnamese agents and propaganda leaflets into the DRV, as well as raids and sabotage missions along its South China Sea coast. These actions nested neatly into the Flexible Response strategy, and Gaddis posited that they also dovetailed nicely with Rostow’s perspectives.

[H]is commitment to economic development not as a traditionally liberal end in itself, but as a means of stabilizing the world balance of power; ...his assumption that the balance of power was so delicate that even slight shifts might upset it; his conviction that victories for communism anywhere (even though communism was itself fragmenting) would bring about such shifts. Rostow did not, to be sure, favor intervention against all communist-led insurgencies: the primary

responsibility, he insisted, remained with “local forces” motivated presumably by a sense of their own nationalism.⁶

Hence, according to OPLAN 34A, it would not be American commandos beaching boats and hitting the silk to prosecute raids into North Vietnam. The U.S. would train, equip, and arm South Vietnamese volunteers to do so; MACV would also plan the missions and debrief the survivors.

If the Soviet commitment to the DRV was drawing down, why were U.S. resources and personnel increasingly dispatched to South Vietnam? Gaddis argued that both Kennedy and Johnson administrations “viewed the American stake there as determined exclusively by threats and obligations: the security of the United States, indeed of the entire non-communist world, was imperiled *wherever* communist challenges came up against American guarantees (italics in original).”⁷

Meanwhile, OPLAN 34A evolved. On 22 July Nguyen Cao Ky, South Vietnam’s air force chief, told the world that his nation was airdropping saboteur teams into North Vietnam,⁸ and soon the U.S. National Security Advisor confirmed to President Johnson that this was part and parcel of 34A; and that eight of these airdrops had occurred since April of 1964. Of course, Bundy also had to admit that these drops were not terribly successful, and that most of these agents were never seen again.⁹

This information was readily available due to the Secretary of Defense’s “statistical analysis techniques for tracking and controlling military operations.” McNamara, wrote H.R. McMaster, “believed covert operations were an ideal method for applying pressure on North Vietnam while minimizing the risk of escalating the war.” Further, McNamara emphasized OPLAN 34A’s maritime component (MAROPS), in which high-speed boats, commanded and operated by U.S. SEALs, were landing South Vietnamese saboteur and dive teams near North

Vietnam's coast and naval facilities to plant explosives, raid, and ambush DRV response units, before climbing back into the boats and egressing back to Da Nang. Compared to the agent air drops, MAROPS, underway since May of 1964, had achieved relative success.¹⁰

Since December 1962, U.S. destroyers had been collecting IMINT, ELINT, and SIGINT by means of DESOTO patrols off North Vietnam's coast, as part of MACV's intelligence cycle supporting OPLAN 34A. Standard procedure for these missions—and there had been two so far, one in December 1962 and a second in April 1963 off North Vietnam—was to onload a “communications van” to the destroyer's deck at the Taiwan port of Keelung, to collect foreign communications traffic; and an “Electronic Countermeasures (ECM) van” to harvest radar emissions data. Each was staffed by specialists—either linguists or ECM technicians—to run the equipment and interpret gathered information.¹¹

On July 3, MACV requested DESOTO support for OPLAN 34A coastal raids, and the new CINCPAC, Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, approved and forwarded the ask to his intelligence collection managers. As the operation's duration was unspecified, it would entail multiple intelligence cycles, with the assumption that continuous analysis would make raids more effective and efficient; it would certainly assist in compiling and updating orders of battle for radar, security, and other coastal DRV units—a process essential to constructing the overall picture of how North Vietnam was protecting its territory. Simultaneously, U-2 sorties had launched from air bases in the Philippines and near Saigon to photograph MAROPS targets before and after the raids, to support MACV's pertinent planning and after-action reports.¹²

OPLAN 34A contained other operations, though, potentially of a more strategic nature than either delivering South Vietnamese frogmen or commandos. Karnow reported that the agenda also

included maritime activities designed to intercept Communist ships delivering materiel to the Vietcong in the South and to kidnap fishermen for interrogation. But the most important aspect of the marine operation was related to plans then being refined by Pentagon experts for eventual strategic air and naval attacks against North Vietnam. Among these plans was a blueprint for an amphibious invasion by U.S. and South Vietnamese ground troops—an idea particularly favored in subsequent years by Rostow and the more vigorous members of the American military establishment.¹³

CINCPAC therefore dispatched a destroyer, the *USS Maddox*, and its DESOTO collection capabilities, and the aircraft carrier *USS Ticonderoga*, with ancillary ships, to the Gulf of Tonkin. The destroyer's captain, John J. Herrick, was ordered to stay at least 8 miles from the coast and at least 4 from offshore islands, even though naval intelligence had recently speculated that the DRV, like China, would adhere to a 12-mile limit in the claim to its territorial waters. "Thus," explained Karnow, "the destroyer was conceivably violating North Vietnam's sovereignty in connection with a clandestine South Vietnamese operation."¹⁴ As its sailors were photographing and compiling graphic shipboard radar profiles of the coastline, as well as taking water temperature measurements at various depths, though, this proximity to shore makes sense.¹⁵

As the destroyer sailed from Taiwan into the Tonkin Gulf, on 30 July, MAROPS missions fired on the islands of Hon Me and Hon Ngu, both located within seven miles of the coast and, when DRV radar and radio traffic sparked up in the vicinity, *Maddox* was able to eavesdrop on frequencies and emissions, then transmit data "to a special American intelligence center in the Philippines (Naval Communications Station San Miguel), which in turn relayed the information to CIA headquarters outside Washington."¹⁶

On the morning of 2 August, the destroyer found itself adjacent a large flotilla of Vietnamese junks, sounded general quarters, and advised Seventh Fleet it was steaming east to avoid the possibly-armed boats; Captain Herrick was ordered to continue the mission regardless. By 1100 hours the *Maddox* approached the patrol's northernmost point, near the Red River delta,

sighted DRV patrol boats, and the linguists in the communications van intercepted an order to the patrol boats to refuel, then attack. The *Maddox* turned seaward and a running gun battle ensued with the faster patrol boats in pursuit. In response to Herrick's request for assistance, the *Ticonderoga* launched three Crusader jets, which arrived on station that afternoon and strafed the DRV boats. At the end of the twenty-minute engagement, two North Vietnamese patrol boats were damaged and a third sunk; one bullet had punched a hole in the *Maddox*, but produced no casualties.

When the combat reports arrived in Washington, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Earl Wheeler, dispatched the following to the Commander in Chief, Pacific:

1. You are authorized to continue the DeSoto patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin area in conformance with routes and times specified in reference A, subject to the following:
 - a. Closest approach to the NVN mainland coastline will be 11 miles, repeat 11 miles.
 - b. Air patrol CAP (Combat Air Patrol) will be provided during daylight hours, however, CAP will be maintained to the seaward of the two destroyers so as to preclude any possibility of overflight of NVN.
 - c. Be extremely watchful for any possible action including possible submarine activity either against the DeSoto patrol or the *Ticonderoga* task force.
 - d. Avoid close approaches to NVN coast during period when maritime activities related to OPLAN 34A are underway.¹⁷

In response, CINCPAC immediately ordered another destroyer, the *Turner Joy*, to join up with the *Maddox* in support.¹⁸ These orders, of course, flowed downward from discussions at the White House about the proper response to the attack. "Although the President opposed retaliation, he affirmed his commitment to continuing covert operations against North Vietnam.

His decision was consistent with the central tenet of the evolving strategic concept for Vietnam: demonstrate restraint, yet appear steadfast and determined.” Accordingly, on the night of 3 August, MAROPS boats shelled a radar station adjacent Vinh Son, and a security post near the mouth of the Ron River, 200 miles to the south.¹⁹

The following morning, based on SIGINT declaring the DRV navy might prosecute another attack on the destroyers, President Johnson met with a group of Democratic lawmakers in the White House’s East Wing dining room and “told the legislators that if there was another attack, the United States would have to retaliate... The legislators agreed that another incident would virtually require American military action against North Vietnam and they supported the president’s idea of a congressional resolution.”²⁰

Edwin C. Moise’s detailed account described subsequent events, but John Prados, in his history of the CIA, distilled them into the following: on the night of 4 August, in rough seas and thick fog, the DESOTO patrol’s guns fired at radar-acquired targets (not visually aimed) in response to an assumed second patrol boat attack. “President Johnson,” in turn, “retaliated with carrier air strikes on North Vietnam... then went to Congress for a resolution supporting his action, and on August 7, 1964, the legislature approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. President Johnson then relied on the resolution in place of a declaration of war.”²¹

Anthony Austin, in *The President’s War*, bluntly assessed that, regarding 4 August, “evidence of the attack that had been received in Washington at the time of the decision to retaliate was not only skimpy but of questionable quality. From the communications traffic it would seem that the facts increasingly demanded caution, but the operational demands of striking North Vietnam within a few hours were so overwhelming that there was not time for amplifying information to come in.”²² Rather than sitting through another intelligence cycle to

verify a second attack, the Johnson White House evidently preferred to execute action in support of policy.

In supporting his assertion, Austin examined the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings chaired by Senator James W. Fulbright (D-AR). To shape Robert McNamara's February 1966 testimony, Senator Fulbright read a cable aloud, relayed from the Naval communications facility in the Philippines, which had been monitoring the traffic from the *Turner Joy* and *Maddox* during the patrol, dispatched to Washington in the hours between the second alleged attack and the retaliatory airstrikes:

[A] review of action makes many recorded contacts and torpedoes fired 'appear doubtful'. 'Freak weather effects' on radar and 'over-eager' sonarmen may have accounted for many reports. 'No visual sightings' have been reported by the *Maddox*, and the Commander suggests that a 'complete evaluation' be undertaken before any further action.²³

After some dissemination and paper shuffling, according to the account, the Secretary of Defense suggested the source was the relay station, when in fact the report represented an on-the-spot assessment from the Task Force commander on the *Maddox*. Austin depicts Fulbright reading this cable as a turning point in the hearings. "[I]t was a klaxon call for scrapping all the preparations then being made for reprisal. Yet twelve hours later the planes were on their way." Indeed, he asserts, "the revelation that the commander of the patrol himself had cast doubt on his own earlier reports of an attack swung the committee bodily into distrust of McNamara's whole position."²⁴

William B. Bader, fresh from the U.S. Foreign Service's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, signed on as a staffer at Senator Fulbright's request to the committee and was thus present at McNamara's testimony. So was the committee's Chief of Staff Carl Marcy (its longest-serving Chief of Staff—1955-1973). Each, in later recollections, provided granularity to

accounts of these closed sessions; and each tacitly supported Austin's perspectives on McNamara's testimony.

Bader wrote in 2004: "No credible evidence of a second attack on Aug. 4 has ever been produced, and it probably never happened. The reports of the attack given to Congress and the public were spurious. The commander of the Maddox quickly expressed his doubts over whether there had been an attack, but Washington was already committed to confirming a second attack."²⁵

Marcy had served Fulbright on the committee from the Eisenhower to Nixon administrations. When asked why LBJ's administration was so reticent and deceitful before these closed hearings, when a consensus likely existed in both Congress and the American public that the Communist monolith was pushing the DRV to attack the DESOTO patrols, he answered:

Looking back it seems like it was a mistake, that he could have had much more support from Congress. But I suppose at the time that Johnson felt he was going with the tide in the country and the press. It wasn't until there began to be doubts about light at the end of the tunnel that the members of the Senate began to be skeptical.²⁶

When queried further about Senator Fulbright's doubts, Marcy elaborated, stating that

the only reason that Senator Fulbright got interested in investigating the Gulf of Tonkin incident was because of a small newspaper article which appeared in the *Arkansas Gazette*, in which some seaman had come home and said it didn't happen quite the way it had been reported. That was some years later. It seems to me that Senator Fulbright's quarrel with the administration about our involvement in Vietnam was based on his concern as to whether the United States, by sending troops to Asia, could by military means handle what he more and more and more thought was essentially a civil war.²⁷

"...a political master stroke..."

Why then the rush to escalation before further analysis or communication with either the engaged patrol or Hanoi itself? Several of these accounts are quick to point out that LBJ was

competing in his first presidential election within a few months. McMaster asserted that the president sought to convince the electorate he had considered all options before using force, as a foil to Goldwater's "hawkish stance on national security and military policy;" in the end he judged a single airstrike would prove, however, that the current administration "was neither indecisive nor timid."²⁸ Moise similarly argued that if LBJ had failed to act after the 4 August "attack", he ran the risk that the electorate would learn of the event, and he would thus be open to allegations of covering up "a Communist attack on U.S. fighting men either out of cowardice or political expediency."²⁹ Thus it is inferred that little room for further investigation existed, which in the circumstances might have led to charges of vacillation or indecision.

Those charges could have cost him votes, and Johnson, in the summer of 1964, wanted to win by a large margin. His principal aides, led by Rostow at the State Department's policy planning staff and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs William Bundy (his National Security Advisor's brother), had cobbled together a temporary solution to the burgeoning problem in Indochina. "They had drafted a legislative resolution that would serve a dual purpose: by giving Johnson a free hand to conduct the war in Southeast Asia as he saw fit, it would strengthen his international credibility; more important, its passage by a substantial majority in Congress would assure him bipartisan endorsement and thereby remove the Vietnam issue from the election campaign."³⁰ Karnow placed the initial suggestion for such a resolution at February 1964, and as early as November of 1965 the press asserted that when the President "presented his Vietnam resolution to Congress the day after the Gulf of Tonkin crisis... He had been carrying it around in his pocket for weeks waiting for the moment."³¹

William Bundy—in this job a little more than two months—drafted the resolution on May 25, and a list of 94 targets in North Vietnam as well. Planners ginned up missions for each

of them—addressing tactical concerns such as mission routes, suppressing enemy air defenses, combat air patrols orbiting nearby in case the DRV launched fighters in response, combat search and rescue, and U-2 IMINT—and presented these to McNamara, who ordered strike units to launch within 72 hours of the order to execute.³²

On 4 August Secretary Rusk cabled Ambassador Taylor in Saigon, advising him to visit Prime Minister Nguyen Khanh “as soon as possible to be sure he has accurate account of NVN actions against our two destroyers. You should tell him that President will shortly be announcing U.S. responsive measures against NVN including actions against NVN naval craft wherever they may be found on the high seas, U.S. air strikes against four torpedo boat bases on NVN coast, air cover for these operations which will engage any unfriendly aircraft.” Moreover, Taylor was directed to advise Khanh to keep the information secret in the interests of operational security, to “take no independent action” outside South Vietnam, and to “avoid public statements during this critical period.”³³

Three hours later, Rusk cabled selected American diplomatic stations around the world (NATO nations, New Delhi, and Karachi, e.g.) a copy of the upcoming presidential announcement, with instructions to convey the text to leaders of their respective host-nations, as well as a personal message from LBJ:

As I am sure that you will agree, these attacks could not go unanswered. The response we are making is, however, limited and fitting. I hope that it will make clear to the North Viet-Nameese regime the dangerous character of the course they are following in Southeast Asia.³⁴

President Johnson sent a personal follow-up message to Khanh to prepare him for U.S. retaliatory measures against the DRV for the alleged Tonkin Gulf attacks.³⁵

When the president pulled the Tonkin Gulf Resolution out of his pocket in the first week of August 1964, then, kinetic and diplomatic support for his political initiative was in place.

“Let the President go to the people and tell them their navy was coming under repeated, deliberate, and unprovoked attack on the high seas, let him ask for a Congressional resolution aimed at deterring the enemy from going any further, and he would release a surge of atavistic emotions precluding discussion with Congress on how the country had gotten into this involvement and how it should now proceed. The simplest answer to all these questions lay in heading off the questions.”³⁶ Undoubtedly one of them would pertain to how the Communist monolith would respond.

The Available Intelligence

The oft-described “information firehose” switched on shortly after the alleged PT boat attack on 4 August, a metaphor in which data rushes fast and voluminous, and analysts are compelled to sort valuable facts from the flow, and to put them aside for processing. Unfortunately, rather than look for salient inputs to decisions, the policy-makers in Washington at this point had set the conditions for their preferred course of action; they were interested in maintaining it, regardless of the intelligence apparatus’s findings—unless, of course, culled data added momentum to the chosen initiative. The intelligence cycle, though, always begins with a request for information.

On 4 August the National Security Council met for twenty-five minutes to discuss the situation. According to the transcript, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) John McCone reported to the president that North Vietnam was

reacting defensively to our attacks on their off-shore islands. They are responding out of pride and on the basis of defense considerations. The attack is a signal to us that the North Vietnamese have the will and determination to continue the war. They are raising the ante.

In response, the Secretary of Defense reported that the PRC was moving one of its air force regiments into North Vietnam.³⁷

It is here that U.S. Information Agency Director Carl Rowan asked about certainty that the “North Vietnamese provocation” actually occurred, and advised the president to be ready for accusations of “fabricating the incident.”

It is appropriate to cite the next three recorded statements at this meeting to reveal not only the intelligence relationship to policy, but how quickly and baldly it was asserted:

Secretary McNamara: We will know definitely in the morning. As of now, only highly classified information nails down the incident. This information we cannot use and must rely on other reports we will be receiving.

Secretary Rusk: We should ask the Congressional leaders whether we should seek a Congressional resolution. (The draft resolution read by Secretary Rusk is attached.) This short and clear draft is similar to the Mid-East resolution.

Secretary McNamara: In addition to the air strikes, we plan to send major U.S. reinforcements into the area. These include ships, men and planes. (A detailed listing of these forces is attached.)

The Secretaries of Defense and State had clearly prepared for this meeting, with supporting materials to facilitate decisions. McNamara shielded his assertions with sensitive, classified evidence that must be defended from either disclosure or discussion. Rusk pivoted to the need for a resolution to protect any U.S. retaliatory actions; then the Secretary of Defense provided naval, ground, and air orders of battle to the president to prosecute those retaliatory actions. The transcript concludes: “A draft statement for the President was revised. It is to be made public by the President as soon as the U.S. attack planes are over target.”³⁸

In his 1995 re-examination of the war, McNamara lent further perspective to this moment, and where the White House’s emphasis lay. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, he argued,

expressed “President Johnson’s oft-repeated warning that, if events ever forced us to expand the war, we must avoid the mistake President Truman had made in Korea, i.e., engaging in military operations without congressional approval. Congress will not accept any responsibility for a ‘crash landing’ unless it has also been in on the ‘takeoff,’ said Johnson, and therefore he was determined to have congressional authorization of any major U.S. military action in Southeast Asia if he ever had to initiate it.”³⁹ To acquire it, he would need to both make a case, and to assemble it with the most convincing evidence for presentation to Congress.

Two days after the second incident, therefore, Rusk phoned McCone to discuss evidence of the second attack. According to the memo, the DCI “said he had gone into the question of the use of some of the sensitive information to prove the night attack and disprove Hanoi’s allegation that it did not take place; it just cannot be used; we will have to have eyewitness accounts and things of that kind.”⁴⁰

The message CINCPAC thus sent to the Joint Chiefs on 6 August from Hawaii implies that McNamara ordered up such accounts from eyewitness sailors, attempting to seize control of the intelligence cycle. The product is a three-page Flash (highest importance) classified cable that summarizes the 2 August attack, then includes short statements from sailors and Marines on board the *Turner Joy* and *Maddox* to support the 4 August attack allegation.⁴¹

The text reports that around 9 p.m. the destroyers were sailing 60 miles off the DRV coast when “three high speed radar contacts were detected about 14 miles to the eastward of the two ships;” ten minutes later the radar contacts “indicated probable hostile intent by changing course and speed to close the range and take course which would permit launching torpedoes.” Sonar stations then reported “hearing” torpedoes running, and the forward gun director officer and two seamen reportedly saw one of them “coming from the direction of the radar contacts

which had ambushed the U.S. ships,” then pass 300 feet from the ship, running parallel. Multiple sailors on the *Turner Joy*’s signal and maneuvering bridges claimed observing a search light that winked out when friendly aircraft arrived on station, and also alleged observing torpedo boats when those aircraft dropped flares. The pilots—cruising between 700 and 1500 feet overhead, reported gun flashes both on the surface and in the air, as well as a “snakey” wake half a mile ahead of the *Maddox*. Two Marines manning machine guns on the destroyer claimed to see lights circling the ship, so “both believed the lights to be from one or more small boats going at high speed.”⁴²

The weather conditions, the text reports, were “overcast, with limited visibility.”⁴³ Other officers on the destroyers (i.e., the task force commander and *Turner Joy*’s first lieutenant) noted fluctuating winds—averaging about 17 knots—blowing spray about on the surface, where five-to-six-foot waves were encountered during this crucial action. The “limited visibility” in these accounts rests at about 300 yards maximum.⁴⁴ Hence, whatever confidence these eyewitnesses brought to the culled reporting, conditions were not ideal either on the ships or in the air (for pilots dropping flares to assist in the action) for providing certainty. Later, before the Fulbright Committee in February of 1968, Secretary McNamara cited a message from task force commander Captain John Herrick “stating that atmospheric conditions and sea conditions and other conditions cast doubt on some of the reports of firings, observations, and torpedoes.”⁴⁵

Again, the chain of command was aggressively searching for evidence of a second attack. The possibility of the task force expending so much ordnance and fuel to attack phantom surface targets adjacent the DRV coast was not to be entertained in the investigation of the 4 August engagement. Indeed, Moise describes a storm of message traffic transiting the Pacific—Washington’s queries and CINCPAC’s replies. At some point the requests for information

began vaulting over Hawaii directly to Captain Herrick, who was supplying a volume of reports corroborating the attack, while the aircraft carriers were not.⁴⁶

On 10 August, higher-ranking Defense department civilians began arriving in CINCPAC's area of responsibility to interview eyewitnesses,⁴⁷ but the Pentagon had already sorted and utilized "those who would provide evidence that there really had been an attack" on the 4th for their analysis and subsequent reporting:⁴⁸ "The after-action reports written a few days or a few weeks after the incident [therefore] present an impression of more consistency than was actually present in the available evidence."⁴⁹ LBJ wanted the incident verified, so he "leaned on McNamara," who phoned Admiral Sharp, who began "exerting pressure" on the *Maddox* captain to confirm the second attack. Captain "Herrick canvassed his officers and men, but they could produce only inconclusive fragments from the memories of the frantic night."⁵⁰

The reason not much was being culled from the *Ticonderoga* lay in the fact that none of its pilots launched to support the destroyers on 4 August—including one of the carrier's squadron commanders James Stockdale—could absolutely corroborate reports of an attack. In his memoir, Stockdale recounts his experience on the night of 4 August, describing higher than normal humidity and "lightning-charged air up in the Gulf [that] tonight could be expected to 'duct' or play tricks on old-fashioned radar."⁵¹ Having launched from the *Ticonderoga* alone after his wingman's jet developed mechanical problems, he arrived over "two very luminous wakes," which he confirmed were the destroyers by asking them to flash their red masthead lights 1000 feet below him.⁵² For around ninety minutes, he reported, he orbited them at or below the same altitude, listening to the radio chatter between the ships. "The *Joy* was firing at 'targets' the *Maddox* couldn't track on radar, and the *Maddox* was dodging 'torpedoes' the *Joy* couldn't hear on their sonar, and neither ship was detecting any electromagnetic emissions

(enemy radio or radar) in the area.”⁵³ The radio traffic was not congruent with what Stockdale could see from his aircraft “while I maneuvered close to the water, unencumbered by a wingman, lights off, trying to find whatever boat the destroyers were talking about and blast it immediately;”⁵⁴ no target, however, presented itself during that feverish hour-and-a-half. Stockdale had participated in the 2 August melee against DRV patrol boats, so he knew what to look for:

[W]here are the metal-to-metal sparks? And the boat wakes—where are they? And boat gun flashes? The day before yesterday, I saw all of those signs of small-boat combat in broad daylight! Any of those telltale indicators would stand out like beacons in this black hole we’re operating in.⁵⁵

A photo reconnaissance jet had also launched, dropping flares and snapping photos of the area, but the developed film provided no corroboration either; while the destroyers were clearly depicted in the developed photo frames, neither PT boats nor PT boat wakes are visible. Moise queried the pilot, Commander Donald Hegrat, about the sortie; Hegrat described the weather under the low cloud ceiling as “stormy... with a lot of thunderstorms and lightning in the area,” and asserted that “given the clear visibility of the wakes of the destroyers, he would have seen the wakes of PT boats with his own eyes if any had been present.”⁵⁶

Intelligence analysts prefer as many -INTs as possible to support a conclusion before taking it to decision-makers. MACV-SOG, the entity prosecuting the OPLAN 34A raids against the coast, prided itself on knowing where DRV navy units were at any given moment, in order to protect MAROPS. On 4 August its communications center tracked no DRV boats at sea, and no signals traffic indicating any had left port. In Washington, however, according to CIA Deputy Director Ray Cline, “Everyone was demanding the sigint; they wanted it quick, they didn’t want anybody to take the time to analyze it.”⁵⁷ To put this phenomenon in intelligence cycle

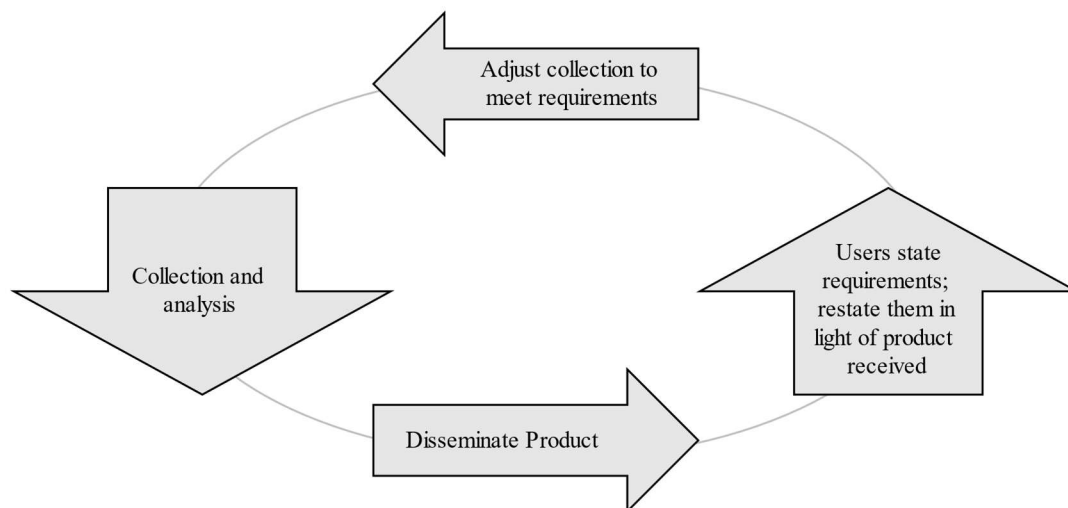
parameters, the customer demanded raw information without any analysis, and then pushed the ‘finished product’ up to the most senior decision makers in the U.S. government.

According to Cline, these intercepts, from multiple collection sites, needed to be translated by interpreters and cleared by an approving official before transmission up the chain of command; thus there could be a lag time of five to six hours before each approved message reached senior officials like himself in Washington. Further, date/time groups on the reports caused confusion between the time of intercept and the time of transmission from the intercepting station. This issue of message date/time groups drove him, as director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the State Department (1969-73), to re-assess the collected messages. He concluded that “the communications intercepts that had been cited as evidence for the August 4 incident all referred in fact to the August 2 incident.”⁵⁸

A pattern is discernible. Only mission debriefs from Navy witnesses (to include aircrews overhead looking for signs of the enemy), IMINT, SIGINT, or any other information *supporting* the claimed second attack transited the Pacific Ocean toward the White House. If anyone on CINCPAC’s staff or the JCS looked at it before forwarding to the Executive Branch, the delay was not made to facilitate rigorous analysis. To revisit the ideal intelligence cycle, someone—likely McNamara—stated the requirement to support a policy already engaged; adjustments were made to sift out any collected information that failed to support the policy; supporting information was then collected and disseminated to the Legislative Branch and the American public. While collection was adjusted to meet the administration’s requirements, and the product was repeatedly distributed to stakeholders in the Vietnam War, the intelligence cycle model was not properly or ideally employed in this case. Comparing the intelligence provided and how its collection and preparation differed from the ideal Intelligence Cycle will reveal the role

intelligence played in U.S. decision making, and how senior decision makers distorted the process of intelligence collection and analysis.

Fig. 1 Military concept of the intelligence cycle⁵⁹



In this first case study, the Oval Office received information it needed to pursue the policy eventually enabled by the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which passed both houses of the 88th Congress on 7 August; President Johnson signed it three days later. Undersecretary of State Ball, in his memoirs, described the three days between the second incident and the resolution's passage, and claims Johnson himself was unconvinced by the "intelligence":

[T]here was some evidence that the commanders might have misread the radar blips; if the destroyers were in danger, it could have been because they were firing at one another. Within the next two or three days, even President Johnson began to doubt the occurrence of a second attack. With disgust, he said to me at one point, "Hell, those dumb, stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish!"⁶⁰

Indeed, at 1:27p.m. EST on 4 August the *Maddox* dispatched the aforementioned report (later read aloud at the Fulbright hearings) doubting "reported contacts and torpedoes" and

recommending a pause to evaluate the situation before resuming further action. This message arrived at the National Military Command Center two hours hence, precipitating a meeting between McNamara, his Deputy Secretary Cyrus Vance, and the Joint Chiefs “to marshal the evidence to overcome lack of a clear and convincing showing that an attack on the destroyers had in fact occurred.”⁶¹ They concluded that “an attack had taken place,” and at 5:19p.m. the Joint Chiefs sent CINCPAC an order for a retaliatory strike against five DRV coastal sites and “any PT boats [lingering] beyond the three mile limit.”⁶² Soon H.J. Res. 1145 was on its way to the House of Representatives for passage (416-0), then the Senate (88-2), and eventually to President Johnson’s desk.⁶³

HUMINT later derived from pertinent captured DRV naval personnel, it turned out, did *not* corroborate the 4 August attack narrative. The U.S. Navy engaged and sank three DRV PT boats in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1966, capturing 19 sailors, one of which was a senior commander. Again, during McNamara’s testimony before the Fulbright Hearings, this interrogation report was brought forth in queries about the second Tonkin Gulf engagement.

The senior officer had been interrogated for more than a hundred hours. He was described as cooperative and reliable—not particularly unusual qualities among prisoners undergoing interrogation. When the question of the August, 1964, incidents came up, the officer proved to know all about the action against the *Maddox* on August 2. He said he had written the subsequent action report. He also gave the Navy information that enabled it to destroy a number of North Vietnamese patrol boats in their bases.⁶⁴

Thus was established not only this DRV officer’s credibility, by virtue of testimony from the first engagement, but his reliability, as he subsequently provided actionable intelligence for successful U.S. combat operations against his own nation’s naval forces.

Fulbright read McNamara an excerpt from the interrogation report. The prisoner “obviously has traveled in higher circles and has proved himself exceptionally knowledgeable on almost every naval subject and event of interest. *Yet he*

*specifically and strongly denies that any attack took place” on August 4. (italics in original)*⁶⁵

McNamara, in response, asked that everyone present without a top-level security clearance leave the room so he could read aloud more SIGINT intercepts he brought. After seven hours of testimony, though, they adjourned, and committee member Senator Albert Gore, Sr. (D-TN) declared to the outgoing Secretary of Defense (McNamara was moving soon to his new position presiding over the World Bank) that “there is more question now than when you came.”⁶⁶

McNamara wrote later that “evidence of the first attack is indisputable. The second attack appears probable but not certain.” Further, he concluded that subsequent retaliatory strikes were “probably” justified; a resolution would have gone to congress, he argues, without the Tonkin Gulf Incident, “within a matter of weeks, and very likely it would have passed. But the resolution would have faced far more extensive debate, and there would have been attempts to limit the president’s authority.”⁶⁷

First, Retaliation, then the Resolution

Before sending the resolution’s draft to Congress, however, the White House had initiated another intelligence cycle—to find DRV targets against which the *Ticonderoga* and the now on-station carrier *Constellation* (it had left Hong Kong the night of 3 August)⁶⁸ could launch retaliatory airstrikes. The JCS in response provided a list of four patrol boat bases and an oil depot. It is likely McNamara took this list into the NSC meeting at 6:15p.m. EST, where he “outlined the evidence supporting our conclusion and presented our proposed response. On the morning of 5 August naval aviators flew sixty-four sorties against these targets, in which two American aircraft were lost, and a pilot—the *Constellation*’s Lieutenant (j.g.) Everett Alvarez, Jr., was shot down near Hongay, northeast of Hanoi.⁶⁹ Stockdale, as commander of Fighter Squadron 51 on the *Ticonderoga*, participated in the attack on the oil tank farm at Vinh.

As President Johnson went on national television shortly before midnight in Washington to announce the in-progress strikes, his military was initiating another intelligence cycle—a bomb damage assessment, which soon reported all targets “severely” struck, with an estimated 25 North Vietnamese vessels listed as damaged or destroyed. One can assume these intelligence cycles—producing target lists and folders, complete with overhead imagery, maps, and evaluations of local anti-aircraft threats; as well as tasking reconnaissance assets to later overfly and photograph struck targets for analysts to assess effects of these retaliatory strikes for dispatch to Washington—were performed with excellence, effectiveness, and efficiency, in support of the administration’s retaliatory policy.⁷⁰

The Central Intelligence Agency, meanwhile, was publishing its own solid analysis. After the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy replaced Allen Dulles as Director of Central Intelligence with John McCone, a former Chair of the Atomic Energy Commission and Undersecretary of the Air Force, who held more expertise in industry than intelligence. McCone quickly began reforms, arguing that “covert operations had been given too much emphasis by his predecessors; he wanted to boost the intelligence community’s analytical contribution to policy formation.”⁷¹ One way to do so was devoting resources to production and dissemination of National Intelligence (NIE) and Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIE), culling together contributions from the National Intelligence Board (i.e., information from Defense, NSA, and the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research) to present assessments and future scenarios regarding highest national security issues to the highest stratum of the U.S. government.

Six decades of hindsight reveal a remarkable prescience in many of these big-picture assessments. The June 1964 NIE regarding the Communist world, for instance, evaluated

opportunities for and threats to the non-Communist nations regarding each of the globe's Communist powers, to include the DRV. The analysts at CIA's Office of National Assessment, in organizing the report, divided "The Other Communist Powers" into "The Soviet Camp" and "The Chinese Bloc," and, within weeks of the Tonkin Gulf Incident, placed the DRV in the latter category.

From the beginning, North Vietnam has struggled to stay neutral in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and has found it more and more difficult to do so. Proximity to China and the pressures of the war in South Vietnam impel the North Vietnamese party toward China's side. It now espouses Chinese views on most doctrinal issues in the dispute. However, its stand is somewhat less extreme than North Korea's, and it continues to trade with and to receive aid from the USSR and the East European Satellites. Ho Chi Minh has tried to prevent a formal Sino-Soviet split, probably because he fears that such a split would result in his coming under Chinese control. We believe that North Vietnam will continue to side with the Chinese on most issues, but that Hanoi will seek to maintain its ties with Moscow and to avoid too close a Chinese embrace.⁷²

While the report explicitly cast the DRV into China's orbit, the analysis for North Vietnam was shrewd. As an entity balanced between the two great Communist powers, Ho's government was lumped with others into the General Implications conclusion to the estimate.

Those parties which commit their allegiance either to Moscow or to Peiping will be exposed to reprisals, intrigues, and disruptive action by the other side. The result will be that a number of parties will be torn by internal struggle, and much energy will be devoted to attacking and destroying factional rivals... On the other hand, some Communist parties will benefit from the breakup of a disciplined international movement. They will have a wider range of choice in adopting the particular coloration they believe most politically effective in their own national environments. They will have the opportunity to disavow the USSR or China on specific occasions, and they may gain a new respectability in their own countries by ceasing to be the mere instruments of a foreign power.⁷³

The same month, LBJ formally tasked the agency to address repercussions for the rest of the region if North Vietnam seized both Laos and South Vietnam. The report generated in response, according to *The Pentagon Papers*, argued against the Domino Theory. The analysis said this outcome would damage U.S. standing in the region and raise China's status as leader of

the world revolution “at the expense of a more moderate Soviet Union.”⁷⁴ The U.S. could maintain its leverage, though, by holding onto Pacific Island bases—e.g., Japan, the Philippines, and Guam—to deter further PRC and DRV aggression in Southeast Asia.

The prevailing anxiety held, however, amongst officials closest to the Oval Office, wherein “all of the countries of Southeast Asia, from Cambodia to Malaysia, would tumble automatically into the Communist camp if the linchpin, South Vietnam, were knocked out, and that the United States position in the rest of the Far East, from Indonesia through the Philippines to Japan and Korea, would also be irrevocably harmed.”⁷⁵ Accordingly, when George Ball in October sent a 67-page memo to Rusk, McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy forecasting possible Chinese intervention and nuclear conflict in the event of escalation, Rostow doubled down.

Send American troops to Vietnam promptly, he asserted, and the Communists would understand that “we are prepared to face down any form of escalation” they might mount. “Massive” U.S. air and naval forces should be deployed in the Pacific to strike at North Vietnam and even China should either or both react. Only a stupendous display of American muscle would drive the Communists into submission. “They will not actually accept a setback until they are sure that we mean it,” Rostow affirmed, and they had to be told bluntly that “they now confront an LBJ who has made up his mind.”⁷⁶

Thus, again, Walt Rostow seized the opportunity to predict the adversary’s response to “American muscle” when espousing his policy decisions.

It is often said, however, that the enemy gets a vote, and after the Tonkin Gulf Incident, Hanoi’s relationship to the Soviet Union evolved in important ways. The nature and image, according to Douglas Pike, morphed “from bare-footed Viet Cong with their homemade shotguns to Vietnamese Communist armies equipped with the best weapons the Communist world could produce.” In 1964, cutting-edge weaponry for use against American strike aircraft was *not* manufactured in the People’s Republic of China. “Technology was making the USSR

more important to Hanoi [as the] North Vietnamese High Command was devising a new kind of strategy that attempted to match U.S. technology in terms of weapons and firepower.”⁷⁷

The Soviet Union’s immediate response to Tonkin, however, mostly occurred in its press, and Khrushchev did send a formal letter to President Johnson airing concerns about war in the region.⁷⁸ Ilya Gaiduk argued that at this point, “although not averse to a Communist victory in the region, the Kremlin ascribed to Indochina no geostrategic importance and did not want the crisis there to be an impediment to the process of détente with the United States and its allies... Soviet leaders were eager to delegate the primary responsibility for the fledgling Communist state in North Vietnam to their Chinese allies, thus making the Chinese their agents in Asia.”⁷⁹

Whatever role Rostow and others ascribed to the USSR in the summer of 1964, its interests were not congruent with either Mao’s or Ho’s regarding war in Vietnam. The coterie of principal advisors around President Johnson, however, were still deeply committed to both the monolithic Communist camp model—in which the Soviets, Mao, and Hanoi were united and locked into an existential struggle with the rest of the world—and the Domino Theory. Rostow, in the BNSP, had described one of four major missions of U.S. force as “To supplement allied and friendly forces in deterring or countering Communist non-nuclear attacks on the free community or in sea areas or on lines of communication vital to its survival.”⁸⁰ When he submitted the draft document in 1962, Rostow may not have had the Gulf of Tonkin (or the Ho Chi Minh Trail) in mind here; by August of 1964, though, DESOTO and MACV-SOG operations were certainly working this mission description against Communist forces in Southeast Asia.

The previous May, the CIA released SNIE 50-2-64: *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*, evaluating predominantly air and naval actions

proposed “to induce the DRV to bring about a major reduction of Viet Cong insurrectionary activity in South Vietnam and to respect the 1962 Geneva agreement on Laos”⁸¹ (i.e., Laotian neutrality and freedom from foreign military forces within its borders). The estimate concluded that, in retaliation, “Hanoi could agitate world opinion against the US, hoping that a new Geneva conference or UN action would result, and [would] bring a cessation of attacks.” However: “We think that North Vietnam, while taking various precautionary measures, would order the Viet Cong... to refrain from dramatic new attacks, and might reduce the level of the insurrections for the moment. Communist China and the USSR would both support these courses.” The report advocated attaining breathing room and time for the Saigon government to deal with the counterinsurgency on its territory, but to manage expectations, it forecasted that the adversary’s overarching intention “would be to preserve Communist gains and assets in these two countries (South Vietnam and Laos, where the Ho Chi Minh Trail had been supplying the Viet Cong insurgency since 1959) and to resume the insurrectionary campaigns at a later date.”⁸²

In later paragraphs, analysts argued that when these campaigns resumed, deployed American forces would confront the same methods used against the French a decade earlier, the PRC would keep its forces out of the hostilities, and the Soviet Union would offer propaganda, diplomacy, and weaponry to aid the DRV. Any ambiguity in stated U.S. support or failures would not only weaken governments in South Vietnam and Laos, but the morale and discipline “deterioration would be felt generally through non-Communist Asia.”⁸³

Two weeks later, on 9 June, the Board of National Estimates dispatched a memo to DCI McCone, regarding a possible domino effect occurring with the loss of South Vietnam and Laos. Losing these two non-communist nations would, it argued, “lead almost inevitably to the communization of other states in the area, and perhaps beyond... [and] would be profoundly

damaging to the US position in the Far East, most especially because the US has committed itself persistently, emphatically, and publicly to preventing Communist takeover of the two countries.”⁸⁴ It forecast that Cambodia would likely follow them, and Thailand would move toward neutrality. While Indonesia could be emboldened to move on Malaysia, however, the assessment argued that the U.S.’s island bases in the Western Pacific—Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines—would endure. U.S. influence on the Asian mainland, and relations with British and Australian SEATO allies (both of which depended on U.S. guarantees to Malaysia) would likely be damaged with the loss of South Vietnam and Laos.⁸⁵ In the Manichaeian perspective on the Cold War, the free world would lose; China and, to a lesser extent, the USSR, would therefore win.

McNamara in his memoir wrote of disagreement within the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding the efficacy of influencing events in South Vietnam by bombing the DRV. The JCS at his request had, regardless, produced the “Ninety-Four Targets List,” an air campaign proposal emphasizing DRV airfields, supply lines, and industrial facilities. “They considered attacks on these targets necessary to prevent the collapse of America’s position in Southeast Asia... The study did not mention that many of these strikes would have to be launched from airfields in South Vietnam, or that U.S. combat troops would be needed to keep the airfields safe.”⁸⁶ Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson argued with his peers that the insurgency was in South Vietnam, where the Vietcong operated, and even if the U.S. obliterated the DRV’s war-making potential, that insurgency could only be defeated below the 17th parallel. McNamara points out that General Johnson’s argument was not included in the “talking paper” JCS presented to him and General Maxwell D. Taylor, the newly appointed U.S. ambassador to Saigon, on 8 September.⁸⁷

A week later, the Joint Chiefs executed a war game, Sigma II-64, specifically to evaluate effects of both “Massive Deployments” and “Response to Air Strikes,” among other issues regarding U.S. posture in Southeast Asia. Evaluating the latter exercise component reveals not only the Joint Chiefs’ priorities, but how far they were willing to go to safeguard the region from communist influence.

Would Ho order the suppression or the stopping of Viet Cong operations? Would the Viet Cong respond to Ho’s direction if told to cease operations in SVN? Would industrial bombing of NVN (North Vietnam) have real effect on a primarily rural agrarian population? Would North Vietnam be politically stable after a bombing campaign? Would the regime gain or lose support from the people, including the armed forces? (Historic examples: ex-Germany, Italy and Japan in WWII.) Would US air attacks against Communist China, if accompanied by public statements that no effort would be made to overthrow the communist government of the country, result in USSR support for the Chicoms? If so, what form would this support take? Material only? Troops and material? Nuclear?⁸⁸

Indeed, the words “USSR,” “Chicom,” and “Nuclear,” not to mention the allusion to the most recent war in which victors demanded unconditional surrender, reveal much about the scope of this “politico-military game involving a crisis situation in Southeast Asia.”⁸⁹

The exercise Blue Team, representing U.S. and South Vietnamese governments, “less the highest executive authorities,”⁹⁰ employed a strategy of “political, economic and military measures against” their notional counterparts from the DRV and PRC—the Red Team—to undertake punitive strikes on military and industrial targets in NVN to cause the NVN to make a political decision to cease support of the insurgency in Laos and SVN.”⁹¹ The Blue Team vigorously prosecuted an air campaign, aurally mining North Vietnam’s ports, and supporting the Saigon government with an augmented counterinsurgency program. “All these efforts had failed to halt VC insurgency, and the DRV was stated to be infiltrating major PAVN (People’s Army of Vietnam) units into SVN. SIGMA II confronted Blue [Team] with the question of what

to do since escalation of the war into NVN had failed to achieve desired results in SVN, and the enemy appeared to be raising the ante toward major ground warfare.”⁹² McNamara, in his memoir, referred to Sigma-II 64 as the “closest I came to getting a straight answer to my inquiry about [economic and military effects of striking] the ninety-four targets.”⁹³

Regardless, the Communist monolith, the Domino Theory, and the CIA’s estimates enabled escalating U.S. commitment to South Vietnam. Another, 1 October’s SNIE 53-2-64, described a trend of expanding decay in South Vietnam’s society—characterized by “increasing defeatism, paralysis of leadership, friction with Americans, exploration of possible lines of political accommodation with the other side, and a general petering out of the war effort”—and accelerating erosion of the government’s “will and effectiveness.” Though premature by about four months, its warning that a “coup by disgruntled South Vietnam military figures could occur at any time”⁹⁴ was prescient. As the autumn of 1964 progressed, though, events there began to accelerate and test all these intelligence assessments and assumptions.

The Viet Cong Reacts: Bien Hoa

The retaliatory U.S. airstrikes against DRV naval capability precipitated further violent action in South Vietnam; this in turn affected both superpowers’ policies toward the blossoming proxy war.

The U.S. had been training South Vietnamese pilots to fly the Martin B-57 Canberra bomber in the Philippines, at Clark Airbase. While there was no decision to turn these 1950s-era trainers over to South Vietnam’s air force (VNAF), the USAF had opted shortly after the Tonkin Gulf Incident to move the training and aircraft to Bien Hoa airbase, 20 miles from Saigon. Though comprising a violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords’ stipulation against introduction of combat jets into South Vietnam, the squadron moved anyway and bedded down at Bien Hoa.⁹⁵

On 1 November, days before the U.S. presidential election, Viet Cong sappers inserted a mortar team into the base's fence line. In a 30-minute barrage, the U.S. and South Vietnamese air forces lost multiple aircraft and personnel, as well as several base infrastructure buildings.⁹⁶ Though Ambassador Taylor in Saigon advocated for immediate reprisal airstrikes against North Vietnam, LBJ chose to wait until after the election. On 6 November, though, Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky launched a retaliatory mission with 32 VNAF propeller-driven strike aircraft against a Viet Cong facility in War Zone D (approximately 30 miles north of the air base, within South Vietnamese territory).⁹⁷

Townsend Hoopes argues in his memoir that "the Bien Hoa attack crystallized official U.S. determination for intervention. The doctrine of deterrence, which had been applied with success against Russians in Europe, had proved no inhibition to the primitive North Vietnamese who were determined to finish a civil war by unifying the country on their own harsh terms."⁹⁸ Recognitions that a doctrine that worked against the Soviets was not applicable to the DRV, and that the Cold War in Southeast Asia was not congruent with the one in Central Europe, represent progress; the president's advisors' continuing attitude toward the conflict as international (between the Vietnams that were created at Geneva), rather than a civil war in South Vietnam, however, represents a glaring error.

For the Soviets, though, Bien Hoa was also a crystallizing development. In November of 1964, Gaiduk wrote, their influence with North Vietnam's military was waning, while China's was rising. The DRV general staff informed the Soviet military attaché in Hanoi that its views on strategy and tactics diverged from the USSR's, and "the DRV Ministry of Defense informed the attaché that there was no longer any need for the Soviet military experts in their country, and as soon as their term of business ended, they should leave. No replacements would be

requested.”⁹⁹ The DRV had, after all, perceived Soviet reaction to the Tonkin Gulf—a simple condemnation of the U.S. actions and another call for “peaceful reunification”—as inadequate. This appeal occurred yet again when Hanoi sent Communist Party Secretary Le Duan to Moscow in the middle of August, and Ho Chi Minh’s biographer William Duiker asserted that Soviet officials “compounded the problem by procrastinating on a request from the NLF [the National Liberation Front—a.k.a. the Viet Cong] for formal diplomatic recognition as the sole legal government of South Vietnam.”¹⁰⁰ There is thus a case to be made that rather than viewing the conflict as one between two nations, the Soviet hierarchy understood a civil war was brewing in South Vietnam between a guerrilla organization and a teetering government imposed by outsiders at Geneva. The fact that Ky conducted airstrikes against his own territory after the Bien Hoa attack supports it.

In the Autumn of 1964, however, an insurrection was also percolating in the Kremlin.

Chapter 4 - Khrushchev's Fall

In the realm of intelligence support to U.S. policy in the wake of the change in Kremlin leadership, the intelligence resources that had *not* shifted to Southeast Asia—i.e., the diplomatic community with experience in Moscow, the CIA's analysts, State's Directorate of Intelligence and Research—provided valid and accurate intelligence, as well as plausible forecasting on future Soviet policy.

There are, however, two interrelated intelligence cycles described in this chapter, and when they switched on, collection managers accordingly matched up requests for information with suitable means for satisfying them. The SIGINT Navy would not be ideal, as the seat of Soviet power lay far from the coasts. The fact that the United States had already lost two of its U-2 IMINT collection platforms over the USSR and Cuba made them a dangerous option for use over central Russia, an act both illegal and provocative. The best collectors emerged closest to the crisis—diplomatic staff at U.S. Embassy Moscow and the best analysis products emerged from the CIA and State Department. Ultimately the U.S. coped with Khrushchev's expulsion and the subsequent, nebulous new hierarchy, by preserving the status quo and seeking opportunities for cooperation with the Soviet Union in peaceful applications of culture, science, and technology. By their very nature, even if held on neutral territory, these discussions between the two superpowers' diplomats furnished information and impressions for analysis that the technical collection apparatus could not. Going further, because diplomats could sustain contacts over time, they could use their conversations to follow up on important or promising points, enabling intelligence agencies to refine their analysis.

Indeed, the intelligence enterprise influenced the foreign policy at the highest level, during this tense internal Soviet leadership crisis, toward a favorable outcome. There was, however, a second situation in Southeast Asia pertinent to this discussion—the possibility of the Vietnam War rising from a tactical- to a strategic-level conflict. This chapter will discuss ways in which the United States, enabled by both intelligence cycles and diplomacy, managed to maintain the status quo in its bilateral relations with the Soviets as well as its growing commitment to Southeast Asia.

The Flash Point Cycle

The question of direct Chinese or Soviet intervention—above and beyond what was already invested in terms of training, economic, and weaponry support to North Vietnam—loomed over the Johnson administration at the end of 1964. The U.S. administration was inclined to introduce both bombing sorties and ground combat units to prop up South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted these deployments, and so did most of the civilians in LBJ's cabinet.¹ Men like Rusk and Rostow argued from a Manichaean perspective, in which a loss to Communism anywhere on the globe portended more losses in the Cold War. Memories of both appeasing the Nazis and discounting the threat of China's intervention in Korea loomed large amongst Johnson's advisors.

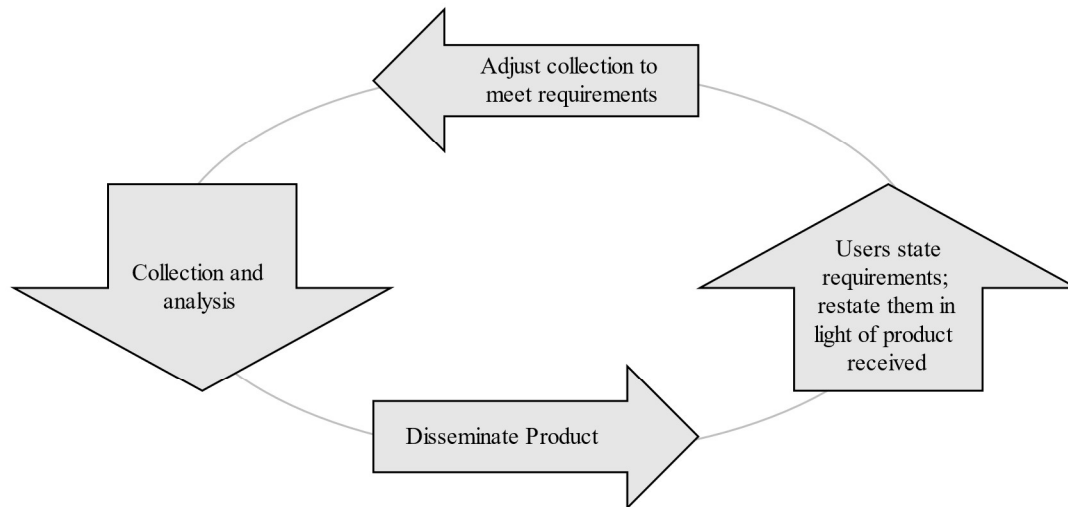
Of the two Communist nations vying for leadership in the struggle against the West, the PRC was the more likely to intervene on the side of Ho Chi Minh if the United States pushed too many military assets into Vietnam too soon. China was geographically closer, its cadres had assisted Ho in expelling France from North Vietnam, and its host of soldiers—adeptly employing mass and shock—had certainly shattered the confidence of UN forces on the Korean peninsula in 1950.

The Soviet Union, by contrast, appeared to be the less belligerent of the two, seeming to preserve Khrushchev's Peaceful Coexistence doctrine after ejecting him from the Kremlin. Admittedly, the DRV was employing Soviet-produced weaponry to protect itself—i.e., PT boats, anti-aircraft artillery, radar, and fighter jets, even as intelligence collection assets from Defense and the NSA were helping to construct Communist organizational charts and orders of battle from data harvested in the air and waters adjacent North Vietnam. If Chinese forces suddenly massed to cross the border and push southward, or if the DRV unexpectedly switched on a radar associated with a distinct Soviet-made surface-to-air missile system, these collectors would likely detect that this time. The White House thus had the intelligence it needed to make good assessments of the flash point, and thus the means to avoid it, as Pentagon planners presented options for augmenting the American military commitment to Southeast Asia.

The Hot Line Cycle

While the Soviet leaders espoused Peaceful Coexistence, they also had more than one nuclear device in their arsenal. Approaching and retreating from the flash point might be viewed as an operational concern vis-à-vis China within the NSC, but faulty communications with the other superpower could lead to ICBMs arcing from multiple directions over the Arctic. Knowing who would answer the hot line was therefore a higher—strategic—uncertainty, and thus worthy of its own intelligence cycle.

Figure 1. Military concept of the intelligence cycle²



Again, the high-tech collection platforms one would use to assess enemy units and weaponry were already increasingly deployed to Southeast Asia by the Fall of 1964, and they were answering the White House's stated requirements effectively and efficiently; they were not, however, a good fit for the Hot Line Cycle.

This chapter will demonstrate that the ideal collection platforms in this case were Americans deployed to the Moscow embassy. Ambassador Kohler was sending multiple cables each day—usually to the State Department, where INR analysts packaged assessments up for dispatch to the Secretary of State and ultimately the other officials closest to LBJ in the national security apparatus. Its inputs were, however, arguably more reliable than raw data conveyed through distant photographs or recorded beeps and squeaks. American embassy officials—defense attaches, CIA Chiefs of Station, even Marine guards—were all collectors, reporting information to an experienced and eloquent analyst, Foy D. Kohler. This extra node of analysis

served to winnow out extraneous detail and to transmit the important events and trends upward, admittedly to higher levels of analysis, but ultimately to the cycle's primary customer, the coterie of officials advising Lyndon Johnson.

On the day Khrushchev was ousted from power—14 October 1964—the Johnson Administration's foreign policy was essentially realist. Nations, realists argue, are like billiard balls, clacking across the felt, their movements governed by self-interest. A rough balance of power existed, and despite recent perturbations like Berlin and the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was holding, and the United States was thriving. Gaddis wrote that “the whole idea of maintaining a balance of power had been to prevent concentrations of hostile force; adversaries fragmented among themselves presumably balanced themselves, without the need for outside countervailing pressure. One implication of living with diversity, after all, had been that the United States could tolerate varying degrees of enmity in the world so long as it was neither consolidated nor coordinated.”³

The Sino-Soviet Split, though, revealed a Soviet government that struggled to either unite or communicate—let alone consolidate or coordinate—with China. At the intra-national level, the Soviet Politburo was exhibiting a similar phenomenon. The administration's policy, though, “engaging the enemy without appeasement,” which Gaddis argued had begun with Eisenhower, was important to the BNSP, and called for seeking opportunities to cooperate and communicate with the Soviet Union to maintain a stable international equilibrium.⁴ This arguably supports the first listed Major Mission the document lists in “The Role of U.S. Force” section: “To deter or deal with a direct nuclear assault against the U.S. or other vital areas.”⁵

The BNSP also advocated, under the heading “Crisis Avoidance and Management”, for the need to “avoid or minimize crises promoted or exploited by the Soviet Union.”⁶ Specifically,

to “promote communications—informal as well as formal, direct as well as indirect—designed to convey to Moscow a clear understanding of our intentions;” and to “try to work over the longer view toward tacit understandings with the USSR as to ground rules governing our competition. We should seek to exploit the U.S.-Soviet common interest in preventing situations arising in which either a Soviet or an American ally may try to inflame a given situation and thus engage to its own benefit the prestige of the two major powers.”⁷ As the United States ramped up its commitment to Southeast Asia and Mao was increasingly criticizing the Kremlin for failing to be adequately Leninist, there was an opportunity for U.S. policy to act within this approach—to strengthen and diversify its common interests with the USSR via communication, coordination, and cooperation in scientific and cultural fora.

How would the U.S. intelligence apparatus support such a policy, though? The Johnson administration appears to have asked the State Department to find out, after the shakeup in the Soviet leadership, what the new hierarchy looked like, where responsibilities lay for the various government departments and, ultimately, who would answer the hot line when LBJ picked up the phone.

Importantly, every change in Soviet leadership, going back to 1917, when the Bolsheviks murdered the Romanov family, had engendered bloodshed at the top. In 1964, however, the USSR had recently threatened the U.S. with its nuclear arsenal, so the stakes were higher than the previous instances when Lenin’s and Stalin’s tenures abruptly ended. While the Johnson Administration’s commitment to Vietnam ramped upwards, the situation in Moscow—where U.S. policy engaged at the strategic level—demanded clarity. Of this work’s three case studies, it is the most perilous, but also the most successful application of the Intelligence Cycle.

While the White House used tactical intelligence to support its existing policy decisions in Vietnam, at the strategic level—where a Soviet succession crisis could push the Doomsday Clock’s hands closer to midnight—the intelligence community not only performed well, but its products were heeded and used in shaping U.S. policy in response to the evolving situation within the Kremlin. This chapter will reveal how the Oval Office—with little control or awareness over this evolving contingency—utilized State Department and CIA intelligence assets to monitor and cope with it.

The “noisy rocket brandisher”

Historian Robert Caro asserted that when Lyndon Johnson was accompanying his predecessor’s body back to the nation’s capital in late November 1963, Khrushchev was very much on his mind. The flight lasted two hours and six minutes, and on it the new President wrote the words “Staff,” “Cabinet,” and “Leadership” on a notepad, signifying that he wanted the key members of the White House Staff, all the Cabinet members possible, and Congressional leaders to meet him at the White House as soon as he arrived. He then called his new special assistant, Bill Moyers, to the Air Force One stateroom and told him:

It’s the Kremlin that worries me. It can’t be allowed to detect a waver... Khrushchev is asking himself right now what kind of man I am. He’s got to know he’s dealing with a man of determination.⁸

Indeed, when Ambassador Dobrynin sat down for lunch with Attorney General Robert Kennedy half a year later to hand off a personal letter from Khrushchev, he pushed Kennedy about whether Johnson’s foreign policy was in continuity with the Kennedy Administration, or if it was a new departure from JFK’s understood objectives.⁹ Clearly, the Soviet leaders, a month before the *USS Maddox* was defending itself against Soviet-manufactured patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin, had questions about the new administration, and had initiated a back-channel

intelligence cycle utilizing the Soviet ambassador to Washington. It is also interesting that the Soviet government's representative expressed unease about the PRC, which:

wanted a war in which other societies would be destroyed, while there would be 200 Chinese left. Khrushchev said that this was building a civilization on a graveyard and the Poles and Russians had asked where such a policy would leave them. But the Chinese had not given any ground. Mao was now becoming a god, like Stalin at the end. People were required to bow down toward Mao and to memorize his teachings. [Dobrynin then] asked where American policy was heading in Vietnam.¹⁰

Robert Kennedy's response is noteworthy for its emphasis on continuity in policy and an implied reassurance that the United States was not interested in transforming the planet into a necropolis; if escalation were to occur, it would not be a spasmodic alteration from U.S. precedent in the region.

Khrushchev, though, had distanced himself from his predecessor, and actively disparaged Stalin in his testament before the CPSU 20th Party Congress in 1956. Pike described Nikita Khrushchev as "a crafty actor and a master dissembler, ...a blustering bully, a noisy rocket brandisher whose stock in trade was diatribe, invective, and the ultimatum. But behind this crudity was a cool skilled gambler who measured odds carefully and bluffed well."¹¹ Khrushchev had indeed survived Stalin, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and a previous attempt to overthrow him in 1957.

As in the Tonkin Gulf Incident, no one in the administration was terribly surprised by Khrushchev's fall, and no one perceived a need to alter set policy in its aftermath. Implicitly, this conversation at the White House showed a tendency to stay on course; the overriding concerns appeared to be the upcoming election, messaging to the electorate, and keeping Congress apprised—if not supportive—of overarching policy decisions moving forward.

Indeed, as early as March 1964, the CIA was forecasting a power struggle in the Kremlin in an intelligence memorandum, asserting that Khrushchev's successor was likely in the Presidium at the moment, and "the outline of [his] policies may already be at least faintly visible in the murk of current Soviet political controversy and in the changing form of Soviet society as a whole. Thus it is possible to speculate about the political climate at the time of Khrushchev's departure and to consider the nature of those who will seek to succeed him."¹² Presciently, the Directorate of Intelligence pointed out that "while there are pronounced individual differences between the men now at the top of the Soviet hierarchy, most of them tend to look at the world through the eyes of the party apparatchiki and represent collectively a fairly conservative body of opinion (underlined in original)." Further, the report described the influence of both PRC and U.S. policies as "'outside' pressures" on the contenders for Soviet power. "Although there is probably little that either country can do to determine the course of the succession struggle, the attitudes and intentions of both countries will be a major ingredient of debate, and the political fortunes of the individual leaders and their functions will in part rise and fall on the basis of the successes and failures of their policies, including their foreign policies."¹³

Later, as the U.S. intelligence enterprise strove to derive both the new leadership lineup and state of relations with the USSR, the Johnson White House again returned to its Basic National Security Policy to cope with the uncertainty of a sudden change in the Soviet hierarchy. Like the Tonkin Gulf Incident, it was a development that, if handled poorly, could have exacerbated tensions between the superpowers, with catastrophic effects. The adherence to policy, as well as intelligence derived from both diplomatic engagements and solid analysis, however, permitted the Johnson Administration to navigate through this perilous moment with minimal perturbation.

Khrushchev's Vulnerabilities

Experts continue to debate about the point at which Khrushchev's rule began to unravel. Political Scientist Carl A. Linden argued that it began in 1956, when his Secret Speech at the 20th Party Congress attacked Stalin and "began a fateful conflict inside the Soviet leadership over the direction of the communist one-party state."¹⁴ The idea that his criticism of Stalin's legacy encouraged dissent behind the Iron Curtain holds some merit. The congress occurred in February; by June, there were workers riots in Poland and an armed revolution against the Soviet-sponsored government in Hungary. The USSR was compelled to push resources into both countries to re-establish control and to place proxies back in charge.

The four-hour speech vilifying Stalin produced downstream effects in Beijing, too. After all, at this moment "Mao was still pushing China along the path blazed by Stalin, seemingly oblivious to the liberalization and relaxation in the Soviet bloc. He began his own push for rapid collectivization and nationalization in 1953, just as Moscow was condemning these policies as 'adventurism' in the satellite states."¹⁵ Thus, having attacked Stalin's legacy for its excesses, if Khrushchev found himself in trouble, he was increasingly unlikely to garner support from Mao's government in China.

Bohlen, who was not present at the Secret Speech (diplomats were not permitted at this portion of the Congress) but learned of its contents two weeks later, reported "Khrushchev and his colleagues concluded that they could not remake the Soviet mechanism as long as the legend of Stalin persisted," and that a major change in the Soviet system required reverence for Stalin to end; otherwise any proposed reform would fail.¹⁶

Khrushchev was, however, not only vying for leadership of the Soviet Union, but the entire Communist world. "The Soviets were especially worried about the satellite states, where

they had been attempting to hold the lid on national pressures by easing their strict controls... The puff of fresh air that had blown through the Communist world was sufficient in itself to shake the Soviet empire.”¹⁷ There is thus a case to be made that the 20th Party Congress started Khrushchev’s fall from power. Some Soviet leaders held their own version of the domino theory in which they feared that if any of the satellite regimes in Eastern Europe broke away it would create a cascading result that could lead to the fall of the Soviet Union itself. This anxiety, of course, proved prescient, but Khrushchev had been in Novodevichy Cemetery for two decades when the end finally occurred.

The first attempt to oust Khrushchev from the First Secretary position occurred a year after the Secret Speech, at the behest of the old guard “Muscovites”—men like Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich—who had managed to hold on through the Stalin years. On 18 June 1957, at the convocation of the CPSU Presidium, the Muscovites, joined by Voroshilov and Bulganin—who had also survived Stalin’s purges and the Second World War—voted to remove Khrushchev from his party leadership position. The Muscovites were not excited about the Peaceful Coexistence policy, the “Thaw,” in which Khrushchev was permitting more cultural exchanges with the West, nor with the political relaxations that both liberated political prisoners from the Gulags and made Khrushchev the first Soviet leader to visit the United States.

Khrushchev held on to his role as First Secretary, though, due to support from Marshal Zhukov (the Defense Minister) and Ivan Serov (KGB Chairman), who flew supporters into the capital on military aircraft. Mao, surprisingly, also supported Khrushchev during the attempted putsch, possibly in exchange for the 15 October 1957 agreement that allegedly promised Soviet assistance for China’s nuclear weapons program.¹⁸ This phenomenon was short-lived, however,

especially as Mao complained early and often that the Soviet Union was slow-rolling the promised “prototype nuclear weapon and related technical data.”¹⁹

Khrushchev deposed his rivals from their positions and sent them to run industrial plants and other relatively unimportant tasks in far corners of the Soviet empire. However, later events revealed Khrushchev had only achieved a limited victory; he retained his position but remained open to challenges.

In July 1957, Ambassador Lewellyn “Tommy” Thompson presented his credentials in Moscow and cabled the State Department about his concern that “Khrushchev might not remain in power for long and worried that the Soviet leader’s successors would not continue his policies or honor his agreements.”²⁰ Thompson continued to warn that Khrushchev was particularly vulnerable. In 1960 he repeatedly advised Washington and selected journalists that Khrushchev faced growing opposition inside his government and party due to his plans to cut defense spending; the Soviet Union’s continuing problems with both its economy and agriculture; and an exacerbation of the split with the PRC over Peaceful Coexistence.²¹ Accounts from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, however—which harvested information from the local diplomat and journalist communities for dispatch homeward—*were* both reaching the highest levels of the U.S. government *and* influencing perceptions of the Cold War in the early 1960s. Further, the U.S. intelligence apparatus was writing solid estimates for communication to the White House.

Eight months after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Ambassador Thompson was again warning the Kennedy administration of Khrushchev’s vulnerability regarding Cuba—specifically in relation to the dangerous continuation of U-2 missions over the island. “Being pressed as he is on every side, he is concerned we are going to knock Castro off one way or another at a time he

cannot afford it. If he loses Cuba at this time on top of everything else, he is going to have to go.”²²

Like any professional politician, Khrushchev could weather a lot of criticism from his colleagues if the Soviet public was pleased with his performance; by the Autumn of 1964, though, criticisms were emerging from all over the Soviet political spectrum.

The Available Intelligence

On 15 October the U.S. Embassy in Moscow cabled a FLASH message to Foggy Bottom. Citing reliable press correspondents’ rumors, it reported that Khrushchev was either “forced out” or “stepped down,” then listed several items described as “circumstantial evidence”— for example the delayed publication of the daily broadsheet *Izvestiya*, which usually occurred at 5:00 p.m. Ambassador Kohler’s staff also noted that Khrushchev had not appeared at that day’s reception for Cuba’s president Osvaldo Dorticos Torrado; Brezhnev, Kosygin, Mikoyan, Podgorny, Foreign Minister Gromyko, and Central Committee member Yuri Andropov did show up, though, revealing both a possible new leadership roster and the importance of the event.²³ Meanwhile, Embassy personnel were verifying that Khrushchev’s pictures were being removed from key locations. They would also look for Khrushchev’s presence at the upcoming “big reception” for the three recently-returned Voskhod-1 cosmonauts. The report was passed to State, Defense, CIA, and the White House itself.²⁴

Meanwhile the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) issued a checklist to Secretary Rusk on “Urgent Issues That Confront The New Soviet Leaders,” including: power consolidation of “leadership with at least two heads”; “Which leader controls the Soviet nuclear trigger; [which] ear is at the Moscow end of the hot line?”; resource allocation; “how to deal with the Chinese without encouraging them to take advantage of

uncertainties in the current Soviet leadership”;²⁵ and—perhaps most pressing—“There is likely to be pressure to create a single point of authority in dealings with the U.S., and to derive increased prestige from this role.”²⁶ These pertinent observations may represent INR’s attempt to influence or anticipate an intelligence cycle from the Oval Office.

One can, however, discern the issues that most worried administration officials in the “back-grounder” Rusk and Ambassador Thompson delivered to a dozen reporters that evening in Washington, so perhaps the Secretary of State had requested the checklist in preparation for the event. Rusk told the press “that Khrushchev had referred to Brezhnev in the past as his likely successor,” and mused that “there was more involved than merely the age and health of Chairman Khrushchev.” Thompson tallied the number of days in the previous seven years that Khrushchev had been absent from Moscow (2.75 years, on 88 separate trips; of which 1.75 years had occurred outside the USSR), in which “the Soviet Government had been by run by others... although Khrushchev had retained policy control.”²⁷

INR had compiled a second and more lengthy intelligence note on this date for Rusk, an initial assessment that “the move was sudden and forced upon Khrushchev.”²⁸ The report cited Brezhnev’s and Kosygin’s recently-published statements to forecast that Soviet domestic policy would not change much, and posited that “If history repeats itself, the leadership will be preoccupied with further resolving the succession and the direction of policy change will be expressed in further personnel shifts.”²⁹ Therefore, “new leadership is likely to wish to avoid tests of strength with the West at least until after it feels that its internal position is consolidated,” specifically regarding Berlin or U.S. reconnaissance flights over Cuba.³⁰ Moreover, INR suggested that the regime’s relationship toward China would likely remain unchanged, but that the Eastern European satellites were watching and waiting. “Unless a clear line emanates soon

from the Kremlin, dissident elements within Eastern Europe may seek to take advantage of the situation.”³¹

The next day, the 16th, Ambassador Kohler cabled Rusk from Moscow, concluding that Khrushchev “has been jettisoned by his colleagues,” specifically “Brezhnev, whose ambitions Khrushchev has been obviously trying to frustrate...,” and that the “huge portrait of Khrushchev noted earlier on Hotel Moskva was removed shortly before midnight.”³² He dispatched an update later, reporting that images of Khrushchev had also been pulled from bookstores and covered up or taken down in public buildings; Kohler also provided a list of officials removed recently from their duties—including the editor of *Izvestiya*, Khrushchev’s son-in-law Aleksei Adzhubei.³³

CIA composed a five-page memorandum the same day that made its way to the National Security Advisor, “World Reaction to Khrushchev Resignation,” a summation of international press headlines “marked by some apprehension but no great alarm... Asian countries reportedly are displaying more concern than those in Western Europe and Latin America. No significant reaction has been received from Africa.”³⁴ Specifically, South Korea (“fear”), South Vietnam (“shocked and frightened”), and India (“concerned”) were highlighted in Asia—all in anticipation of possible changes in Sino-Soviet relations.³⁵ In a similar fashion, the Bonn, London, and Paris embassies sent cables to the State Department with similar updates on Western Europe’s press and government reactions.³⁶

Interestingly, a point paper Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John T. McNaughton drafted on 16 October disputed the official Soviet justifications of age and health for Khrushchev’s ouster. “It is reported,” he explained, “that Leonid Brezhnev (who is 58, but who has had two heart attacks and who, reportedly, drinks heavily) has become

the new First Secretary and that Alexey Kosygin (age 60) is to be the new Prime Minister. These men are the ones whom the Community expected to succeed Khrushchev in the event of his death or retirement.”³⁷ The point paper posited instead a need for “new, younger, and more vigorous (and ambitious?)” leadership among other reasons. It was McNaughton’s section about the way ahead, though, that provides a window into the conversations orbiting the President’s desk at this point.³⁸

McNaughton offered contradictory advice, arguing for more intelligence collection on the situation in the Soviet Union, as Moscow would likely enter a “period of confusion and policy reassessment.” He warned that “in the past, the first persons to take over after a long reign have not stuck;” and that the world would be “particularly sensitive to our behavior.” Further, he urged the U.S. government to communicate its rationale for actions taken, while signaling its openness to cooperation by confirming validity of existing agreements with the USSR. McNaughton advocated also for heavily scrutinizing costs, advantages, and risks before taking any major foreign policy actions. Perhaps, most importantly, he argued that the administration should control the message to the American public regarding “the implications of the change and to anticipate and rebut any erroneous implications.” He urged precautionary measures like putting the U.S. military on high alert and monitoring third countries (e.g., PRC, France, Cuba, satellite nations) and their possible actions to avoid unexpected crises. However, he also pushed for taking advantage of “the Soviet period of relative political incapacity” and ramping up efforts to “induce defections at Soviet embassies.”³⁹

Neither side wanted dangerous misunderstandings at this sensitive moment, and predictably Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin secured a meeting with President Johnson on the 16th, “under instructions to inform the President of the governmental changes which had been made in

the Soviet Union.” The meeting minutes convey reassurances of stability in foreign policy, with peaceful coexistence as well as “respect for the sovereignty and independence of other nations” as the USSR’s continued and guiding principles. President Johnson reassured him of “the continuity of our own policy following the death of President Kennedy,” with an emphasis on peace and flexibility.

He used the Cuban crisis to illustrate the importance of this concept. The President said that we were not going to be provocative but that we were also not going to be pushed around. He referred to the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin in this connection.⁴⁰

LBJ’s message fit within Rostow’s BNSP guidance on “Crisis Avoidance and Management (Chapter IV. Relations with Communist Regimes, Section 2) in preparation for the encounter. Seeking to “avoid or minimize crises promoted or exploited by the Soviet Union,” the section advises promoting communications, “designed to convey to Moscow a clear understanding of our intentions.” The “how” is described in two subsections:

- e. When crises with Communist involvement do erupt, our purposes in them should be to avoid any net loss for our interests and use the crisis, if possible, for increasing our power position vis-à-vis the Communists and to close out the crisis as quickly and with as little violence as consistent with the above. We should avoid both concessions which would encourage the Communist [sic] to mount future crises, and efforts to inflict a dramatic humiliation on them.
- f. We should not allow crises to distract our attention and energies from the long-term policies and enterprises on which, ultimately, the success of our efforts to build and defend the free community depends. We should try, on the contrary, to meet immediate threats in ways which reinforce the long-term constructive direction of these policies.⁴¹

Thus, while it may seem incongruent for President Johnson to signal his commitment to dialogue and the status quo, and then to pivot to the escalation in Vietnam, the BNSP envisioned both actions occurring simultaneously.

That afternoon, the president described this meeting to the press corps in the White House Fish Room as a 45-minute conversation, in which he “expressed to the Ambassador the

determined purpose of the United States Government to continue in a quest for peace.” He then announced to reporters that the PRC had executed “a low yield test... in Western China,” its first nuclear detonation, and again he oriented those present toward Vietnam.

The United States reaffirms its defense commitments in Asia. Even if Communist China should eventually develop an effective nuclear capability, that capability would have no effect upon the readiness of the United States. And our readiness to respond to requests from Asian nations for help in dealing with Communist Chinese aggression... We will pursue with dedication and determination our purpose of achieving concrete, practical steps on the roads that lead away from nuclear armaments and war, and a world of cooperation and development and peace.⁴²

Though Rostow may not have been present in the Fish Room, his BNSP had certainly attended the conference, alongside his socioeconomic model that called for U.S. assistance to the developing world.

The BNSP, though, also specifically addressed the message to domestic audiences, stating: “We should make a purposeful effort to acquaint the Congress and people with the contours of the world in which we live, the positive objectives we intend to pursue, and the progress being made, thereby confronting the 1960’s with a posture of national poise and confidence, and with a sense of forward movement towards well understood goals. To this end, exposition of the main lines of policy laid down in this paper, in forms suitable for public presentation, should be systematically undertaken.”⁴³ The president’s mention of both change in Soviet leadership and a PRC nuclear test—before the electorate learned of these events by other means—thus implies both a gloss of transparency and a firm hand on the rudder as the ship of state navigated unexpected currents and obstacles.

Within the next half hour, Special Assistant to the President McGeorge Bundy and Ambassador Thompson provided a follow-up “deep background” briefing on the day’s events to selected members of the press.⁴⁴ In it, a journalist asked Thompson who he believed was now

“number one” in the Soviet hierarchy. After clarifying his response would be off the record, he mused that he would lean toward whoever was leading the CPSU (i.e., Brezhnev, the new First Secretary) and, later, that to Washington the change in leadership “was a surprise. But we know that Khrushchev is 70 years old and anything could happen.”⁴⁵ The Johnson administration thus managed to perform preliminary tasks in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s expulsion—within both diplomacy and messaging—while monitoring the reaction in the global press.

The CIA, meanwhile, attempted to explain Soviet leaders’ behavior during and after the change in leadership. On the 17th, the Office of Current Intelligence issued a memorandum, “Implications of Khrushchev’s Downfall,” which integrated sources beyond diplomatic and press information. In its first paragraph, the memo emphasized stability, describing an authority transfer conforming to “normal constitutional procedures,” and forecasting that “Soviet foreign policies will remain unchanged [and that] the new leaders [will] continue the broad policy lines of the Khrushchev era.” Further, it was deemed likely that “in the period immediately ahead, the new leaders will concentrate on consolidating their domestic position and refrain from any major foreign initiatives, both in the contest with Peiping and in relations with the West.”⁴⁶

The report discussed Khrushchev’s leadership style as well as his friction with “a variety of entrenched interests which compete in the allocation of limited resources”⁴⁷ within the Soviet economy, citing impressions from both Ambassador Kohler and a summer 1963 meeting between Khrushchev, Rusk, and Under Secretary of State Averell Harriman. “Khrushchev’s successors,” it read, “must expect the Chinese to exploit his downfall as a repudiation of his stand in the Sino-Soviet conflict... [S]ources close to the Chinese government regard Moscow developments as a ‘big victory’...” The report concluded, however, that it would be “difficult to see how the changeover in Moscow could produce any basic change in attitude toward China.”⁴⁸

The State Department supplemented this information with a telegram to all U.S. diplomatic posts worldwide, stating that Moscow had told its own diplomats in world capitals to echo what Dobrynin had told LBJ—that “no changes in [the] general line of Soviet policy are to be expected,” and that Brezhnev, in an “unidentified and unpublished public utterance” had also “emphasized continuity of policy.”⁴⁹

State also sent a memo to Bundy at the White House, not only emphasizing the “orderly transition of power,” in the Kremlin, but asserting that it would be divided by Khrushchev’s “top lieutenants and long-time associates, Brezhnev, Kosygin and Mikoyan. They probably will share their power with the other members of the Party Presidium for at least an interim period.” Then, perhaps, to avoid sounding too certain: “Their new preeminence may be transitory...”⁵⁰ “None of these [three] politically sophisticated individuals is associated with inflexible Stalinist attitudes toward the United States,” it concluded, but should “there continue to be serious divergences of opinion within the top Party leadership contributing to an atmosphere of indecision, this would support the maintenance of the status quo in U.S.-Soviet relations” (underlined in original).⁵¹ One could easily assume from Soviet history that there would be divergence of opinion at the top of the hierarchy, though, and given the conservative nature of the three personalities listed, not much would change regarding the posture toward the United States.

Two days after this new regime took over in the Kremlin, though, the PRC detonated its first atomic device. “As a nuclear power,” wrote Jeremy Friedman in his history of the Sino-Soviet competition, “China could more convincingly pose as an international heavyweight and champion of Africa and Asia. To defeat the Chinese challenge, then, the Soviet leadership that succeeded Khrushchev would need to adopt policies from the Chinese, taking a more militant

stance in both theory and practice to reassert its self-appointed position as the leader of the world revolution.”⁵²

The minutes from the 17 October National Security Council meeting reveal growing concern regarding the PRC’s nuclear capabilities, in competition with a need to understand the leadership transition in Moscow, for the administration’s time on the agenda. While CIA Director McCone briefed the room on Khrushchev’s removal that “there is no one cause, but many,” this occurred after his report on PRC nuclear capabilities and speculation on whether the Chinese now possessed a weapon that would fit into the bomb bay of the Ilyushin 28 bomber “which has a 600 mile radius.”⁵³

Secretary of State Rusk, according to the minutes, reported on the recent British elections and discussions on Article 19 of the UN Charter with the USSR (which did not want to pay for U.N. activities it did not support, i.e., other nations’ peacekeeping operations), but most of the NSC meeting pertained to the recent Chinese nuclear test. Japan’s and India’s likely anxieties, African nations’ possible advocacy for PRC membership in the UN, and a motion to “make a study in depth of Chinese Communist nuclear weapon capabilities” all appear in the record, as well as Rusk’s and McNamara’s conclusion that the president should “make a statement to the American people” regarding China’s nuclear test. Clearly, in the week after Khrushchev’s removal, the administration’s concerns were not monopolized by who would be standing on top of Lenin’s mausoleum at the next May Day parade.⁵⁴

It is pertinent to ask what requests for information (RFIs) Washington was pushing to its intelligence apparatus. On 17 October Executive Secretary of the State Department Benjamin Read sent a memorandum to McGeorge Bundy expressing a need for “more solid information” on the event before establishing its significance. It is safe to assume, however, that Bundy in his

role as the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs had sent pertinent RFIs to State and hence to U.S. Embassy Moscow, and that this document represents one of several responses. For example, Read wrote of apparent certainty that "Khrushchev was forced out against his will," and suggested "an orderly transition of power" to Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Anastas Mikoyan.

The memo assessed that the most critical reason for the ouster lay with "in the context of the Sino-Soviet dispute and the competition for influence in International Communism, Soviet relations with bloc parties and key parties outside" it. Read leaned forward here to assess that this factor would drive "Soviet policies directed at the gradual improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations or as a minimum the avoidance of actions" that could endanger them; he then posited that the State Department's analysis was based on "personalities and past actions" of the aforementioned three "politically sophisticated" Soviet officials. Read admitted "that we as yet have no measure of any alignments of forces within the Presidium which could condition" policy toward the U.S., but if continued "serious divergences of opinion within the top Party leadership [contribute] to an atmosphere of indecision, this would support the maintenance of status quo in U.S.-Soviet relations."⁵⁵

Beyond the prudent advocacy for betting on the status quo, while remaining vigilant for deviation from it,⁵⁶ one can easily sort from this document State's knowns, unknowns, and assumptions. Perhaps Read was leaning forward in the attempt to also forecast the White House's questions regarding Khrushchev's ouster, but this memo more likely represents a response to either oral or written RFIs from Bundy or the president. One may also assume that these RFIs quickly moved downstream toward U.S. Embassy Moscow.

Aftershocks and Assessments

Kohler sent another report from Moscow on Soviet citizens' "largely unconcerned to apathetic" attitudes regarding the expulsion; Khrushchev's pictures were still coming down and pertinent exhibits at the Marx, Lenin, and Revolutionary Museums were now under renovation on October the 18th.⁵⁷ The Voskhod-1 cosmonauts were to parade through the capital the following day, though, and new portraits sans Khrushchev "in revised hierarchical order... Brezhnev, Kosygin, Mikoyan, Suslov, Podgorny..." had been hung along the route from the airport.

On 19 October, Ambassador Kohler sent a telex to the State Department on the cosmonaut reception in Red Square, reporting that Kosygin met them at Vnukovo airport, Podgorny introduced the speakers to the crowd, and Brezhnev delivered a speech in which "Key seems clearly to lie in leadership's determination to establish role of party as cradle of legitimacy. Foreign policy statement," it continues, "also general, with emphasis on peaceful goals—disarmament, strengthened UN, European security—and anti-imperialism."⁵⁸ His summation: "These early indications seem to reflect leadership's intention to concentrate on establishing itself institutionally while avoiding signalling [sic] new lines of policy on tactics except possibly in area of communist unity."⁵⁹ Afterward, at the Kremlin reception, Brezhnev and Kosygin sought out Ambassador Kohler to express interest in improving U.S.-Soviet relations. "No discussion of Khrushchev nor sign that he was missed," Kohler cabled to Rusk, "with officials seemingly anxious to convince others that situation is normal."⁶⁰

On 22 October, Rostow sent Bundy a report from State's Policy Planning Council in which member John Huizenga, in examining the ouster, argued that it had occurred due to Khrushchev's goals outpacing resources; "collapse of Moscow's authority over the international Communist movement" (i.e., the increasing rivalry with China); and vulnerabilities due to a

leadership style in which “Khrushchev attempted, partly from necessity and partly from choice, to govern by politicking rather than by terror, to be political boss rather than oriental tyrant.”⁶¹ Huizenga assessed it “likely that the coup against Khrushchev was pre-emptive. Probably it was feared not only that he might force unwanted policies on the party, but even that he might try to remove those who were opposing him.”⁶² The key questions Huizenga posed open an aperture into the State Department’s intelligence cycle regarding the ouster a week afterward.

First, he asked how stable the new leadership arrangements were. He warned that the collective leadership concept could prove transitory, as historically their “system needs a point of authority and decision embodied in a boss personality, and... the present issues of policy conflict are severe and urgent.”⁶³ The paper asked how the new leadership might “tackle the problem of China and the situation in the Communist movement?”⁶⁴ However, the “question of questions,” according to the analysis, was “What resolution will now be attempted of the key and chronic quarrel over economic allocations?”⁶⁵ and Huizenga admitted that this represented the biggest unknown. “Khrushchev,” he wrote, “made a strong pitch for a shift in priorities in favor of the consumer sector, and implied that the defense allocation should at least be held at the present level. It could be that he was overthrown on this issue...”⁶⁶ The Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), nested within the CIA’s Directorate of Science and Technology to cull open-source intelligence from foreign news broadcasts for the U.S. government, released a classified report two days later that dovetailed with the Huizenga paper.⁶⁷

CIA’s Directorate of Intelligence also issued a memorandum on the 22nd—“Khrushchev’s Fall and Its Consequences”—that argued his successors had “little room for maneuver” in dealings with the PRC now. “The removal of Khrushchev, plus the Chinese atomic feat, practically ensure that any substantial rapprochement would be on Mao’s terms. Both sides are

wary and quiet at present, but the USSR is at a tactical disadvantage because China can afford to wait and to make large demands.”⁶⁸ The memo also said there were “no strong reasons to expect a change in Soviet policy in Southeast Asia,”⁶⁹ where the two chief Communist powers were supporting Ho and the U.S. was ramping up its commitment to Saigon.

The BNSP, again, in Section IV (Relations with Communist Regimes) advocated for a bifurcated policy toward the other camp. “While defending the free community against Communist pressures, we should also seek to intensify peaceful penetration of the Bloc countries and to attract those countries into closer association with a strong and closely-knit free community. Thus we should seek opportunities to deal with Communist nations constructively in terms of limited areas in which our national interests overlap with theirs, rather than only in terms of reaction to their aggressive enterprises.”⁷⁰ Within this section, specifically regarding avoidance or minimization of crises with the Soviet Union: “We should promote communications—informal as well as formal, direct as well as indirect—designed to convey to Moscow a clear understanding of our intentions.”⁷¹

Therefore, in the midst of the October events at the Kremlin, the United States appeared to be espousing a business-as-usual approach to Moscow. In the week afterward, Dobrynin asked for and received a meeting with LBJ. Kohler spoke with Brezhnev and Kosygin at the cosmonaut reception, in line with the BNSP’s recommendation to “maintain continuing pressure on the USSR to expand exchanges of persons on equitable terms and... exploit to the maximum those opportunities open to us to reduce restrictions on the flow of information.”⁷²

Specifically, the BNSP mentioned “cooperative ventures in such fields as outer space, Antarctica, public health, and peaceful uses of atomic energy”⁷³ as opportunities. On 25 October, accordingly, LBJ released a statement with an attached letter instructing Secretary of

Commerce Luther Hodges to “bring the interested Federal departments and agencies into closer consultation and cooperation” with counterparts in the Soviet Union to exchange weather information within a UN initiative to which Kennedy had committed the United States—the World Weather System. “The United States and the Soviet Union have been working out an agreement to exchange weather information over a direct communications link between the two capitals. The agreement we have now reached provides for the exchange on a reciprocal basis of weather information gathered by satellites.”⁷⁴ In the midst of leadership instability within the principal nuclear-armed adversary, the White House—utilizing words such as “consultation,” “cooperation,” and “communication,” was taking control of the messaging to both the American electorate and the Kremlin. The Administration sought to project reassurance by way of signaling that it would carry out its plans and policies, maintain its agreements with the UN, and work to maintain its channels to the Soviet Union, regardless of who led it.

On 28 October, though, the senior U.S. diplomat in Moscow cabled the State Department that things were not so certain on his end. “The principle that Central Committee of the Party is the custodian and source of legitimacy, established by Khrushchev (in self-defense) in 1957, has now been successfully used against him, and thus confirmed. The door is thus open for maneuver, intrigue and conspiracy among rivals for power within this 170-odd member body, as well as within the Presidium proper.” Ambassador Kohler acknowledged that Brezhnev, “is presently in best power position as Party First Secretary, but has been there too short a time to be in full control of party personnel and machinery. He is vain and ambitious and, in due course, may well be tempted to follow Khrushchev’s example by combining top party and government roles.”⁷⁵

While Khrushchev's disruptive policies in agriculture and industry had dislocated and disgruntled party membership at lower levels of the apparatus, Kohler observed that:

The Soviet elite in general—bureaucrats, managers, scientists, intelligentsia—was practically unscathed by the changes. Indeed the reaction of its membership ranged from indifference to pleasure. It is this elite which collectively keeps Soviet society ponderously rolling forward, and it will presumably continue to do so under almost any conceivable conditions.⁷⁶

The CPSU would continue to oppose systems of imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism in “Moscow’s continuing struggle against Chinese orthodoxy,” but Kohler predicted a more careful examination of foreign aid, moving forward, to “such places as India, Egypt, Algeria, and Cuba;” and he forecasted “the last of personal, off-the-cuff remarks on major policy issues.” In the future, by contrast, Soviet representatives would stick to the collective CPSU script “in both public and private. Such more orthodox diplomacy may, in fact, be an advantage for us in that we should have a clearer understanding of Soviet positions, undiluted by Khrushchevian bombast.”⁷⁷

At UN headquarters, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and former Khrushchev ally Anastas Mikoyan breakfasted with Ambassador Stevenson and his deputy Charles Yost on 29 October. This conversation indicated Soviet priorities in the wake of the removal. Mikoyan was, after all, a conspirator within it, a senior official who held onto his position after the event. Not only was he authorized to break bread with Adlai Stevenson, but he likely filed a similar report on the conversation when he returned to Moscow. Mikoyan emphasized continuity in Soviet foreign policy—including its relationship with the PRC and “defensive” support for Cuba—and collective leadership in the altered Presidium. He confirmed “decisions are taken collectively” there, where both Brezhnev and Kosygin were members, but “gave no indication which if either would play leading role.” Stevenson, in response to a query

about the impending presidential election, advised Mikoyan that “while large majority in election would of course give Pres. Johnson more flexibility than Pres. Kennedy had had with his very narrow margin and domestic reforms would presumably be carried forward, there was no reason to expect changes in foreign policy from those previously pursued...” Stevenson informed Mikoyan that China’s aspirations in the Far East were a U.S. concern, but “Mikoyan seemed to expect some ‘change’, presumably relaxation, in US foreign policies after election and to be disappointed not to have his expectation confirmed.”⁷⁸

Back in the Soviet capital, though, two days later, Mikoyan accompanied Kosygin to meet with India’s Prime Minister during her stopover there, and reassured her, too, that Soviet foreign policy would maintain its course and that he “hoped for further development of good relations with India.” They also discussed hopes for a Soviet “modus vivendi with China,” and the USSR leadership believed that the PRC would continue nuclear tests—a concern shared by India. Given these meetings with Stevenson and Ghandi, the USSR was working to assuage peer nations that the break with Khrushchev was an orderly one, and that the status quo was secure in its international relations. The fact that India’s embassy in Moscow shared this information with Kohler’s staff reveals something about India’s concerns at this moment as well, vis-à-vis their relations with both camps.⁷⁹

Having contacted the diplomatic community, the Kremlin then reached out to its citizens by means of the press, on 1 November, to elaborate upon the initial (17 October) announcement regarding the change in leadership. Kohler’s analysis of the internal political message within the article also echoes previously derived information on the new top-level decision apparatus:

Statement puts heavy emphasis on collective leadership, described as the most important principle of Leninist leadership, and on Soviet democracy inside party and generally. Stresses that according to program, building of Communism means increasing freedom of individual and rights of Soviet citizens. Not only

does party base itself on wisdom and experience of the people, but role of Soviets, trade unions, and Komsomol is supposed [to] become more meaningful... Soviet reader is presumably supposed to conclude he not only has stake in system, but will also have increased voice in it... Khrushchev not mentioned by name, but... October plenum, which deposed Khrushchev, is held up as demonstration of unity and ideological and organizational strength of party.⁸⁰

There were also few surprises in the Soviet foreign policy assessment. Kohler summarized this section by asserting that the “statement seems aimed at reassuring West and neutrals, but lacks any hint of significant shift in Sino-Soviet dispute.”⁸¹ Direct Soviet communications to the Johnson Administration, as well as the U.S. government’s own sources of information and analysis, generally pointed toward Soviet leaders’ desire to maintain the international status quo; there were, however, some hints to the contrary.

Subtle Tells from Moscow: Speeches, Receptions, and Toasts

When LBJ defeated Barry Goldwater on 4 November, the congratulations message from the USSR was co-signed by Mikoyan and Kosygin.⁸² The same day, both the Board of National Estimates and the State Department issued further reports on the post-Khrushchev USSR. One report, “Implications of the Fall of Khrushchev For Soviet Military Policy,”⁸³ was mostly devoted to the strategic nuclear balance. Another, compiled by State’s Director of Intelligence and Research, was more holistic in its treatment of “The Fall of Khrushchev.” “His style,” the report argued, “presumably became an issue because the successes no longer came so easily. However, the problems to which he was seeking answers remain to confront Khrushchev’s successors.”⁸⁴ In contrast to the CIA document, this report voiced concerns about Soviet foreign policy actions further down the warfare spectrum—e.g., struggles for influence in the post-colonial spaces. It forecast a possible “effort may be made to maintain the maximum Soviet influence possible in Indochina, and to restore Moscow’s damaged image there. However, there are limits to what Moscow can or will do in Vietnam and Laos, where Soviet interests are not

vital and Chinese Communist influence is predominant.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, “Soviet policy in the underdeveloped areas has by and large paid the Soviet Union ample dividends in the spread of its state influence... Their dilemma is particularly apparent at present in the necessity of balancing efforts at improvement of Soviet relations with neutralist countries and the capitalist West with the dictates of communist orthodoxy and militance.”⁸⁶ In 1964, therefore, future Soviet aid to the DRV was an unknown variable.

For the 47th anniversary of the October Revolution, though, First Secretary Brezhnev provided some clarity in a speech delivered at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses, “avowing Soviet support for ‘national liberation struggles,’ [in which he] specifically condemned alleged Western interference in Cyprus, the Congo, Southeast Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and Latin America, and avowed Soviet support for the ‘just’ anti-Western struggles taking place there.” Two of his other themes, support for Cuba and Soviet defense readiness, also conveyed a clear pro-active direction in foreign policy under the new leadership.⁸⁷ The speech was broadcast live on Soviet television on 6 November, and sparked up significant reporting on the event from U.S. Embassy Moscow.

According to one of the reports, PRC Premier Zhou Enlai sat behind Brezhnev during the speech, “impassively, and applauded general references to communist unity but not specific references as to how it was to be brought about, nor foreign policy statements except such as on Taiwan and Cuba. Foreign policy review seemed standard, with remarks on Germany, Cuba, Taiwan, Korea and Vietnam tailored to presence of visitors and, in any case quickly balanced by offer of improved relations with West.” Brezhnev’s explicit call “for improved relations with the U.S.,” the 7 November report noted, “is first by present leadership.”⁸⁸ More details were forthcoming—the sort of subtle notes one was not going to attain from the translated speech text:

...whole atmosphere at meeting seemed strained and less than enthusiastic. A nervous Mikoyan served as cheerleader for applause. [Cuba's Minister of Industries Che] Guevara, however, seemed to take signals from Chou [Enlai] rather than Mikoyan.⁸⁹

These factors may seem miniscule, but they do reflect the concerns in Washington. The delegations from these nations and their attitudes mattered; as did the possibility of China seeking influence, and possibly gaining it, vis-à-vis the USSR in Cuba.

A second report from Kohler arrived at Foggy Bottom less than three hours later, answering a query about Brezhnev's condition amid rumors of a recent stroke ("Brezhnev seemed to be in good health, his complexion ruddy, his step firm, and his speech unfaltering.")⁹⁰ Kohler fired off another, two hours later, describing the reception after the speech. Toasts were made and it was noted who made them, and in which order—Kosygin, Podgorny, Suslov, Brezhnev, and Mikoyan. Kosygin, Podgorny, and Brezhnev all congratulated Kohler on LBJ's recent electoral victory during the ambassador's trip through the receiving line.

Kohler, though, included a lengthy paragraph about Defense Minister Marshal Rodion Malinovsky's "violent toast dedicated to Soviet armed strength. He [cited] Defense Secretary McNamara's allegation US could obliterate Sov Union and asserted Sov armed forces could destroy USA or any aggressor..."^{91 92} Significantly—

Promptly afterwards Kosygin came over to me with obvious intent [to] counteract Malinovsky performance. In reply to his question, I told him franky [sic] I did not like Malinovsky's remarks and felt they were uncalled for. He was at some pain to explain that they were in no sense a threat—only a statement that Sov armed forces, like all armed forces, were intent on protecting Sov people... This led to some discussion of disarmament and I expressed hope that we could take some practical steps in this field during next year... Kosygin looked around, noticed that we had become surrounded by other diplomats and said that this is a matter which involves all countries great and small. I agreed, said that this was reason for setting up ENDC which provided for representation of large and small powers, and I hoped we could make progress in this forum.⁹³

The cable noted that Zhou Enlai's only interaction with a Soviet leader was a single short talk with Brezhnev.

The most important figures in the new hierarchy would be present for the anniversary of the October Revolution, and so would the international community's senior diplomats. Of course, Kohler was tracking the Chinese premier's behavior and interactions at the event to try and derive the new regime's relationship with Beijing. When the Kremlin's senior military advisor made his boorish toast, the identity of the figure who moved to smooth things over with the U.S. ambassador was worth reporting to Washington—Premier Kosygin, who headed the new Soviet government, not Brezhnev, chief of the CPSU. Previously, Khrushchev had held both these positions at once, and so the division of responsibility between the two offices was unclear to American officials. Kohler's mention of the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament, a 1961 UN initiative emphasizing nuclear disarmament, confidence-building measures, and test controls—one to which the U.S. and Soviet Union had been sending representatives since March of 1962—not only displayed confidence in the UN in front of diplomats around him and Kosygin, but served to emphasize the sort of cooperation for which the BNSP advocated. Kohler, the career diplomat in closest proximity to the change in Soviet leadership, was doing his best to provide crucial intelligence about current Soviet leadership and policy.

The New Soviet Team

In October 1964 U.S. officials knew Brezhnev led the CPSU and Kosygin was premier, but U.S. intelligence did not yet know the delineation of responsibility and balance of power between them. Indeed, when Llewelyn Thompson returned to Moscow for his second term in January of 1967, he presented his credentials to Podgorny, while hand-carrying a letter from LBJ

to Kosygin, asking him to facilitate a meeting with the North Vietnamese ambassador to the USSR.⁹⁴ Podgorny, as Chairman of the Presidium, was technically head of state; the fact that Thompson was acting as courier for a personal letter from his president to the Soviet premier (not Podgorny) in the attempt to help end a war, though, reveals how complex these interactions could be as well as how the Johnson Administration perceived the new hierarchy in Moscow.

It is telling, for instance, that Johnson addressed this important letter to Kosygin. Brezhnev could have favored anyone to run the Soviet government after Khrushchev, and he picked Kosygin for compelling reasons—arguably the same reasons LBJ sent the letter to him.

On economic and social policy questions, Kosygin was more experienced and authoritative than Brezhnev. Managers of the biggest industries knew and respected him as an “economic heavyweight”. And in this Brezhnev yielded to Kosygin... And in all the following years Brezhnev did not even think of replacing Kosygin with someone else. The Secretary General had no desire to busy himself with the “rusty” mechanism known as “the Soviet economy”.⁹⁵

Kosygin was also notable for having risen to full membership of the Presidium outside Khrushchev’s patronage. However, Kosygin “avoided giving the impression, as Khrushchev did, that he intended any radical shakeup of established interests in the regime and yet conveyed a picture of himself as a forward-looking apostle of efficiency and ‘scientific’ methods.”⁹⁶ For Brezhnev and the clique of conservatives around him, Kosygin was an ideal selection to co-lead the USSR. The Sovietologists around President Johnson would have likely advised him to make a sensitive request for facilitating a meeting with the DRV in 1967 to a sober and steady personality like Kosygin.

Again, however, more than one intelligence cycle was at work during this tense moment. The NSC’s concern about a flash point drawing the PRC into Vietnam grew even more poignant now that China had broken the status quo by detonating its own nuclear weapon. Fortunately, the Soviet détente strategy would continue, and the USSR’s policies toward Vietnam would ebb

and flow to keep that strategy viable. Though this was bound to disappoint recipients of its economic and military aid in Hanoi, the USSR would hew to policy that “a negotiated settlement outcome of the war [w]as the best insurance against being drawn further into it (since it could always counter a Hanoi appeal for intervention with a new proposal for political settlement).” Any such settlement would undoubtedly preserve the status quo established in 1954, with a Vietnamese regime in position on each side of the 17th Parallel, unless the popular elections agreed-upon during that Geneva meeting indeed occurred. As neither the regime in Saigon nor its U.S. ally were interested in such a development, the situation in Southeast Asia would likely remain static, which would have been sufficient for American policy.

On 9 December, when Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko stopped at the Soviet Embassy on his way to the UN General Assembly, he and Dobrynin hosted Rusk, Thompson, and Kohler for a meeting. Gromyko bluntly asked about U.S. intentions in Southeast Asia. “As the Soviet Union had stated on a number of earlier occasions, it believed that the U.S. had made a great mistake by getting involved in South Vietnam, because there were no U.S. interests involved in that area.” He stated that “the U.S. had its troops in South Vietnam and was now increasing them. This was not in accord with the U.S.-expressed desire to reduce tensions in the area.”

Rusk answered that “it appeared that there was no problem between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. in South East Asia. Unfortunately, Hanoi and Peiping were very active in the area [and] if Hanoi and Peiping left their neighbors alone, there would be no U.S. troops in that area.” The Secretary leaned on Gromyko to “in no way encourage Hanoi and Peiping... [and to use] influence to restrain them,” to which Gromyko countered that “the U.S. had prevented elections from taking place in Vietnam as provided for under the 1954 agreement” and that U.S. troops

were in South Vietnam, while the Soviets had sent none to North Vietnam. “If the Soviet Union were to match the U.S., it would have troops in North Vietnam.”⁹⁷

Rusk predictably mentioned aggression from “Hanoi and Peiping,” while Gromyko accused the U.S. of “aggression against North Vietnam” and again pushed Vietnam-wide elections while observing that none of the Saigon governments requesting U.S. help had been “supported by the people.”⁹⁸ The meeting only succeeded in establishing the respective viewpoints. While neither side wished to be labeled the aggressor, the Soviet position reflected its contest with China (and Rusk clearly knew it). The individuals present at this meeting reveal that détente was still important to the Soviet Union, and Gromyko’s repetitive allusions to elections to settle the impasse in Vietnam reveal Moscow’s desired outcome; meanwhile, the conditional statement that “If the Soviet Union were to match the U.S...”⁹⁹ reveals a capability to do so, but not necessarily the desire.

Pike asserted that not only was Khrushchev leaning toward disengagement from the conflict, but that what “eventually saved Hanoi was Khrushchev’s abrupt departure and the advent of a new regime in Moscow determined to rectify Khrushchev’s doctrinal errors and policy losses.”¹⁰⁰ In January 1965 both Rusk (14 January)¹⁰¹ and Ambassador Thompson (15 January) told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Soviets for the near term would be preoccupied with competing with China for influence, “and that anything that they and we are doing or talking about is going to be simply a part of their problem with Peiping, that in the most basic sense the Peiping problem is their No. 1 foreign policy problem.”¹⁰² The Secretary of State also argued, however, that if the U.S. and the PRC again ended up locked in a land war—this time in Vietnam, the Soviet “position would be terribly affected if it should leave one of its fellow socialist countries to be deeply injured by a capitalist, the chief of the capitalist world,

without giving that country support. On the other hand, we do not have the impression that the Soviets are anxious to become entangled with us over Southeast Asia...”¹⁰³ Implicitly, Rusk was more concerned about the threat from China’s reactions to U.S. initiatives in Southeast Asia than the USSR’s.

Halberstam asserted that, by April, the other men around LBJ were also principally occupied with the PRC, and that China’s previous intervention in Korea shaded their perspective on the bombing campaign against Hanoi, as well as the introduction of American combat units to South Vietnam. At the beginning of April, after numerous updates from Ambassador Maxwell Taylor in Saigon, a specific hypothetical about the Chinese threat was bouncing around the Oval Office.

The question, then, was how much pressure the United States could bring to bear on Hanoi without reaching what they called the flash point, the flash point being the point at which the Chinese Communists would enter the war with their own troops. There was a general agreement that the flash point was the destruction of the MIGs and the airfield at Phuc Yen [approximately 20 miles north of Hanoi]. But, added Bill Bundy, the North would not give in unless we hit them close to the flash point. “The flash point” was an important phrase; it was the point to which they would escalate without really going to war. War was the Chinese coming in and the events getting out of hand. What they were doing was below the flash point; thus it was not war.¹⁰⁴

How, though, would the national security experts around the president know if military action in Southeast Asia was approaching this hypothetical tripwire? Certainly there were other applicable actions besides hitting Phuc Yen; as the number of planned strike sorties and deployments of Marine battalions were advocated, they would need a methodology for sensing and avoiding this moment, as well as a methodology for retreating from it. Memories of the previous land war in Asia, with its sudden introduction of a host of Chinese volunteers thus influenced U.S. policy fifteen years later. The Korean War, though, offered another parallel: independent of China’s intervention, the modern weaponry the USSR had provided Kim’s forces

in 1950 was arguably as big a factor as the military equipment it could unload at Haiphong in 1965.

Deriving Soviet intent in Southeast Asia was thus critical at this moment. In contrast to the hot line intelligence cycle, while meetings between diplomats were critical, the U.S. could use its IMINT, ELINT, SIGINT, and other technical platforms to collect tactical indicators of Soviet or Chinese units and equipment operating in North Vietnam.

Hugging Up to The Flash Point—Graduated Pressure

The fourth Major Mission that Rostow put under the Role of U.S. Force section of the Basic National Security Policy is the longest, but most pertinent to this case study. “In the event of war,” the document pushes for strategy “to conduct hostilities so as to minimize damage to the U.S. and its allies, frustrate opposing military forces, and conclude hostilities on terms acceptable to the U.S. and its allies. It is in the interest of the U.S.,” it cautions, “to achieve its wartime objectives while limiting the destructiveness of warfare; in this sense, it is a goal of U.S. policy that any war be a limited war.”¹⁰⁵

The U.S. policy apparatus in Fall 1964 accordingly applied management and business techniques to Southeast Asia, “graduated pressure—maximum results with minimal investment, and the belief that the enemy would respond ‘rationally’ to precisely controlled military stimuli... [a policy] consistent with the educational backgrounds and professional experiences of... economists, managers, and systems analysts, such as Rostow and McNamara, [who] tried to achieve maximum political payoff with minimal investment of military force, which they planned to use to affect Hanoi’s calculations of future costs and benefits.”¹⁰⁶ Having decided to intervene heavily in Vietnam before Khrushchev’s ouster, the Johnson White House stayed on

course, per Rostow's BNSP chart, forging agreements and emphasizing communication in its interactions with the USSR while escalating its commitment to Southeast Asia.

The administration's activities at this point reveal not only concerns about why Khrushchev was ousted, vis-à-vis other world events, but how it would define it for the American electorate. On the morning of the 16th, a special meeting of the NSC occurred at the White House, with LBJ, Rusk, McNamara, Ball, Thompson, Bundy, DCI McCone, and CIA Director of Intelligence Ray Cline, who took notes. An updated Kremlin organizational chart was brought in, McCone speculated on the causes of the ouster (i.e., Khrushchev's erratic behavior, the Sino-Soviet Split, and the guns-or-butter controversy regarding resource allocation in the Soviet economy). Rusk and Thompson concurred with his assessment, then the Secretary of State made recommendations:

[Rusk] emphasized he felt the President should make sure there was no anxiety in the U.S. over this change of the Soviet leadership since American policy is made in Washington not Moscow. Our attitude should be that we are prepared for whatever comes and will continue on a steady course. We do not know whether the new Soviet leaders will be better or worse than Khrushchev. We should not adopt the view that they are likely to be worse. After all, it was Khrushchev who brought on the Berlin crisis and the Cuba missile crisis in 1962. Our approach should be watchful but steady, and we should be ready to cooperate with Moscow in steps toward international peace if the new leaders wish to move in this direction.¹⁰⁷

The meeting also covered the new Labour government in Britain, as well as that day's Chinese nuclear test, but President Johnson made a near-term course correction before the meeting adjourned. "The President," it was recorded, "said that he had decided it would be wise for him to cancel part of his campaign plans and stay in Washington for several days to deal with all of these complicated new developments in national and world affairs. He said that he wanted Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, and the DCI to surface some of these key issues, at least

for the benefit of the Congressional leadership, to show that the President and his Administration were attending to business even at the expense, if necessary, of some political campaigning.”¹⁰⁸

On 19 November, with the election over and a month spent reflecting on the Khrushchev ouster, Ambassador Kohler cabled the State Department two significant reports. The first comprised an assessment that the “forthcoming period may be one in which—even more than in past—Soviet actions in E-W relations will often seem contradictory or inconsistent. Most important, however, it promises to be period in which, while tactical shifts may occur, continuation of main lines of policy which current leadership has inherited will not be altered.”¹⁰⁹ The second, sent 23 minutes earlier, comprised two paragraphs. One of those cooperative measures from the BNSP—a bilateral agreement on exploring peaceful use of nuclear energy to fuel desalination plants in nations (e.g., Israel) lacking fresh drinking water—was signed in Moscow, with Kohler and LBJ’s Special Assistant for Science and Technology Dr. Donald Hornig representing the United States as signatories. Kohler reported:

Following signing of desalting agreement Nov 19, I had opportunity for few words alone with Gromyko. I took occasion to inquire whether he had opportunity to consider question I put to him Nov 11¹¹⁰ as to who manned Sov end of hot line... Gromyko said matter was under consideration. However, he stated “There is a government” and I could be sure even now that person who responded on hot line would be authorized to speak for government.¹¹¹

Taken in aggregate, these two communications served to reassure the White House that, at least from the U.S. government’s perspective most physically proximate to the new Soviet hierarchy, that the status quo looked preserved and well-managed in the Kremlin. Admittedly, betting on the status quo was safer for analysts—and at this point it did *not* include augmented Soviet adventurism in Berlin or Cuba, nor a radical departure from business as usual in Moscow; certainly, with the distribution of power to more individuals within the Kremlin walls, any sudden disruption was less likely.

Indeed, while the CIA wrote its dependable estimates of the new Soviet leadership, the best intelligence sources for deriving the new regime were diplomats. Men who had served as U.S. Ambassadors in Moscow—Averell Harriman,¹¹² Bohlen, Thompson, and now Foy Kohler—had survived the McCarthy era and were still providing good counsel. Unlike their counterparts on China, the foreign service officials with responsibility for Soviet Union desks were not purged in the 1950s,¹¹³ and therefore were available to advise LBJ's NSC on the perturbations within Kremlin organizational charts, as well as likely branches and sequels to U.S. decisions regarding the USSR. By November 1964, though, having won the presidential election and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the other superpower was increasingly lower on the agenda at National Security Council meetings. Vietnam, however, was still very much on the NSC's docket.

“If tensions increased, we believe the Soviet interest would be to contain or reduce a crisis.”

In the aftermath of Khrushchev's departure, the intelligence apparatus was also busy preparing courses of action for the White House regarding Vietnam. Its performance in evaluating recent events in the Kremlin was demonstrably accurate by the standards of intelligence analysis, and the Johnson Administration would understandably desire its assessment of the situation brewing in Southeast Asia. Both the NSC and the intelligence enterprise could see events converging toward a decision-point on U.S. commitment to the regime in Saigon and, as in the Tonkin Gulf case, the intelligence analysis and the preferred policy were beginning to merge as well at the top; the available options and the reactions they would facilitate from the other side—the Soviets, the PRC, and North Vietnam—were evoking serious contemplation amongst both U.S. analysts and decision-makers as winter approached in Washington.

On 23 November 1964, before his departure for Lima, Peru, to attend meetings of the Inter-American Committee on the Alliance for Progress and Inter-American Economic and Social Council, Walt Rostow penned a memo to Rusk, entitled “Some Observations as We Come to the Crunch in Southeast Asia.” Evidently he wanted to get his own perspectives into any discussions on Vietnam that would occur in his absence. “I presume,” he wrote, “that in early December some major decisions on Southeast Asia will be made. I should, therefore, like to leave with you some observations on the situation [and] have already communicated them to [Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, and the National Security Advisor’s brother] Bill Bundy.”¹¹⁴

Rostow began by citing passages from Special National Intelligence Estimate 10-3-64 (submitted by the Director of Central Intelligence after approval by Directors of State’s Intelligence and Research Department, Defense Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency), “Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Action,” a document which describes the DRV and PRC as optimistic about the situation in South Vietnam, but wary of “a major US response against” themselves, “in which the great weight of superior U.S. weaponry could be brought against them... [i.e.,] U.S. air and naval power.”¹¹⁵ In light of this, Rostow advocated for “critical moves”—introducing ground forces into South Vietnam and perhaps “the Laos corridor”; “a minimal installation of the principle that from the present forward North Viet Nam will be vulnerable to retaliatory attacks for continued violation of the 1954-1962 accords;” and deploying “massive forces” into Pacific Command in case of an escalatory response to U.S. measures—“including forces evidently aimed at China as well as North Viet Nam, should the Chinese Communists enter the game.” Rostow then expressed

confidence that “we can do this in ways which should be understood—and not dangerously misinterpreted—in Hanoi and Peiping.”¹¹⁶

Again, there was little distinction between communist nations in Rostow’s mind. “They will not actually accept a setback until they are absolutely sure that we really mean it,” he writes. “They will be as searching in this matter as Khrushchev was before he abandoned the effort to break our hold on Berlin and as Khrushchev was in searching us out on the Turkish missiles before he finally dismantled and removed the missiles from Cuba.” Preserving the status quo in Southeast Asia would only demand “that we enter the exercise with the same determination and staying power that we entered the long test on Berlin and the short test on the Cuba missiles. But it would take that (i.e., Kennedy’s) kind of Presidential commitment and staying power.” In the end, it is a simple equation of resources plus persistence. “[O]ur assets, as I see them, are sufficient to see this thing through if we enter the exercise with adequate determination to succeed.”¹¹⁷

The document with which Rostow supports these arguments is—again—SNIE 10-3-64, which offers four possible courses of action (COAs) to the administration: resuming DESOTO patrols with or without the OPLAN 34A MAROPS; resuming OPLAN 34A operations (evidently without DESOTO support), with emphasis on MAROPS; air action and/or ground operations against infiltration-associated targets in southern Laos (i.e., the Ho Chi Minh Trail); and, finally:

A systematic pattern of gradually intensifying US/GVN attacks against the DRV itself, including those associated with infiltration routes and military and economic targets. These attacks on the DRV would not include the use of nuclear weapons or US ground forces in organized US combat units. This program would be combined with directly communicated assurances that US objectives were confined to eliminating outside Communist support and guidance of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao insurrections.¹¹⁸

This fourth COA is distinguishable from the others in its length, its detail, and the number of pages—five—of text needed to explain it. At the end of the explanation, almost as a supplemental paragraph, SNIE 10-3-64 says that the Soviet Union “is probably uneasy about the situation in Indochina for several reasons, the most important being a realization that it might escalate to general war. If tensions increased, we believe the Soviet interest would be to contain or reduce a crisis.”¹¹⁹

It is notable here that the author of the Basic National Security Policy, who did not often look for gray areas in different actors and actions of the Cold War, described “Hanoi and Peiping” as the principal recipients of the message the U.S. would send in Southeast Asia. While the SNIE described the USSR as a standoff factor, likely to intervene only to “contain or reduce” an escalation of hostilities, Rostow looked to the recent past, personifying the Soviet Union as “Khrushchev,” and then tallying recent episodes in which Khrushchev backed down before U.S. resolve and power. About a month had passed since the disruption in the Kremlin, but Rostow appeared to believe Soviet power was consolidated in the hands of one man, and that the playbook used to cope with him was still valid, even with new decision-makers in Moscow.

Given Townsend Hoopes’s recollection, Rostow likely returned from his trip to Peru with little disruption to his own agenda, which appeared to jibe nicely with the advice moving upward to the White House. Hoopes, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for National Security affairs, was tasked in January 1965 to re-examine allocations to 11 “forward defense countries” bordering Communist states. South Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, Philippines, India, Pakistan, Iran, Greece, and Turkey “were related to our global strategy of containment, and absorbed collectively almost 75 percent of our total military-assistance dollars... McNamara and McNaughton wanted a fresh assessment of rock-bottom future aid requirements in these key

countries as a basis for determining new priorities and thus a reallocation of limited... resources.”¹²⁰ Thus, for 1964, “\$215 million had been initially allocated to Vietnam, but \$357 million had eventually been required. The additional \$142 million had to be found by scaling down several other important programs—in Korea, Turkey, and Greece—where substantial military assistance was an integral part of our foreign policy relationship and therefore diplomatically (and perhaps militarily) damaging to reduce.”¹²¹

The previous chapter demonstrated that the U.S. intelligence collection apparatus was already increasingly committing its high-demand/low-density assets to Southeast Asia in this critical period. Hoopes demonstrated that by January of 1965—when he returned to public service after a decade at an international private-sector consulting firm—Vietnam was vacuuming up dollars as well. The United States foreign policy apparatus was shifting its attention and emphasis from the two nations which initially pulled these resources into the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan, as well as the recent unfinished war astride the 38th Parallel, and toward Saigon.

Chapter 5 - Kosygin's Hanoi Visit

By 1965, a trend had emerged. Strategic Cold War concerns—i.e., the other superpower, with its growing arsenal of nuclear weapons and capable delivery systems—drove high-level U.S. intelligence cycles. U.S. (and other nations') diplomats and reporters in Moscow would in turn provide timely data for analysis within these cycles, and tensions with the Soviet Union would ebb and flow, with the pertinent U.S. policies informed by these strategic-level assessments. As with Tonkin and Khrushchev, though, Cold War emphasis in LBJ's cabinet now seemed to consistently devolve to the operational, then tactical levels; along with the resources, the attention always seemed to move toward Southeast Asia. In that theater, U.S. diplomacy and its more technical collection apparatuses quickly tightened their aperture.

In February, the U.S. knew that the Soviet Premier would be in North Vietnam while the NSC was contemplating rolling more U.S. troops and bombs into the theater. American officials expected that the Soviets would complain, by means of both their press and Washington embassy, about the U.S. pushing its military units into South Vietnam to secure its growing air bases. If a U.S. airstrike on the DRV landed on Aleksei Kosygin during his planned visit, though, Moscow might hurl more than words in retaliation. It was therefore appropriate to initiate intelligence cycles about Kosygin's itinerary and aims during his visit to Hanoi.

Historian Michael Beschloss has asserted that in early February LBJ had “been pondering Operation Rolling Thunder—systematic, regular American bombing of North Vietnam. But he has been wary of starting Rolling Thunder until the new Soviet Premier, Aleksei Kosygin, ends a ‘friendship visit’ to Hanoi.”¹ The CIA was tracking his itinerary and reported, in the 3 February President's Daily Brief (PDB), that Kosygin would leave “early tomorrow for Hanoi, via Peiping,” and assessed that “the Pravda article of Sunday welcoming the President's [8 January]

State of the Union remarks about US-Soviet relations was in fact intended to soften the impact of Kosygin's trip on the US."²

When, however, the Viet Cong seized the initiative during this visit, attacking U.S. installations at Pleiku and Qui Nhon, U.S. policymakers appeared less concerned about accidentally bombing the Soviet premier than deciding which targets to hit in retaliation, and the bomb damage assessments it would harvest after doing so. Indeed, when McGeorge Bundy called LBJ at 10:06 on the morning of 10 February to report the Qui Nhon attack, he was already suggesting possible targets, as well as a press conference "to do a full-dress account of this affair... coolly and directly to the American people." By 10:25 President Johnson was on the phone with Speaker of the House John McCormack, citing American casualty numbers and stating that "we've got to meet right quick on targets."³

Hence the Johnson Administration moved at a high tempo toward its preferred tool box—airpower—and the tactical intelligence establishment would appropriately assist in planning and evaluating the generated strike missions' effects. The big-picture assessments at the strategic level were comparatively slow, analytical, and less dependent upon technology, evident in the 3 February PDB and its use of Soviet press statements to form its conclusions. As the Tonkin Gulf Incident illustrated, initiating an action and tasking sea- or air-borne platforms to collect upon an adversary's response is something at which the United States had honed its skills since at least the Second World War—by means of a strictly military intelligence cycle. A devolution can thus be derived in the intelligence support to U.S. policy—from people to platforms collecting the data; from diligent analysis to quickly available scorekeeping; and greater dependence upon the Department of Defense over State and CIA for the process. The burden of big-picture

analysis moved to SNIEs, but all roads were leading toward Vietnam, where the policy and resources were increasingly directed, too.

So it is in Vietnam, as this case study will demonstrate, where the administration's policies toward Vietnam and the USSR were not only about to merge, but their collision could have proven catastrophic. Again, the Vietnam course was set and the White House was pushing the throttle forward, and the Intelligence Cycle was disregarded if its products failed to support the forward momentum. At the strategic level, the United States possessed excellent intelligence, and policymakers accepted and acted upon it; and again, in its policy toward Vietnam, the administration focused its attention on tactical over higher-level intelligence products; the intelligence apparatus therefore served to enable the policy in place, and not to provide guidance to American policymakers as the commitment surged forward.

While the risk of injuring or killing the Soviet premier during this event loomed large, however, the Johnson Administration was apparently looking for indicators that military action against any target in North Vietnam during his visit might drive the USSR to amp up its military aid to Hanoi—either out of indignation or a need to counter the perception of Soviet weakness such an attack might provoke in the Third World.

Graduated Application

On 16 October 1964, David Klein, National Security Council Assistant for Europe and Canada, compiled a memo to his boss McGeorge Bundy, predicting that the new Soviet government would have its hands full balancing “the Khrushchevian course of peaceful co-existence” with “Moscow-Peking cooperation,” forecasting that “we are going to see a slow down in Soviet diplomacy, at least as far as East-West relations are concerned, until the government shakes itself down and the leadership takes hold.” He went on to argue that “two-

headed leadership is improbable,” and favored Brezhnev as the new boss over Podgorny, with no mention of Kosygin in the document. “From our viewpoint, it is important to indicate to the new government our intention to continue along the course we have been going. This is the only one that makes any sense and permits us to deal with the urgent and crucial issues facing both of us.”⁴

Meanwhile, China continued to loom over Soviet-DRV bilateral relations. A North Vietnamese delegation led by Party Secretary Le Duan traveled to Moscow in February 1964 to meet with Khrushchev and other senior Soviet officials. When Le brought up the difficult relationship between the PRC and Soviet Union, Khrushchev demanded that Hanoi both pick a side in it and put its allegiance with the USSR. Contrary to tradition, there was no joint communique issued before Duan and his entourage departed; on 15 February Hanoi made an anodyne announcement that a meeting and discussions had occurred. It is shortly afterward that Soviet economic aid and exports were drastically reduced alongside “a steady warming in Hanoi’s rhetoric about China.”⁵ A year into this trilateral distress, Kosygin flew to Hanoi.

By this point, though, American policy toward North Vietnam had also changed. A National Security Action Memorandum, drafted by Colonel L.J. Legere, Assistant to CJCS Maxwell Taylor, for McGeorge Bundy two years before Kosygin’s trip to Hanoi, expressed a future need for “controlled and graduated application of integrated political, military and diplomatic power,” with incremental adjustments to pressure on an adversary, thus controlling escalation’s actions and tempo. Coordination of political, economic, diplomatic, psychological, and military instruments “toward our overall objective” within the flexible response strategy would—as it had Khrushchev in the Cuba crisis—govern how the ship of state adjusted its rudder and throttle in navigating toward its intended destination.⁶

On 8 January 1965 the Secretary of State told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that not only did the USSR hope to stay out of hostilities in Southeast Asia, but was alarmed about the prospects of the U.S. clashing with both China and North Vietnam in the region. Pressed by Senator Albert Gore (D-TN), Rusk mused that “if Hanoi and Peiping can be turned back in Southeast Asia, can be brought to a point where they recognized that they have go [sic] to adjust their policy and start leaving these people alone, that then the idea of peaceful coexistence in the Communist world will be greatly strengthened. But if Peiping shows profit from its militancy, if they demonstrate that this is the way of the future, if they demonstrate they are making headway, they are picking up countries, then I think this gives an enormous impetus to the more militant doctrine of communism as declared by Peiping and that Moscow would be sorely tempted to move in that direction rather than to try to stay on a basis of peaceful coexistence.”⁷

The new U.S. strategy—manipulation by dint of slowly ratcheting up the pressure or bleeding it off the DRV—was the administration’s method for coping with this phenomenon. Again, as Halberstam described it, the recent past provided a model—but an imperfect one—for employing the strategy.

They would, as they thought, use power in the same slow, judicious manner as they had during the missile crisis. Not too much, not too little. Signaling clearly and cautiously their intentions (that is, that they did not want to go to war)... Being in control of the communications all the way through. Riding herd on the military and keeping them away from all but technical decisions. Which was fine, except that they made one fatal mistake; they forgot that in the Cuban missile crisis it was the Russians, not the Cubans, who had backed down. The threat of American power had had an impact on the Soviets, who were a comparable society with comparable targets, and little effect on a new agrarian society still involved in its own revolution. Thus, though they were following the same pattern as they had in the missile crisis, they lacked a sense of history, and what had seemed so judicious before became injudicious in Vietnam.⁸

Besides, as the previous chapter illustrated, the Flash Point intelligence cycle was predicated on the threat from the PRC, not the Soviet Union, and these two rival nations' interests in Vietnam were hardly congruent.

Pleiku

On 3 February the CIA reported that Kosygin and a “high-level Soviet military, economic, and party delegation will leave for Hanoi on 4 February. The visit probably foreshadows an increase in Soviet military assistance to North Vietnam and possibly a new long-range economic aid agreement.”⁹ After noting IMINT of “at least six 37mm. self-propelled antiaircraft guns in the vicinity of Phuc Yen airfield” since late December 1964—notable for the fact that Phuc Yen was the DRV’s first jet-capable airbase, this particular air defense artillery piece was new to the DRV order of battle, and the USSR had *not* provided it to China—“which suggests direct Soviet assistance to North Vietnam,” the report offered a poignant assessment:

The new Soviet leaders almost certainly hope that an increase in economic and military assistance to North Vietnam will give them a greater voice in the formulation of Communist policy in Indochina. They may also hope that their newly demonstrated interest in the area will serve as a deterrent to possible US extension of the war to North Vietnam. Kosygin and company will probably also press Hanoi to return to its traditional position of neutrality in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Apparently in anticipation of increased Soviet support, Hanoi began, following Premier Pham Van Dong’s return from Moscow last November, to tamp-down its public criticism of Soviet policy. The theme of “bloc unity” is now once again getting attention in Hanoi propaganda, as the Vietnamese seek, for the present at least, to avoid giving offense to either Moscow or Peiping.¹⁰

The initial report of the weapon system had appeared in the 30 January President’s Daily Brief with overhead imagery of “POSSIBLE ZSU 57/2 SELF-PROPELLED ANTIARICRAFT GUNS NEAR PHUC YEN AIRFIELD,” accompanied by a snapshot of the system (evidently from a recent Red Square May Day parade) and list of specifications (i.e., weight, speed, armament). Whichever system had arrived—37mm or 57mm—both reports assessed that the guns were of

Soviet manufacture, were deployed in the last week of December 1964, and had “never been observed in Communist China.”¹¹ The follow-on implication that Soviet technicians were on-site to either train DRV gunners or operate the guns themselves was significant.

On 2 February, however, Kosygin *was* observed in Communist China, stopping off first in Beijing, where he and Central Committee secretary Yuri Andropov met with Mao to discuss “the sharp question of borders between [their] two states,” a two-hour meeting which devolved into “criticism of the current Soviet leadership.”¹² Pike asserted that the purpose of Kosygin’s journey to Hanoi was to “negotiate and sign a defensive pact,” and his appointment with Mao to arrange “joint and coordinated Sino-Soviet military assistance to Hanoi.”¹³ In China, Kosygin “represented his nation, not his person, like ‘Great Mao’” had, and left for the second leg of the journey “vexed” and “repelled” at the way the conversation had jumped the track into a defense against Mao’s appraisal of the new lineup in the Kremlin.¹⁴ Three days later, thus having departed Chinese airspace without an agreement, Kosygin and Andropov were in Hanoi.

McGeorge Bundy, John McNaughton, and Assistant Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Andrew Goodpaster were simultaneously in Saigon on a fact-finding mission for President Johnson, taking briefings and discussing the possibility of pulling American dependents from South Vietnam, as well as the state of the Viet Cong insurgency.¹⁵ With delegations from each of the superpowers in Vietnam at this moment, the situation appeared stable.

“...mouse-trapped by Hanoi.”

On 7 February, in Hanoi, Kosygin told a mass audience that the USSR would support North Vietnam against any threat to “her independence and sovereignty.”¹⁶ Within hours (6 February in Washington), in South Vietnam’s Central Highlands, Viet Cong sappers and mortars

attacked both Camp Holloway, a U.S. Army helicopter base, and a MACV advisory detachment compound near Pleiku, South Vietnam, killing 8 U.S. soldiers and damaging 17 aircraft—including five destroyed UH-1B helicopters. In total, four such attacks occurred throughout South Vietnam on 7 February.¹⁷

Accordingly, LBJ's National Security Council met to discuss appropriate levels of force for retaliation against the DRV, the participation of South Vietnam's air force in the effort, and the discussions to arrange when McGeorge Bundy returned from Saigon. Senator Mike Mansfield (D-MT) asked about the possibility of Kosygin stopping in Beijing again on his way home for more conversations with Mao regarding the way ahead for North Vietnam. "Ambassador Thompson said that he might consult but that the leadership of the Soviet Union today is so much a collegial affair that no decision could be arrived at before Kosygin returned to Moscow to consult."¹⁸

Mansfield, who replaced LBJ as Senate Majority Leader when he ascended to the Vice Presidency in 1961, though, added a second observation before the huddle adjourned. "The North Vietnamese attack has opened many eyes," he said. "It appears the local populous [sic] in South Vietnam is not behind us, else the Viet Cong could not have carried out their surprise attack."¹⁹ McNamara remembers Mansfield looking "straight at the president across the cabinet table," in conjunction with this declaration. "He urged Johnson to weigh this fact carefully, because a reprisal strike" would change the nature of the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam. "The president heard Mansfield out," he recalls, "then ordered the strike, basing his action on the authority granted by the Tonkin Gulf Resolution."²⁰

After the meeting, President Johnson quickly issued a press release announcing intent to pull American dependents from South Vietnam.

It has become clear that Hanoi has undertaken a more aggressive course of action against both South Vietnamese and American installations, and against Americans who are in South Vietnam assisting the people of that country to defend their freedom. We have no choice now but to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our continued determination to back South Vietnam in its fight to maintain its independence.

He also announced the deployment of a Hawk air defense missile battalion (to defend the airbase at Da Nang),²¹ and that “[o]ther reinforcements, units, and individuals *may* follow” (italics added).²²

Within the hour, Press Secretary George Reedy was in front of the press corps, where he was asked “if the White house sees any connection with the events and Kosygin in Hanoi” and if there had “been any communications with the Soviet side about this thing.” Reedy answered that he did not know to both these queries.²³ Still in South Vietnam, receiving briefings on the situation in Saigon, and flying up to Pleiku to survey the damage, McGeorge Bundy later told a reporter that “Pleikus are streetcars,” which Hoopes in his memoir interpreted as “if one waits watchfully, they come along. Thereafter, the air strikes were almost imperceptibly transformed into a systematic program of bombing the North, but without formal acknowledgement of the shift until after it was established fact.”²⁴ Gaiduk, in *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* wrote, similarly, that “Pleiku provided such a wonderful opportunity to punish the North Vietnamese that the Soviet premier’s presence in Hanoi could not deter Washington from such a move.”²⁵

The same day, Ambassador Thompson invited Dobrynin to his home to discuss these events, where “he had told the Ambassador that we had cancelled a proposed [DESOTO] patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin to be certain that no embarrassing incident would take place during Mr. Kosygin’s visit to Hanoi. However, we had been forced to react when the Viet Cong attacked our personnel...” According to the 8 February NSC Meeting minutes, LBJ responded to

Thompson's follow-up report by asking "all of those present to preserve the secrecy of the various ways we communicate with the Russians. He said he had authorized the discussion with Ambassador Dobrynin because of the importance of conveying our view to the Russians."²⁶

The NSC minutes also recorded George Ball, representing the Secretary of State at the meeting, suggesting that the USSR had no foreknowledge of the Pleiku attack, and if it had, "the Russians might not have sent Kosygin to Hanoi." He further described "the Russians" as "on the spot" because of Pleiku, possibly "mouse-trapped by Hanoi." The minutes state that Congressional leaders were present—Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen (R-IL), Senator Mansfield, Speaker of the House John McCormack (D-MA), and House Minority Leader Gerald Ford (R-MI)—and that Ball reported, "We have talked to the Russians in an effort to explain why we had to retaliate as we did. Our hope is that they will understand why we acted as we did, at least to the extent of being annoyed by the North Vietnamese action."²⁷

Ball added that a letter "explaining our case" had also been dispatched to the UN Secretary General, "to preempt any effort of a UN member to call a Security Council Meeting" in response to the bombing missions. Having reassured the four legislators that the U.S. was prepared for such a development, however, Ball expressed a "wish to control the circumstances of that discussion. He recalled when we had proceeded in a similar manner following the Desoto Patrol incident in the Gulf of Tonkin."²⁸ The White House had in effect done the strategic heavy lifting to support the chosen policy, defending itself against international criticism by energizing its diplomacy with the Soviets and the United Nations, the two most likely attack vectors.

The report also supports Halberstam's assertion in *The Best and the Brightest* that at this point LBJ was not using the National Security Council to determine policy, an institution he regarded as "too large... bulky... and thus too leaky, [with] too many people who talked to

much. He used it more as a forum, to inform the rest of the government on which way things were going and signing doubters on...”²⁹ If the meetings were growing more frequent in 1965, though, so were the doubters.

On 10 February the Viet Cong blew up the Viet Cuong Hotel in Qui Nhon, which the U.S. Army was using to billet a helicopter unit deployed to the neighboring airfield, killing 23 and wounding 22 enlisted American soldiers. At the consequent NSC meeting LBJ asked “whether all those present agreed we should launch a retaliatory strike,” and Vice President Humphrey expressed his “doubts as to whether the strike should take place today, or whether it should be delayed until Mr. Kosygin left the DRV. He had mixed feelings about whether we should retaliate as Secretary McNamara had recommended”—i.e., a 130-airplane strike against the Thanh Hoa bridge, which traversed the Song Ma river, approximately 85 miles south of Hanoi. “He shared the State Department’s view that Kosygin’s presence in Hanoi or in the Far East limited our freedom of action.”³⁰

Up to this moment, McGeorge Bundy had advised the president that there was disagreement in the room. “Some believe,” according to the minutes, that “we should not launch another raid while Kosygin is in the Far East. Some feel an attack now might force the Chinese Communists and the Soviet Union together.” Ball, representing the State Department, noted that the Soviet action to the earlier retaliatory attack had been “mild,” but that Kosygin was leaving that afternoon for North Korea. He argued for holding off further reprisal actions until Kosygin’s departure. Ambassador Thompson “added that our objective should be to avoid any deeper Soviet commitment to the North Vietnamese. If the Chinese Communist Air Force comes in in response to our retaliatory attack, very heavy pressure is put on the Soviets to come to the aid of the Vietnamese.”

Both Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon and McGeorge Bundy shot back that the U.S. could not “put ourself in the position of giving the Russians control over our actions by their moving Soviet diplomats from one place to another,” and DCI McCone iterated the primary policy objective—“to help the South Vietnamese overcome aggression,” and argued that any notional Soviet reaction should not affect it. McNamara confirmed support from the Joint Chiefs and Ambassador Taylor in Saigon for the planned airstrikes; LBJ warned everyone present to ensure there were no leaks to the press³¹ and, eventually, authorized execution³² of a revised strike plan to hit two North Vietnamese barracks closer to the DMZ.³³

McGeorge Bundy also mentioned that day’s intelligence estimate, SNIE 10-2-65: *Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Actions*, a copy of which was attached to the meeting minutes. The estimate stated that since Khrushchev’s ouster the Soviet Union had altered course in Vietnam, reasserting its interests there, and that “Kosygin’s visit to Hanoi is the latest step in this process.” These interests lay in putting the DRV directly in the middle position between the Soviets and the PRC, “to discourage the US from broadening the war, and to participate in the Communist victory which they expected. To these ends, the USSR probably planned to offer to strengthen North Vietnamese air defenses and to provide equipment for use in insurgency and subversion [in South Vietnam].”³⁴

The CIA assessed the likely Soviet response to further U.S. bombing attacks would entail augmented diplomacy and propaganda, designed to “bring the US to the conference table,” and provision of military hardware—anti-aircraft guns, surface-to-air missile systems, jet fighters, and the radar installations to direct all of them in defense of the DRV airspace, all “installed and operated by Soviet personnel.”³⁵ Referring to them as “technicians” would shield the Kremlin from acknowledging any military casualties incurred in any U.S. bombing campaign.³⁶ Further,

if the USSR failed “to satisfy North Vietnamese requests for this kind of aid [it] would be costly to the Soviet position, the more so if such aid had previously been promised.”³⁷

The SNIE’s final assessment, though, allayed fears of a monolithic and coordinated response from the other camp.

Heightened military conflict would itself exert strong pressures for effective unity. Nevertheless, we have at several points indicated our belief that the USSR and China act as competitors in North Vietnamese affairs and that they would continue to do so during a period of sustained US air attacks on North Vietnam. We have also pointed to complex and conflicting interests which make for delicate relations—and difficult communications—between Hanoi and both its allies. We think it likely that policy coordination among the three Communist countries involved will be chronically imperfect and occasionally quite erratic.³⁸

Then, to remind the NSC that the world is complicated and unpredictable: “In any case, since Communist policies will be constantly fashioned and refashioned to meet a constantly changing situation, they will be difficult to foresee very far ahead.”³⁹

Supporters of retaliatory action arrived prepared to push through their policy. Most present were in favor of retaliation for Qui Nhon, and the Secretary of Defense had ensured a possible target list was generated for them before walking into the cabinet room. The National Security Advisor cited an SNIE describing a manageable worst-case scenario from the three principal Communist actors. Thus, any attempt at devil’s advocacy would be hard pressed to switch off a retaliatory action. Hoopes, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs, also attended. In his memoir he described Humphrey’s contribution to this meeting, an argument that “the attempt to gain a military solution in Vietnam would take years—far beyond the end of 1967 when the President would have to position himself for reelection. His views were received at the White House with particular coldness, and he was banished from the inner councils for some months thereafter...”⁴⁰

Halberstam provided a similar assessment: “From the time of his dissent on Pleiku, Humphrey was not invited to meetings, not informed of important memos on the drift of the policy.” Questioning the retaliatory action, whether Kosygin might be underneath it or not, was not going to move either the process or the meeting along. “He was, in effect, frozen out. His staff, already small, would scurry around Washington trying to pick up the play on Vietnam for him.”⁴¹

Undersecretary of State Ball was also present, and in his memoirs he placed himself within the circle of doubt—with Mansfield, Humphrey, and Thompson. The Secretary of Defense, who had brought along acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral David McDonald, is in Ball’s memoir a critical enabler for this phenomenon—brushing “caveats aside” to get the bombs to the targets. For McNamara:

There would never be a perfect moment to begin bombing; someone could always find an objection and time was of the essence. We had to show immediately that we were reacting to the Vietcong attack. It was the quintessential McNamara approach. Once he had made up his mind to go forward, he would push aside the most formidable impediment that might threaten to slow down or deflect him from his determined course. So, once again, he carried the day. Not only did the President come down on McNamara’s side but he was so annoyed at Hubert Humphrey’s cautionary words that the Vice-President was thereafter excluded from our meetings for many months.⁴²

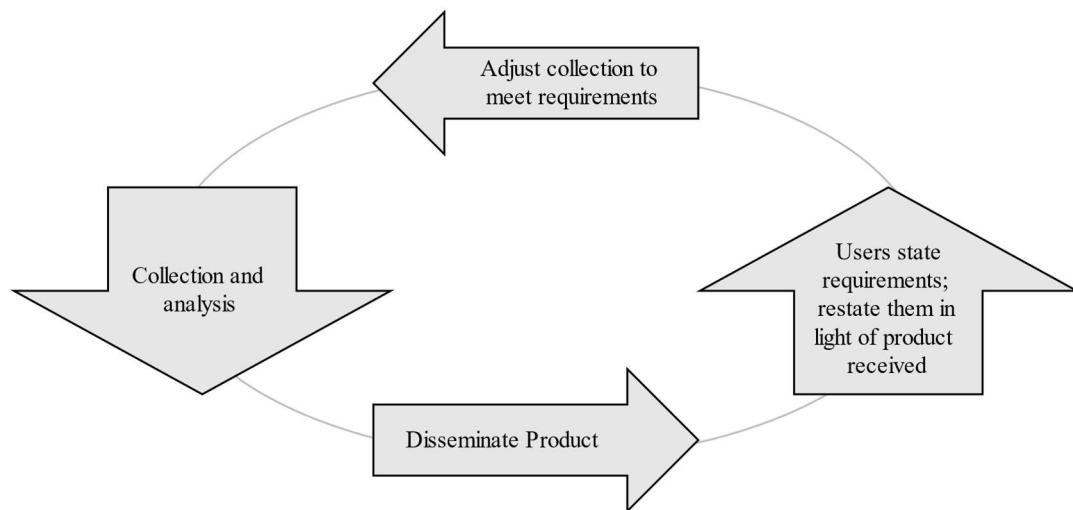
One could infer that the Premier of the Soviet Union was regarded as such an impediment. No matter what sort of analysis Ambassador Thompson, the State Department, or even the CIA provided, the demand for retaliatory action would prevail.

“...a wrap-up for you early in the morning.”

Each strike mission induces its own Intelligence Cycle to generate battle damage assessment (BDA), and the missions that kicked off Operation FLAMING DART were not exceptions. The customer asks the collection manager about mission success, the manager tasks

intelligence assets (i.e., reconnaissance aircraft) to fly over the target and snap photographs, photo interpreters compare the pre- and post-strike photos, and a report is made, summarizing the contrast, usually employing metrics such as percentage destroyed. The report is then sent to the customer, who is rarely satisfied, even in the modern era, with how long it takes to both complete the cycle and to provide BDA.

Figure 1. Military concept of the intelligence cycle⁴³



Lyndon Johnson, however, received BDA of these retaliatory strikes the same day. The level of detail provided depicts not only the data sources—i.e., debriefed pilots—but follow-up reports from strike squadrons’ operation centers.

Declassified audio of the initial assessment, conducted by a Lieutenant Colonel Mike Cook over telephone to the President, reveals “fragmentary” post-strike information such as that “three groups of barracks” were burning very heavily, “heavy to moderate fires were noticed,” but that “a great deal” of smoke and dust had obscured the target. Cook reported three USAF

aircraft lost, one of which had exploded after landing at Da Nang, but all pilots were recovered and evidently unharmed. One of the strike aircraft seized the opportunity to attack an enemy gunboat on the river after hitting the primary target; the pilot witnessed it burning as he egressed the target area. Cook also reported that one of the 85 carrier-based aircraft, an F-8 like the one Commander Stockdale flew during the Tonkin Incident, did not return from the mission. Cook assured the president that not only had he coordinated with both U.S. Embassy Saigon and Press Secretary Reedy on subsequent announcements to reporters, but that he expected additional strike results, promising “a wrap-up for you very early in the morning.”⁴⁴

President Johnson asked seven questions during this three-and-a-half-minute conversation—including: whether the missing pilot could have returned to his carrier in the elapsed time, whether he was “the only human we lost,” and how many aircraft the Navy had launched from these carriers. “Gosh,” he asked at one point, “that anti-aircraft is better than we think it is, isn’t it?”⁴⁵

He asked if BDA had come back from the VNAF missions yet and why their pilots had diverted from their primary targets. The answer was weather, but it speaks to an implied loss of control over the retaliatory action once initiated. U.S. air units were, after all, accountable to their commander in chief; the VNAF was not. Toward the end of the exchange, LBJ asked about any “substantial number of people in these targets we hit.” Cook answered that he did not have the numbers, but would try and follow up with an estimate from the “intelligence agency” (likely the DIA).⁴⁶

The “wrap-up” report duly arrived the next morning, announcing that the VNAF had launched again from Da Nang at 3:00 a.m. local time, for a re-attack on the previously

weathered-in barracks at Chap Le, losing one aircraft (all pilots recovered safely); “many fires were set,” according to the mission debriefs, “and the results were ‘excellent’.”⁴⁷

The wrap-up report dramatically scaled back claims of success, reporting that, of the sites targeted on 7 February only Dong Hoi was actually hit. “The other missions aborted” due to cloud cover over the targets. Analyzed post-strike photography listed buildings destroyed and burning. “Task group commanders now estimate the Dong Hoi strike as moderately good,” it read, but they were requesting further photo reconnaissance missions. Analyzed DRV reports (likely derived from SIGINT) mentioned land communications disrupted in the target area.⁴⁸ There was more detail on the anti-aircraft fire from gunboats, and a confirmation that no enemy aircraft were launched in defense of the target. Interestingly, both Chinese and North Vietnamese air defense radars “tracked the strike aircraft from shortly after their launch until they had left North Vietnamese territory.”⁴⁹

The fog of war revealed itself in this update. The missing naval aircraft was in reality an A-4E, “which according to pilot reports, was hit by ground fire and went down in the sea one to two miles off Dong Hoi. The pilot ejected and has not been recovered.”⁵⁰ The text goes on to add further detail to the Pleiku attacks—U.S. aircraft destroyed, casualties, and simultaneous attacks in coastal installations.

In a subsequent section—Communist Political Reaction—its conclusion depicts “propaganda designed to discredit the US air strike as unwarranted aggression” from the DRV and PRC. Regarding the USSR in particular:

Moscow TASS has also reported the White House statement and the North Vietnamese Defense Ministry Statement, but there has as yet been no authoritative Soviet reaction to the US air strikes. Subsequent to the strikes, Hanoi broadcast a report that talks between Kosygin and Vietnamese leaders had taken place sometime on 7 February. There has been no other reporting on Kosygin’s activities since the US action. Moscow announced on 8 February that

a meeting of the military members of the Kosygin delegation with the DRV Defense Minister, Vo Nguyen Giap, took place on the 7th. No details of the discussion were given.⁵¹

The report concludes with a section on “Free World Reaction” (e.g., Japan, South Korea, Europe) and a map of the DRV depicting where the airstrikes occurred. The document’s significance lay not only in its subject matter (revealing the intelligence cycle customer’s asks), but its collection methodology for each.

The post-strike sections, specific to targets and BDA, imply IMINT, pilot debriefings, and SIGINT collection to fill in the details of Lieutenant Colonel Cook’s initial verbal after-action report to the president. Further, the ground crews, by measuring holes in the recovered aircraft, could derive the sort of anti-aircraft weaponry directed skyward during the attack (i.e., 14.5 and 37mm guns).⁵² A platform, either a ship or aircraft, was clearly collecting ELINT emissions from air defense radars, too.

The big-picture “Communist Political Reaction” depends on open-source press releases from the PRC, the DRV, and the USSR, and accounts that Kosygin had met with Giap somewhere in North Vietnam on the day of the bombing missions. If the White House was indeed interested in BDA regarding its relationship with the Kremlin, that would be collected—again—by either Soviet press releases or its State Department sources.

Indeed, a two-page Annex was affixed to the 9 February PDB, citing recent statements from the Soviet government and Kosygin’s speech in Hanoi the day before to argue that neither appeared “to signal any significant increase in the level of [military assistance] envisaged prior to Kosygin’s departure for Hanoi.” From identified trends, it concluded with the following assessment:

[T]he USSR will continue to avoid military guarantees or specific commitments to defend North Vietnam. However, the Soviet government statement is

considerably stronger than Khrushchev's reaction to the Tonkin Gulf incidents last August. This attempt to demonstrate support for North Vietnam reflects the intention of the new Soviet leaders to regain influence in Hanoi and to compete more effectively with the Chinese Communists.⁵³

The next day's PDB announced that Kosygin was finally out of North Vietnam, "in Peiping where he met what appears to have been another rather cool reception," while in "Moscow Soviet officials continue to make relatively conciliatory noises toward the US."⁵⁴

"...at this point the new Soviet leadership was indignant..."

Kosygin's actual aim during the visit to Hanoi was to arrange a single and integrated Soviet-PRC logistic system for supplying North Vietnam, part of an overarching enterprise to craft a united front against U.S. intervention in the region. When Mao refused, it was Soviet aid that enabled the DRV to endure and to eventually seize Saigon a decade later.⁵⁵ Indeed, the fact that the United States attacked a country while the Soviet premier was *in* it to discuss military and economic aid *to* it likely shaped subsequent Soviet policy choices.

Near the end of Kosygin's visit, on 9 February, the USSR and the DRV issued a joint communique declaring their bilateral cooperation, moving forward, "against imperialism, and for peace, national independence, democracy and Socialism."⁵⁶ The CPSU ratified it as a binding defense pact a month later, on 26 March. Whether or not had Khrushchev planned to throttle back on Soviet commitments to Hanoi before he was ousted, the Kremlin was now, through its state-run press, explicit about its response to the recent U.S. actions in the theater. On 9 February, *Pravda* declared that the USSR had already warned about U.S. attempts to infringe on its "brother Socialist nation's sovereignty" and had expressed hopes that realism would govern Washington's reactions to the situation developing on "the Indochina peninsula;" instead, the U.S., it argued, was resorting to aggression against the "peace-loving government" in Hanoi. The article expressed its hopes for improving Soviet-American relations, however:

The Soviet leadership emphatically supports the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's... announcement protesting against the conducted U.S.A. military actions..., against [its] build-up of armed forces and weaponry in South Vietnam. It is fully united with the DRV government's demand for the necessity of stopping such actions, to ensure strict fulfillment of the 1954 Geneva Agreement regarding Vietnam, to defend peace in Indochina and Southeast Asia. In the face of the U.S.A.'s indicated actions, the Soviet Union will be forced, with its allies and friends, to take further measures for the protection of security and reinforcement of [DRV] defense capability. Let no one doubt that the Soviet people will fulfill its international obligation in [its] relations with brother Socialist nations.⁵⁷

In contrast with the 6 February speeches by Kosygin and Pham Van Dong (gratitude for Lenin and his October Revolution, mutual recognition of sacrifices in assailing fascism and imperialism, striving to build Socialism, etc.),⁵⁸ the tone three days hence is bellicose and focused.

On the 10th, Pravda published a joint communique from the two leaders—Pham and Kosygin—calling the DRV an “outpost of the Socialist camp in Southeast Asia—playing an important role in the struggle against American imperialism, contributing to the defense of peace in Asia and the entire world.” This imperialism manifested itself in “unceasing provocations and acts of direct aggression,” specifically on “5 August 1964 and especially the barbaric American airstrike[s] against DRV territory on 7 and 8 February” 1965. These attacks were described as “incompatible with either international law or the 1954 Geneva Agreements.” The Soviet leadership asserted through this communique that, “following the principles of Socialist internationalism, it will not remain apathetic toward the provision of security to fraternal Socialist nations and will render the DRV necessary help and support.”⁵⁹

Within the previous decade, the proclamation asserted that:

U.S.A. leadership has been disrupting the 1954 Geneva Agreements in Vietnam, trying to prevent a united nation, to turn South Vietnam into a new type of colony and a U.S. military base. It has illegally ruled South Vietnam [with] tens of thousands of its soldiers and officers, a large quantity of weaponry and military

technology, leading a “special war” against South Vietnam’s population... [which is forced] in this very dangerous situation... with weaponry in hand, to carry out the struggle for its liberation.

The Soviet delegation thus expressed here “full support [for] the righteous, heroic struggle of South Vietnam’s populace for independence, peace, and neutrality, led by the National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam,” i.e., the Viet Cong.⁶⁰

Gaiduk, in *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, argued that at this point the new Soviet leadership was indignant, and that U.S. actions in the wake of the Pleiku attack “destroyed what was left of Moscow’s hope to avoid an internationalization of the conflict in Vietnam. As a result, the Soviet Union would be forced to set aside its policy of propaganda and noninvolvement and plunge into a war with unpredictable consequences.”⁶¹

On 24 February, at a celebration for the Voskhod-2 cosmonauts’ safe return to earth, Brezhnev brought up North Vietnam and the “American imperialism” threatening its sovereignty; but he also hinted at the zeal of Soviet citizens volunteering to go to assist this fraternal Socialist nation in their fight to help fulfill the USSR’s “international obligation toward the DRV.”⁶² One can assume, as Gaiduk did, that this remark set off the alarm bells in the Oval Office. The fact that Ambassador Kohler addressed it in a telegram a month later also hints at an Intelligence Cycle generated to ascertain the threat’s credibility. Kohler labeled Brezhnev’s remarks as an attempt to “persuade the world that the only alternative to serious deterioration of the situation is a conference on Soviet terms,”⁶³ and a “cover to allow Moscow to dispatch Soviet personnel to man sophisticated weaponry sent by the USSR to Hanoi.”⁶⁴

On 26 February, Kosygin conveyed some of this perspective to the Soviet populace on television, describing a de facto state of war in Vietnam between “foreign interventionists and the Vietnamese people.” He accused “militaristic circles” in the United States of embarking

upon “a dangerous path of aggressive action,” and declared that the “peace-loving states” of the world were compelled to both protect peace and prevent the spread of the conflict. “Neither bullets nor napalm have stopped—and cannot stop—South Vietnam’s national liberation movement,” he said, and “during our stay in our fraternal republic we bore witness to the great courage and fortitude with which the Vietnamese people met the American militarists’ provocative actions.” Kosygin had, in effect, made his own Manichaeian assertion here. On the one side were the U.S. and its Saigon proxy regime; on the other were the Vietnamese people—both those manning the DRV’s air defense units and those prosecuting an insurgency south of the 17th Parallel.

As for the BNSP’s cooperative initiatives—e.g., water desalinization, weather forecasting—Kosygin appeared skeptical.

Recently Washington has announced the need to search for paths toward strengthening peace, about the importance of broadening international contacts. The Soviet Union, as it is well-known, has sought contacts with other nations with the aims of strengthening international cooperation, for working out measures toward weakening international tensions. However, these United States declarations are impossible to combine with its actions directed against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The violation of elementary norms in international rules and the UN Charter—it is a slippery path, and could be a long one.⁶⁵

He closed with an international call to strictly fulfill the Geneva Agreement, to prevent the conflict’s expansion, and negotiate a path to solving the problems in Indochina. As the joint communique had also stipulated, though, the Soviet Union now felt compelled to “take further measures for the protection of security and reinforcement of [DRV] defense capability.”⁶⁶ The near-term would reveal what this entailed.

Soviet rockets, mortars, artillery guns, fighter jets, and trucks began to flow toward Hanoi.

The CIA had forecast increased Soviet aid to North Vietnam before Kosygin had even

left Moscow, in a 1 February intelligence memorandum. An economic aid mission was already in Hanoi to manage in-place bilateral agreements, led by an official from the Soviet State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations, but the “presence of high-ranking military and economic officials on [Kosygin’s incoming] delegation almost certainly foreshadows a substantial increase in Soviet economic and military assistance.” The DRV’s assessed shopping list reveals Hanoi’s concerns—“such defensive weapons as surface-to-air missiles, antiaircraft weapons, and naval torpedo and patrol craft.”⁶⁷ Again, the status quo is emphasized in assessing Soviet policy in Vietnam.

Soviet uncertainty and concern regarding US intentions probably was heightened not only by US air strikes against the infiltration routes in Laos, but by a more general feeling that the US may be impelled to adopt more far-reaching military measures in an attempt to check the erosion in South Vietnam... Kosygin probably will argue that the Viet Cong campaign is progressing satisfactorily and that North Vietnam should avoid actions which might provoke US reprisals.⁶⁸

After the Kosygin visit, in the spring, the promised aid began to move toward Hanoi through Soviet cargo ships and China’s rail corridor.⁶⁹ Indeed, Kosygin had stopped in Beijing again on his way home from Hanoi to coordinate the logistics for this endeavor, with the PRC agreeing to non-military Soviet aid transported by air, “but [it had] restricted military hardware to a limited land corridor... [with] tight restrictions on the number of Soviet personnel permitted to accompany aid transiting China.”⁷⁰

Hoopes in his memoir concluded that the rough partnership Kosygin cobbled together in Beijing to supply the DRV in the aftermath of the February 1965 visit was decisive. He described a North Vietnamese society of farm laborers, freed for other tasks by China’s food aid, “subject to the harsh discipline of an authoritarian regime in wartime, [that] could be moved from place to place at will and at a cost to the regime of little more than rice rations and minimal shelter.” This available workforce, summoned to rebuild infrastructure (e.g., the Ho Chi Minh

Trail) and fill in bomb craters, proved highly efficient and effective. Hoopes compared the DRV populace to London's during the Blitz, a society "under siege... drawn closer by a clear and present danger in ways that emphasized common interests and subordinated factional differences and grievances. A psychological climate was being created in which the government in charge could extend and reinforce tough decrees by effective appeals to patriotism, loyalty, and readiness for sacrifice of all citizens." The lifeline of China's food aid, pumping beneath a Soviet air defense umbrella, was thus critical to North Vietnam's survival. Indeed, U.S. "bombing seemed to be strengthening the social fabric... Unlike the situation in Saigon, Hanoi seemed to be free of labor absenteeism, draft dodging, black market operations and prostitution."⁷¹

Pike's research revealed that the first surface-to-air missiles arrived in February 1965, part of a total 500,000 tons of war materiel the Soviets shipped through December. By the middle of the year, 1500 radar-guided anti-aircraft weapons were in place, and thirty surface-to-air missile batteries—crewed by DRV soldiers and serviced by 4000 Soviet advisers and technicians—were protecting the nation's airspace. Soviet rockets, mortars, artillery guns, fighter jets, and trucks began to flow toward Hanoi. Further, Pike pointed out, the Soviets "supplied all of North Vietnam's petroleum during the war."⁷² Whether by rail or sea, the USSR had instituted a crash military supply program for Hanoi that lasted at least through the moment Soviet-manufactured armored vehicles crashed the U.S. Embassy Saigon gates in 1975 with North Vietnamese commanders in the cupolas.

"Our aim is to get Hanoi to realize that the North Vietnamese cannot win over South Vietnam without danger of our escalating the war."

At the NSC meeting on 26 March, DCI McCone briefed that Hanoi was likely unready “to accept negotiations,” that though the PRC was urging the DRV “to stand firm... the Chinese Communists are not ready to get into the fight,” and that China had refused “overflight clearances for Soviet planes flying materiel to North Vietnam.”⁷³

The floor was then turned over to Ambassador Thompson, who had spoken privately two hours earlier with Dobrynin. According to the record, the Soviet ambassador repeated that his nation could not “disassociate themselves from the fate of a socialist country such as North Vietnam,” and confirmed that the USSR was sending assistance to it. Moreover:

The Soviets warned us in advance that we were following a dangerous path in escalating the war in Vietnam. We are jeopardizing US/USSR relations. The U.S. has assumed a grave responsibility by continuing its aggression [and] should withdraw its forces from all of Vietnam and strictly observe the Geneva Agreement of 1954... The United States has underestimated the serious effect of the current crisis.⁷⁴

Much of this had been stated previously by the Soviet duumvirate and its press. The Secretary of State’s response to Thompson’s report, however, is revealing. Before the discussion veered off into the most recent requests from Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland in Saigon, Rusk asserted that:

It is a pity that the U.S. and the USSR are being dragged along by North Vietnam. There is a difference between one country attacking another and the USSR supporting another socialist country. The Soviets are paralyzed by U.S. bombing and, as long as it continues, they cannot take any political action without exposing themselves to the criticism that they are not defending a socialist country. We do not know what they will do, however, if the bombing is stopped. The effect of the U.S. air strikes was serious, but the attacks have not created a crisis. Our aim is to get Hanoi to realize that the North Vietnamese cannot win over South Vietnam without danger of our escalating the war.⁷⁵

The NSC was holding fast to its perception of assisting one nation against a second aggressor nation, both of which were de facto superpower proxies—a situation akin to the previous war on the Korean peninsula. Rusk’s postulate that the Soviet reaction to a bombing halt represented a

great unknown is belied by the statements from both the Kremlin and the state-controlled Soviet media. Initiating an Intelligence Cycle regarding such a cessation, married up with a proposal to revisit the Geneva Agreements, would have been appropriate here. However, considering the remainder of this meeting, in which LBJ and his advisors discussed the repercussions of South Vietnamese soldiers employing U.S.-supplied tear gas and the “problems with over 200 reporters based in Saigon” who were reporting it, the priorities did not favor such a cycle at this time.⁷⁶

The cycles initiated in the Spring of 1965, though, were implied in the reports submitted from the U.S. intelligence community to the upper levels of government. The specific courses of action covered within them—i.e., conventional airstrikes against China, against Soviet weaponry recently acquired by the DRV, and employment of a strategic bombing air campaign against North Vietnam—comprise a likely list of topics the White House handed off to the intelligence apparatus for analysis.

On 28 April, for example, the DCI provided SNIE 10-5-65, *Communist Reactions to Certain U.S. Actions*, to “estimate likely Communist, particularly Soviet and Chinese, reactions to non-nuclear air strikes by the US against China.”⁷⁷ The document develops and evaluates increasingly hostile scenarios—up to its section on “Extensive US Bombing Throughout China”—and forecasts possible Soviet reactions to each of them. In this worst-case scenario, the report assesses the USSR

would have to consider on the one hand the possibility that the existence of a Communist regime in China was in jeopardy, and on the other the danger of general nuclear war. Peiping would be vigorously insisting that Moscow come to its defense and in some way bring US attacks to a halt. In these circumstances, the USSR would almost certainly make a considerable effort, on an emergency basis, to sustain Chinese war fighting capabilities. At the same time, the USSR would also make a maximum effort to stop the war through political action, particularly by mobilizing world opinion against the US and persuading China to negotiate. Beyond this, so much would depend upon the circumstances in which the crisis had developed that the Soviet reaction cannot be anticipated. The

Soviets would probably still believe that the US was not bent on attacking the USSR. Hence, we believe that the USSR would not attack US forces outside China, initiate the use of nuclear weapons, or provide them to China. We believe that Soviet actions would be calculated to limit the risk to further escalation, but we cannot be sure that Moscow would correctly calculate these risks.⁷⁸

This particular hypothetical posits the PRC not only reacting “with a combination of military moves in Southeast Asia (i.e., into North Vietnam, Laos, and South Vietnam),” but engaging “the US with all the forces at its disposal.”⁷⁹ Hence, someone in the high levels of policy formation must have kickstarted an Intelligence Cycle by asking what the Soviet Union would do when “the flash point” was reached, in a scenario that, again, ominously resembles the Korean War.

On 4 June, more estimates arrived from the DCI. SNIE 10-7-65 sought “to estimate Communist reactions if the US does not attack the surface-to-air missile sites, light bombers, and fighters recently furnished to the DRV by the USSR.”⁸⁰ It concluded that “US acceptance of the present buildup would be encouraging” to the other side, which might “infer that the US, at least for the time being, had accepted certain limitations and ground rules in the bombing of the DRV.” The PRC would continue to worry about the growth of Soviet influence in Hanoi, but “would also be somewhat relieved of their apprehensions that the US would escalate the war to bomb targets in China.” The DRV might decide to amp up attacks in the south,⁸¹ it advised, but the “Soviets would probably view their involvement as now somewhat less dangerous, although still not without risks, and they might be encouraged to take a more rigid position with the US,” to make more favorable conditions for their desired negotiated settlement in the conflict.”⁸²

The same day, the NSC’s Executive Secretary Bromley Smith forwarded SNIE 10-6-65 to the President, with a cover letter stating that McNamara had requested it “for use in discussions of possible U.S. actions in Vietnam.” Those actions were, specifically, “US air

strikes, including the use of heavy bombers, aimed at destroying fighter and bomber aircraft and surface-to-air missiles in North Vietnam.”⁸³ These proposed targets were, of course, Soviet-manufactured weapons. It concluded that “US bombings or [sic] airfields and SAM sites, especially by bombers from Strategic Air Command (SAC), would provoke a crisis for Soviet policy,” which would be “compelled to comply promptly with DRV requests to provide substitutes for those weapon systems destroyed.”⁸⁴ More Soviet boots on the ground, it suggested, might also arrive “to man such equipment. Moscow might even acknowledge a Soviet presence in the hope of deterring the US from further attacks.” Deploying SAC assets, though—i.e., B-52s—would reveal “the danger of continued escalation” to the USSR. The SNIE concluded that Soviet aid to the DRV would increase alongside new commitments to Hanoi, coupled with more “pressures and threats against the US” by means of the USSR’s media and diplomatic enterprises.

The prospect of yanking Strategic Air Command from the quiver had driven at least one other intelligence cycle, because the CIA issued SNIE 10-6/1-65, *Probable Reactions to Certain US Courses of Action*, on 4 June 1965, estimating for the customer “Communist and Free World reactions to SAC heavy bomber strikes on enemy positions in South Vietnam.” In this scenario, the bombers could hit airfields in Hanoi and Haiphong either before or after employment over South Vietnam. If SAC showed up over the DRV first, the assessment said there would be “relatively little additional hostile reaction from Hanoi, Peiping, or Moscow over and above that already produced by the strike on these sensitive North Vietnamese targets.”⁸⁵ The document acknowledged that U.S. land- and carrier-based strike aircraft were already servicing targets below the 17th Parallel—so if these missions were launched over South Vietnam first “the new

ingredient would not be the nature of the target or the severity of the bombardment but, simply, the fact of SAC's participation.”⁸⁶

This, in turn, would bring increased apprehension not only “in Peiping, Hanoi, and especially Moscow that this use of US strategic forces foreshadowed the use of SAC over North Vietnam and a general heightening of tensions,” but it “would be shared in a number of Free World capitals (notably Paris, London, Rome and Tokyo) where some adverse reaction would almost certainly be registered—both on military and on political grounds—to this use of SAC. Foreign press comment would be extensive and generally hostile.” Whichever Vietnam was bombed first, though, the SNIE forecasted that the DRV would ask for more air defense weaponry, warnings from the Communist world, and Western countries augmenting “diplomatic activity designed to promote early negotiations.”⁸⁷

To this point in 1965, according to these reports, the White House was looking for analysis on several distinct courses of action: U.S. airstrikes against the People's Republic of China; against Soviet air defense systems and their crews in North Vietnam; deploying Strategic Air Command's nuclear-capable bombers against those same air defense assets; and using them against targets in South Vietnam. The constant in all these COAs was—of course—an increasing number of U.S. airstrikes in the theater, which demanded more aircraft carriers in the South China Sea, but also more proximate jet-capable airfields. As recent attacks at Bien Hoa and Pleiku demonstrated, a robust airbase defense capability—armed personnel—would be needed to secure these facilities.

On 23 July 1965, almost a year after the Tonkin Gulf Incident, SNIE 10-9-65 explored this action, too. Predictably, an Intelligence Cycle was initiated to “estimate foreign reactions, particularly those of the Communist powers,” to a list of proposed actions:

For purposes of this estimate, we assume that the US decides to increase its forces in South Vietnam to about 175,000 by 1 November. We further assume related decisions to call up about 225,000 reserves, to extend tours of duty at the rate of 20,000 a month, to increase the regular strength of the armed services by 400,000 over the next year, and to double draft calls. We further assume (a) that the increase in forces would be accompanied by statements reiterating our objectives and our readiness for unconditional discussions, (b) that US forces would be deployed so that no major grouping threatened or appeared to threaten the 17th Parallel, and (c) that we might either continue present policy with regard to air strikes or extend these strikes in North Vietnam to include attacks on land (but not sea) lines of communication from South China and military targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.⁸⁸

An included appendix and map describe known rail, road, sea, and inland waterway logistic routes alongside assessments of possible throughput rates for incoming supplies to the DRV.

This SNIE assessed that China and North Vietnam would remain confident of a Communist victory regardless of added US troop numbers. The proposed air campaign, while making Soviet and Chinese shipments “more difficult and costly... would still not have a critical impact on the Communist determination to persevere and would not, at least for the short term, seriously impair VC capabilities in South Vietnam.”⁸⁹ The Soviets, however, it was assessed, wanted a Communist victory, but not one “which would magnify the prestige and power of China.” The USSR, by contrast to the PRC and DRV, was conscious of the strategic risks of the conflict, and focused on maintaining relations with the West. Moscow, the report claimed, wanted negotiations, but in the “circumstance outlined in our assumptions, we believe that the USSR would see no alternative to continued support of the DRV and further expansion of its military aid,” specifically the replacement of “air defense equipment destroyed by US attacks in the Hanoi area.”⁹⁰

It is in broader Soviet policy, though, where the analysts saw greater consequent risk. The assumed actions could sabotage the proposed renewal of disarmament negotiations, and “would probably lead [the Soviets] to devote the talks entirely to attacks on the US or even to

break them off.” The proposed troop increases—boosting the draft and calling up reserves—“would carry total US manpower above the 2.8-2.9 million total which we estimate for the USSR; they would also imply a reversal of the downward trend in US military spending which Kosygin cited in justifying the 1965 reduction in the overt Soviet military budget.” The hawks in the Soviet government and the collective leadership would therefore likely be inspired to advocate for more military appropriations. “In these circumstances,” the section concluded, “the USSR probably would respond with an overt increase in its own military spending.”⁹¹

Hence, in the aftermath of the Kosygin visit, the national command authority was looking at a series of increasingly belligerent options in the theater, and each included either more air strikes or troops pushed forward to enable and execute them. All of these options were likely to irritate the new collective Soviet leadership, but these assessments tended to look first at the effect upon either Hanoi or Beijing, then the Kremlin; this is interesting because the USSR was the only player holding the means to attack the continental United States with a nuclear weapon, or to swallow up Berlin if incensed enough by these measures proposed in the SNIEs. Rather than focus upon this sort of high-quality but time-consuming analysis, though, Johnson’s NSC put its attention upon the sort of tactical sources that might derive short-term Soviet responses; deriving long-term effects of U.S. actions in the theater would require something more cerebral and time-consuming. Deducing the consequences for Soviet-DRV bilateral relations would demand such an approach, and the SNIE provided it.

Pike favored 7 February as the “start of intimate and wartime relations” between the Soviet Union and Hanoi—not only “the day the United States began sustained bombings and air strikes against North Vietnam,” of course, but a day the Soviet Premier was present in the DRV capital when a belligerent force attacked the country. Up to that point, Pike wrote:

[T]he USSR's commitment to the war was still open-ended. The Kremlin leadership had already indicated to the DRV that Khrushchev's disengagement policy would be reversed, but policy options remained with respect to the war. After February 7, and subsequent developments that month, the USSR was increasingly locked into an association in which policy choice was reduced either to full support or total breach.⁹²

This binary model is difficult to elide with the SNIE analyses, where the consequences—the Soviets replacing *defensive* weaponry, encouraging negotiation between the belligerents, keeping a lid on other Cold War disputes—do not represent the actions of a superpower with such a stark choice forced upon it by its principal adversary.

The Intelligence Cycles influencing U.S. policy after 7 February are worth reviewing. The bomb damage assessments from the airstrikes in response to Pleiku and Qui Nhon were clearly expressed, quickly executed, and represented an Intelligence Cycle that air intelligence professionals had been conducting since at least the Second World War. The post-strike analysis presented to LBJ in February 1965 was as professional and pragmatic as the one delivered to Churchill after the Combined Bombing Offensive hit the V-weapons factory at Peenemünde in August 1943—and likely more accurate. These cycles served to support a favored near-term U.S. policy. If, after all, the targets were hit so accurately at such a relatively low cost (i.e., compared to the aircraft the U.S. Army Air Corps lost for each target it bombed in Germany during World War II), with no likely need to re-attack them, it would be easy to argue for more bombing missions to bring Hanoi to the table and thus save South Vietnam from its belligerent neighbor. Assessing Soviet reactions, though, was a completely different matter.

On 27 July the NSC met again. Both the new DCI, Admiral William Raborn—a career naval aviator and World War II aircraft carrier commander, who replaced McCone in April—and his Deputy, Richard Helms, represented CIA. CJCS General Earl Wheeler attended, as did Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach. Secretary Rusk brought Ball and William Bundy, but

Ambassadors Thompson and Henry Cabot Lodge (leaving to take over U.S. Embassy Saigon in August) were also summoned to participate. According to the minutes, President Johnson opened the meeting by stating that prior to “formalizing decisions on the deployment of additional forces to Vietnam, he wished to review the present situation with Council members present.”⁹³

The Secretary of State briefed a political situation in which the PRC opposed any negotiations between the DRV and either the U.S. or Saigon. “There appear to be,” however, “elements of caution on the other side—in Hanoi as well as Moscow. Our purpose is to keep our contacts open with the other side in the event that they have a new position to give us.” He recommended that any “U.S. actions... should be presented publicly in a low key but in such a way as to convey accurately that we are determined to prevent South Vietnam from being taken over by Hanoi. At the same time, we seek to avoid a confrontation with either the Chinese Communists or the Soviet Union.”⁹⁴

Secretary McNamara then took the floor, briefing that the Viet Cong forces’ numbers were growing alongside the fraction of them committed to combat. Moreover, they now controlled more territory in South Vietnam, isolating the cities from rural areas, and disrupting the economy. South Vietnamese soldiers, by contrast, were deserting their units. “At least 26% of the population of South Vietnam,” read the minutes, “is controlled by Viet Cong, according to Secretary McNamara’s figures.” To remedy this situation, he requested a further 13 battalions of U.S. troops be sent (beyond the already approved and announced 15), bringing the number to 350,000; and he declared that in January 1966 the Defense Department would request a supplementary appropriation bill to finance further operations in the theater.⁹⁵

The President then acknowledged that the situation was “deteriorating,” and laid out four available courses of action, based on the aforementioned SNIEs: First, “to bring the enemy to his knees,” a phrase which implies throwing everything in the U.S. arsenal at him short of a nuclear weapon. Explicitly, though, LBJ said, “including SAC.” He then tacked on the fact that fewer “than 10% of our people urge this course of action;” one may assume he meant the domestic electorate. His second COA was to “get out on the grounds that we don’t belong there.” Again, one can assume whom he was describing by remarking that “[m]ost feel that our national honor is at stake and that we must keep our commitments there.” The third presented option preserved the status quo, with “forces at the present level, approximately 80,000 men,” a COA which he cautioned ran the risk of taking more casualties and ceding more areas to the Viet Cong. “No one,” he pointed out, “is recommending this course.”⁹⁶

Finally:

We could ask for everything we might desire from Congress—money, authority to call up the reserves, acceptance of the deployment of more combat battalions. This dramatic course of action would involve declaring a state of emergency and a request for several billion dollars. Many favor this course. However, if we do go all out in this fashion, Hanoi would be able to ask the Chinese Communists and the Soviets to increase aid and add to their existing commitments.

In order to make likely gains during the “critical” monsoon season, though:

We have chosen to do what is necessary to meet the present situation, but not to be unnecessarily provocative to either the Russians or the Communist Chinese. We will give the commanders the men they say they need and, out of existing materiel in the U.S., we will give them the materiel they say they need. We will get the necessary money in the new budget and will use our transfer authority until January. We will neither brag about what we are doing or thunder at the Chinese Communists and the Russians.

The plan was thus to maintain this third status quo COA until January. The alternatives to it, he argued, were “to put in our big stack now or hold until Ambassadors Lodge and [U.S. Ambassador to the UN Arthur] Goldberg and the diplomats can work.” He clarified that he was

not asking for authority to call the reserves at this point in the plan; then he asked if anyone opposed this course of action, encountered no response, and adjourned the meeting.⁹⁷

There are no recorded inputs from his resident Kremlinologist Llewelyn Thompson.

Warping Toward Predetermined Policy...

Within a year of the *USS Maddox*'s DESOTO patrol off North Vietnam's coast, then, the intelligence cycles supporting U.S. policy had evolved. Still valued were prompt answers to the White House's queries, but a temporal tightening of the cycle has always been desired by those requesting answers. Collection platforms closest to the action were also sought. The White House had nearly instant access through the State Department to updates from both Saigon and Moscow via teletype. As the phone call with Lieutenant Colonel Cook reveals, LBJ could also bypass traditional intelligence protocol by going directly to after-action pilot debriefs regarding any mission deemed especially pressing.

The analysis, though, as the timeline progressed to this focal NSC meeting at the end of July 1965, appears to increasingly warp toward support for predetermined policy. Though the SNIEs seemingly reveal queries about how the Cold War adversaries would respond to certain initiatives, those initiatives increasingly look like *faits accomplis*. B-52s eventually dropped high explosives on both North and South Vietnam, launching from Guam (where four miles off the end of the runway Soviet intelligence ships were fulfilling their own intelligence cycle, monitoring the bombers' takeoff times and dispatching this data to Hanoi by radio).⁹⁸ Specialized USAF fighter-bombers were, by November of 1965, flying "Wild Weasel" missions in strike packages over North Vietnam—a capability expressly used to find and destroy Soviet-made SAM systems.⁹⁹

While strike missions were never pushed beyond the Chinese border, many of these COAs evaluated in Special National Intelligence Estimates were thus put into practice. Indeed, the overarching conclusion is that instead of asking the national intelligence apparatus for pros and cons of any given course of action the White House was asking if the COA was doable. Tacitly, once it was assessed that the Soviets both favored going back to Geneva-style negotiations, and were reluctant to expand the war beyond minimal obligations to other “Socialist” nations, little was restraining Pentagon planners from requesting as many bombing sorties and military personnel for Vietnam as they desired. The July NSC meeting minutes argue that those asks were forthcoming. At this point, policy was arguably influencing the intelligence assessments toward expanding the war.

Again, it was during Kosygin’s sojourn in Hanoi that the Viet Cong took control of the timetable south of the DMZ, attacking Pleiku and initiating a cyclical series of U.S. actions and Intelligence Cycles. After the Pleiku attack, as this work has revealed, a vigorous debate occurred in the White House about the proper response, and it developed into joint U.S.-VNAF retaliatory airstrikes. These bombing missions demanded assessments, which entities all the way up to the Oval Office followed closely in order to measure progress in supporting the Saigon domino. While the National Security Council discussed this, the Viet Cong then blew up the hotel in Qui Nhon, the principals gathered again to discuss the proper response, the proper response was deemed airstrikes, and the BDA was demanded again. All of this happened within the span of 96 hours while the Soviet Premier was discussing proper military and economic support for the DRV in its defense against a growing U.S. presence next door.

In this enterprise, of course, the U.S.—and especially the Department of Defense—could play to its strengths and recent experience. The emphasis lay in collection hardware over

humans, and from qualitative analysis to statistical (i.e., BDA). It was a textbook military intelligence cycle, but for the fact that the adversary—the communist guerrilla cadres now integrated into South Vietnam’s society—was initiating it.

When Ambassador Thompson returned to Moscow in 1967, he noted some changes since his last tour (1957-62)—i.e., the Khrushchev years—that jibed with Klein’s assessment. In his communications back to the State Department, a month into his new tour, Thompson noted more anti-U.S. articles in the press regarding Vietnam and “general distortion of American life and policies.” In Soviet society, he described an improved standard of living and freer expression in private conversations amongst intellectuals. “Ideology,” he wrote, “appears to play an even more important role in policy making as well as propaganda—possibly the result of the [Communist Chinese] hammering at revisionism... [and] a somewhat greater emphasis on internal problems in relation to foreign affairs.”¹⁰⁰

In contrast to his previous tour, he also viewed Soviet leadership as comparatively “weak”:

While Brezhnev is clearly number one, the Politburo is in fact operating collectively. One well-informed observer told me that formerly it was only necessary to convince Khrushchev in order to carry out a given proposal. Now it was necessary to convince nearly every member of the Politburo since almost any one of them could successfully block it. It appears true, however, that the direction and management of agriculture and the economy has improved and that the regime’s pride in its “business-like” approach is largely justified although hampered by collectivity which makes for indecision and lack of bold initiatives.¹⁰¹

Perhaps this was the influence of the “economic heavyweight”¹⁰² Kosygin—the business-like approach, but the more collective process in the Soviet leadership to decision-making was also a change in the way it did business after Khrushchev. Thompson also found the Kremlin more secretive. “Khrushchev was a prolific source of information on Soviet policies and the thinking

that lay behind them. Now there is remarkably little contact between the diplomatic corps and the political leadership and such as there is, is not generally rewarding.”¹⁰³

...and Yawing Toward Charybdis

The American ship of state was in 1964-5 attempting to navigate a perilous Cold War strait. To use the strictly maritime metaphor—in which a ship is attempting to transit between a rock shoal and a whirlpool toward safety—the Scylla and Charybdis metaphor is appropriate. The LBJ White House could veer close to nuclear Armageddon with the Soviets and smash itself to bits, or Vietnam, catching itself in an eddy of ever-tightening circles as its options and energy were depleted toward a doomed outcome. Perhaps the ship’s officers believed they were successfully remaining equidistant from both hazards with the seemingly smooth and gentler corrections to rudder and throttle, expounded within the graduated pressure policy. By investigating and discussing tipping points with either the PRC or the USSR—risking either Korea-style human wave attacks or nuclear war, the NSC may have succumbed to the deception of full control and safety between the two extremes. In fact, Chinese volunteers did not flood into North Vietnam to wash across the DMZ; nor did the Department of Defense significantly alter its defense readiness condition between the Cuban Missile Crisis (DEFCON 2) and the Yom Kippur War (DEFCON 3) in preparation for a strategic confrontation.

The United States, though, did increase its commitment to the Vietnam War, veering into the metaphorical whirlpool and staying in it for another decade. The price of extracting the ship of state was high in people, resources, and political capital—both at home and abroad. The middle course plotted between Scylla (in the ancient Greek, “she who rends”) and Charybdis (“the sucker-down”)¹⁰⁴ was not a valid one, and responsible U.S. officials had access to reports

of true heading and location throughout LBJ's presidency to indicate this. Necessary course corrections, however, were not made.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The best way to trace the divergence between a policy and intelligence inputs, as these three cases reveal, is to analyze the initial intelligence cycle and compare it with the cycles the customer subsequently requested. President Johnson and his cabinet received high-quality, useful analysis from the American intelligence apparatus during this period. The initial products in all three case studies reveal professionalism, objectivity, and an adherence to the Intelligence Cycle ideal. It is, however, not a straight line between the request for information and desired answers; it is a cycle, at the end of which the decision-maker customer evaluates the product and often initiates a new cycle to fill in the unknowns. This analysis has demonstrated that as the cycles progressed, at the sub-strategic levels pertinent to Vietnam, the requests for information more resembled requests for support for the Johnson administration's existing policy decisions. This conclusion chapter will drill down further to explore human factors that contributed to the marked divergence between initial analysis and subsequent policy actions in the case studies. This, in turn, will assist in evaluating why the LBJ administration continuously emphasized predetermined policy over intelligence in its approach to the Cold War.

The administration handled its bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union—one far more dangerous than anything the U.S. encountered in Vietnam—well, because it could connect directly to the Kremlin by way of the hot line, and because the diplomatic station in Moscow maintained constant dialogue with Soviet leaders. The embassy—a static collection platform—performed all the functions within the intelligence cycle, from collection to packaging and dissemination of a useable product. One entity—the U.S. ambassador—acted as the final authority before hitting the send-button to dispatch telexes to the State Department.

The Johnson administration was neither the first nor the last to make decisions from incomplete information—this is an unavoidable facet of leadership and national security. Given LBJ’s recognition that his relationship with the Soviet Union had existential stakes, he and his NSC regularly and appropriately chose to pause for analysis before making major decisions, instead of taking dynamic, intuitive actions. However, in dealing with Vietnam, administration leaders moved steadily toward confrontation, and tailored each new intelligence cycle during a crisis to validate their consensus belief that the confrontation was going their way. Historical analogies to Munich and Korea only exacerbated this phenomenon; as Harvard professors Richard Neustadt and Ernest May argued in *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers*, analogies like these enabled “administrations to make decisions they wanted to make with a minimum of fresh analysis. Those analogies also helped to create and preserve consensus.”¹

Again, there was no U.S. embassy in Hanoi or Beijing in the mid-1960s, nor a hot line from Washington to the responsible leaders in either capital; meanwhile, U.S. assets were increasingly rolling into a conflict that alarmed both the DRV and its neighbor China. The U.S. administration’s dependence upon statistics and historical analogy over intellectual heavy lifting in handling reports from the theater resembled counting seized checkers rather than pondering the possible downstream effects one must consider in moving a specific chess piece. As they repeatedly escalated American involvement in Vietnam, though, administration officials warped the intelligence cycles toward sustaining their forward momentum, at the expense of detecting unforeseen dangers. As this study has revealed, Tonkin was an early and stark example of this phenomenon in the Johnson administration.

The Tonkin Gulf Incident

The Tonkin Gulf Incident began with an intelligence tasking—to build an order of battle map of North Vietnam’s coastal defenses. Raids conducted by way of OPLAN 34A’s MAROPS component would stimulate both North Vietnamese coastal radar and communications activity, and the personnel and equipment package aboard the destroyer would facilitate collection of both consequent ELINT and SIGINT data from the shore defenses’ emissions. On 2 August, the DRV’s navy responded, and its patrol boats fired upon the *Maddox*. After assessing and reporting damage the next day, the destroyer was ordered to approach the coast again. President Johnson used the report of a second attack on the 4th of August 1964 as a pretext to obtain the use of force resolution he had already decided he wanted; this was also the moment policy took over the intelligence cycle.

In foul weather and rough sea conditions, in a state of hypervigilance, the *Maddox*, supported by the *Turner Joy* and an aircraft carrier, sailed back toward its patrol track off North Vietnam’s coast. As scholars have long acknowledged, the second attack never occurred. The destroyer crews believed they had been attacked, aimed their guns by radar, and fired at something—sea spray or clouds, perhaps; LBJ himself suggested it was flying fish—but *not* North Vietnamese patrol boats.

Regardless, in the immediate wake of the 4 August incident, a new Intelligence Cycle was initiated in the Oval Office, and it is here—at the new cycle’s first step—Adjust Collection to Meet Requirements—that intended policy hijacked this and all following cycles. The customers here likely intimated a requirement that the sailors involved and investigators dispatched find evidence of that second attack, and adjusted collection requests to meet their requirements—a fusion of steps 1 and 2 in an ideal intelligence cycle. Subsequent reporting (which included corroborating sailors’ names and serial numbers) in support of the second attack

was harvested; testimony that did not support it was winnowed out somewhere between the eyewitnesses and the NSC—likely at Pacific Command or the Pentagon.

A squadron commander who had strafed real DRV patrol boats on 2 August was again overhead during the second episode—James Stockdale—providing the overwatch that senior commanders always want over a developing fight, and he adamantly reported that the enemy was absent on 4 August. This account never reached the National Security Council; if it had, the effect on Southeast Asia policy would have likely been negligible anyway. The CINCPAC's staff collected and analyzed all this filtered data (Step 3) from the sailors closest to the event, as well as combat message traffic relayed from Naval Communications Station San Miguel in the Philippines, then disseminated it to the White House (Step 4). It is, of course, the nature of a cycle that demands the customer restate his/her requirements to fill in blanks and gain further insight into an action, but by this point the Johnson White House possessed all the analysis it needed to press forward with its predetermined policy, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

The Khrushchev Ouster

As the October 1964 change in the Soviet government played out, the United States possessed limited collection capability for the sudden requirements to assess both what had happened and with whom LBJ would end up speaking if he picked up the hot line to the Kremlin. The sort of deployable collection platforms—listening from off-shore or snapping photos from high altitude—in use over the Caribbean and Southeast Asia were ineffective for monitoring political events in Moscow, at the center of the Eurasian landmass.

Experienced American diplomats stationed in Moscow, the “Russia Hands,” emerged as key intelligence collection platforms. The presence of ambassadors like Bohlen, Thompson, and Kohler was critical to guiding U.S. policy. Their access to both high officials in the Soviet

hierarchy and other nations' diplomats working in Moscow, and their long experience observing the Soviet political system, proved essential to this process. The U.S. embassy also held both defense attaches and a CIA station to aid in the collection and analysis stages of any intelligence cycle. Even with the growing U.S. commitment to Southeast Asia, this capability in Moscow proved valuable in enabling the State Department to cope with the Soviet succession crisis. Foggy Bottom matched the collection requirements up to its collection platform at the U.S. embassy in Moscow and, as this information began to roll in, the Directorate of Intelligence packaged the subsequent analysis into memoranda and SNIEs about how this new leadership might respond to possible U.S. actions. Again, though, as the emphasis shifted to the war in Vietnam, the majority of the DNI's estimates were focused on the Southeast Asia theater, and the new Kremlin leadership's possible responses to U.S. initiatives within it, which revealed where the Johnson Administration was focused in October 1964.

Kosygin's Visit to Hanoi

The Kremlin's announcement of this event triggered a reasonable intelligence ask, which veered off toward U.S. aims in Indochina. The need to discern the exact locations and timetable for the Kosygin visit to the DRV was important to the Johnson White House. Both the Soviet and North Vietnamese media, though, furnished this information in standard press releases to the Communist world well ahead of the actual event.

This intelligence cycle, however, was quickly highjacked by the Viet Cong in February 1965, when its guerrillas hit U.S. installations in South Vietnam. Seemingly, to the officials advising LBJ, the Soviet premier's potential presence under U.S. air-to-ground munitions became increasingly irrelevant next to the opportunity to execute their own retaliatory attacks against military targets north of the 17th Parallel. The operational mission planning and bomb

damage assessment were exemplars of diligence and professionalism in the wake of those punitive strike missions, but the focus on tactical damage assessment revealed the administration's determination to continue to prosecute similar attacks.

The CIA's estimates composed in support of long-range policy—i.e., analyses of courses of action to cope with the blossoming conflict in Vietnam—were accurate and farsighted. Working backwards within the intelligence cycle, these SNIEs were well-written, -organized, and timely. The analysis was prescient, in that America's adversaries did respond to the attacks largely as the analysis had predicted; one could therefore argue that the collection means chosen to meet the requirements were appropriate to the stated demands from the White House. It is the requirements themselves, presented to the intelligence community, that reveal the policy.

A senior decision-maker had clearly asked his staff about consequences from a specific COA—e.g., “How would the Communist Bloc respond if we took military action beyond China's border with North Vietnam?”—which reveals much about the intelligence customer's perspective and mindset in confronting an issue. Considering the administration's concerns about a second Chinese intervention like the one that nearly pushed UN troops off the Korean peninsula in 1950, that customer could have been anyone in LBJ's inner circle. It was likely SNIE 10-5-65's assertion that the Soviets, faced with both an imperiled PRC and the risk of nuclear war, “would almost certainly make a considerable effort, on an emergency basis, to sustain Chinese war fighting capabilities”² that convinced the NSC it would be a mistake to put bombs on targets in China. The intelligence community had thus made a compelling argument for limiting the target list to North and South Vietnam. When the administration was willing to listen to the intelligence community, the analysis was often conducive to good policy choices.

The targets chosen in retaliation for Pleiku and other attacks, however, were solely military, and situated geographically closer to South Vietnam than Hanoi. It is thus apparent that once these missions were slated for execution, Kosygin's whereabouts were less important to the NSC than the queries of how many U.S. aircraft were lost or how many secondary explosions were described in aircrew debriefings.

So, again, the American Cold War policy trend arcs toward Southeast Asia in each of these examples—even Khrushchev's deposition—because that is where the policy was headed in 1964. Cuba and Berlin were still sore points, but compared to Vietnam they were not nearly as urgent or inflammatory. Vietnam was also the sort of violent and dramatic, but not so strategic (i.e., prone to going nuclear) conflict upon which the United States could play to its strengths.

...overimpressed by evidence that is first-hand and vivid...

LBJ's biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin, in her chapter "Vietnam," wrote:

Studies suggest that national leaders tend to fit incoming information about other nations into existing theories about their own nation. Experience with his own system typically determines what a leader perceives in another system. It is hard for any leader to see that issues important to him are not important to others, and even more difficult to realize that others may be governed by different values and assumptions. Perception is always influenced by personal and historic memory. Historical analogies often precede rather than follow a careful analysis of the situation.³

Goodwin cited political scientist Robert Jervis to support her contention.

In his 1976 work on human perception's influence on international relations, Jervis drew a distinction between policymakers' tendency to follow their intuition—which made them "overimpressed by evidence that is first-hand and vivid," and "thinking slow"—the intellectual heavy lifting essential to effective analysis. Jervis elaborated that intuition "mistakes correlation for causation, develops simple stories, and is prone to exaggerate the influence of personal characteristics and underplay external factors in explaining others' behavior."⁴

One intuitive phenomenon he examined was “sunken costs,” which he applied to Vietnam, in which committing nonrecoverable resource investments—e.g., people, cash, even political capital—drive the decision-maker to press ahead with further investment.⁵ The U.S. had, after all, been investing in Southeast Asia since the Second World War, and if Saigon fell to the Communists those costs would never be recovered, in the perspectives of those contemplating further investments in this conflict.

Jervis tied this to the skewing of cost-benefits analyses, within which he believed “those who favor a project are likely to estimate the costs as lower and the benefits as higher than do the opponents. If the dispute is less technical, one side is apt to say that the goal is vital and attainable without the sacrifice of other important values, while the other side will argue that the goal is both less important and more costly.”⁶ Certainly this came into play when the devil’s advocates in LBJ’s cabinet—Hoopes, Ball, and Vice President Humphrey—argued for more analysis over intuition regarding the growing commitment to Saigon. Indeed, wrote Jervis, “most of those who favored withdrawing from Vietnam believed both that the war could not be won and that the costs of the defeat were relatively low. Those who thought we could win felt that the costs of losing were high (i.e., that the ‘domino theory’ applied).”⁷

Johnson’s predecessor seated his brother at his ExComm meetings, including during the Cuban Missile Crisis, where the Attorney General reliably insisted on pausing the deliberations to enable rigorous analysis. Ambassador Thompson, also present, described in his later oral history how Robert Kennedy “would deliberately bring out all the bugs in a given course of action, making sure that every possibility was looked at... [as] people who had formed strong opinions nevertheless wanted to be sure that facts contrary to their opinions had been understood.”⁸

RFK, though, held some advantages when he questioned the option of bombing Caribbean missile sites in 1962: “total confidence in his relation with the President [as well as] an almost absolute insistence on being well and honestly briefed” both before and during these important conferences. Halberstam wrote that Robert Kennedy had a final related trait— “the capacity to grow and change and to admit error”—and argued that RFK was “the first senior official who questioned the overall policy... totally secure in his place in the Administration, and also secure in his credentials as an anti-Communist” when the NSC was discussing Diem’s political ineptitude in the fall of 1963. By September of 1964, though, Robert Kennedy had left the cabinet to campaign for the Senate. By most accounts, Lyndon Johnson preferred reading reports to hearing them from briefers,⁹ a marked contrast to the sort of discussions the Kennedys brought to the ExComm meetings. In late 1964 Undersecretary of State Ball played a similar role in the Johnson Administration’s debates, but Ball was a more junior and less influential actor; he could not replicate Robert Kennedy’s ability to halt a discussion and rigorously evaluate an option.

Consensus

Lyndon Johnson consistently sought consensus, and if he was not in fact deriving it in the NSC meetings, the true state of affairs could be slanted and leaked for public consumption. On the day following the 27 July meeting, he delivered a press conference, later known as the “Why We Are in Vietnam” speech, televised from the East Room of the White House. He began by reading a letter “from a woman in the Midwest” with a son currently serving, in which she contrasted her husband’s service in the Second World War to the current situation, and LBJ’s explanation soon drifted to *appeasement*.

“This is,” he declared, “a different kind of war... But we must not let this mask the central fact that this is really war... guided by North Vietnam... spurred by Communist China... to extend the Asiatic dominion of communism.” The proximate nations could not resist communism without the United States, “and an Asia so threatened by Communist domination would certainly imperil the security of the United States itself.” He acknowledged no marching armies or solemn declarations in the current fight, but “we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.”¹⁰

His Secretary of State had personally experienced some of these events in Europe in the early 1930s as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, an era in which Rusk had also spent a semester in Germany. Halberstam called this phenomenon the “lessons of Munich,” whereupon:

the West would provide the answers which had been applicable in 1939 but which had been neglected then... The United States would take the place of Britain; it would balance, stabilize and protect the world. And so the lessons were clear for young Dean Rusk: whatever the United States set out to do it could accomplish. There was a great centrist political strength in the United States; further, when confronted by the strength and, most important, the determination of a just and honorable democracy, the totalitarian forces of the world would have to respect that power.¹¹

Rusk, though, was only one of the men advising LBJ who vividly remembered these lessons. McNamara, Ambassador Taylor, the Bundys, even Hoopes and Ball all served in the Second World War; so, of course, did the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In his 2023 study of American presidents at war, political scientist Andrew Payne pointed out that advisors—and the perspectives they carry—are extremely influential upon the policy process. He explained that these “figures can play an instrumental role in shaping what issues reach the Oval Office and how the president seeks to resolve them... [and] any dialing up or

down of a proposed course of action may at least be in part attributable to the influence of those advisors whom the president finds most persuasive.” Payne emphasized these internal bureaucratic debates—e.g., NSC meetings—in his study, and examined the roles of these officials in choosing which issues reached the president, as well as the order in which they were prioritized on his schedule for discussion. “Since elites are often selected into foreign policy roles as much for their political experience and partisan identities as their knowledge about foreign affairs,” he wrote, “they will be attuned to what is politically desirable for the president. Even individuals who are expected to provide advice based on objective professional expertise, such as senior military officers, have institutional incentives and civic-minded reasons to recommend options that align with public preferences.”¹²

The 27 July session displayed LBJ’s desire for consensus. He asked if anyone opposed the selected course of action, then adjourned the meeting; as Halberstam described the Johnson White House, this was not an anomaly, and partly attributable to LBJ’s experience on Capitol Hill. “He did not particularly want to be out in front alone on a policy; he was not by any instinct a loner, and in the Senate, if he did his work well, the responsibility (the potential blame) could be broadly shared. He liked as many other fingerprints on the door as possible...”¹³

There is a concern, though, that the more individuals are involved in a decision—even if the decision-maker is only seeking ‘buy-in,’ the more individual personal bias enters the deliberation. As political scientist Beth A. Fischer argued in her analysis of JFK’s intelligence support within the Cuban missile crisis, in “every stage of the decision-making process, biases are apt to introduce error. These biases are perfectly normal, and have two causes: our needs and motives; and the cognitive shortcuts we employ to help us cope with the sheer volume of

information with which we are bombarded every day—much of which is contradictory or ambiguous.”¹⁴

Human Biases

Fortunately, Jervis discussed multiple human biases that are appropriate to policy formation in the Johnson White House. For example, confirmation bias:

The process of drawing inferences in light of logic and past experience that produces rational cognitive consistency also causes people to fit incoming information into pre-existing beliefs and to perceive what they expect to be there... It is striking that people often preserve their images in the face of what seems in retrospect to have been clear evidence to the contrary. We ignore information that does not fit, twist it so it confirms, or at least does not contradict, our beliefs, and deny its validity. Confirming evidence, by contrast, is quickly and accurately noted.¹⁵

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was ready and waiting for presentation to Congress. Rusk famously asserted that the Pleiku attack was one of many “streetcars” appropriate to trigger a planned action in response. In the end, the intelligence analysts reviewing these critical events were not aware that policy had already been drawn up by the White House; their reports were thus valued mainly as window dressing to justify the policy. Like panning for gold, the analysts only needed to present the glittering information nuggets *confirming* decision-makers’ pre-conceived policies to enable the actions that followed.

Betts, in his “Theory Traps” chapter of *Enemies of Intelligence*, called it “psychological bias toward continuity,” arguing its origins were more physiological than emotional. It is “an unconscious human tendency to see what one expects to see, which distorts the analytical handling of evidence;” in analysis it “is reinforced institutionally by the orientation process, the research inventory, and incentives to produce a corporate product.”¹⁶ The phenomenon is, however, definitively psychological, where “the threshold is higher for discrediting information consistent with the dominant hypothesis than for confirming it, and impressions persist even after

the evidence on which they were based is discredited. When strategic assumptions about enemy aims and behavior are consistent with the tactical indicators of impending action, threats are perceived and precautionary actions are taken.” Conversely, “[w]hen there are discrepancies between the strategic assumptions and tactical indicators, strategic assumptions prevail.”¹⁷ In the presented case studies, confirmation bias at the higher level interprets what is reality.

There were, for example, several levels between the Oval Office and sailors manning the *Maddox* on 4 August 1964. According to interviews Moise conducted for his account of the Tonkin Gulf Incident, a sonar operator onboard reported “noise spokes” or “hydrophone effects” to both the anti-submarine warfare and weapons officers onboard. The sonar room duly reported this to the captain over the ship’s communication system, and Herrick “could hear in the background over the same speaker the actual noises,” which he interpreted as torpedoes in the water. While he later admitted that these sounds were “possibly the beat of the destroyer’s own propellers,” he immediately informed the *Turner Joy*, and both ships began evasive actions.¹⁸ All of this was appropriately logged and subsequently used to support the assumption in Hawaii and Washington that, on 4 August, DRV patrol boats were pressing an attack against the U.S. Navy.

Accounts of American policy in Vietnam are redolent with similar examples. Stanley Karnow, in his history of the conflict, identified Rostow and NSC staffer Robert Komer as consistent purveyors of “the upbeat accounts” in which LBJ sought comfort as the war progressed. Neil Sheehan of the Saigon press corps reported that when goaded by correspondents for his rosy updates to LBJ, Komer—by then reassigned to South Vietnam to lead the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Program—responded that “the President didn’t ask for a ‘situation’ report, he asked for a ‘progress’ report. And that’s

what I've given him—not a report on the situation, but a report on the progress we've made.”¹⁹

This mentality is akin to a BDA report citing sorties flown, fuel consumed, and number of bombs dropped, rather than effects upon the target. This is a significant analogy, given the experiences of other officials reporting results to the president as the war evolved.

The Statisticians

It is trite and intellectually lazy to flippantly say that these were men of their time, but each of the personalities examined in this circle around LBJ (and the president himself) were reared and educated in the first third of the twentieth century. America had brought forth Henry Ford's assembly line approach to manufacturing, invented the airplane, and developed vaccines against both scarlet fever and pertussis. It was a time of optimism, when applying the scientific method and management ingenuity to social challenges was deemed appropriate. Technocrats, with their emphasis upon measurements and efficiency, were trusted to advise and guide decisions of great importance.

It is thus significant and appropriate that, given the COAs presented at the 27 July meeting, airpower was most likely to be selected in this forum. It is, after all, the tool men like Rostow and McNamara had focused upon in the Second World War—not flying the missions, but evaluating the effects of strategic bombing on the enemy's war-making capabilities. This is how McNamara, commissioned into the U.S. Army Air Corps from his position teaching accounting at Harvard Business School, learned about war. Collecting, collating, and communicating this information was, of course, integral to the process, and it presents a fine example of the volume of incoming contradictory and ambiguous information that talented officers were tasked to reconcile and sort.

“Before long,” as McNamara described it, “wherever U.S. air forces flew, clerks attached to the units would record things like the status of planes (ready for combat, out of action), the condition of the men (types of training, casualties, replacement needs), and the state of operations (number of missions flown, type of mission, targets attacked, degree of success, losses of men and equipment, and so on). By assembling such reports, commanders could get an up-to-date picture of the operations—and shortcomings—of American airpower all over the world.”²⁰ Only one component of the above description, though—*degree of success*—demands a deep and unbiased examination of the enemy’s capabilities; the rest is operational data. Establishing degree of success—BDA—necessitates an intelligence cycle, because there is an adversary to consider. In 1964, data on damage to the *Maddox*, injuries to U.S. sailors (if any), and ammunition expended in combat were reliable data points, and easily accessed by dint of modern communication apparatus. As this work has shown, after the second alleged attack, reports on North Vietnam’s actions and situations were filtered and fused to support conclusions about *enemy action* already reached in Washington. The data supported subsequent policy and the United States edged closer to the whirlpool.

The assumption that an economy, enduring a consistent hail of bombs, must agree to peace talks, is rational. Further, when the society dropping the bombs seems to have a nearly-endless supply of munitions and airplanes, the metaphor of a valve applying or releasing pressure on the targeted population emerges as a rational construct. A historian or political scientist, though, comfortable in the multiple variables of human behavior, could quickly point out that Hitler’s air ministry also compiled statistics predicting success in the Battle of Britain by targeting British imports, supplies, and willpower.²¹ The implicitly irrational population, assailed almost nightly during the Blitz, however, did not behave in the prescribed manner;

again, this sort of behavior could not be easily quantified, so evidently it did not matter to the statisticians in LBJ's inner circle either as they contemplated launching more bombing missions against North Vietnam.

Evoked Sets, Sources, and the Information Firehose

“A person will perceive and interpret stimuli in terms of what is at the front of his mind,”²² Jervis wrote, to describe ‘evoked sets’ influence upon perception. The phenomenon is exacerbated, he wrote, in situations with no real-time two-way communication between the perceiver and the decider. What’s more, investing “a considerable amount of time preparing a contingency plan increases the probability that the decision-makers will see future events as resembling the situation they had contemplated and as calling for the plans they have developed. Rational or not, people interpret incoming information in terms of what is of concern to them at the time the information arrives.”²³

Jervis also wrote about credibility of sources, a factor that intelligence officials should *always* consider, because passing erroneous information may drive the consumer to seek analysis from other avenues and/or make faulty decisions. As Jervis describes it, “when a source is shown to be wrong on one issue, he and his other views are judged more severely.” If the demand disappears, so do the resources—budget, personnel, etc.—so this is a pertinent concern for any intelligence enterprise. Apropos of the Johnson White House, though, Jervis also pointed out that a source’s credibility, “and thus the influence of later messages it sends, is diminished if an initial message is too discrepant from our beliefs” as consumers.²⁴

The three case studies here, though, deal with complicated, multi-faceted events—the ones that senior decision-makers do not have the time to master on their own. These officials were thus dependent upon their staffs and briefings to assist them in making good decisions.

President Johnson, McNamara, and Rusk were unlikely to read any SNIE in its entirety. Again, there was no time to do so, as these officials were “constantly overwhelmed by administrative responsibilities and demands for meetings; they cannot read, ponder, and digest so much material.”²⁵

Or, as Christine Abizaid, former director of the National Counter-Terrorism Center, has argued, those making the policy do not have the time for “the deep thinking, the long papers, the hard research questions” on a complicated topic, but need “the two-page summary of it [to make] a smart policy decision. So much of foreign policy is about crisis management, decision-making on the fly, and finding the least bad option.”²⁶

In a similar manner, American political scientist Joseph S. Nye, Jr. has argued that senior policymakers are constantly overwhelmed by the amount of information they must process to make these decisions. He compared it to “drinking from a firehose of information” and noted the paradox that although government “rests on a sea of paper... the higher you go, the more it becomes an oral culture.” For information to move a decision-maker, it must arrive quickly, be brief, and often be presented orally, even if based on extensive research and writing. Nye and Abizaid’s arguments imply that Johnson’s NSC meetings were more influential to policymakers than the archived formal reports.

“Intelligence consumers are political animals who have risen by being more decisive than reflective, more aggressive than introspective, and confident as much as cautious.”²⁷ Betts’s description here jibed well with histories on LBJ compiled by Doris Kearns Goodwin and H.R. McMaster; Betts did not, however, let senior producers off the hook, regardless of which administration they serve. To improve their performance, Betts argued that intelligence managers must “anticipate the cognitive barriers that limit decision makers’ use of their

products,” while being “sensitive to the policy context, and the range of options available” to decisionmakers. This requires selecting senior intelligence officials who bring with them “theoretical temperaments and personal skills in forcing unusual analyses to the attention of the principals,” not “only intellectually sharp analysts but also [those] skilled as bureaucratic politicians.” Betts’s model requires a careful balance, though, because he also warned that intelligence agencies should guard against their staffs losing objectivity by becoming too invested or influenced by policymakers’ political and personal goals.²⁸

The “oral culture” Nye described, however, is also important, as demonstrated in the minutes to these pertinent NSC meetings; and Betts posited that there is no way to alter this to amplify written reports’ importance to the process. “No reform,” he argued, “can be legislated that can keep a presidential lieutenant from saying something the president wants to let him say. The most common and least remediable form of politicization is the fast-and-loose conversational exchanges through which intelligence is conveyed and judged at the highest levels.”²⁹

Regardless of the good estimates that percolated up toward the White House, the intelligence representative at the NSC meetings was the point of contact, and could defend the reports or defer to the perspectives of officials like MacNamara, Rusk, Rostow, or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Regarding perspective on the USSR, this was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Ambassador Thompson often accompanied the Secretary of State to these meetings; without him, Kohler’s telexes from Moscow or Adlai Stevenson’s reports from private meetings at the UN might not have influenced policy as much. “Compared with this problem, politicization of wording in formal written estimates is small potatoes. The only safeguards at

the top are the character and stolidity of the intelligence officers interacting with the politicians.”³⁰

James Wirtz called it “the ‘intelligence to please’ syndrome,” which in its more benign manifestation has analysts supporting a COA “because they simply desire to please policy makers.” In a bureaucracy constantly fighting for budgetary allocations, not to mention a dependence upon consumers’ demand to remain relevant, as well as a limited number of promotions available within it, this is understandable. Wirtz, however, also described a situation where these analysts “are directly pressured by policy makers to produce estimates that support an ongoing program or preferred initiative.”³¹ This phenomenon in both its versions depends on Betts’s “presidential lieutenants”³² both advocating and protecting their analysts, however.

In its ideal manifestation, the delta separating theory and practice regarding intelligence’s influence on policy may have emerged from intelligence historian John Ferris in 1995. He argued that intelligence indubitably affects “the thoughts and actions of statesmen. The question is how.”³³ As Ferris described it, theoretically “states need information in order to formulate and follow a grand strategy and a foreign policy; to determine which aims they can or must achieve, the means by which they can best do so, the options that are open to them, and the optimum way to allocate their resources and to elucidate the power and the policies, the intentions and the capabilities, of every player in the game.” In fact, he asserted, “intelligence rarely affects the determination of policy—although this does happen. Frequently, however, it does affect the *execution* of policy (*italics added*).” It influences the tactical level more than the strategic, Ferris argued, and the Johnson administration’s Vietnam policy decisions support this.

The fate of South Vietnam, for all the talk of The Domino Theory and binary Cold War perspective overlaying the end of European colonialism in the Third World during this period,

was never a vital United States interest. Maintaining the status quo in relations with the Soviet Union—keeping the missiles in the silos, the bombs in the bays, and the DEFCON above 4 (DEFCON 1 indicating nuclear war is either on or imminent)—*was* such an interest, and therefore a strategic one. Intelligence was therefore, if one employs Ferris’s perspective, not likely to alter U.S. policy toward the USSR—whether it was one, two, or three people running that nation at any given time. Stated differently, the retaliatory strikes against the DRV were going to happen regardless of what the intelligence apparatus reported to the NSC. Kosygin’s presence may have modified the tactical “how,” but the diligently-planned operation was already in motion in early February 1965.

“Analysts worry most about truth,” Betts contended in his work, but “operators worry most about utility.” The thinkers and the doers ideally will coalesce around a COA, but there is also a question of *when* the analysis arrives. “Analysis that undermines a policy option is most useful if it arrives before a decision to choose that option is made,” he observed. “It may be discomfiting or unwelcome even then, but it has more of a chance of affecting choice. Once policymakers move from decision to implementation, however, their interests become vested.”³⁴

In all three case studies, mid-course corrections were possible. The national command authority *could have* taken a pause to evaluate what actually happened on 4 August in the Gulf of Tonkin, rather than launching airstrikes against North Vietnam’s naval capability a day later. LBJ *could have* told his Defense Secretary to ensure the Soviet Premier had exited the DRV before—again—launching retaliatory airstrikes against military targets after Pleiku. He *could have* also paused his decision-making process to consider warnings from intelligence agencies that even if the Soviets and the PRC did not directly intervene, their support would likely permit

North Vietnam to continue the war in South Vietnam despite greater American intervention. Action displaced analysis in each case.

When the Soviet Politburo removed Khrushchev—the center of power for over a decade—and demanded collective leadership in all policy matters, the Johnson White House, though, adhered to its Soviet policy without interruption. U.S. Embassy Moscow sent along its observations from ground zero, the CIA published estimates on possible future Soviet actions, but the administration adhered to the policy toward the USSR outlined in Rostow's Basic National Security Policy.

Historians have scrutinized Rostow's roles in the decision-making process. In April of 1966 he had replaced McGeorge Bundy as National Security Advisor and stayed in the position through the end of LBJ's presidency; he would now be “running the council's operations and infusing the policy process with a presidential perspective,”³⁵ as principal advisor to the President on national security, as well as gatekeeper to all pertinent briefings and material for LBJ's perusal. “Under Rostow's regime,” wrote Doris Goodwin, “the most optimistic news was packaged and sent to the President.”³⁶

Rostow, who during World War II had worked at the Office of Strategic Services and argued that oil was the linchpin holding the Third Reich's industrial base together, brought this same perspective to the war in Vietnam—with a “particular affection for the bombing of electric grids and petroleum resources”³⁷ in the DRV. The CIA did not agree with his optimism, and assessed in June 1966 that a vigorous air campaign against energy targets would have little effect. The president and McNamara approved it anyway. “The North Vietnamese had,” however, by this point, “learned to adjust to American power, and dispersed their reserves to areas invulnerable to American attack. So at an extremely high cost in American men and

planes, we destroyed the surface storage while the North Vietnamese were able to pressure the Soviets into larger and larger petroleum commitments.”³⁸

Rostow’s influence, though, reached beyond Southeast Asia issues. Llewelyn Thompson recalled at least two instances in which Rostow fouled diplomatic initiatives involving the Soviets. In October of 1966, an opportunity emerged to broach a nonproliferation treaty with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, and the Kremlinologists had sent the White House talking points to facilitate the initiative. The opportunity was squandered, and after a short investigation, Thompson learned the reason.

Rostow had a habit of putting little notes on top of other people’s letters or memos to LBJ. These additions would often editorialize, highlight, or summarize the memos in such a way as to promote Rostow’s particular point of view... LBJ had apparently not read the talking-points memoranda from his advisors, including those by Thompson and Harriman, but had only looked at Rostow’s cover note, which suggested not discussing nonproliferation.³⁹

It is well within the National Security Advisor’s purview to set the meeting agendas and sift through the president’s incoming memoranda regarding pertinent issues, but Thompson’s recollections imply that Rostow was zealously pushing the envelope and encroaching on the State Department’s responsibilities here.

In early February 1967, to cite another example, Kosygin was in London meeting British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and warming in their discussions to the idea of the Soviet Union brokering U.S. talks with the DRV. “Over dinner, Kosygin told Wilson that if the US bombing stopped, Hanoi would definitely enter into talks, which Wilson found promising.” Rostow did not favor stopping the bombing, told the president Wilson’s initiative would likely fail and, without LBJ’s support, it did.⁴⁰

Indeed, Rostow may have evolved from policy guru to gatekeeper later in Lyndon Johnson’s presidency, but the historiography points to traits specific to the president that also

obstructed intelligence's influence upon policy. Goodwin argued, for example, that after the 1964 electoral victory, LBJ insisted on "pushing forward on every front at once" while he could leverage the popular mandate he garnered (a 16 million-vote margin) in defeating Barry Goldwater. "Johnson," she wrote, felt that it was necessary to act swiftly, since he could not know how long his consensus would last," as Johnson tried to maximize the passage of new domestic policies.⁴¹ Goodwin also asserted that LBJ's focus on his domestic agenda had caused him to ignore foreign policy until events forced him to shift his attention to it.

In his *International History of the Vietnam War*, R.B. Smith linked the eventual U.S. commitment to the war with the consensus concept, arguing that LBJ's two decades in the Senate had made him "a master in the art of political compromise." However, there was a downside to this characteristic:

[He emerged] more adept at commanding the illusion of consensus behind each decision, day by day, than assessing the actual and potential consequences of his own moves in the international power-game. By choosing to expand American military involvement step by step, without any declaration of war or the drama of a global crisis, Johnson succeeded in avoiding a clear definition of his own 'war aims'. The result was that in late February 1965 he authorized a bombing programme which was too big for the Communist powers to ignore, yet too small to achieve a major impact on Hanoi.⁴²

In Vietnam, the administration confronted a situation that was not legally war, yet neither was it peaceful below the 17th Parallel (or along the Ho Chi Minh Trail). There was no grave threat to the United States, such as LBJ's predecessor had confronted in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Thus no declaration of war nor its goals were articulated; it was a "programme" with plentiful ways and means available, but no positive ends. If, however, the goals were all based on avoiding negative conclusions—a Chinese military intervention, nuclear war, or the collapse of South Vietnam—then one could argue for a partial foreign policy success.

Coda: Back at the Ranch

This work has examined the decision process the Johnson administration executed during 1964 and 1965, between the Tonkin Gulf Incident and Aleksei Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. Relatively close on the heels of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and a prelude to LBJ's only personal meeting with Kosygin at Glassboro, New Jersey, in 1967, the three case studies are essential to understanding this period of the Cold War.

This examination asked whether the NSC received accurate intelligence regarding Soviet attitudes toward these three events, and if this information was altered between its inception and its reception by senior-decision makers in Washington. In addressing these questions, it provided an in-depth investigation of the administration's decision process and any influence that either intelligence collection platforms or analysts had upon the process.

The BNSP that both Kennedy and Johnson administrations utilized, which Walt Rostow created, outlined the administrations' perceptions of the USSR, and established a doctrine for coping with it—for example, it offered contemporary options for responding to Soviet influence in formerly colonized nations; the Sino-Soviet split and the tensions that grew out of it; and what circumstances would favor investing U.S. blood and treasure into another land war in Asia. The Basic National Security Policy the Johnson administration inherited and maintained was thus critical to this examination and deriving intelligence products' influence on subsequent U.S. actions within this period.

The work also used the Intelligence Cycle as a conceptual model to derive the relationship between intelligence producers and consumers. If, for example, information was provided and disregarded, and then the policy moved into an adverse or risky direction, the cycle might reveal at which of its steps—and which responsible actor—caused this diversion.

Conversely, if intelligence identified an opportunity and policy-makers failed to seize it, the three case studies have served to examine that phenomenon as well.

Finally, this concluding chapter examined the external influences in both bureaucracy and human characteristics of decision-making at higher levels, to lend insight into *why* this presidential administration disregarded or embraced intelligence recommendations and analysis. The works of political scientist Robert Jervis and international relations scholar Richard K. Betts have proved essential in gauging the contrast between the Intelligence Cycle and how it performed for the U.S. national security apparatus within the scope of this study. While scholars have debated the ideal form of the Intelligence Cycle and intelligence's influence on foreign policy, this study has sought, by parsing the model into its components, to derive where the cycle succeeded or failed to influence three focal Cold War events in the mid-1960s, as well as to use the cycle to test how the Johnson Administration used intelligence. U.S. relations with the USSR were preserved—never again did bilateral tensions reach the level of the recent Cuban Missile Crisis, and this constitutes successful influence. It is in Vietnam, as two of these chapters elucidate, where the failures occurred: the policy was already in place, and the Intelligence Cycle was disregarded if its products failed to support the policy.

Consequently, this work examined Jervis's assertion that there are systems competing for influence in foreign policy, and the quicker intuitive one often supersedes the analytical and more work-intensive deductive approach.⁴³ In Southeast Asia, clearly intuition was the preferred approach within LBJ's inner circle, regardless of what the Intelligence Cycle provided in support. Both the Tonkin and Kosygin case studies, after all, ended in desired kinetic action—bombs on North Vietnamese target sets—rather than a pause for analysis.

Betts's "inherent enemies of intelligence"—"a collection of mental limitations, dilemmas, contradictory imperatives, paradoxical interactions, and trade-offs among objectives in the intelligence process itself that often block proper assessment and judgment and make it difficult to fix one source of failure without creating another"⁴⁴—are also evident in each of these case studies and, again, especially within the Tonkin Gulf Incident and Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. The ideal Intelligence Cycle seeks to mitigate these factors—mapping the process and defining each stage—arguably more applicable to Jervis's deductive approach, while it is the "gut" human factors that enable Betts's list of inherent enemies. There is thus much interplay between the two models in this examination.

Soviet sources have been especially difficult to research since 2000. Fortunately, biographies of both Kosygin and Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Dobrynin are available to provide the Soviet perspectives within these events. Meanwhile, their American counterparts—e.g., Ambassadors Thompson and Bohlen—have provided illumination as well as insight. The U.S. government memoranda, meeting minutes, and intelligence estimates—mostly declassified in the 1990s—however, reveal pertinent intelligence inputs and deliberations within the National Security Council.

In 1964, the Johnson administration was confronted with choices between its set Cold War policy—influenced by the BNSP, senior members' experienced geostrategic events (e.g., appeasing Hitler, the Korean War, "losing" China), and even domestic political concerns (the electorate and the electoral timeline)—and the Cold War's dynamic realities, exemplified in these three examined case studies. When a pause was available, in which to consider the available intelligence before acting, LBJ and the coterie of advisors in the NSC adhered to the BNSP.

Within the Intelligence Cycle, the collectors were more technical at the tactical level (i.e., Vietnam), dependent upon airborne and maritime platforms gathering SIGINT, IMINT, ELINT, etc. At the strategic level, American diplomats did the heavy lifting, to include analysis and consistent reporting through telex from U.S. Embassy Moscow. All of this was supplemented by quality analysis packaged and delivered in NIEs and SNIEs from the Directorate of National Intelligence. The analysis-oriented Intelligence Cycles prevented another global nuclear crisis; those action-oriented cycles, on the other hand, sharply turned the ship of state and accelerated it toward catastrophe in Vietnam.

Ultimately, the BNSP, per its advice to seek cooperation with the Soviet Union in enterprises of mutual interest like weather forecasting and international civil aviation standards, as well as cultural and educational exchanges, encouraged communication between the two superpowers. Further, unlike in Beijing and Hanoi, in the Soviet capital the United States maintained a robust diplomatic presence—one which arguably performed every function nested within the Intelligence Cycle. Ambassador Foy Kohler's telegrams continued to be reliably helpful in establishing the Kremlin's actions and interests within the scope of this study. Even during a sudden and dangerous transfer of power at the top of the Soviet hierarchy, the American ship of state steered clear of the rocky shoals of nuclear confrontation. U.S. diplomats—both in Washington and Moscow—effectively warned the helmsmen away from Scylla rending the world into pieces.

Charybdis—the whirlpool drawing the U.S. into Vietnam, though, proved a different matter. The ambassadors dispatched to Saigon were men wedded to the Rostovian policy of countering Soviet influence in the Third World wherever it may pitch up—General Maxwell Taylor, for instance. Tonkin Gulf was where the practice of bending intelligence reporting

toward policy—filtering out information that did not support pre-determined action—was made apparent. This phenomenon is exemplified in the Defense Department officials who flew in and debriefed Commander Stockdale in early August aboard the aircraft carrier, to glean statements supporting the alleged 4 August attack on the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*.

Like these large warships, the ship of state does not respond immediately to throttle or rudder commands, and in August of 1964 she was headed at ramming speed toward Vietnam; and the Johnson Administration was uninterested in either stopping or changing course. For the next decade, both the Johnson and Nixon Administrations struggled to plot a course through the war in Vietnam, South Vietnam proved it was not an ideal ally in its own struggle, and officials relied upon statistical analysis (e.g., the Body Count) that also proved unreliable for guiding or understanding the conflict.

Beyond exhausting the crew and burning up a mountain of resources to extract itself, there were other, less tangible losses to assess. There would be no second full term for Lyndon Johnson; the captain of the ship relieved himself of duty before the 1968 presidential election due to the political effects of the Tet Offensive. Meanwhile, there exists a convincing argument that at the same time Soviet power had reached its apogee—as its nuclear weapon count was catching up to the U.S., its principal adversary was floundering, increasingly sucked into Charybdis, and the USSR's agricultural harvests (one of Khrushchev's and Kosygin's consistent headaches) were finally presenting high yields.

In his final days, Doris Kearns Goodwin sat with Lyndon Johnson at his ranch in the Texas Hill Country, about 70 miles west of Austin, for a series of interviews. She asked him about possible mid-course corrections in this period, actions that could have facilitated either avoiding the war or ending it sooner. His response:

Your idea that I could have chosen otherwise rests upon complete ignorance. For if I had chosen otherwise, I would have been responsible for starting World War III. In fact, it was the thought of World War III that kept me going every day. I saw how long the war was taking. I knew what it was doing to my Great Society programs. But all that horror, as horrible as it was, and I hated it more than anyone—do you know what it’s like to feel responsible for the deaths of men you love? Well, all that horror was acceptable if it prevented the far worse horror of World War III. For that would have meant the end of everything we know.⁴⁵

Johnson died in 1973, soon after this interview, but he remained adamant that he had made the right decision, despite its costs. He thus obliquely relied on the Munich analogy to justify his decision to fight a war he knew was effectively lost when he was speaking to her.

To help illustrate the concept of “the men” he loved, Goodwin recalled that there were 800 U.S. soldiers in Vietnam at the beginning of the Kennedy administration. Shortly after the 1964 presidential election, the troop number had surged to 23,000, and 184,000 at the end of 1965. Certainly, Robert McNamara had briefed these statistics, too, to him, to quantify the U.S. commitment to victory. Goodwin, by contrast, did so to demonstrate that “neither the powers of Johnson’s office nor the intensity of his own conviction could overcome the accumulating facts and evidence of the war’s cost and American errors.”⁴⁶

Fifty years after *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, having penned several histories of U.S. presidents and their policies, she recently published another account of this controversial administration, employing her late husband’s notes from his own time in the Johnson White House. Dick Goodwin, in September of 1964, was made “LBJ’s chief speechwriter”⁴⁷ during the run-up to the presidential election, and his impressions jibed with some of the assertions made here. In his recollections, the specter of Vietnam loomed over everything in the Johnson White House. In the summer of 1965, regardless of more U.S. soldiers and bombs hitting the theater, guerrillas were increasingly attacking South Vietnam’s military infrastructure, the government was ripe for another coup, and American dollars were propping

up Saigon's failing economic initiatives. LBJ's burdens were evident to his staff. Goodwin described to his wife later the "brooding anger" and "gloom" in the Oval Office; Press Secretary Bill Moyers witnessed "paranoid outbursts and depressive reactions"⁴⁸ as the president directed his ire at the anti-war movement, the press, Kennedy loyalists in his government, and especially the State Department.⁴⁹

The White House staff, wrote Goodwin in his 1988 memoir, saw pertinent intelligence on a daily basis, discussed it in the White House Mess with members of the NSC staff, and sometimes with alarmed personnel from the State Department who sought access to the president.

[However] much of what we learned about the war came from those late-evening sessions when Johnson, unwinding from the day's labor, would interrupt his flow of stories and discussion for brief monologues on his troubles in Southeast Asia. We would, on occasion, take advantage of these moments to voice our doubts about the course of the war. Johnson always listened—carefully, courteously—but then proceeded heedless of our unsought advice. After all, what did we know, how could we know of matters so arcane and complex?⁵⁰

So certainly Devil's Advocacy existed on the White House staff—composed of professionals like Goodwin, whom LBJ always suspected of disloyalty: people from the Kennedy camp, "liberals" like Hubert Humphrey, or East Coast intellectuals.

In his memoir, the administration's Domestic Affairs Advisor Joseph Califano described a masterful executive process regarding domestic affairs, one in which he witnessed the president "testing, probing, sucking up facts and opinions like a giant vacuum cleaner" in preparation for major decisions.

Johnson continued to consult and ferret out opposing views even after he'd made up his mind, but before he revealed his thinking, because he didn't want to be surprised by any opposition, fail to muster all possible support, or miss any opportunity to overwhelm or undermine an opponent he could not persuade. He was a political and intellectual baker, kneading with those enormous hands until

every aspect of the proposal was explored; once confident of that, he would put the bread in the oven.⁵¹

Accounts from Richard Goodwin, Robert Caro, and Robert Dallek support this description—again, in the purview of LBJ’s *domestic* agenda. He could move legislation through Congress and convey the administration’s successes to the electorate with considerable legerdemain. It is in its policy toward the Cold War, though, which hinges upon this slice of time between Summer 1964 and Spring 1965, where the Johnson administration veered into the ruinous current leading toward the Vietnam War.

Ironically, one of the resources that the administration expended in the ship of state’s boiler was the electorate’s trust in it, and seeking scapegoats for the situation in Vietnam was not going to alter that. “The passing of time has revealed the tragic consequences of the president’s failure to level with the American people at that pivotal time. It would lead to a loss of trust in his leadership, in the presidency, and in government itself—a mistrust that has permeated attitudes toward the federal government to the present day.”⁵²

Robert Dallek, in his account of the Johnson presidency, argued that the officials around LBJ were aware of the risks, regardless of what they conveyed to the commander-in-chief. The comparisons to World War II, “with a powerful and transparently immoral enemy opposed to fundamental American values,” were not ideal. The Korea analogy was more appropriate, and its “rhetoric about preventing Communist expansion and assuring allies of America’s commitment to their security... much the same as in the early 1950s” was pulled off the shelf for the messaging on Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh, however, had not threatened American territory, and the United Nations was certainly not going to send a huge multinational force to preserve South Vietnam’s sovereignty. Dallek summarized it this way: “[C]hanges on the world scene—the Sino-Soviet

split, the successful confrontation with Moscow over Cuba... the balance of nuclear terror, which made a full-scale war so impermissible, and a war against a guerrilla army—made Americans less susceptible to appeals for sacrifices in a conflict that just might not be as important to the national security as conventional wisdom said it was.”⁵³ Convincing American voters to identify as stakeholders in Vietnam would likely be necessary for preserving the political momentum from the 1964 election, and enabling Lyndon Johnson’s agenda; stated differently, losing their confidence in the Vietnam effort could threaten their identification with the Great Society as well.

Neustadt and May point out that it was not only a policy and cabinet Lyndon Johnson inherited from his predecessor, however:

If ever anything existed like consensus across the board, it developed from efforts by Kennedy and Johnson to gain protections against attacks such as Republicans made on Truman and they themselves had made on Eisenhower. The period marked by *least* public disagreement over foreign policy extended from the winter of 1962, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, until the Spring of 1965, following the bombing of North Vietnam and the [April] invasion of the Dominican Republic—a period of about twenty-eight months. (italics in original)⁵⁴

In this intriguing period, in which LBJ also won the election against Goldwater and began quickly pushing his Great Society agenda through Congress, the foundations were laid for both greater commitment to Southeast Asia *and* preventing nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union.

The policy in place was not perfect, but it was appropriate.

Both the intelligence and diplomacy enterprises were essential factors within this process, but so were Lyndon Johnson’s personality and counselors. In 1976, though, after the last U.S. soldier was evacuated from Saigon, Doris Kearns Goodwin laid out Johnson’s mindset when confronting the Vietnam War:

As Lyndon Johnson saw the situation, large forces were at work in Vietnam that others did not see but that he, privy to vast and undisclosed knowledge of the

matter, clearly understood. Furthermore, these forces had their origin in the experiences of war. It was a test case for World War III; danger to the survival of the free world was the sole criterion for a just apprehension of America's actions in Vietnam. Johnson's thought simply followed to its furthest reach a system of logic rooted in a particular reading of history. But as the need to ward off threatening aspects of reality intensified, his reasoning tended toward rationalization, wishful thinking, denial, repression, and projection.⁵⁵

Hence his personality, training, education, and experience in Texas and national politics had forged a perspective on policy—both domestic and foreign—that would be difficult to alter. LBJ's choice to bow out of the 1968 election served to tacitly recognize that neither the Great Society nor the Vietnam War had developed according to plan.

Advisors like McNamara, Rusk, and Rostow, among others adhering to the BNSP worldview, and measuring success with statistics, would be averse to Devil's Advocacy in these fora. They, like LBJ, were doers—favoring action over analysis; and if they were unlikely to convince him that mid-course corrections were needed in Cold War policy, the analysts writing and packaging the reports would be even less likely to do so. Arguably, the best intelligence the Oval Office received within these complicated events was generated by the diplomats, perhaps because there were fewer moving parts in their assessments. Opinions from seasoned ambassadors, either at Foggy Bottom or U.S. embassies around the world, provided the best insights on Soviet interests and activities. Presumably, if American embassies had existed at this time in Beijing and Hanoi, Lyndon Johnson could have navigated safely between the Cold War hazards and realized his aspirations in a third term.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archives:

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, Massachusetts

Papers of John F. Kennedy

Presidential Papers

National Security File.

LBJ Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas

Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson

Presidential Papers

National Security Files

Country File

Country File, Vietnam

Intelligence Briefings

Agency File

National Intelligence Estimates

National Security Council Meetings File

Books/Collections:

Albracht, William. *Abandoned in Hell: The Fight for Vietnam's Firebase Kate*. East Rutherford: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015.

Ball, George W. *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs*. Norton Paperback. New York: Norton, 1983.

Bohlen, Charles E. *Witness to History, 1929-1969*. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1973.

Fursenko, Aleksandr Aleksandrovič. *Prezidium CK KPSS 1954-1964*. Arhiv Kremlâ. Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2008.

- Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960s*. First Simon&Schuster hardcover edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2024.
- Goodwin, Richard N. *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties*. Perennial Library. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
- Hoopes, Townsend. *The Limits of Intervention: An inside Account of How the Johnson Policy of Escalation in Vietnam Was Reversed*. New ed. New York: Norton, 1987.
- Jacobs, Jack, and Douglas Century. *If Not Now, When? Duty and Sacrifice in America's Time of Need*. 1st ed. New York: Berkley Caliber, 2008.
- Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeevich, and Sergei Khrushchev. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*. Vol. 3: Statesman, 1953–1964. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University, 2004.
- McNamara, Robert S., and Brian VanDeMark. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. 1st ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the USSR and Socialist Republic of Vietnam. *Sovetskii-Soyuz-V'etnam: 30 Let Otnoshenii, 1950-1980*. Moscow: Moscow Political Literature Publishers, 1982.
- Stockdale, James B., and Sybil Stockdale. *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice during the Vietnam Years*. 1st ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.
- U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian. *Foreign Relations of the United States*.
 1950. Korea, Vol. VII. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1976.
 1961-1963, Vietnam, Vol. I, 1961. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1988.
 1964-1968, Vietnam, Vol. I, 1964. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1992.
 1964-1968, Vietnam, Vol. II, January-June 1965. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1996.
 1964-1968, Vietnam, Vol. XIV, Soviet Union. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2001.

Congressional Reports:

Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. *Final Report Book I: Foreign and Military Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976).

United States Senate. Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., February 20, 1968. <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/t/tonkin-gulf-crisis/gulf-tonkin-1964-incidents.html> (accessed 3 May 2024).

United States Senate. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report Book I: Foreign and Military Intelligence*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976).

Secondary Sources

Books/Collections:

Andrew, Christopher M., and Vasili Mitrokhin. *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World*. New York: Basic Books, 2005.

Austin, Anthony. *The President's War*. First. The New York Times Company, 1971.

Bamford, James. *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency: From the Cold War through the Dawn of a New Century*. 1st ed. New York: Doubleday, 2001.

Betts, Richard K. *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Blight, James G., and David A. Welch. *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Cass Series. Studies in Intelligence. London Portland (Or.): Frank Cass, 1998.

Bolger, Daniel P. *Our Year of War: Two Brothers, Vietnam, and a Nation Divided*. First edition. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2017.

Califano, Joseph A. *Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years*. New York: Atria Books, 2014.

Caro, Robert A. *The Passage of Power*. 1st ed. The Years of Lyndon Johnson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012.

———. *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. The Years of Lyndon Johnson 1. New York Toronto: A. A. Knopf Random House, 1982.

- . *The Years of Lyndon Johnson. The Years of Lyndon Johnson 2*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1990.
- . *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 2002.
- Clark, Robert M. *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach*. Fifth Edition. Los Angeles: SAGE/CQ Press, 2017.
- Cohen, Eliot A. *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power & the Necessity of Military Force*. New York: Basic Books, 2016.
- “Current Intelligence Staff Study: The New Stage of the Sino-Soviet Dispute (October 1961-January 1962).” Central Intelligence Agency, February 26, 1962.
https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000107344.pdf.
- Dallek, Robert. *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973*. New York Oxford: Oxford university press, 1998.
- . *Lone Star Rising: Vol. 1: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960*. Cary: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 1991.
- . *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004.
- Duiker, William J. *Ho Chi Minh*. 1st ed. New York: Hyperion, 2000.
- Friedman, Jeremy Scott. *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*. New Cold War History. Chapel Hill (N.C.): University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Fursenko, A. A., and Timothy J. Naftali. *Khrushchev's Cold War: The inside Story of an American Adversary*. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 2006.
- Fursenko, Aleksandr Aleksandrovič, and Timothy J. Naftali. “One Hell of a Gamble”: *Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958 - 1964*. 1. publ. as a Norton paperback. New York: Norton, 1998.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*. Rev. and Expanded ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Gaïduk, I. V. *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963*. Cold War International History Project Series. Washington, D.C. : Stanford, Calif: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford University Press [distributor], 2003.
- . *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*. Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1996.
- Galula, David, and John A. Nagl. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2006.

- . *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. Second St. Martin's Griffin edition. New York, N.Y.: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Griffin, 2019.
- Grachev, V., and V. N. Kazimirov, eds. *Diplomat Anatoliĭ Dobrynin: Sbornik Vospominaniĭ*. Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2014.
- Gray, Colin S. *Modern Strategy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Haas, Michael E. *Apollo's Warriors: US Air Force Special Operations during the Cold War*. Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2002.
- Halberstam, David. *The Best and the Brightest*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.
- Halberstam, David, and Daniel Joseph Singal. *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era*. Rev. ed. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.
- Herman, Michael. *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*. Repr. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press [u.a.], 1997.
- Herring, George C. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. Fifth edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014.
- Horne, Alistair. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962*. New York Review Books Classics. New York: New York Review Books, 2006.
- Jackson, Peter, and Jennifer Siegel, eds. *Intelligence and Statecraft: The Use and Limits of Intelligence in International Society*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2005.
- Janis, Irving L. *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*. 2nd rev. and enl. Ed. of "Victims of groupthink," 1972. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982.
- Jensen, Carl J., David McElreath, and Melissa Graves. *Introduction to Intelligence Studies*. Second edition. New York, NY: Routledge, 2018.
- Jervis, Robert. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. New edition. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Johnson, Lyndon B., and Michael R. Beschloss. *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.
- Jones, Peter, and Sian Kevill. *China and the Soviet Union, 1949-84*. London: Longman, 1985.
- Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam, a History*. New York: Viking Press, 1983.
- Keegan, John. *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to al-Qaeda*. First American edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Kitfield, James. *Prodigal Soldiers*. Brassey's paperback ed. An AUSA Institute of Land Warfare Book. Washington, [DC]: Brassey's, 1997.

- Kolko, Gabriel. *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*. 1. Dr. New York: The New Press, 1994.
- Lambeth, Benjamin S. *NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment*. Project Air Force Series on Operation Allied Force. Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001.
- Lawrence, Mark Atwood. *The End of Ambition: The United States and the Third World in the Vietnam Era*. America in the World. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.
- Lewy, Guenter. *America in Vietnam*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr, 1980.
- Linden, Carl A. *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership: With an Epilogue on Gorbachev*. Updated ed. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Logevall, Fredrik. *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. 1st ed. New York: Random House, 2012.
- MacFarquhar, Roderick. *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution. 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1958 - 1960*. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983.
- Mao, Zedong. *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Maraniss, David. *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- McCormick, Thomas J. *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After*. 2nd ed. The American Moment. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- McManus, John C. *Fire and Fortitude: The US Army in the Pacific War, 1941-1943*. New York, New York: Caliber, 2019.
- McMaster, H. R. *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*. First HarperPerennial edition. New York: HarperPerennial, 1998.
- Moise, Edwin E. *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. Chapel Hill (N.C.) London: the University of North Carolina press, 1996.
- Morgan, Ted. *Valley of Death: The Tragedy at Dien Bien Phu That Led America into the Vietnam War*. New York: Random House, 2010.
- Neustadt, Richard E., and Ernest R. May. *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers*. New York : London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1986.
- Oberdorfer, Don. *Tet! The Turning Point in the Vietnam War*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001.

- Oren, Michael B. *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Palmer, Bruce. *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam*. Lexington, Ky: University press of Kentucky, 1984.
- Payne, Andrew. *War on the Ballot: How the Election Cycle Shapes Presidential Decision-Making in War*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023.
- Petraeus, David Howell, and Andrew Roberts. *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine*. First edition. New York: Harper, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2023.
- Pherson, Katherine Hibbs, and Randolph H. Pherson. *Critical Thinking for Strategic Intelligence*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, an Imprint of SAGE Publications, Inc, 2017.
- Pike, Douglas. *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1987.
- Plokhy, Serhii. *Nuclear Folly: A History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. First edition. New York, N.Y: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021.
- Prados, John. *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA*. Paperback edition. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006.
- . *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War*. New York: Wiley, 1999.
- Prange, Gordon W. *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor; Revised Edition*. 60th ed. East Rutherford: Penguin Publishing Group, 1991.
- Rhodes, Richard. *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*. 1st ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.
- Scales, Robert H. *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War*. 1st Brassey's ed. An AUSA Book. Washington: Brassey's, 1994.
- Shackelford, Philip C. *Rise of the Mavericks: The U.S. Air Force Security Service and the Cold War, 1948-1979*. Transforming War. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2023.
- Sheehan, Neil. *A Fiery Peace in a Cold War: Bernard Schriever and the Ultimate Weapon*. 1st ed. New York: Vintage books, Random House, 2009.
- Sheehan, Neil, Hedrick Smith, Edwin W. Kenworthy, Fox Butterfield, and James L. Greenfield, eds. *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War*. First Racehorse Publishing edition. New York, NY: Racehorse Publishing, 2017.

- Shultz, Richard H. *The Secret War against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.
- Smith, R. B. *An International History of the Vietnam War*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.
- Stueck, William Whitney. *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History*. Princeton (N. J.): Princeton University press, 2002.
- Summers, Harry G. *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*. Introduction, Epilogue and Revisions to basic text. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995.
- Tetlock, Philip E. *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Thompson, Jenny, and Sherry Thompson. *The Kremlinologist: Llewellyn E. Thompson, America's Man in Cold War Moscow*. Johns Hopkins Nuclear History and Contemporary Affairs. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.
- Trinquier, Roger. *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*. PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era. Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2006.
- United States, and United States, eds. *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24: Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5*. University of Chicago Press ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Walder, Andrew G. *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*. Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard Univ. Press, 2017.
- Walton, Calder. *Spies: The Epic Intelligence War between East and West*. First Simon&Schuster hardcover edition. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023.
- Westad, Odd Arne, ed. *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*. Cold War International History Project Series. Washington, D.C. : Stanford, Calif: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Stanford University Press, 2011.
- . *The Cold War: A World History*. First edition. New York: Basic Books, 2017.
- Windrow, Martin. *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam*. 1st Da Capo Press ed. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004.
- Young, Marilyn Blatt. *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Zegart, Amy B. *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC*. Nachdr. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000.
- Zhai, Qiang. *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*. The New Cold War History. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Zubok, V. M., and Konstantin Pleshakov. *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Journals:

Abizaid, Christine. "Public Service and Counter-Terrorism: A Conversation with Christine Abizaid," *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 7, Issue 4 (Fall 2024): 97-103.

Ball, George. "Flaming Arrows to the Sky: A Memoir of Adlai Stevenson," *The Atlantic*, May 1966: 41-45.

Catton, Phillip E. "Refighting Vietnam in the History Books: The Historiography of the War." *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 5 (October 2004): 7-11.

Correll, John T. "Take It Down! The Wild Weasels in Vietnam," *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, 1 July 2010.

Ferris, John. "Coming in from the Cold War: The Historiography of American Intelligence 1945-1990." *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 87-115.

Hess, Gary R. "The Military Perspective on Strategy in Vietnam: Harry G. Summers's *On Strategy* and Bruce Palmer's *The 25-Year War*." *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 91-106.

Hopkins, George W. "Historians and the Vietnam War: The Conflict Over Interpretations Continues," *Studies in Popular Culture* 23, No. 2 (October 2000): 99-108.

Horowitz, Joseph. "The Tangled Legacy of JFK and the Cultural Cold War." *Persuasion*, 24 January 2025.

Italie, Hillel. "Robert Caro's last book on LBJ likely won't be delayed by editor Robert Gottlieb's death." Associated Press, 15 June 2023.

Powell, Colin L. "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead." *Foreign Affairs* 71, Issue 5 (Winter 1992): 32-45.

Torigian, Joseph. "'You Don't Know Khrushchev Well': The Ouster of the Soviet Leader as a Challenge to Recent Scholarship on Authoritarian Politics." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2022): 78-115.

Van de Ven, Johan. "Without an end in sight: Competition between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union during the Vietnam War and its implications for the wider relationship." *Asiademica*, no. 5 (January 2015), 51-2.

- Wicker, Tom. "Lyndon Johnson Vs. the Ghost of Jack Kennedy." *Esquire*, 1 November 1965: 87, 145-160.
- Wilmetts, Simon. "The Cultural Turn in Intelligence Studies." *Intelligence and National Security* 34, no. 6 (2019): 800-817.
- Wirtz, James J. "Robert Jervis: Remembering the Dean of Intelligence Studies." *Intelligence and National Security* 37, Issue 5 (30 March 2022): 732-740.
- _____. "Intelligence to Please? The Order of Battle Controversy during the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, No. 2 (Summer, 1991): 239-263.
- Wolf, Alexander. "US Interventions Abroad: A Renaissance of the Powell Doctrine?" *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 3, No. 4 (Winter 2009): 125-139.

Notes

Notes to Chapter 1 - Introduction

¹ See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, Second St. Martin's Griffin edition (New York, N.Y: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Griffin, 2019), 388.

² Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report Book I: Foreign and Military Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 17-18.

³ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, New edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017). Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁴ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.

⁵ Jervis, lix.

⁶ Jervis, lix.

⁷ Jervis, lix.

⁸ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 9.

⁹ Betts, 12.

¹⁰ Vadim Telitsyn, *Aleksei Kosygin: Vtoroi sredi Pervykh, Pervyi sredi Vtorykh*, (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2022).

¹¹ V. Grachev and V. N. Kazimirov, eds., *Diplomat Anatoliĭ Dobrynin: Sbornik Vospominaniĭ* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2014).

¹² Jenny Thompson and Sherry Thompson, *The Kremlinologist: Llewellyn E. Thompson, America's Man in Cold War Moscow*, Johns Hopkins Nuclear History and Contemporary Affairs (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

¹³ Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1973).

¹⁴ R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 7-8.

¹⁵ Phillip E. Catton, "Refighting Vietnam in the History Books: The Historiography of the War," *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 5 (October 2004), 7.

¹⁶ See George W. Hopkins, "Historians and the Vietnam War: The Conflict Over Interpretations Continues," *Studies in Popular Culture* 23, No. 2, (October 2000), 100.

¹⁷ Hopkins, 101.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1966*, 1st ed, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967).

²¹ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992).

-
- ²² See also Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake* (New York: Mulholland Books, 1972); Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1979); David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000);
- ²³ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, Fifth edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014).
- ²⁴ Robert S. McNamara and Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, 1st ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).
- ²⁵ Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*, 1. Dr. (New York: The New Press, 1994).
- ²⁶ Marilyn Blatt Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*, 1st ed (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).
- ²⁷ McCormick, *America's Half-Century*.
- ²⁸ Gary R. Hess, "The Military Perspective on Strategy in Vietnam: Harry G. Summers's *On Strategy* and Bruce Palmer's *The 25-Year War*," *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 92.
- ²⁹ Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr, 1980).
- ³⁰ Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), vii.
- ³¹ Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, Introduction, epilogue and revisions to basic text (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995).
- ³² Bruce Palmer, *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington, Ky: University press of Kentucky, 1984).
- ³³ See also R.B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War: The Kennedy Strategy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986); Norman Podhoretz, *Why We Were in Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982); U.S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1978); Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995); Andrew F. Krepinivich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Michael Lind, *Vietnam, the Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1999), all cited by Catton as exemplars of the revisionist perspective.
- ³⁴ Gary R. Hess, "The Military Perspective on Strategy in Vietnam: Harry G. Summers's *On Strategy* and Bruce Palmer's *The 25-Year War*," *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 91-2.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.
- ³⁷ H. R. McMaster, *Derelection of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*, First HarperPerennial edition (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998).
- ³⁸ H.R. McMaster, *Derelection of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997), 248.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁰ Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 10–11.

⁴¹ Smith, 13.

⁴² See James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers*, Brassey's paperback ed, An AUSA Institute of Land Warfare Book (Washington, [DC]: Brassey's, 1997); Robert H. Scales, *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War*, 1st Brassey's ed, An AUSA Book (Washington: Brassey's, 1994); Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment*, Project Air Force Series on Operation Allied Force (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001).

⁴³ See Eliot A. Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power & the Necessity of Military Force* (New York: Basic Books, 2016). Weinberger presented the initial list of six rules to the National Press Club on 28 November 1984.

⁴⁴ Alexander Wolf, "US Interventions Abroad: A Renaissance of the Powell Doctrine?," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 3, No. 4 (Winter 2009): 125-139.

⁴⁵ Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 215–16.

⁴⁶ Powell, Colin L. "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead." *Foreign Affairs*; Winter 1992, Vol. 71 Issue 5, 32–45.

⁴⁷ United States and United States, eds., *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24: Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2006).

⁴⁹ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962*, New York Review Books Classics (New York: New York Review Books, 2006).

⁵⁰ David Galula and John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2006).

⁵¹ Zedong Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁵² Petraeus and Roberts, 130., 132.

⁵³ Petraeus and Roberts, *Conflict*, 130.

⁵⁴ See Jack Jacobs and Douglas Century, *If Not Now, When? Duty and Sacrifice in America's Time of Need*, 1st ed (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2008); William Albracht, *Abandoned in Hell: The Fight for Vietnam's Firebase Kate* (East Rutherford: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015).

⁵⁵ David Maraniss, *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); Daniel P. Bolger, *Our Year of War: Two Brothers, Vietnam, and a Nation Divided*, First edition (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2017).

⁵⁶ Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. of "Victims of groupthink," 1972 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 19–27.

⁵⁷ Richard H. Shultz, *The Secret War against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam*, 1st ed (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), xiv.

⁵⁸ Shultz, 31–38.

⁵⁹ Joseph D. Celeski, *Special Air Warfare and the Secret War in Laos: Air Commandos 1964-1965* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2019), 315-6. These sensors were used to cue air interdiction missions. While U.S. aircraft performed admirably, vectored in on targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail from IGLOO WHITE data, the North Vietnamese Army's truck traffic increased and the roads were consistently improved. See Donald Mrozek, *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam* (Washington DC: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989), 103.

⁶⁰ Don Oberdorfer, *Tet! The Turning Point in the Vietnam War* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), 119–20.

⁶¹ Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, 1st ed (New York: Random House, 2012), 702.

⁶² David Halberstam and Daniel Joseph Singal, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era*, Rev. ed (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 237.

⁶³ Gordon W. Prange, *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor; Revised Edition*, 60th ed (East Rutherford: Penguin Publishing Group, 1991).

⁶⁴ William Whitney Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton (N. J.): Princeton University press, 2002).

⁶⁵ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 238.

⁶⁶ John Prados, *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War* (New York: Wiley, 1999), 303–4.

⁶⁷ Joseph Torigian, “‘You Don’t Know Khrushchev Well’: The Ouster of the Soviet Leader as a Challenge to Recent Scholarship on Authoritarian Politics,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2022): 78-9.

⁶⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, Rev. and expanded ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 381. Two of the book's chapters are appropriately devoted to the JFK and LBJ administrations, but given the commonality of personnel and the employment of Rostow's National Security Policy, not to mention the growing U.S. commitment to Vietnam that these sections share, they could have been combined without jeopardizing the flow of the text.

⁶⁹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 627. Like Gaddis, he devotes two pertinent chapters—one to Kennedy and one to Vietnam.

⁷⁰ Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, 1st ed (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

⁷¹ Neil Sheehan, *A Fiery Peace in a Cold War: Bernard Schriever and the Ultimate Weapon*, 1st ed (New York: Vintage books, Random House, 2009).

⁷² Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The End of Ambition: The United States and the Third World in the Vietnam Era, America in the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 17.

⁷³ Lawrence, 294.

-
- ⁷⁴ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 264. The Israeli Air Force also shot up a U.S. intelligence collection ship, the USS Liberty, in international waters off the Sinai coast during this conflict. See James Bamford, *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency: From the Cold War through the Dawn of a New Century*, 1st ed (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 187–239.
- ⁷⁵ Christopher M. Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).
- ⁷⁶ Janis, *Groupthink*, 9.
- ⁷⁷ Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York : London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1986), 237. Their acknowledgment chapter cites interviews with several members of LBJ’s coterie—i.e., the Bundys, Dean Rusk, James Schlesinger, and Theodore Sorenson.
- ⁷⁸ Neustadt and May, 136.
- ⁷⁹ Simon Wilmetts, “The Cultural Turn in Intelligence Studies,” *Intelligence and National Security* 34, no. 6 (2019): 800.
- ⁸⁰ Wilmetts, 801.
- ⁸¹ Wilmetts, 811.
- ⁸² John Keegan, *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to al-Qaeda*, First American edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 24.
- ⁸³ Keegan, 321.
- ⁸⁴ Keegan, 321.
- ⁸⁵ Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 20.
- ⁸⁶ Gray, 348.
- ⁸⁷ Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, The Years of Lyndon Johnson 1 (New York Toronto: A. A. Knopf Random House, 1982); Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, The Years of Lyndon Johnson 2 (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1990); Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 2002). Robert A. Caro, *The Passage of Power*, 1st ed, The Years of Lyndon Johnson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).
- ⁸⁸ Hillel Italie, “Robert Caro’s last book on LBJ likely won’t be delayed by editor Robert Gottlieb’s death,” Associated Press, 15 June 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/robert-caro-lyndon-johnson-book-editor-a8c4d210dd1582494a4146505df2d298> (accessed 7 December 2024).
- ⁸⁹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Vol. 1: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (Cary: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 1991).
- ⁹⁰ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York Oxford: Oxford university press, 1998).
- ⁹¹ Robert Dallek, *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004).
- ⁹² Caro, *The Passage of Power*, xvii.

⁹³ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*.

⁹⁴ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960s*, First Simon&Schuster hardcover edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2024).

⁹⁵ Reportedly, Kennedy was planning to make Goodwin his “advisor on the arts” before fate intervened. See Joseph Horowitz, “The Tangled Legacy of JFK and the Cultural Cold War,” *Persuasion*, 24 January 2005, <https://www.persuasion.community/p/the-tangled-legacy-of-jfk-and-the> (accessed 2 February 2025) and Richard N. Goodwin, *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 225.

⁹⁶ John Ferris, “Coming in from the Cold War: The Historiography of American Intelligence 1945-1990,” *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 91.

⁹⁷ Aleksandr Aleksandrovič Fursenko, *Prezidium CK KPSS 1954-1964*, Arhivy Kremlâ (Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2008).

⁹⁸ Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam*, 1st Da Capo Press ed (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004); Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam*, 1st ed (New York: Random House, 2012); Ted Morgan, *Valley of Death: The Tragedy at Dien Bien Phu That Led America into the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 2010); Christopher Goscha, *The Road to Dien Bien Phu: A History of the First War for Vietnam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022).

⁹⁹ James J. Wirtz, “Robert Jervis: Remembering the Dean of Intelligence Studies,” *Intelligence and National Security* 37, iss. 5 (30 March 2022): 733.

¹⁰⁰ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 18.

¹⁰¹ Betts, 9.

¹⁰² Betts, 12–13.

Notes to Chapter 2 - U.S. Cold War Policy and the Intelligence Cycle in 1964

¹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 198.

² Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention: An inside Account of How the Johnson Policy of Escalation in Vietnam Was Reversed*, New ed (New York: Norton, 1987), 4–5.

³ Hoopes, 5–6.

⁴ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version, July 1962-February 1963,” August 2, 1962, 60, National Security Files, Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/jfknsf-294-003#?image_identifier=JFKNSF-294-003-p0001 (accessed 21 September 2024).

⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 199.

⁶ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version, July 1962-February 1963,” 61.

⁷ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” 61.

⁸ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 9.

⁹ Hoopes, 9.

¹⁰ Lawrence, *The End of Ambition*, 3–4.

-
- ¹¹ Calder Walton, *Spies: The Epic Intelligence War between East and West*, First Simon&Schuster hardcover edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023), 202–3.
- ¹² Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 9.
- ¹³ Letter from Shelepin to Khrushchev, 29 July 1961, in st. (special dossier of the Secretariat of the CC CPSU), 191/75gc, 1 August 1961, TsKhSD (Center for the Retention of Contemporary Documentation), f. 4, op. 13, d. 81, p. 130. Cited in V. M. Zubok and Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 253–54.
- ¹⁴ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 257.
- ¹⁵ This was not a uniquely American phenomenon during the Cold War. Prime Minister Anthony Eden was concerned about the Munich comparison during the 1956 Suez Crisis and, a month after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Mao's press was likening Khrushchev to Neville Chamberlain vis-à-vis the United States. See Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 89, 496.
- ¹⁶ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 16.
- ¹⁷ Hoopes, 126.
- ¹⁸ William R. Tyler, Memorandum for the Record, Lunch with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, 18 December 1963, Box 217, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1-5.
- ¹⁹ McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, Conversation between Dean Rusk and Anatoly Dobrynin, 30 November 1963, Box 218, Memos, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.
- ²⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 207.
- ²¹ George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs*, Norton Paperback (New York: Norton, 1983), 181.
- ²² Ball, 181.
- ²³ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” 62.
- ²⁴ Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*, Cold War International History Project Series (Washington, D.C. : Stanford, Calif: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Stanford University Press, 2011), 2.
- ²⁵ Westad, 229–30.
- ²⁶ Peter Jones and Sian Kevill, *China and the Soviet Union, 1949-84* (London: Longman, 1985), 20. Cited in Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, 25.
- ²⁷ Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, 25.
- ²⁸ “Current Intelligence Staff Study: The New Stage of the Sino-Soviet Dispute (October 1961-January 1962)” (Central Intelligence Agency, February 26, 1962), i, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000107344.pdf (accessed 21 September 2024).
- ²⁹ “Current Intelligence Staff Study: The New Stage of the Sino-Soviet Dispute (October 1961-January 1962),” 67.
- ³⁰ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 8–9.
- ³¹ Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, 234.

-
- ³² Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev and Sergei Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 3: Statesman, 1953–1964 (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University, 2004), 500.
- ³³ Khrushchev and Khrushchev, 3: Statesman, 1953–1964:500–501.
- ³⁴ Khrushchev and Khrushchev, 3: Statesman, 1953–1964:502–3.
- ³⁵ Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, 363.
- ³⁶ Bohlen, 522.
- ³⁷ Bohlen, 523.
- ³⁸ Bohlen, 457.
- ³⁹ Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, 3.
- ⁴⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 129–30.
- ⁴¹ Gaddis, 208.
- ⁴² “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” 92.
- ⁴³ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 20–21.
- ⁴⁴ Hoopes, 21.
- ⁴⁵ Walton, *Spies*, 162.
- ⁴⁶ Lawrence, *The End of Ambition*, 30–31.
- ⁴⁷ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” 63.
- ⁴⁸ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” 64.
- ⁴⁹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 226–27.
- ⁵⁰ Gaddis, 228.
- ⁵¹ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 365.
- ⁵² Ball, 366–67.
- ⁵³ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 38. The full text of the memorandum is available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v01/d227> (accessed 27 May 2024).
- ⁵⁴ Department of Defense. *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Vol. 11, (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 361. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA533420.pdf> (accessed 27 May 2024).
- ⁵⁵ Memorandum from the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow) to the President, 11 November 1961. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v01/d233> (accessed 28 May 2024).
- ⁵⁶ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 367.
- ⁵⁷ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, a History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 358.
- ⁵⁸ Karnow, 249.
- ⁵⁹ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 255.
- ⁶⁰ Goodwin, 255–56.
- ⁶¹ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 261.

-
- ⁶² Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 17.
- ⁶³ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 257.
- ⁶⁴ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 381.
- ⁶⁵ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 266.
- ⁶⁶ Jervis, 267–68.
- ⁶⁷ Jervis, 281–82.
- ⁶⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 211–12.
- ⁶⁹ Neil Sheehan et al., eds., *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War*, First Racehorse Publishing edition (New York, NY: Racehorse Publishing, 2017), 431.
- ⁷⁰ Sheehan et al., 431.
- ⁷¹ Sheehan et al., 431.
- ⁷² U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Korea*, Volume VII, Document 349: Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Allison) to the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze),” 459–60. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v07/d349> (accessed 1 December 2023). Cited in Andrew Payne, *War on the Ballot: How the Election Cycle Shapes Presidential Decision-Making in War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 53.
- ⁷³ Ibid, 259.
- ⁷⁴ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 231.
- ⁷⁵ George W. Ball, “Flaming Arrows to the Sky: A Memoir of Adlai Stevenson,” *The Atlantic*, May 1966, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1966/05/flaming-arrows-to-the-sky-a-memoir-of-adlai-stevenson/660178/> (accessed 22 January 2004).
- ⁷⁶ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 178–79.
- ⁷⁷ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 178.
- ⁷⁸ Peter Jackson and Jennifer Siegel, eds., *Intelligence and Statecraft: The Use and Limits of Intelligence in International Society* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2005), 2.
- ⁷⁹ Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, Repr (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press [u.a.], 1997), 285.
- ⁸⁰ Robert M. Clark, *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach*, Fifth Edition (Los Angeles: SAGE/CQ Press, 2017), 34.
- ⁸¹ Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report Book I: Foreign and Military Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 17–19.
- ⁸² Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report Book I: Foreign and Military Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 18. Cited in Herman, 285.

⁸³ Figure **Error! Main Document Only..** Military concept of the intelligence cycle

⁸⁴ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 379.

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vietnam, 1964*, Volume I, Document 276: Editorial Note, https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed 1 February 2025).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ For perspective, the Joint Resolution declaring war on Japan was voted and signed into law the day after the Pearl Harbor attack, with only 1 dissenting vote in the House of Representatives. John C. McManus, *Fire and Fortitude: The US Army in the Pacific War, 1941-1943* (New York, New York: Caliber, 2019), 45.

⁸⁸ Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, 214.

⁸⁹ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 214.

⁹⁰ Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, 217.

⁹¹ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 128. He published these assertions three decades after the attacks, shortly after many of the cited messages and memoranda were declassified, which he admits in the preface to *In Retrospect*. He also elucidates, however, his methodology and purpose: "Too often, I believe, memoirists rely on their recollections. This leads them, however honest their intent, to remember what they wish to remember—what they wish had happened—rather than what actually occurred. I have tried to minimize this real and human danger by relying on the contemporaneous record whenever possible... To those who find that I have unduly stressed one aspect or neglected another, I simply say that this account comes as close as possible to the truth as I perceive it, based on information available to me today. My aim is neither to justify errors nor to assign blame, but rather to identify the mistakes we made, understand why we made them, and consider how they can be avoided in the future." (xviii).

⁹² Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, 290.

⁹³ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 372.

⁹⁴ Karnow, 372.

⁹⁵ Blight and Welch, *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 133.

⁹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency. "National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-2-64: Prospects for the International Communist Movement," 10 June 1964, Box 1, National Intelligence Estimates, National Security File, LBJ Library, 9.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

⁹⁸ Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers*, 262.

⁹⁹ Sheehan et al., 262.

¹⁰⁰ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 405.

¹⁰¹ Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 48.

¹⁰² I. V. Gaïduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963*, Cold War International History Project Series (Washington, D.C. : Stanford, Calif: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford University Press [distributor], 2003), 206.

¹⁰³ Gaïduk, 207.

¹⁰⁴ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” 23.

¹⁰⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 50-2-64 *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*,” 25 May 1964, 1.

https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001166401.pdf (accessed 22 May 2024).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum from CIA Board of National Estimates to CIA Director McCone, 9 June 1964.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v01/d209> (accessed 23 May 2024).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 486.

¹¹⁰ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 152.

¹¹¹ McNamara and VanDeMark, 153.

¹¹² Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint War Games Agency, *Final Report: Sigma II-64*, 5 October 1964. Box 30, JCS Wargames, Vol. II, National Security File (Agency File), LBJ Library, v.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, B-1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, D-1. These executive authorities were represented by a Control Team within the exercise.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, D-5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, D-11. On D-14 the report states that the majority on Blue Team believed “industrial and military bombing would not quickly cause cessation of the insurgency in South Vietnam,” citing similar air campaigns against North Korea, as well as Britain and Germany in the Second World War, and civilian populations’ consequent determination to persevere in the face of modern air campaigns.

¹¹⁷ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 152–53.

¹¹⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 53-2-64 *The Situation in South Vietnam*,” 1 October 1964, 1. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001166521.pdf (accessed 27 May 2024). The next coup occurred in February 1965, when Nguyen Cao Ky deposed Nguyen Khanh, head of the ruling junta, who was himself involved in several coup attempts—to include the November 1963 coup that executed Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu.

¹¹⁹ A USAF detachment, Farm Gate, had been at Bien Hoa, however, to train VNAF aircrews on propeller-driven aircraft since November of 1961; hence apparatus was in place and functioning for U.S. air operations when the Canberras arrived (e.g., an officers’ club, aircraft maintenance shops). See Michael E. Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors: US Air Force Special Operations during the Cold War* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), 228.

¹²⁰ Robert F. Futrell and Martin Blumenson, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 253.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 28.

¹²³ I. V. Gaïduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1996), 17.

¹²⁴ William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 1st ed (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 542.

Notes to Chapter 3 - The Tonkin Gulf Incident

¹ Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, 37.

² Shackelford, *Rise of the Mavericks*, 144–45.

³ Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, 175.

⁴ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 198.

⁵ Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, First (The New York Times Company, 1971), 228–29.

⁶ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 216.

⁷ Gaddis, 238.

⁸ “Raids on North at Issue,” *New York Times*, 24 July 1964, p.1.

⁹ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 119–20.

¹⁰ McMaster, 120.

¹¹ Edwin E. Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill (N.C.) London: the University of North Carolina press, 1996), 50–51. Moise asserts no ECM van was loaded aboard the *Maddox* for the Tonkin Gulf patrol, though, but that two ECM specialists were added to the destroyer's standard complement of ordinary radarmen, 54.

¹² Moise, 21.

¹³ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 364.

¹⁴ Karnow, 366.

¹⁵ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 55.

¹⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 367.

¹⁷ Telegram from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Commander in Chief, Pacific, 2 August 1964—12:25 P.M. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968*, Vol. I: Vietnam, 1964, Doc. 259. https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed 2 May 2024).

¹⁸ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 121–22.

¹⁹ McMaster, 124.

²⁰ McMaster, 124–25. MAROPS attacks on the night of 3-4 August occurred within a day of the *Turner Joy's* rendezvous with *Maddox*, and 9 hours before the second alleged attack on the DESOTO patrol. See Austin, 183.

²¹ John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA*, Paperback edition (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 343–44.

²² Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, 183.

-
- ²³ United States Senate. Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., February 20, 1968, 54-56. <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/t/tonkin-gulf-crisis/gulf-tonkin-1964-incidents.html> (accessed 3 May 2024). Cited in Austin, 205.
- ²⁴ Austin, Anthony, 206–7.
- ²⁵ William B. Bader, “The Guns of August 1964: From Vietnam to Iraq, Pretext and Precedent.” *New York Times*, 28 August 2004.
- ²⁶ “Carl M. Marcy, Chief of Staff, Foreign Relations Committee, 1955–1973,” Oral History Interviews, September 14 to November 16, 1983, Senate Historical Office, Washington, D.C., 154.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 165-6.
- ²⁸ McMaster, *Derelection of Duty*, 125.
- ²⁹ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 211.
- ³⁰ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 358.
- ³¹ Wicker, Tom. “Lyndon Johnson Vs. the Ghost of Jack Kennedy.” *Esquire*, 1 November 1965. <https://classic.esquire.com/article/1965/11/1/lyndon-johnson-vs-the-ghost-of-jack-kennedy> (accessed 18 October 2023). Cited in Austin, 157-158.
- ³² Austin, Anthony, *The President’s War*, 237.
- ³³ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam, 4 August 1964—6:35 P.M. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968*, Vol. I: Vietnam, 1964, Document 279. (https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html) accessed 4 May 2024.
- ³⁴ Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions, 4 August 1964—9:41 P.M. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968*, Vol. I: Vietnam, 1964, Document 281. (https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html) accessed 4 May 2024.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, Message from President Johnson to Prime Minister Khanh. Document 283. (accessed 4 May 2024).
- ³⁶ Austin, Anthony, *The President’s War*, 289.
- ³⁷ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968 Volume I, Vietnam 1964, Document 278: Summary Notes of the 538th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, August 4, 1964, 6:15-6:40 p.m. https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed 6 May 2024).
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 120.
- ⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968 Volume I, Vietnam 1964, Document 299: Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone), Washington, August 6, 1964--1:10 p.m., https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed 6 May 2024).

-
- ⁴¹ Message from Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet to CINCPAC (courtesy copy to CJCS): Proof of Attack, 4 August 1964—18:40Z, 1-2. [https:// www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/t/tonkin-gulf-crisis/tonkin-gulf-incidents-of-2-4-aug-1964.html](https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/t/tonkin-gulf-crisis/tonkin-gulf-incidents-of-2-4-aug-1964.html) (accessed 6 May 2024). Interestingly, eyewitness statements are embedded in the text, not as an attachment, as if organized within the message to be read verbatim at meetings, rather than as supporting materials for provision upon request to senior civilian decision-makers.
- ⁴² Ibid., 2-3.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 3.
- ⁴⁴ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 110, citing testimony from Lieutenant Commander Douglas G. Smith and Captain John Herrick.
- ⁴⁵ U.S. Senate, Ninetieth Congress, *Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Second Session with the Honorable Robert S. McNamara Secretary of Defense on February 20, 1968*, p. 55. [https:// www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/t/tonkin-gulf-crisis/gulf-tonkin-1964-incidents.html](https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/t/tonkin-gulf-crisis/gulf-tonkin-1964-incidents.html) (accessed 11 May 2024).
- ⁴⁶ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 144.
- ⁴⁷ Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, 301. Austin identifies Alvin Friedman, McNamara's assistant secretary for international security affairs, and Jack Stempler, McNamara's special assistant, flying to the naval base at Subic Bay, Philippines, to gather statements from officers on board the *Maddox*. Stockdale identifies the same two men piped aboard the *Ticonderoga* on 11 August to ask him if "there were any fuckin' boats out there the other night or not?," Stockdale and Stockdale, *In Love and War*, 35-6. These officials' positions within the departmental hierarchy argue that it was the Secretary of Defense or someone higher tasking the collectors in the Tonkin intelligence cycle.
- ⁴⁸ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 145.
- ⁴⁹ Moise, 147.
- ⁵⁰ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 372.
- ⁵¹ James B. Stockdale and Sybil Stockdale, *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice during the Vietnam Years*, 1st ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 12.
- ⁵² Stockdale and Stockdale, 17.
- ⁵³ Stockdale and Stockdale, 18.
- ⁵⁴ Stockdale and Stockdale, 19.
- ⁵⁵ Stockdale and Stockdale, 20.
- ⁵⁶ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 191.
- ⁵⁷ Moise, 197.
- ⁵⁸ Moise, 198-99.
- ⁵⁹ Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, 285.
- ⁶⁰ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 379.

⁶¹ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vietnam, 1964*, Volume I, Document 276: Editorial Note, https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_i/255_308.html (accessed 1 February 2025).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ For perspective, the Joint Resolution declaring war on Japan was voted and signed into law the day after the Pearl Harbor attack, with only 1 dissenting vote in the House of Representatives. John C. McManus, *Fire and Fortitude: The US Army in the Pacific War, 1941-1943* (New York, New York: Caliber, 2019), 45.

⁶⁴ Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, 214.

⁶⁵ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 214.

⁶⁶ Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, 217.

⁶⁷ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 128. He published these assertions three decades after the attacks, shortly after many of the cited messages and memoranda were declassified, which he admits in the preface to *In Retrospect*. He also elucidates, however, his methodology and purpose: "Too often, I believe, memoirists rely on their recollections. This leads them, however honest their intent, to remember what they wish to remember—what they wish had happened—rather than what actually occurred. I have tried to minimize this real and human danger by relying on the contemporaneous record whenever possible... To those who find that I have unduly stressed one aspect or neglected another, I simply say that this account comes as close as possible to the truth as I perceive it, based on information available to me today. My aim is neither to justify errors nor to assign blame, but rather to identify the mistakes we made, understand why we made them, and consider how they can be avoided in the future." (xviii).

⁶⁸ Austin, Anthony, *The President's War*, 290.

⁶⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 372.

⁷⁰ Karnow, 372.

⁷¹ Blight and Welch, *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 133.

⁷² Central Intelligence Agency. "National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-2-64: Prospects for the International Communist Movement," 10 June 1964, Box 1, National Intelligence Estimates, National Security File, LBJ Library, 9.

⁷³ Ibid., 16-17.

⁷⁴ Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers*, 262.

⁷⁵ Sheehan et al., 262.

⁷⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 405.

⁷⁷ Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 48.

⁷⁸ I. V. Gaïduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963*, Cold War International History Project Series (Washington, D.C. : Stanford, Calif: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford University Press [distributor], 2003), 206.

⁷⁹ Gaïduk, 207.

⁸⁰ "Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963," 23.

-
- ⁸¹ Central Intelligence Agency. “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 50-2-64 *Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos*,” 25 May 1964, 1.
https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001166401.pdf (accessed 22 May 2024).
- ⁸² Ibid., 2.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 4.
- ⁸⁴ Memorandum from CIA Board of National Estimates to CIA Director McCone, 9 June 1964.
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v01/d209> (accessed 23 May 2024).
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 486.
- ⁸⁶ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 152.
- ⁸⁷ McNamara and VanDeMark, 153.
- ⁸⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint War Games Agency, *Final Report: Sigma II-64*, 5 October 1964. Box 30, JCS Wargames, Vol. II, National Security File (Agency File), LBJ Library, v.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., B-1.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., D-1. These executive authorities were represented by a Control Team within the exercise.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., D-5.
- ⁹² Ibid., D-11. On D-14 the report states that the majority on Blue Team believed “industrial and military bombing would not quickly cause cessation of the insurgency in South Vietnam,” citing similar air campaigns against North Korea, as well as Britain and Germany in the Second World War, and civilian populations’ consequent determination to persevere in the face of modern air campaigns.
- ⁹³ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 152–53.
- ⁹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 53-2-64 *The Situation in South Vietnam*,” 1 October 1964, 1. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001166521.pdf (accessed 27 May 2024). The next coup occurred in February 1965, when Nguyen Cao Ky deposed Nguyen Khanh, head of the ruling junta, who was himself involved in several coup attempts—to include the November 1963 coup that executed Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu.
- ⁹⁵ A USAF detachment, Farm Gate, had been at Bien Hoa, however, to train VNAF aircrews on propeller-driven aircraft since November of 1961; hence apparatus was in place and functioning for U.S. air operations when the Canberras arrived (e.g., an officers’ club, aircraft maintenance shops). See Michael E. Haas, *Apollo’s Warriors: US Air Force Special Operations during the Cold War* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), 228.
- ⁹⁶ Robert F. Futrell and Martin Blumenson, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 253.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 28.
- ⁹⁹ I. V. Gaïduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1996), 17.
- ¹⁰⁰ William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 1st ed (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 542.

Notes to Chapter 4 – Khrushchev's Fall

¹ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*; McMaster, *Derelection of Duty*.

² Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, 285.

³ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 208.

⁴ Gaddis, 227.

⁵ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” August 2, 1962, 23, National Security Files, Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 60-1.

⁸ Caro, *The Passage of Power*, 358–59.

⁹ Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Kennedy and Ambassador Dobrynin, 7 July 1964, Box 218, Memos, Vol. 5, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 37–38.

¹² Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence. Intelligence Memorandum: The Coming Struggle for Power in the USSR, 19 March 1964, Box 3, National Intelligence Estimates, National Security File, LBJ Library, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁴ Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership: With an Epilogue on Gorbachev*, Updated ed (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 222.

¹⁵ Andrew G. Walder, *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard Univ. Press, 2017), 128.

¹⁶ Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, 402.

¹⁷ Bohlen, 404.

¹⁸ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution. 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1958 - 1960* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), 11–12.

¹⁹ Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, 17.

²⁰ Thompson and Thompson, *The Kremlinologist*, 163.

²¹ Thompson and Thompson, 206. See also Westad, 26.

²² Thompson and Thompson, 343.

²³ U.S. Embassy Moscow, Cable to Secretary of State, 15 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

²⁴ U.S. Embassy Moscow, Cable to Secretary of State, 15 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.

-
- ²⁵ U.S. Department of State Director Intelligence and Research, Intelligence Note for Secretary of State, 15 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1-2.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 3.
- ²⁷ U.S. Department of State, Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy: Items for the President's Information, 15 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1. The State Department had also put together a three-page synopsis of this meeting with reporters for cabling guidance to "all American diplomatic posts" worldwide for confidential "talks with friendly governments," U.S. Department of State Telegram, 16 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.
- ²⁸ U.S. Department of State Director Intelligence and Research, Intelligence Note for Secretary of State: Khrushchev Era Ends, 15 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 2.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 4.
- ³¹ Ibid., 5.
- ³² U.S. Embassy Moscow, Cable to Secretary of State, 16 October 1964 (4:00 am), Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.
- ³³ U.S. Embassy Moscow, Cable to Secretary of State, 16 October 1964 (8:00 pm), Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.
- ³⁴ Central Intelligence Agency Office of Current Intelligence, Intelligence Memorandum: World Reaction to Khrushchev Resignation, 16 October 1964, U.S. Embassy Moscow, Cable to Secretary of State, 15 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.
- ³⁵ Central Intelligence Agency Office of Current Intelligence, Intelligence Memorandum: World Reaction to Khrushchev Resignation, 16 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 4. U.S. Embassy Moscow, Cable to Secretary of State, 15 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 4.
- ³⁶ U.S. Embassies Bonn, London, Paris; Cables to Secretary of State, 16 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library. The UK, France, and West Germany comprise significant sections of the BNSP and the U.S. agenda for European security. For example, it argues that "The European countries will be more inclined to a major partnership with the US if they can develop solid assurance that their homeland is as secure from Soviet threats and pressures as the facts of military life now and foreseeably permit." In a leadership succession moment like this, the State Department would of course wish to hear whether these nations felt shielded from possible downstream effects. "Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963," August 2, 1962, 43, National Security Files, Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers.
- ³⁷ John T. McNaughton, Draft Point Paper: Observations for the Change in Moscow, 16 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

³⁸ If the draft was prepared for McNamara, this assertion is even more likely. In the original document, someone has tick-marked certain points of the outline in pencil and handwritten a SECRET classification at the top and bottom of page 1, as well as a check mark in the top right corner, a standard indication that it has been read and is ready for either further routing or filing.

³⁹ John T. McNaughton, Draft Point Paper: Observations for the Change in Moscow, 16 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1-3.

⁴⁰ Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation: Call on The President by Ambassador Dobrynin, 16 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.

⁴¹ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” August 2, 1962, 60-62, National Security Files, Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers.

⁴² Office of the White House Press Secretary, Remarks of the President in the Fish Room, 16 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.

⁴³ “Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963,” August 2, 1962, 79, National Security Files, Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers.

⁴⁴ Background Briefing by Hon. Llewellyn E. Thompson and McGeorge Bundy Special Assistant to the President, 16 October 1964, Box 219 Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

⁴⁵ Background Briefing by Hon. Llewellyn E. Thompson and McGeorge Bundy Special Assistant to the President, 16 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 4.

⁴⁶ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, Implications of Khrushchev’s Downfall, 17 October 1964, 1, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

⁴⁷ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, Implications of Khrushchev’s Downfall, 17 October 1964, 3-4, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 3-4.

⁴⁸ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, Implications of Khrushchev’s Downfall, 17 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 5.

⁴⁹ Department of State Outgoing Telegram, 17 October 1964, 51 Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.

⁵⁰ Department of State Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Khrushchev’s Replacement: Significance for U.S.-Soviet Relations, 17 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

⁵¹ Department of State Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Khrushchev’s Replacement: Significance for U.S.-Soviet Relations, 17 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.

⁵² Jeremy Scott Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, New Cold War History (Chapel Hill (N.C.): University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 123.

⁵³ Summary Notes of the 543rd NSC Meeting, 17 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid. President Johnson held the NSC-recommended press conference occurred at 4:00 pm on 19 October, in the White House Cabinet Room.

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Soviet Union*, Volume XIV, Document 58: Memorandum From the Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Read) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)," October 17, 1964, 137.
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v14/d58> (accessed 6 February 2025).

⁵⁶ The analysts at State here had prudently examined "issue history" in forming their conclusions, where "in most cases what precipitates concern is a perceived change making current conditions from those of the past." Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 236; experimental research also supports bending the forecast toward the status quo, "the right answer more often than either change for the better (always coming in second) and change for the worse," in Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005), 173.

⁵⁷ Department of State Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 18 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁹ Department of State Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 19 October 1964 (9:00 p.m.), 2, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.

⁶⁰ Department of State Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 19 October 1964 (10:00 p.m.), Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.

⁶¹ Department of State Policy Planning Council Report: Thoughts on the Meaning of the Moscow Events, 19 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2-3.

⁶² Ibid., 4.

⁶³ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁷ Foreign Broadcast Information Service Radio Propaganda Report, Current Developments Series: Factors in the Fall of Khrushchev and the Behavior of the New Soviet Regime, 22 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.

⁶⁸ Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum: Khrushchev's Fall and Its Consequences, 22 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁰ Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963," August 2, 1962, National Security Files, Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers, 60.

⁷¹ Ibid..

⁷² Ibid., 64

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Office of the White House Press Secretary. Presidential Statement on the Completion of an Agreement with the Soviet Union Providing for Cooperation in Weather Matters, 25 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

⁷⁵ Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 28 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁸ USUN Mission New York. Message: Mikoyan Interview, 29 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1-2.

⁷⁹ Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 31 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

⁸⁰ Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 31 October 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 3.

⁸¹ Ibid., 4.

⁸² Department of State Division of Language Services. Translation of cable from Moscow (ITT World Communications) to His Excellency Lyndon B. Johnson President of the United States of America White House Washington [sic] DC, 4 November 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.

⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency Office of National Estimates. Memorandum for the Acting Director, "Implications of the Fall of Khrushchev For Soviet Military Policy, 4 November 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 4.

⁸⁴ Department of State Directorate of Intelligence and Research. Research Memorandum: "The Fall of Khrushchev," 4 November 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, ii.

⁸⁵ Ibid., vi.

⁸⁶ Ibid., vii..

⁸⁷ Department of State Directorate of Intelligence and Research. Intelligence Note: "Brezhnev Cautions on Foreign Issues," 6 November 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 3.

⁸⁸ Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 7 November 1964, Box 219, Vol.6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁹¹ Ibid., 2.

-
- ⁹² Malinovsky was likely referring to McNamara's "No Cities" speech, delivered to the University of Michigan Commencement ceremony on 9 June 1962. Full text available at <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/PDF/MagazineArchive/Documents/2011/June%202011/0611keeperfull.pdf> (accessed 11 June 2024). On 8 November, *Pravda* reported that "Malinovsky on behalf of participants in the Red Square military parade warmly thanked government for constant attention to strengthening of Soviet armed forces, guarding achievements of the October Revolution and peaceful toil of Soviet people, assured that our armed forces have always been and will be loyal to their people, Soviet government, and the great Leninist party." See Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 8 November 1964, Box 219, Vol.6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.
- ⁹³ Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 7 November 1964, Box 219, Vol. 6, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1-2.
- ⁹⁴ Thompson and Thompson, *The Kremlinologist*, 412, 414.
- ⁹⁵ Vadim Telitsyn, *Aleksei Kosygin*, 319.
- ⁹⁶ Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership*, 246–47.
- ⁹⁷ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, I, Vietnam, 1964, 990-3. Document 443. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v01/d443> (accessed 27 June 2024).
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰ Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 48.
- ¹⁰¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Together with Joint Sessions with the Senate Armed Services Committee* (Historical Series), 1965, Vol. 17 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 232, cited in Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union in the Vietnam War*, 25.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., 188, 232; cited in Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union in the Vietnam War*, 25.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 234.
- ¹⁰⁴ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 569.
- ¹⁰⁵ "Basic National Security Policy Short Version (Draft), July 1962-February 1963," 23.
- ¹⁰⁶ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 162.
- ¹⁰⁷ Deputy Director (Intelligence) Ray S. Cline. Memorandum for the Record: Meeting of an Executive Group of the National Security Council, 16 October 1964. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968*, Vol. XIV: Soviet Union, Document 53. (<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v14/d53>) accessed 30 June 2024.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁹ Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 19 November 1964 (received 7:43 a.m.), 3, Box 219, Vol. 7, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.

¹¹⁰ Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 12 November 1964, Box 219, Vol. 7, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.

¹¹¹ Department of State. Incoming Telegram from U.S. Embassy Moscow, 19 November 1964 (received 7:20 a.m.), Box 219, Vol. 7, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library.

¹¹² Harriman was U.S. Ambassador to the USSR from 1943-46. On 19 October 1964 he was serving as Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, and sent a classified memo to LBJ on the personalities of the likely new Soviet hierarchy, providing a solid analysis of Brezhnev and Kosygin, as well as his thoughts on Mikoyan, Podgorny, and the chief party ideologue Mikhail Suslov. See Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs W. Averell Harriman, Memorandum for the President, 19 October 1964, Box 1, National Intelligence Estimates, National Security File, LBJ Library, 1-3.

¹¹³ Bohlen did not experience an easy confirmation hearing, even though he was the Eisenhower administration's choice for the ambassador position, due to his proximity to the principals at the February 1945 Yalta Conference. He asserts in an oral history, now on loan to the Eisenhower Library, that he had warned Secretary Dulles that it was coming, as "immediately after the death of Roosevelt all the people who disliked Roosevelt began to write how he appeased the Russians." He was confirmed anyway on 2 April 1953, and asserts that the "administration rushed by several years the publication of the Yalta minutes" and that in the text his detractors "found absolutely nothing. A completely wet squib." Reminiscences of Charles E. Bohlen, (1970), pages 20-21, Oral History Archives at Columbia, Columbia University in the City of New York.

¹¹⁴ Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers*, 430.

¹¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-3-64 *Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Actions*," 9 October 1964, 1-2.

https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001166418.pdf (accessed 2 July 2024).

¹¹⁶ Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers*, 431.

¹¹⁷ Sheehan et al., 431-32.

¹¹⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-3-64 *Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Actions*," 9 October 1964, 4-7.

https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001166418.pdf (accessed 2 July 2024).

¹¹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-3-64 *Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Actions*," 9 October 1964, 4.

https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001166418.pdf (accessed 2 July 2024).

¹²⁰ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 36.

¹²¹ Hoopes, 38.

Notes to Chapter 5 - Kosygin's Hanoi Visit

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson and Michael R. Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 175.

² Central Intelligence Agency, The President's Daily Brief, 3 February 1965, 3.
https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005967499.pdf (accessed 20 February 2025).

³ Johnson and Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, 166–67.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Soviet Union*, Volume XIV, Document 56: Memorandum From David Klein of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), 131-2,
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v14/d56> (accessed 8 July 2024).

⁵ Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 73–74.

⁶ L.G. Legere to Bundy, with enclosure. February 18, 1963. Kennedy Papers. NSC Files. Box 37, “Cuba General.” Cited in Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 230.

⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Together with Joint Sessions with the Senate Armed Services Committee* (Historical Series), 1965, vol. 17 (Washington DC, 1992), 116. Cited in Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 24.

⁸ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 516.

⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, Weekly Report: “The Situation in South Vietnam,” 3 February 1965, 10.
<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00472A001700020001-1.pdf> (accessed 11 July 2024).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Central Intelligence Agency, The President's Daily Brief, 30 January 1965, 4-5.
https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005967493.pdf (accessed 20 February 2025).

¹² Telitsyn, *Aleksei Kosygin*, 321-23.

¹³ Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 77.

¹⁴ Telitsyn, 323.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume II, Vietnam*, Document 264: Memorandum of Conversation. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d64> (accessed 1 August 2024).

¹⁶ TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union), 10 February 1965. Cited in Pike, 78.

¹⁷ Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam: 1965-1966* (Washington DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), 9.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, Volume II, Vietnam, Document 81: Memorandum for the Record. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d81> (accessed 3 August 2024).

¹⁹ Summary of 545th NSC Meeting. 6 February 1965, Box 1, Vol. 3, Tab 27 (Reprisal Strikes in North Vietnam), National Security File (National Security Council Meetings), LBJ Library, 3.

²⁰ McMaster, *Derelection of Duty*, 171.

²¹ The South Vietnamese air force (VNAF) would also launch retaliatory air strikes from Da Nang on 8 February against DRV targets north of the demilitarized zone “against army barracks and supply areas at Dong Hoi, Vit Thu Lu, and Chap Le...” See Intelligence Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam (as of 0600 EST), 8 February 1965, Box 10, National Security File (Intelligence Briefings), LBJ Library, 1.

²² Office of the White House Press Secretary. News Conference, 7 February 1965, Box 219, Vol. 7, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 2.

²³ Office of the White House Press Secretary. Statement by the President, 7 February 1965, Box 219, Vol. 7, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

²⁴ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 30.

²⁵ Gaïduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 28.

²⁶ Summary of 547th NSC Meeting. 8 February 1965, Box 1, Tab 29, Situation in Vietnam, National Security File (NSC Meetings), LBJ Library, 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 521.

³⁰ Summary of National Security Council Meeting No. 548. 10 February 1965, Box 1, tab 30, National Security File (NSC Meetings), LBJ Library, 3.

³¹ Ibid., 1-2.

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ McMaster, *Derelection of Duty*, 221. These targets were requested by MACV directly to CINCPAC that day in a cable, with information copies to the Joint Chiefs and State Department, with approval from both Ambassador Taylor and South Vietnam’s acting Prime Minister. The cable laid out both suggested aircraft for each distinct target, as well as specific USAF aircraft for flak suppression and combat air patrols against possible defensive MiG launches. See Telex from COMUSMACV to CINCPAC DTG 101725Z. 10 February 1965, Box 218, vol. 7, National Security File (Country File: Vietnam), LBJ Library.

³⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. SNIE 10-3-65: Communist Reactions to Possible US Actions (Formerly SNIE 11-6-65), Draft No. 3. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d111> (accessed 28 September 2024).

³⁵ Ibid., 5-6.

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

³⁸ Ibid., 12.

³⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁰ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 31.

⁴¹ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 534.

⁴² Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 390. In his account of the LBJ presidency, Robert Dallek described Johnson's "obsession with assuring Humphrey's obedience and conformity to his designs," going back at least to the 1964 Democratic Convention. For months, LBJ had, through intermediaries, implied Humphrey would be his vice presidential pick, and had repeatedly asked for assurance of both Humphrey's loyalty and adherence to secrecy. In Dallek's account, this process had exhausted Humphrey by the time the choice was announced three days into the convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. See Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 156–60.

⁴³ Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, 285.

⁴⁴ Telephone conversation # 6813, sound recording, LBJ and LT. COL. MIKE COOK, 2/7/1965, 8:51PM, Recordings and Transcripts of Telephone Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Presidential Library, accessed 8 August 2024, <https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/tel-06813> .

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Intelligence Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam (as of 0600 EST). Intelligence Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam (as of 0600 EST), 8 February 1965, Box 10, National Security File (Intelligence Briefings), LBJ Library, 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

⁵² Ibid., 2.

⁵³ Central Intelligence Agency, The President's Daily Brief, 9 February 1965, 5. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005967512.pdf (accessed 20 February 2025).

⁵⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, The President's Daily Brief, 10 February 1965, 5. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005967516.pdf (accessed 20 February 2025).

⁵⁵ Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 114–15.

⁵⁶ TASS, 10 February 1965. Cited in Pike, 78.

⁵⁷ Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the USSR and Socialist Republic of Vietnam. *Sovetskii-Soyuz-V'etnam: 30 Let Otnoshenii, 1950-1980* (Moscow: Moscow Political Literature Publishers, 1982), 94–5.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 89–93.

⁵⁹ “From the Joint Communique of USSR and DRV Delegations, 10 February 1965,” *Pravda*, 11 February 1965, *Sovetskii-Soyuz-V’etnam: 30 Let Otnoshenii, 1950-1980*, 96-7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶¹ Gaïduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 30.

⁶² *Pravda*, 24 March 1965, cited in Gaïduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 37.

⁶³ Telegram, Foy Kohler to Washington, 26 March 1965, Box 46, NODIS-LOR, vol. II, National Security File (Country File: Vietnam), LBJ Library, 1. Cited in Gaïduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 37.

⁶⁴ Gaïduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 37.

⁶⁵ “From the address of CPSU CC member and President of the Council of Ministers of the USSR A.N. Kosygin to USSR Central Television,” 26 February 1965, *Sovetskii-Soyuz-V’etnam: 30 Let Otnoshenii, 1950-1980*, 101.

⁶⁶ Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the USSR and Socialist Republic of Vietnam. *Sovetskii-Soyuz-V’etnam: 30 Let Otnoshenii, 1950-1980* (Moscow: Moscow Political Literature Publishers, 1982), 95.

⁶⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Current Intelligence. Intelligence Memorandum: The Kosygin Delegation to North Vietnam. 1 February 1965, Box 219, Vol. 7, National Security File (Country File: USSR), LBJ Library, 1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁹ This arrangement lasted until 1968, when “during the Cultural Revolution those supply trains were often attacked and robbed of weapons and munitions by feuding factions,” driving Zhou Enlai to put China’s railways under the control of the People’s Liberation Army. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, 150-1.

⁷⁰ Van de Ven, Johan. “Without an end in sight: Competition between the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union during the Vietnam War and its implications for the wider relationship.” *Asiademica*, no. 5 (January 2015), 51-2.

⁷¹ Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 106–7.

⁷² Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 120.

⁷³ Summary Notes of 550th NSC Meeting. 26 March 1965, Box 1, National Security File, Vol. 3, tab 32, Vietnam, (National Security Council Meetings), LBJ Library, 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 4. On 22 March, the State Department had been compelled to respond to this development, stating “that employment of the short-lived gas was not inhumane or internationally illegal...” Radio Moscow had “seized upon the gas issue immediately... charging the United States with ‘using increasingly barbarous methods—in particular waging chemical warfare.’” See “Saigon Forces Use Tear Gas on Enemy,” *New York Herald Tribune*, European Edition, 23 March 1965. <https://archive.nytimes.com/iht-retrospective.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/1965-saigon-forces-use-tear-gas-on-enemy/> (accessed 18 August 2024). Considering that tear gas had recently been employed

against protesters in Selma, Alabama, on 7 March, the administration's concern about "the gas story" and "our public information system in South Vietnam" is understandable.

⁷⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-5-65 *Communist Reactions to Certain U.S. Actions*," 28 April 1965, Box 1, National Security File (National Intelligence Estimates), LBJ Library, 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 12, 15.

⁸⁰ Central Intelligence Agency. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-7-65 *Implications of a Certain US Course of Action*," 4 June 1965, Box 1, National Security File (National Intelligence Estimates), LBJ Library, 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-6-65 *Probable Communist Reactions to Certain US Actions*," 2 June 1965, Box 1, National Security File (National Intelligence Estimates), LBJ Library, 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁸⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-6/1-65 *Probable Reactions to Certain US Courses of Action*," 4 June 1965, Box 1, National Security File (National Intelligence Estimates), LBJ Library, 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁸⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-9-65 *Communist and Free World Reactions to a Possible US Course of Action*," 23 July 1965, , Box 1, National Security File (National Intelligence Estimates), LBJ Library, 1-2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁹² Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 74-75.

⁹³ Summary Notes of 553rd NSC Meeting. 27 July 1965, Box 1, National Security File, Vol. 3, tab 32 (National Security Council Meetings), LBJ Library, 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁸ Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 121.

⁹⁹ John T. Correll, “Take It Down! The Wild Weasels in Vietnam,” *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, 1 July 2010, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/article/0710weasels/> (accessed 20 August 2024).

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Soviet Union*, Volume XIV, Document 200: Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 457-8. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v14/d200> (accessed 8 July 2024)..

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Vadim Telitsyn, *Aleksei Kosygin*, 319.

¹⁰³ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Soviet Union*, Volume XIV, Document 200: Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 13 February 1967. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v14/d200> (accessed 8 July 2024).

¹⁰⁴ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. 2 (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc. 1960), 368.

Notes to Chapter 6 - Conclusion

¹ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 75. It is appropriate that the book devotes a chapter-and-a-half to the Johnson administration’s deliberations on Vietnam in 1965.

² Central Intelligence Agency. “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 10-5-65 *Communist Reactions to Certain U.S. Actions*,” 28 April 1965, Box 1, National Security File (National Intelligence Estimates), LBJ Library, 15-16.

³ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 268–69.

⁴ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, lix–lx.

⁵ Jervis, 106–7.

⁶ Jervis, 130–31.

⁷ Jervis, 131.

⁸ Thompson and Thompson, *The Kremlinologist*, 309.

⁹ Walton, *Spies*, 362.

¹⁰ President Lyndon Johnson, “Why We Are in Viet-Nam” (Press Conference, The White House, Washington, DC, 28 July 1965). <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-1038> (accessed 23 August 2024).

¹¹ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 323.

¹² Andrew Payne, *War on the Ballot: How the Election Cycle Shapes Presidential Decision-Making in War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 37–38.

¹³ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 442.

¹⁴ Beth A. Fischer, “Perception, Intelligence Errors, and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” in Blight and Welch, *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 150–51.

¹⁵ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 143.

-
- ¹⁶ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 59–60.
- ¹⁷ Betts, 60.
- ¹⁸ Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*, 125–26.
- ¹⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam, a History*, 502.
- ²⁰ McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 8–9.
- ²¹ Williamson Murray, *Strategy for Defeat: The Luftwaffe 1933-1945* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1983), 44-45.
- ²² Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 203.
- ²³ Jervis, 204.
- ²⁴ Jervis, 122.
- ²⁵ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 40.
- ²⁶ “Public Service and Counter-Terrorism: A Conversation with Christine Abizaid,” interview with Christine Abizaid, *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 7, Issue 4 (Fall 2024). <https://tnsr.org/2024/09/public-service-and-counter-terrorism-a-conversation-with-christine-abizaid/> (accessed 28 September 2024).
- ²⁷ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 46.
- ²⁸ Betts, 47.
- ²⁹ Betts, 96.
- ³⁰ Betts, 96.
- ³¹ James J. Wirtz, “Intelligence to Please? The Order of Battle Controversy during the Vietnam War,” *Political Science Quarterly* 106, No. 2 (Summer, 1991): 240.
- ³² Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 95.
- ³³ John Ferris, “Coming in from the Cold War: The Historiography of American Intelligence, 1945-1990,” *Diplomatic History* 19, No. 1 (Winter, 1995): 97.
- ³⁴ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 78.
- ³⁵ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 81.
- ³⁶ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 320.
- ³⁷ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 630–31.
- ³⁸ Halberstam, 631.
- ³⁹ Thompson and Thompson, *The Kremlinologist*, 402.
- ⁴⁰ Thompson and Thompson, 417–19.
- ⁴¹ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 216.
- ⁴² Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, 378.
- ⁴³ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, lix.
- ⁴⁴ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 12.
- ⁴⁵ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 310–11.

⁴⁶ Goodwin, 311.

⁴⁷ Goodwin, *An Unfinished Love Story*, 195.

⁴⁸ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 282.

⁴⁹ Goodwin, *An Unfinished Love Story*, 248.

⁵⁰ Richard N. Goodwin, *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties*, Perennial Library (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 386.

⁵¹ Joseph A. Califano, *Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years* (New York: Atria Books, 2014), 117.

⁵² Goodwin, *An Unfinished Love Story*, 249.

⁵³ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 291.

⁵⁴ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 259.

⁵⁵ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 311.