CONTAINMENT CONTINUED

AN ANALYSIS OF THE VIETNAM WAR DURING THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE iii

Chapter

I. PRELUDE TO THE FULL COMMITMENT 1

II. THE PERIOD OF CRISES 11

III. THE FULL COMMITMENT 35

IV. THE BUILD UP 66

V. THE OFFENSIVE 94

VI. THE DECISIVE DECISION 122

BIBLIOGRAPHY 145

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 149

PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the Johnson Administration's approach to and management of the Vietnam War from 22 November 1963 to 31 March 1968. The historic events and decisions during that period were enormously difficult and complex matters. They included: key conferences, decision papers, escalation by all major participants, the attitude of the North Vietnamese, military flashpoints, diplomatic initiatives and the political stability within South Vietnam. As such, they cannot be viewed in isolation or out of context. Therefore, I have elected to use an interpretive-narrative approach as the literary vehicle to expose, clarify and test the thrust of United States' governmental policy in South Vietnam.

The conclusion that I have drawn from my research and the thesis which I propose is that the United States maintained a remarkably consistent policy toward Vietnam from November of 1963 through March of 1968. To be sure, the means used to achieve that policy changed as the exigencies of the situation changed. The United States government was not faced with a static situation in which a single most desirous and effective means to accomplish an objective could be devised and implemented. The methods employed were as flexible as conditions required; however, the United States' over-all objective and

policy remained constant. That policy is best described by a single word, containment.

A word is in order about the source materials used. Numerous autobiographies, biographies, monographs, studies, papers and articles have been published on the period. However, none has achieved the distinction of presenting an objective, integrated over-view. In this paper I have attempted to meld the best of the published sources and thus present a fresh and original view. Some of the references used, such as Lyndon B. Johnson's Vantage Point, and Townsend Hoopes' The Limits of Intervention, were specifically selected to furnish an insight into the perceptions of the situations as viewed by primary and secondary participants. Other publications, such as David Kraslow and Stuart Loory's The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam, and Chester Cooper's The Lost Crusade, were used to provide information, e.g., peace initiative details, that was not available or sorely lacking in primary sources. Finally, and most significantly, I leaned heavily on the three published editions of the Pentagon Papers. These publications demand additional comments.

With the release of the Pentagon Papers in June of 1971, the American people were provided with a unique insight into the workings of the United States government's decision making apparatus. Prior to 1971, the next most recent body of policy documents allowed to become public was dated 1946, which was the last year that the State Department revealed any of its archives. Thus, the Pentagon Papers are a new,

revealing and relatively untouched store house of primary source material. However, the three editions are not the same and further clarification as to their distinction and uniqueness is required.

The United States government edition was prepared by a Task Force of thirty-six members under the general chairmanship of Leslie H. Gelb of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The Task Force included representatives from the military services, State Department, Office of the Secretary of Defense and government subsidized think-tanks. The study had its birth on 17 June 1967 when Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara directed Gelb to prepare a study which detailed the history of United States' involvement in Vietnam since World War II. The work was completed in January of 1969 and included chronologies, analyses, narratives and summaries covering the period 1945 to 31 March of 1968. The result of the Task Forces' effort was a forty-seven volume work which contained thirty-seven studies and fifteen collections of documents.

Following the 30 June 1971 Supreme Court decision which allowed the New York Times to publish articles which included information from the original study, the United States government published forty-three of the forty-seven volumes. The study was formally called a House Armed Services Committee Print and entitled, United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967. When offered for public sale in September of 1971, it was bound in twelve books and contained approximately 4,000 pages of primary source documents and 3,000 pages of narrative. The

final four volumes of the original work deal with diplomatic negotiations and have not been published due to the on-going sensitive nature of their contents. To compensate for the lack of official government publications regarding diplomatic efforts, I have relied on the excellent autobiographies and monographs that were mentioned above. They provided a great deal of pertinent information regarding United States' and worldwide peace initiatives.

The United States government edition contains a wealth of information regarding national policy planning, decision making and implementation. It reveals the inner workings of governmental agencies at the highest level. However, it does have some serious drawbacks. The entire study unsuccessfully attempts to pursue a topical approach within an over-all chronological framework. The result is a disjointed, redundant and often puzzling series of studies which lack continuity. In addition, the literary style changes from study to study, thus adding to the researchers' problems. However, if each of the studies is simply viewed as a whole, in and of itself, the entire work takes on added meaning and clarity.

The New York Times edition of the Pentagon Papers is a one volume work which was published by Bantam Books in July of 1971, two months before the government edition. It consists of summaries prepared by the staff writers of that newspaper, along with selected documents from the original papers. This edition lacks the wealth of information of the government edition and was obviously prepared with a liberal orientation.

It is, however, highly readable in comparison with the government edition in that it avoids distracting governmental jargon and acronyms.

The Gravel edition of the Pentagon Papers is a four volume work which was published in September of 1971, shortly after the government edition was issued. It consists of portions of the government edition of the Pentagon Papers which United States Senator Mike Gravel (Democrat, Alaska) had incorporated or read into the record of the Senate Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds on the evening of 29 June 1971. In comparison with the government edition of the Pentagon Papers, this edition consists of 2,900 pages of narrative, 1,000 pages of appended documents and 200 pages of public statements by government officials justifying the United States' involvement in Vietnam. This latter selection was drawn from the United States Department of State Bulletins and the Public Papers of the Presidents.

The Gravel edition also includes 110 documents from the Johnson Administration which were not included with the government study. In addition, a number of documents which did not appear in the Gravel subcommittee report but which were included in the New York Times edition have been reprinted in the Gravel edition in proper chronological sequence.

The format of the Gravel edition is a chapter sequence which provides the reader with a convenient, nearly chronological, four volume flow of information. It is unquestionably the best organized and prepared of the three editions currently

available. Its only serious shortcomings are the facts that it omits: the "Statistical Survey of the War," which is found in Book Seven of the government edition; and, the sections dealing with "Negotiations" which are contained in Book Twelve of the government edition. There are some further omissions, but none of these affected this study.

In conclusion, the three editions of the Pentagon Papers have unique advantages and disadvantages. The Times edition is the most succinct, editorially biased and provocative. However, it lacks the balance and the depth of analysis and primary source information which the other editions contain. The government edition is the fullest and richest; however, due to its format and confused arrangement it is difficult to follow and master. The Gravel edition is unquestionably the best of the three. It has a healthy balance of narrative and documents, and is arranged in a chronological order which facilitates use. However, it does lack the total narrative and documentary sections which the government edition possesses.

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE TO THE FULL COMMITMENT

In 1947, George F. Kennan, while serving as a member of the State Department Policy Planning Staff, used the pseudonym "Mr. X" and published an article in the July issue of Foreign Affairs entitled "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." In it, he argued that the expansive tendencies of communist Russia must "be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce."[1] This article, in fact, outlined the assumptions which guided the Truman Administration's foreign policy during the early years of the Cold War. This policy was given the informal title, containment of communism, and was initially directed only toward Soviet Russia; however, its application expanded geographically as the Cold War expanded.

Since that time, the press and the government have deluged the public with such phrases as nuclear monopoly, massive retaliation, flexible response and realistic deterrence. These phrases are really only descriptions of succeeding military strategies which were used to implement the over-all national policy of containment. They were not changes to the policy itself, and should not be confused as being new policies.

When dealing with the Vietnam war, a key question arises. Was containment carried forward and applied as the basis for the United States' policy decisions on Vietnam during the Johnson Administration from 22 November 1963 to 31 March 1968? This is the question with which this paper will deal.

The United States was deeply involved in Vietnam for many years prior to the Johnson Administration. From 1950 to 1954, the United States provided over 2.6 billion dollars to the French in the form of military aid and over 126 million dollars directly to the Bao Dai government in the form of economic, military and technical assistance. Following the departure of the French from Vietnam, the United States poured in an additional 1.8 billion dollars from 1955 through 1959.[2]

Obviously them, by the end of the Eisenhower Administration the United States had a large economic investment in South Vietnam. This commitment to support that country was matched, however, by a strengthening of resolve on the part of the indigenous insurgent forces, the Viet Cong, who were attempting to overthrow the existing governmental structure. This strengthened resolve was demonstrated by the formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in December of 1960.[3]

When John F. Kennedy assumed the office of the presidency, the United States' military strength in Vietnam was approximately 900.[4] He was faced with the problem of determining whehter Truman's and Eisenhower's commitment to Vietnam should be continued. If so, he was further required to outline the objective of United States' policy in South Vietnam and

the general concept of operation. Thomas Bailey, the eminent Stanford historian, characterized this as "Kennedy's most monumentous long range decision."[5] Unquestionably, Bailey was correct.

On 11 May 1961, President Kennedy approved the Top Secret National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) #52 as a definition of the United States' objectives in South Vietnam. This document's pertinent portions state:

> 1. The United States' objective and concept of operations stated in the report are approved: to prevent communist domination of South Vietnam; to create in that country a viable and increasingly democratic society, and to initiate on an accelerated basis, a series of mutually supporting actions of a military, political, economic, psychological and covert character designed to achieve this objective.[6]

The paragraph above is loaded with typical government jargon; however, it can easily be interpreted as stating that the United States' objective was the maintenance of a democratic, non-communist, pro-United States government in South Vietnam. Furthermore, the United States was prepared to mount and execute operations in support of this objective. In short, communism would be contained north of the seventeenth parallel.

A bare two weeks later, Lyndon B. Johnson, following a vice-presidential trip to Saigon, presented an equally significant memorandum to President Kennedy. This document stated in part:

> 1. The battle against communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination to achieve success here--or the United States inevitably must surrender the Pacific and take up defenses on our own shores.
> . . . . . .

> 3. There is no alternative to United States leadership in Southeast Asia.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 8. We must decide whether to help these countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and the fortress America concept.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . It [the decision on what to do] must be made with the knowledge that at some point we may be faced with the further decision of whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our efforts fail. We must remain master in this decision. What we do in Southeast Asia should be part of a rational program to meet the threat we face in the region as a whole. . . . I recommend we proceed with a clear-cut and strong program of action.[7] [Italics mine.]

This memorandum is another clear commitment to the containment of communism. Johnson revealed his perception of the situation and unveiled his recommended solution: deployment of major United States forces, if necessary. This, in fact, was the position that Johnson maintained when he became the President in November of 1963; however, a great deal happened before then to further harden his stand.

Through the summer and early fall of 1961 the non-communist, political and military situation in Saigon deteriorated. The Viet Cong strength rose to 15,000, and, as their number increased, so did their activity.[8] On 1 November 1961, while on a fact finding tour in Saigon, General Maxwell D. Taylor dispatched an urgent Top Secret eyes-only cablegram to the President. In it he recommended that 8,000 United States' troops be deployed to Saigon since he had "reached the conclusion that this is an essential action if we are to reverse the present downward trend of events. . . ."[9]

Ten days later, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara forwarded a rare, joint memorandum to Kennedy which stated, in part:

> . . . The United States should commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism. The basic means for accomplishing this objective must be to put the government of South Vietnam into a position to win its own war. . . .
> . . . . . .
> We should be prepared to introduce United States combat forces if that should become necessary for success. Dependent upon the circumstances it may also be necessary for United States forces to strike at the sources of aggression in North Vietnam.[10]

The President rejected the proposal for United States combat troops; however, he did decide in NSAM #111, dated 22 November 1961, to increase the United States military advisory strength so that by the end of the year there were over 3,200 military advisors in-country and more on the way.[11]

During that first year of the Kennedy Administration the foundation for full commitment was laid. Kennedy elected to follow the program of his two predecessors in supporting South Vietnam. The United States government outlined its policy for containment in Southeast Asia in NSAM #52. Vice-President Johnson supported and expanded this policy in his May memorandum. General Taylor urged the use of greater military force to support this policy. Rusk and McNamara in their joint memorandum further refined and expanded the United States' objective in South Vietnam. Finally, President Kennedy ordered the advisory build-up. Containment continued in Southeast Asia and the focal point of effort was South Vietnam.

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Throughout 1962 the Kennedy administration addressed itself to other world trouble spots such as Cuba, Berlin, the Congo and Latin America; however, Vietnam also received attention. The Military Assistance Advisory Command (MACV), which would become known as Pentagon-East under General William Westmoreland, was established in February under General Paul Harkins. In accordance with the Presidential decision in NSAM #111, the advisory strength increased to over 10,000 by the end of the year.[12]

The United States continued to increase its advisory element through the spring of 1963. Then in August of 1963, Kennedy recalled Ambassador Frederick Nolting and replaced him with Henry Cabot Lodge.[13] During the early summer of that year, rising dissention and tensions had been in evidence in the South Vietnamese government. President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, had applied increasingly repressive measures against the sacred Buddhist monks who were disenchanted with the Diem-Nhu rule.[14] In addition, Diem was proving himself to be less and less responsive to both the South Vietnamese military and United States political pressures for reform and liberalization. Moreover, Nolting was proving himself less able to exercise any influence over Diem.[15] Therefore, he was replaced by Lodge, a seasoned politician and diplomat.

The instability with the Diem government continued through September and into October; however, the United States remained committed to the maintenance of a pro-United States,

anti-communist government. The question was whether the United States should continue to support Diem or opt for another pro-United States type or body of government? The rumors and threats of coup and counter-coup were rampant in Saigon.

After requesting advice from Washington, Lodge was informed of the United States' position in a Top Secret cablegram on 5 October 1963 which stated:

> . . . President today approved recommendation that no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup. There should, however, be urgent covert effort with closest security, under broad guidance of Ambassador to identify and build contacts with possible alternate leadership as and when it appears. . . .[16]

The United States was thus clearly aware of the possibility of a coup and had taken measures to ensure that the coup leadership would be in the United States' camp if it was successful.

On 1 November 1963 Diem was overthrown by a coup and replaced by a pro-United States government headed by General Duong Van Minh.[17] Twenty-one days later President Kennedy was assassinated and the Kennedy phase of the United States' involvement was terminated.

The Kennedy Administration had to a degree carried forward the commitments of Truman and Eisenhower. It had established and defined the United States' objective in South Vietnam. It had demonstrated that it would increase the military advisory presence. It had indicated that it was prepared to commit United States' ground combat troops and to employ air assets to support its policy. It remained for the

Johnson Administration to determine if the policy should be continued, if it should be modified or if it should be abandoned.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I - PRELUDE TO THE FULL COMMITMENT

1. Walter LaFeber, America in the Cold War (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969), pp. 35, 36, 44. Thomas G. Paterson, ed., Containment and the Cold War (Reading, Massachussets: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1973), p. 27.

2. Chester L. Cooper, The Lost Crusade (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970), pp. 162-65.

3. Peking Review, December 20, 1963, p. 4.

4. Cooper, p. 477.

5. Thomas A. Bailey, Presidential Greatness (New York: Appleton & Century, 1966), p. 330.

6. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967, Committee Print, The Pentagon Papers, V.B. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 136. (Hereafter referenced as USG ed.)

7. USG ed., V.B. 4, pp. 162-66.

8. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Eyeless in Indo-China," The New York Review of Books, October 21, 1971, p. 32.

9. USG ed., V.B. 4, pp. 337-42. Eyes only means that it was to be seen only by the addressee and not by any intervening agency, headquarters or administrative assistant, regardless of their security clearance.

10. USG ed., V.B. 4, p. 360.

11. Cooper, pp. 478-79. Senator Mike Gravel, compiler and editor, The Pentagon Papers, Vol. II (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 114, 117, 118, 410, 449, 450, 454. (Hereafter the Gravel edition of the Pentagon Papers will be referenced as: Gravel, followed by the appropriate volume and page number.) See Gravel II, pp. 654-59 for the Joint Chiefs of Staff talking paper regarding the completed and planned military build-up.

12. Philip Geyelin, Lyndon B. Johnson and the World (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 183. Cooper, pp. 478-80. Gravel II, pp. 653, 656-57, 671-72, 682-83, 703.

13. Cooper, p. 481.

14. Frances FitzGerald, Fire in the Lake (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), pp. 126-27, 134-35.

15. Paul Y. Hammond, The Cold War Years (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969), p. 188. Gravel II, pp. 229-31.

16. USG ed., V.B. 4, p. 574.

17. Cooper, p. 483.

CHAPTER II

THE PERIOD OF CRISES

When Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the office of the presidency on 22 November 1963, the United States' military presence in South Vietnam had surpassed the 15,000 man level.[1] During the funeral arrangements and formal state burial procedures for President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the deceased executive, Johnson faced the task of determining what the United States' policy should be in Vietnam. However, before I discuss his initial decision in that area, a comment regarding the nature and character of President Johnson is necessary.

Michael Davie, the editor in 1965 of the London Observer described President Johnson as:

> Purely and aggressively American--the first uninhibited product of the American frontier since Andrew Jackson. He is no idealist, yet he is a man of undoubted compassion. He distrusts bankers but uses them. He is suspicious of east coast intellectuals yet McGeorge Bundy of Harvard is one of his right-hand men.[2]

To a great extent, the above description aptly characterizes Johnson, but, even more important, he was a mover and a doer. He liked to set an objective. Then, he relished acting quickly and positively to achieve the objective. His roots were deeply set in the soil of frontier America. He had a profound and abiding faith in the American way, democracy and freedom. Finally, he possessed a strong distaste for and distrust of

communism in any form. Such was the make-up of the man, who, more than any other, was the central personality of the period. Unquestionably, he was influenced by advice from various individual members of the government and other pressure groups; however, in the end, he alone made the decisions which created a new policy or continued an old policy in Vietnam.

Initially, President Johnson was guided and assisted by the results of a top level conference on Vietnam which had been convened in Honolulu on 20 November 1963, just two days prior to Kennedy's assassination. This was a unique all-agency meeting of some forty to sixty government officials. President Kennedy had directed that the principles assemble in order to complete a "full-scale review" of United States policy in Southeast Asia following the Diem coup.[3] The participants included: Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) John McCone, Ambassador to Vietnam Henry C. Lodge, and numerous top military commanders in Vietnam and the Pacific.[4]

The aftermath of this conference was NSAM #273 which Johnson approved on 26 November 1963 and stated, in part:

> It remains the central objective of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported communist conspiracy. The test of all United States decisions and actions in this area should be the effectiveness of their contribution to this purpose.[5]

The NSAM further stated:

> It is a major interest of the United States government that the present provisional government of South Vietnam should be assisted in consolidating itself in holding and developing increased public support.[6]

In addition, the document authorized planning for covert operations, graduated in intensity, which could, if necessary, be applied against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). These plans eventually become the basis for the famous 34A operations.[7]

President Johnson approved this document on his fourth full day in office. This action was, in fact, one of the most significant of his entire tenure. He elected to continue the policy of Kennedy. He defined his objective as being the eradication of communist influence from South Vietnam and he opted to bolster a shaky but pro-United States government in South Vietnam. He approved the preparation of plans that could lead to an even greater involvement by the United States. In short, he established his objective as containment and he indicated that he was prepared to go to great lengths to achieve that objective.

In keeping with this position and as a further verification of the frontier image, as described by Davie above, President Johnson told Ambassador Lodge shortly after assuming office: "I'm not going to go down in history as the first American President who lost a war."[8] He meant what he said!

How were the United States' intentions perceived by the North Vietnamese? This is an important question which is

difficult to document due to the lack of primary source information; however, a good indication of their perception can be obtained from the pages of the Peking Review. For example, regarding the Honolulu conference, the Peking Review reported:

> These latest developments have clarified the south Vietnamese situation. United States imperialism is losing the war but is ready to gamble still more stakes. Under such conditions no illusions can be entertained about its changing its course.[9]

This is an extremely significant statement. If China understood the intentions of the United States, then so did North Vietnam. Both China and North Vietnam recognized that the United States was committed to a foreign policy which supported a pro-United States, non-communist government in South Vietnam. They also realized that the United States was prepared to become even more fully committed.

As 1963 drew to a close, the Commander-in-Chief of the United States' forces in the Pacific (CINCPAC), in accordance with the decisions of NSAM #273, submitted Operations Plan (OPLAN) #34A to Washington. This was a program designed to apply increasing pressure by the South Vietnamese (GVN) forces on North Vietnam, in order to force the North Vietnamese to cease its aggressive policy against South Vietnam. The plan included numerous overt as well as covert operations, such as "commando type coastal raids," and was to be carried out with United States military advisory assistance.[10] The military was thus prepared to execute operations in support of United States' foreign policy.

By the beginning of 1964, the situation in Vietnam looked bleak, but not critical. However, as the year progressed the picture darkened even more. Political turmoil in South Vietnam continued. Both the United States and North Vietnam escalated their participation in the war. Two significant peace initiatives failed. President Johnson strengthened the United States' position and its resolve. Several significant conferences were convened to seek a solution. The President, himself, faced the problem of running for election in the midst of a growing Asian involvement. In short, it was a period of immense crisis.

During the month of January alone, three consequential events occurred. First, President Johnson in mid-month approved the above referenced OPLAN #34-A as a program of:

> . . . progressively escalating pressure . . . to inflict increasing pressure upon North Vietnam and to create pressures which may convince the North Vietnamese leadership, in its own self interest, to desist from its aggressive policies.[11]

This was a clear indication of increasing resolve and commitment.

Then, on 22 January General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, forwarded a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense which stated:

> 1. National Security Action Memorandum #273 makes clear the resolve of the President to insure victory over the externally directed and supported communist insurgency in South Vietnam. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 6. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are convinced that in keeping with the guidance in NSAM #273, the United States must make plain to the enemy our determination to see the Vietnam campaign through to a favorable

> conclusion. To do this, we must prepare for whatever level of activity may be required and being prepared, must then proceed to take actions as necessary to achieve our purposes surely and promptly. . . .[12]

Quite obviously then, the American military perceived the objective in South Vietnam to be the defeat of communism and the maintenance of a pro-United States form of government there. South Vietnam was to be retained in the free world camp. Containment was to be continued.

The final event in January was the overthrow of the regime of General Duong Van Minh who had replaced Diem. This coup was the culmination of weeks of political unrest. A group of officers headed by General Nguyen Khanh were disenchanted with the Minh government. They felt that the Minh government had pro-French leanings and might even attempt to neutralize the country in order to halt the war. The Khanh forces moved on the thirtieth of January and replaced Minh with Khanh in a bloodless coup.[13]

This action did not correct the political instability in South Vietnam. It only heightened it. From then until mid-1965, the Vietnamese government was absolutely chaotic with changes every few months. These political uncertainties and the resulting governmental paralysis insured a period of continued crisis. The United States faced an almost impossible problem. It was committed to the preservation of South Vietnam, but there was no stable governmental base in that country. There was no strong, central governing body or agency to which United States support could be directed. This factor of

building stability was the key to the achievement of the United States objective in South Vietnam. Until the central government was stabilized, the United States hopes for success were virtually nil.

In a House Appropriations Committee Hearing in February of 1964, McNamara testified that:

> The survival of an independent government in South Vietnam is so important . . . that I can conceive of no alternative other than to take all necessary measures within our capability to prevent a communist victory.[14]

This was indicative of the Administration's perception of the problem. The preservation of a non-communist government was the objective and the United States was prepared to take the appropriate steps to achieve it. But the development of a stable government was the first, necessary step.

In the following month, pressure by the Viet Cong and governmental instability in South Vietnam continued. The National Security Council met and the President approved a new action memorandum, NSAM #288. It stated in part:

> We seek an independent non-communist South Vietnam. We do not require that it serve as a western base or as a member of a western alliance. South Vietnam must be free, however, to accept outside assistance as required to maintain its security. This assistance should be able to take the form not only of economic and social measures but also police and military help to root out and control insurgent elements.
>
> Unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under communist dominance. . . .[15]

Quite clearly, the over-all objective remained containment. The words and phrases used in the above memorandum were not rhetoric designed to impress a public audience. They were

words and phrases of policy and goals which would be translated into action, if necessary. The objective was to keep communism out of South Vietnam. If this was accomplished, the country would remain pro-United States and the danger to the remainder of Southeast Asia would be eliminated.

Following the approval of NSAM #288 on 17 March, the United States military prepared OPLAN 37-64 as a vehicle to assist in achieving the objectives of the NSC memorandum. This plan called for a three phase operation against the infiltration routes in Cambodia and Laos and specified targets in North Vietnam. In a general outline, the phases were:

Phase I - Air and ground strikes in South Vietnam and hot pursuit into Cambodia and Laos.

Phase II - "Tit for Tat" air strikes in North Vietnam.

Phase III - Increasing air strikes in North Vietnam.

The strikes were designed to be conducted by GVN forces with some assistance by United States aircraft.[16]

While the military prepared plans to support the United States policy objective, the State Department also moved to open a channel of communications with North Vietnam. On 30 April, Secretary of State Dean Rusk visited Ottawa and secured the Canadians' approval to use Blair Seaborn, a new member of the International Control Commission on Indo-China, as an interlocutor between the United States and Hanoi.[17]

Even so, the possibilities of opening discussions appeared remote. Even Senator J. William Fulbright recognized

that fact when, in a speech in March of 1964, entitled, Old Myths and New Realities, he stated:

> . . . the hard fact of the matter is that our bargaining position is at present a weak one; and, until the equation of advantage between the two sides has been substantially altered in our favor, there can be little prospect of a negotiated settlement.[18]

Nevertheless, the United States continued to pursue the Seaborn initiative.

In June of 1964, a kaleidoscope of activity on a world-wide level reflected an increased United States interest and concern over Vietnam. In Honolulu, top United States policy makers including Rusk, McNamara, Taylor, Westmoreland and Lodge, met to formulate plans to improve US-GVN operations and to expand the United States advisory effort.[19] In North Vietnam, Blair Seaborn, acting as an intermediary for the United States, conducted the first peace feeler of the Johnson Administration. The terms included: the withdrawal of North Vietnamese elements from South Vietnam; the cessation of infiltration; a promise by Hanoi to abide by the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962; and, finally, a pledge of United States economic assistance to the region if Hanoi acquiesed. Hanoi rejected the offer.[20]

Finally, in that same month, Washington announced that General Westmoreland would replace General Harkins as the head of MACV and that General Taylor would replace Lodge as Ambassador to Vietnam.[21] Why such a major change in the leadership of the United States country team?

Present primary source material does not provide an adequate answer to this question; however, some reasonable deductions are possible. Unquestionably, Lodge's presidential aspirations played a role in his replacement. The fact remains, however, that Johnson found a new duo to replace an old twosome. The new combination was heavily weighed in the direction of an aggressive military attitude and posture. Johnson thus selected a team from which he could expect to see more results. Taylor, a seasoned intellectual and militarist, was a well-known Cold War warrior who stood for no nonsense and who accomplished difficult tasks. Westmoreland was generally known, in military circles, as an activist who openly and quickly abided by the orders of his superiors. He was not a maverick. He was an achiever. Speculation can thus lead us to the conclusion that Johnson expected this new team to act forcefully and obediently to rapidly achieve the United States' objective in South Vietnam.

The enemy, however, proceeded undaunted and unimpressed by these changes. The Viet Cong by mid-July increased their active strength to approximately 34,000.[22] The North Vietnamese decided to escalate the level of combat action by moving from a guerrilla-type war to large unit formations. In keeping with this decision, they began to infiltrate pure North Vietnamese regular army units into the South.[23]

This activity did not go unnoticed. On 27 July, the United States increased the MACV contingent to approximately 21,000 men.[24] Two days later, MACV announced that the North

Vietnamese had infiltrated over 10,000 personnel into the South during the last five years.[25] The mutual escalation game began to take on substance and form.

In August of 1964 the attacks on the USS Maddox and Turner Joy by North Vietnamese P.T. boats took place in the Gulf of Tonkin. Using routine contingency plans, the United States launched a retaliatory strike of sixty-four planes. Twenty-five North Vietnamese P.T. boats were destroyed and four P.T. boat bases were damaged.[26] Eric Goldman, the intellectual in residence of the Johnson Administration at that time, provided a unique insight into the President's thinking:

> Aides working with LBJ at the time of the decision noted that he had the air of a man who believed only one course of action tenable and was ready merely to discuss the details of implementing it. . . . it was axiomatic in LBJ thinking that respect for the flag must be rigorously maintained and that aggression must be stopped and stopped hard when it first shows itself.[27]

This appears to be an accurate description of an instinctive reaction by the President and it also reinforces the concept of continued containment; however, a deeper insight into the United States policy position is found in a cablegram which Ambassador Taylor forwarded to the White House shortly after the Tonkin incident. Although the message dealt primarily with Taylor's recommended rejection of French President Charles De Gaulles' attempts to reconvene a Geneva-type conference to reach a neutralist settlement of the situation in Vietnam, it also accurately reflected his position regarding United States policy in Vietnam. The cablegram stated in part:

> . . . to rush to the conference table would serve to confirm to the Chicoms that U.S. retaliation for destroyer attacks was a transient phenomenon. . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . morale and will to fight . . . would be undermined by what would look like evidence that U.S. is seeking to take advantage of any slight improvement in non-communist position as excuse for extricating itself from Indo-China via [conference] route. . . .[28]

Thus, not only did Taylor reject the negotiation attempt by De Gaulle, he also made it perfectly clear that the United States commitment was keyed to bolster the "morale and will to fight" of the South Vietnamese. The United States remained committed to the preservation of a non-communist South Vietnam. The United States would not abandon South Vietnam to a Geneva-type conference, which had proven unsuccessful in the past. The United States was prepared to take the necessary steps to improve the fighting position of Saigon.

August of 1964 proved to be a flash-point for all aspects of the Vietnam involvement and the action was not only confined to the first few days. On 6 August, United Nations' Secretary General U-Thant visited President Johnson and left the meeting feeling that the United States was receptive to negotiations over Vietnam.[29] This began yet another effort for a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

On the following day, Congress passed the Southeast Asia Resolution, commonly referred to as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The President used this as the formal justification for continued involvement and escalation in Vietnam.[30] At the same time the military, under orders from Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific, began to

prepare "extensive plans . . . for future punitive or retaliatory strikes to be made in response to any renewed overt acts of aggression."[31] This operation was code named Flaming Dart and was a natural outgrowth of Phase II of OPLAN 37-64, which was mentioned earlier.

In mid-August Blair Seaborn, again acting as an intermediary between Washington and Hanoi, presented a note to Pham Van Dong, the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister. The message contained: an explanation of United States actions in the Gulf of Tonkin incident; a threat that "if the DRV persists in its present course [with regard to South Vietnam] it can expect to continue to suffer the consequences"; a hint that if they confined their activities within their own borders they could expect to accrue "economic and other benefits"; and finally, a statement that "the United States policy in South Vietnam is to preserve the integrity of that state's territory."[32] The North Vietnamese did not react favorably to this note and that ended the Seaborn initiative.

The note itself is worthy of further comment. It demonstrated a stiffened resolve on the part of the United States government. It contained a clear threat of reprisal if Hanoi continued its activity and a veiled promise of reward if it ceased. Viewed over-all, it demonstrated the fact that United States policy remained the support of a non-communist South Vietnam and the containment of communism north of the seventeenth parallel.

August ended with a renewal of political unrest in Saigon. The Khanh government was overthrown and replaced by a triumvirate of Generals Khan, Minh and Khiem. This was the first of seven major changes in government which Saigon experienced during the remainder of that year.[33] Against that backdrop of frustrating instability, the deadly game of escalation and the fruitless gestures of diplomacy continued.

Meanwhile, on the diplomatic front from September through December of 1964, the United Nations' Secretary General pursued the negotiation attempt which he had discussed earlier with the President. The basic thrust of his effort was the arrangement of a meeting through Moscow between the United States Ambassador to Russia and the North Vietnamese Counsel General. The proposed location of the meeting was Rangoon.[34]

Regarding this initiative, Robert McCloskey, a State Department spokesman, commented in November 1965 that the United States had been cold to the effort because, "We did not believe North Vietnam was prepared for serious talks."[35] Secretary of Defense McNamara commented in a news conference on the twenty-sixth of that same month, that in the autumn of 1964 it was evident that "beyond a peradventure of doubt that Hanoi was not prepared to discuss peace in Southeast Asia based upon the agreements of 1954 and 1962 and looking toward the lifting of aggression against South Vietnam."[36]

Referring to this same initiative, Adlai Stevenson, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, stated in an interview with Eric Sevareid that:

> He [McNamara] said the South Vietnamese government would have to be informed and this would have a demoralizing effect on them . . . that government was shaky enough as it was.[37]

An analysis of the United States attitude toward the initiative must also include the reiterated fact that Johnson was running for election during that period. Any attempt to push South Vietnam to the peace table when that government was so weak and disorganized would only have provided additional support for the President's militaristic opponent, Barry Goldwater. Johnson apparently recognized this fact and acted accordingly.

It can thus be readily deduced that the United States was not anxious to move to a conference table unless the internal situation in South Vietnam was strengthened and the North Vietnamese ceased their support of the insurgency. At that time, neither prerequisite was possible.

But what was the North Vietnamese position toward negotiations? The answer to that question is found in the published resolutions of an International Conference held in Hanoi on 29 November 1964. Among other requirements, the North Vietnamese demanded:

> The U.S. Government must put an immediate end to its aggressive war in south Vietnam, withdraw all U.S. troops, military personnel and weapons from south Vietnam, remove all U.S. military bases in south Vietnam and let the south Vietnamese people settle their own affairs according to the Programme [sic] of the south Vietnam National Front for Liberation.[38]

These were the exact requirements that North Vietnam would demand time and time again through 1968; however, to have

withdrawn United States forces at that time and to have allowed the NLF to participate in the settlement of the South Vietnamese political affairs would have meant the guaranteed loss of South Vietnam. The United States policy makers recognized this fact, and, in keeping with the national policy objective of containment, they ignored the North's demands.

Meanwhile, the political turmoil in Saigon demanded corrective action. If the United States could not directly influence this situation, it could at least provide some sort of screen behind which the Vietnamese could stabilize their government themselves. In this vein, Johnson approved on 10 September NSAM #314 which stated that, ". . . the first order of business at present is to take action which will help to strengthen the fabric of the government of South Vietnam."[39] This document also authorized the resumption of patrols by United States ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. These patrols had been suspended since the incident of 4 August.[40]

Four days after these patrols resumed, the destroyers Morton and Edwards fired on unidentified attackers in a little known, third Gulf of Tonkin incident. The President ordered the immediate termination of these patrols.[41] This decision was probably based as much on the sensitive nature of the impending general elections in the United States as on anything else. No source is available to confirm or deny this analysis; however, the action was certainly in keeping with the similar posture that he was maintaining regarding negotiations.

Two weeks before the United States presidential election, Ambassador Taylor cabled Washington:

> A recent analysis suggests that if the present rate of infiltration is maintained the annual figure for 1964 will be of the order of 10,000. . . . We are finding more and more "bona fide" North Vietnamese soldiers among the infiltrators. I am sure that we must soon adopt new and drastic methods to reduce and eventually end such infiltration if we are ever to succeed in South Vietnam.[42]

There was no immediate reaction from the White House. The cable carried an obvious appeal for greater involvement in order to achieve the United States objective in Vietnam. Again, one can logically surmise that a decision was delayed until the election was completed.

On 1 November, only three days before the election, the Viet Cong staged a highly successful attack on the United States base at Bien Hoa. Five United States servicemen were killed, seventy-six wounded, six B-57's destroyed and twenty-one other B-57's damaged.[43] Again, Johnson did not react.

On the day following his election, he did act. He was then a President in his own right and not merely a substitute. He ordered the formation of a special National Security Council Working Group on South Vietnam with the mission of formulating a more effective and feasible solution to the problem.[44]

This group worked throughout the month with the backdrop of continued governmental instability in South Vietnam. They finally developed three, alphabetically-designated options which they deliberated at great length.

Under Option A, the United States would continue its then present policy of military and economic assistance to South Vietnam which included reprisal actions "for any recurrence of V.C. spectaculars such as Bien Hoa." Under Option B, the United States would institute a "systematic program of military pressure against the North with increasing pressure actions to be continued at a fairly rapid pace and without interruption until we achieve our present stated objectives." Under Option C, the United States would intensify communications with Hanoi and at the same time institute a program of graduated and deliberate military pressure on the North.[45] It is noteworthy that under each of the options a negotiated settlement was emphasized as the ultimate outcome.[46]

During the debate over the relative merit of each option, a clear separation of opinion emerged. George Ball from the State Department favored Option "A." General Wheeler (CJCS) and John McCone (CIA) favored Option "B." The adherents for Option "C" included: John McNaughton and Robert McNamara from the Department of Defense; Dean Rusk and William Bundy from the State Department; and McGeorge Bundy from the White House Staff.[47] Ambassador Taylor preferred a high order of Option "A" or a low order of Option "C."[48] This clearly revealed the dovish, hawkish or moderate position of each of the participants.

By the twenty-ninth of November, the principals agreed on the recommendation of a course of action which reflected Option "A" and the lowest order of actions under Option "C."

This recommendation included a thirty day Phase I, which continued the current United States' actions in Vietnam and a two to six months Phase II in which military pressures against the North gradually and systematically increased. The Phase II program included: the aerial bombardment of the infiltration routes in Laos and the southern portion of North Vietnam; the aerial mining of the ports in the North; and, a United States naval blockadge of the North. The stated United States objectives were:

> 1. Get Hanoi and North Vietnam (DRV) support and direction removed from South Vietnam. . . .
>
> 2. Re-establish an independent and secure South Vietnam with appropriate safeguards. . . .
>
> 3. Maintain the security of other non-communist nations in Southeast Asia. . . .[49]

Quite obviously then, containment remained the central objective and stability in South Vietnam was imperative to the issue.

The President, on 1 December 1964, approved the NSC recommendation with some changes. The most significant modification was his decision to implement only Phase I and to retain the decision to implement Phase II until an unspecified future date.[50] His decision reflected a course of least possible additional commitment. It was really a continuation of past policies. Containment prevailed.

Decisions must be translated into action. On December fourteenth Johnson approved Operation Barrel Roll which consisted of United States and GVN armed, aerial-reconnaissance

missions against the infiltration routes in Laos.[51] The intent was to apply limited pressures against North Vietnam, to keep them somewhat off balance and to provide some breathing room for the government in the South.

Viewed in retrospect, the operation was unsuccessful. Five days later in South Vietnam, General Khanh, with support from a group of young turk generals, attempted to purge the tottering, civilian government of Tran Van Huong.[52] Again, the Saigon leadership was disorganized and thrown into disarray.

The Viet Cong moved to antagonize and disrupt even more the chaotic situation in the South. On Christmas Eve they detonated a bomb in the United States Bachelor Officers Quarters in Saigon which resulted in over forty-five casualties.[53] During this same time frame, the North Vietnamese began to infiltrate organized units, not just fillers to the South.[54] These units, when joined with an increasing Viet Cong force, formed a formidable opponent. The Viet Cong, themselves, had advanced far enough militarily to form their own First Division.[55] It took no brilliant analyst to predict that the Viet Cong, reinforced by the North Vietnamese, were preparing to move from small guerrilla operations to large mobile formations. This was the classic progression in the stages of a successful insurgency.

As the year ended, the United States' strength in Vietnam had increased to 23,000; however, the North Vietnamese had demonstrated a remarkable capability for infiltrating over 12,000 men annually.[56]

The year of 1964 had been a period of major crises. Intense political instability in Saigon served only as a springboard for heightened Viet Cong activity and North Vietnamese support. Major diplomatic initiatives failed due to a determined resolve on the part of the principal antagonists. Major United States' policy decisions reflected a continuance of the policy of containment with an accompanying strategy of graduated pressure and retaliatory response. Total commitment was not a reality then; however, it was imminent.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II - THE PERIOD OF CRISES

1. Harrison E. Salisbury, Behind the Lines--Hanoi (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), p. 3.

2. Geyelin, p. 21.

3. USG ed., IV. B. 4, p. 24.

4. Lyndon B. Johnson, The Vantage Point (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 62.

5. Noam Chomsley and Howard Zinn, The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, Vol. V (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 214. (Hereafter referenced as Gravel V.)

6. Senator Mike Gravel, compiler and editor, The Pentagon Papers, Vol. III (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 19. (Hereafter the Gravel edition of the Pentagon Papers will be referenced as Gravel, followed by the appropriate volume and page number.)

7. USG ed., IV. C. 2. a, pp. 1-2.

8. Hugh Sidey, A Very Personal Presidency (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1968), p. 211.

9. Peking Review, December 6, 1963, p. 29.

10. Gravel III, pp. 151-52.

11. Gravel III, p. 152.

12. Neil Sheehan, et al., The Pentagon Papers, New York Times edition (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1971), pp. 274-75. (Hereafter referenced as NYT ed.)

13. Gravel II, pp. 308-09. Johnson, p. 64.

14. Gravel V, p. 218.

15. Gravel III, pp. 50-51, 499-500.

16. Gravel III, pp. 287-88.

17. Gravel III, p. 163.

18. Gravel III, p. 287.

19. Gravel II, pp. 323-25.

20. Johnson, p. 67. Gravel III, p. 292.

21. Johnson, p. 44. Cooper, p. 485. Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1969), p. 22.

22. Gravel II, p. 11.

23. Johnson, p. 67.

24. Cooper, p. 485.

25. Franc Schurman, et al., The Politics of Escalation in Vietnam (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 47.

26. Eric Goldman, The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 183. Johnson, p. 117. Gravel III, p. 186.

27. Goldman, p. 176.

28. Gravel III, pp. 188-89.

29. Geyelin, p. 202.

30. Louis Heren, No Hail, No Farewell (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), p. 133. Goldman, p. 178.

31. Heren, p. 71.

32. Gravel III, pp. 521-22.

33. Gravel II, p. 335. Cooper, pp. 485-86.

34. Geyelin, p. 207.

35. USG ed., VI. A., pp. 1-2.

36. USG ed., VI. A., pp. 1-2.

37. Eric Sevareid, "The Final Troubled Hours of Adlai Stevenson," Look, November 30, 1965, p. 84.

38. Peking Review, December 11, 1964, p. 16.

39. Gravel II, p. 338.

40. These patrols were code worded "DESOTO" patrols if the U.S. participated and "34A" patrols if only GVN participated. Gravel III, p. 88.

41. Gravel III, p. 133.

42. Gravel II, p. 584.

43. Geyelin, pp. 198-99. Johnson, p. 121. Gravel III, p. 288.

44. Gravel III, p. 210.

45. Gravel III, p. 659.

46. Gravel III, p. 225.

47. Gravel III, p. 239.

48. Gravel III, p. 243.

49. Gravel III, p. 678.

50. Gravel III, p. 251.

51. Gravel III, pp. 92, 290.

52. Gravel II, p. 346. Gravel III, p. 137.

53. Johnson, p. 212. Geyelin, p. 217.

54. Admiral U. S. G. Sharp and General William C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 95. (Hereafter referenced as Westmoreland Report.) Hammond, p. 221. Johnson, p. 121.

55. Johnson, p. 67.

56. Westmoreland Report, p. 95. Cooper, p. 487. Geyelin, p. 184.

CHAPTER III

THE FULL COMMITMENT

The period of political and military crises in Vietnam which commenced in 1964, continued through the first six months of 1965. During that same period, the United States moved from a phase of policy planning and re-affirmation to one of full military commitment. This military commitment was merely the tool to achieve the over-all national objective of containment.

In a memorandum on 6 January, William Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, stated to Dean Rusk:

> . . . the situation in Vietnam is now more likely to come apart more rapidly than we had anticipated in November. . . .
>
> Introduction of limited U.S. ground forces into the northern area of South Vietnam still has great appeal to many of us, concurrently with the first air strikes into DRV. It would have a real stiffening effect in Saigon and a strong signal effect in Hanoi.[1]

At approximately the same time, John McNaughton, an Assistant Secretary of Defense, forwarded a memorandum to Robert McNamara which stated that the United States "stakes in South Vietnam" were to buffer "real estate near Thailand and Malaysia" and to maintain "our reputation."[2]

Taken together these notes provide a keen insight into the Administration's perceptions regarding Vietnam. The internal situation was disintegrating within that country. Increased U.S. assistance appeared necessary to steady the country. Finally, the United States had to act if it were to continue to contain communism and retain the free world's respect as a defender of western freedom.

Saigon proved to be less than responsive to the obvious demand for political stability. On 27 January, General Khanh repeated his performance of the previous year and overthrew the civilian regime of Premier Tran Van Huong.[3] In response to this newest coup, John McNaughton sent yet another memorandum to his superior:

> U.S. Objective in SVN is not "to help a friend" but to contain China. Loss in SVN would merely move the conflict to Malaysia or Thailand.
> . . . . . .
> The three options:
>
> (a) Strike the DRV.
>
> (b) Negotiate; or
>
> (c) Keep plugging.
>
> Negotiation . . . is no way to improve the actual situation; it might serve to diffuse and confuse to some extent the psychological impact of loss. . . . It is essential that we keep plugging in SVN in any event . . . start re-educating U.S. public that SEA confrontation will last years.[4]

It is recognized that the above quotation as well as the two which preceded it, do not reflect the same certainty of foreign policy determination as do NSAM objective paragraphs or a presidential action memorandum; however, they did reflect

the thinking of policy planners in the Johnson Administration. They reflected the attitudes which those people retained toward the problems at hand, and, in general, they were a mirror of the ultimate objective which the United States was attempting to achieve. In addition, they provided an excellent indication of future actions.

In the case of the immediately preceding quotation, it clearly indicated that the objective remained containment and that the then present United States activity in South Vietnam should be continued and possibly expanded. It also reflected a rather negative attitude toward negotiations. But what was going on in the area of diplomacy at that time?

United Nations' Secretary General U-Thant continued to pursue his attempt to open negotiations. In mid-January he secured the Burmese approval to use Rangoon as a meeting place between the principal antagonists. He continued to press United States officials for a positive reaction to his efforts; however, he received nothing more than a lukewarm response. Finally, at the end of January Adlai Stevenson, the United States' Ambassador to the United Nations, informed U-Thant that the United States had to proceed slowly due to the shaky nature of the Saigon government which could not really stand the strain of negotiations at that time. Undaunted, U-Thant then forwarded a letter recommending negotiations to the Hanoi government. The North Vietnamese refusal did not arrive until the end of February.[5]

This reply formally terminated the U-Thant effort which had commenced back in August of 1964; however, military events in January and February contributed significantly to the hardening of positions by both Washington and Hanoi. Needless to say, persistant fluctuations within the Vietnamese government also strongly influenced the United States' position. In short, mutual escalation and governmental unsteadiness served repeatedly to thwart diplomatic initiatives.

In January, General Westmoreland reported that the North Vietnamese had moved elements of three regular army regiments into Vietnam. This increased the total estimated North Vietnamese infiltration figure to over 19,000, and they were proceeding at a rate of 1,000 men per month.[6] In response, the Koreans deployed a force of 2,000 at the request of the United States to assist the South Vietnamese, and President Johnson approved Westmoreland's request to use United States jets in support of Vietnamese ground units.[7]

On 6 February, Soviet Premier Alexi Kosygin arrived in Hanoi for a state visit.[8] The Viet Cong heralded his arrival on the following day by attacking the United States' base at Pleiku and inflicting 134 casualties. The United States immediately retaliated by conducting air strikes with forty-nine Skyraiders and Crusaders on Dong Hoi, 160 miles above the seventeenth parallel.[9]

While these strikes were in accordance with both the plans that the United States' military had been preparing for a year and with the President's 1 December 1964 approval of

the NSC policy review, they deserve further comment. This action was a flash-point in the United States' involvement in Vietnam. It differed greatly from the Gulf of Tonkin reprisal action in that it was obviously intended to be linked to the expansion of aggression by the North Vietnamese. It also appears to have been a clear signal for a change of ground rules on the conflict in the South.

What was the public and private attitude of the United States government at that time? Adlai Stevenson in a letter to U-Thant explained the United States objective as:

> . . . to arrest reinforcement of the Viet Cong by infiltration from North Vietnam, to bolster the morale of South Vietnam and support their war effort to resist systematic and continuing aggression, to help bring about a negotiated settlement to the conflict.[10]

His verbage was clear. When viewed in light of the current situation, it added up to continued containment.

McGeorge Bundy, the President's National Security Affairs Advisor, in a memorandum to Johnson at the same time stated:

> The situation in Vietnam is deteriorating and without U.S. action defeat appears inevitable--probably not in a matter of weeks or perhaps some months, but within the next year or so. . . .
>
> The prospect in Vietnam is grim. The energy and persistence of the Viet Cong are astonishing.
>
> There is one grave weakness in our posture in Vietnam which is within our own capability to fix--and that is the widespread belief that we do not have the will and force and patience and determination to take the necessary action and stay the course. . . .
>
> We believe that the best available way of measuring our chance of success in Vietnam is the development and execution of a policy of sustained reprisal against

> North Vietnam--a policy in which air and naval action against the North is justified by and related to the whole V.C. campaign of violence and terror in the South.[11]

He thus strongly argued for the movement from a more tit-for-tat reprisal policy to a sustained reprisal program. He was, in fact, arguing for the rapid movement to Phase II of the NSC policy which had been argued in November in Washington and then approved only in part by the President. He played on such terms as "inevitable defeat," "grim prospects," and the appearance of the lack of "will and force and patience and determination" on the part of the United States.

How would the President react to such terms in such a situation? Philip Geyelin, the Wall Street Journal reporter, characterized the President's attitude toward such a situation in these words:

> Johnson doesn't believe that relations between nations turn on minor understandings, on cultural differences, or on what you say in speeches or formal diplomatic exchanges. He thinks that relations turn on fundamentals, on what you do and more important, what your motives are thought to be, whether people think you have a tough minded view of your own interests.[12]

In this particular case, Geyelin's analysis was accurate for in less than a month, on 2 March, President Johnson authorized the initiation of a systematic and sustained aerial bombing campaign, code named Rolling Thunder, to replace the reprisal campaign, code named Flaming Dart. Four days later he authorized the landing of two Marine battalions at Da Nang to provide security for the important United States airbase located there.[13]

While the United States moved into a phase of full air involvement and token ground commitment, other meaningful actions had taken place in Moscow, London, Peking, Saigon and on the battlefields of South Vietnam. Within the deadly confines of the power vacuum in Saigon, Dr. Phan Huy Quat formed yet another government in mid-February and General Khanh found himself again on the way out.[14] The Saigon government continued its turbulent nature and almost defied efforts to steady it.

The Chinese government in Peking seized the opportunity to capitalize on the initiation of the United States' air strikes in February with an official statement which proclaimed:

> The U.S. imperialists will never succeed in their attempt to use air strikes against north Vietnam as a means to frighten the south Vietnamese people into not offending the U.S. aggressor.[15]

This was a typical propaganda blast but it did reflect their perception of North and South Vietnam as being one nation. Their over-all tone and the use of the lower case in north and south appears to substantiate that analysis. Then, in a stronger statement on 29 March, Chou En Lai, the Chinese Premier, in an address in Tirana, Albania stated:

> The Chinese people . . . will give the south Vietnamese people all necessary material assistance including weapons and all other war materials. We are also prepared to send our personnel to fight alongside with the south Vietnamese people whenever they deem it necessary.[16]

This was an open challenge. It threatened the employment of a Chinese volunteer force similar to that used in Korea. It concentrated on the struggle in South Vietnam and not the bombing in the North. It revealed their recognition that the

United States was focusing its actions on the South and suggested in a negative fashion that they recognized that the United States had no designs on or yearnings for a ground action in the North. Indirectly, it acknowledged that the United States' actions in South Vietnam were similar to those in South Korea. The Chinese perceptions were correct.

Meanwhile, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese used the first quarter of 1965 to intensify and enhance their own position through covert and overt actions. In February, the Viet Cong blew up a United States barracks in Qui Nhan inflicting forty-four casualties.[17] In March they detonated a bomb outside the United States Embassy in Saigon.[18] The estimated Viet Cong strength increased to 37,000 regulars and 100,000 irregulars, which was a 33 percent increase over 1964. The combined VC-NVA combat maneuver battalion total reached 72 as opposed to 133 for the South Vietnamese.[19] On the surface, a 2:1 ratio would appear to greatly favor the southern forces; however, this was not true. The Saigon troops were spread over vast areas performing static defense missions. Their battalion-ratio superiority merely enabled them to protect the large populated areas. They lacked the required 10:1 ratio considered necessary to both protect the population and to ferret out a combined guerrilla-main force aggressor in its protected base areas. In addition, the political circus in Saigon served only to enhance the mobility and freedom of action of the VC-NVA forces. In short, the aggressor was on the offensive and the defender was barely able to hold on.

In March, the Russians delivered to Hanoi their first shipment of surface-to-air missiles in response to the stepped up air action by the United States. The Chinese provided seventy MIG aircraft. The North Vietnamese radar system was improved.[20] Obviously the North Vietnamese prepared for a long war.

On the diplomatic level, while the U-Thant effort waned, the British sought another solution to the Southeast Asian problem. Lord Harlech, the British Ambassador in Washington, approached Dean Rusk and informed him on 7 February that the Soviet Foreign Office appeared receptive to a proposal to convene a meeting of the participants of the 1954 Geneva Conference with the "UK-USSR" as co-chairmen. The purpose would be to elicit the participants' views on the Vietnamese situation and the possible terms of a peaceful settlement. Two weeks later, Rusk informed Lord Harlech that the United States agreed to the British proposal.[21]

A State Department memorandum prepared by William P. Bundy on 18 February indicated the United States intentions and diplomatic posture.

> That the U.S. itself take no initiative for talks but would agree to cooperate in consultations--not a conference--undertaken by the UK and USSR as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference. As an opening move the British would request an expression of our views, and we would use the occasion to spell out our position fully, including our purposes and what we regard as essential to the restoration of peace. We would further present our case against the DRV in the form of a long written document to be sent to the President of the United Nations Security Council and to be circulated to members of the U.N.[22]

It appeared that what the United States really wanted to do was to publicly air the nation's purpose and present a weighty case against North Vietnam. The UK-USSR gambit would then have served as a vehicle to openly express a hardened United States position.

The British proposal dragged-on for approximately a month. Then on 16 March Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko informed British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart that the "United States would have to deal directly with Hanoi on the Vietnam situation."[23]

Why did the United States maintain such a hard-line position regarding negotiations? The answer is not simple; however, an analysis of the situation does provide a reasonable answer. In December of 1964 and then again in February 1965, the North Vietnamese demanded the withdrawal of United States forces.[24] The NLF, in a broadcast in March of 1965, reiterated that the withdrawal of United States forces was as a pre-condition to negotiations.[25] Within South Vietnam, the combined NVA-VC forces controlled more than fifty percent of the countryside. They could see the Saigon government literally crumbling before their eyes. The balance of power was in the hands of the aggressor, so that if the United States had gone to the negotiating table, it would have had no reasonable bargaining basis. To have withdrawn United States' support would have meant the unquestionable loss of South Vietnam to communism. The United States had to play for time. Time to stabilize the South Vietnamese government. Time to bolster the South's

fighting ability and potential. Time to regain the balance of power. Time to prepare the American public for the introduction of United States troops in a combat role, if necessary.

This time could be obtained by presenting a hard-line, negotiating position and by using air interdiction as a counter to the North's infiltration. This time was necessary to retain South Vietnam within the free world countries. In short, it appears that time was the key to containment during the first three months of 1965.

During the second quarter of 1965, a torrent of public and private diplomatic activity occurred. In response to an invitation by Marshal Josip Tito, seventeen non-aligned nations met on 1 April in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. They issued an open appeal for a peaceful solution to the Vietnamese situation through negotiations without pre-conditions. The United States, in a quiet diplomatic note, welcomed this request and expressed particular pleasure with the phrase "negotiations without pre-conditions."[26]

To emphasize the sincerity of that reply, President Johnson presented a major policy speech on Vietnam at Johns Hopkins University on 7 April 1965. In it, he stated:

> There are those who wonder why we have a responsibility there. We have it there for the same reason that we have a responsibility for the defense of Europe. World War II was fought in both Europe and Asia and when it ended we found ourselves with continued responsibility for the defense of freedom.
>
> Our objective is the independence of South Vietnam and its freedom from attack. . . .[27]

This was a direct allusion to the post-World War II containment policy and a transference of that policy to Vietnam. He then went on to say that the United States was prepared for and open to "unconditional discussions."[28] What he did not say was that the United States would cease its bombing of North Vietnam or its support of South Vietnam, for that would have led to the certain loss of that nation. The United States was open to negotiations but it maintained a hard-line position. This action was in consonance with the policy of containment.

Hanoi countered the President's speech on the following day by airing a Four-Point program for negotiations which called for: the withdrawal of all United States forces; the eventual reunion of North and South; the settlement of the South's political situation in accordance with the dictates of the National Liberation Front; and, finally, the non-interference of all third countries.[29] Hanoi reiterated its position in a North Vietnamese News Agency press release on 22 April 1965, which stated:

> . . . the four points laid down by Pham Van Dong on 8 April constitute "the basis for the soundest political settlement of the Vietnam problem. If this basis is recognized, favorable conditions will be created for the peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem."[30]

The upshot was that the North flatly rejected both Belgrade's and Washington's call for negotiations without pre-conditions.

The President acted to further test the resolve of Hanoi, when, on 12 May, he ordered a pause in the bombing. Under the code name Mayflower, messages were delivered by the American Ambassador to the North Vietnamese representative in

Moscow and by the British Consul General to the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister in Hanoi. The notes stated that a bombing halt had commenced, would continue into the following week and that the United States looked to Hanoi to reciprocate by "significant reductions in armed actions."[31]

The President revealed his full purpose in a cablegram to Ambassador Taylor in Saigon:

> My plan is not to announce this brief pause, but simply to call it privately to the attention of Moscow and Hanoi . . . and tell them that we shall be watching to see whether they respond in any way.
>
> . . . My purpose in this plan is to begin to clear the path either toward restoration of peace or toward increased military action, depending on the reaction of the communists. We have amply demonstrated our determination and commitment in the last two months and I now wish to gain some flexibility.[32]

Johnson used the bombing pause as a further test of the North Vietnamese position. If they failed to react favorably, then he was obviously considering moving the nation into a full commitment in South Vietnam. Although undocumented, it is apparent that he must also have recognized that he could use their rejection as a propaganda device against them.

Hanoi replied to Johnson's attempt to open negotiations by returning both notes unopened on 18 May. Johnson responded by ordering an immediate resumption of the bombing.[33]

The intent and resolve of the North Vietnamese was clear. They further verified their position at the end of May when Pham Van Dong informed Blair Seaborn, the ICC representative in Hanoi, that the recognition of the North's Four Points and the withdrawal of United States forces were absolute

pre-conditions to talks.[34] The leaders of the North were evidently prepared for both the bombing of their own land and a continuation of the war in the South. What had the United States done to enhance the possibility for victory?

On April first, the same date as the Belgrade appeal, a White House meeting was convened to discuss further actions in Vietnam. Following the meeting, the President approved the movement of two additional Marine battalions and one Marine air wing to Da Nang and an increase of 20,000 support forces.[35]

Johnson revealed his perception of the situation at that time in these words:

> What we saw taking place rapidly was a DJAKARTA-HANOI-PEKING-PYONGYANG axis, with Cambodia probably to be brought in as a junior partner and Laos to be merely absorbed by the North Vietnamese and Chinese.[36]

To him and to the nation's policy planners, communism was on the move. Vietnam was a testing ground, as were Greece and Turkey in 1947, Korea in 1950 and Cuba in 1962. Communism had to be stopped and contained, and there was no substitute for active United States' involvement.

In mid-April, Westmoreland, Taylor and McNamara met in Honolulu for a strategy review. They agreed to recommend the leveling-off of the bombing in the North in favor of the application of greater ground pressure in the South in order to "break the will of the DRV/VC by denying them victory."[37] Johnson translated this strategy into action by ordering the 173d Airborne Brigade and the 3d Marine Brigade to Vietnam in late April.[38]

On 7 May 1965, Johnson requested and received $700 million in additional appropriations for use in Vietnam.[39] This must be interpreted as a Congressional approval of the President's actions, policy and objective.

At approximately the same time, President Johnson held a conversation with Amintore Fanfani, the Italian Foreign Minister. The President encouraged the Ambassador to help the United States seek a peaceful settlement in Vietnam.[40] Johnson must have still been stinging from Hanoi's rejection of his Baltimore speech; however, he retained the political sense to balance further military commitment with yet another peace initiative.

In the face of the military ground escalation by the United States, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese boldly launched a summer offensive. They achieved unprecedented successes throughout the country with major victories in Phuoc Long, Quang Ngai and Dong Xoai. Hanoi moved the entire 325th NVA Division into the Highlands and the 304th Division into the panhandle.[41] These actions precipitated a real fear in Saigon of the loss of major areas in the northern section of the country.

Under such selective and effective pressure the inevitable occurred. The Quat government was overthrown by a group of young turk generals. On 12 June, General Nguyen Cao Ky was apointed Premier and General Nguyen Van Thieu was named as the Chief of State.[42]

Saigon had struggled, stumbled and limped along since the early fall of 1964 under various types of civilian-headed governments; however, all had failed. Reeling under the brunt of recent communist military victories and an increasing political tension within the country, the group of military fire-brands sought to stabilize the nation by a strong military control of the government.

There is no hard evidence that the United States was actively involved in the latest political move in Saigon; however, shortly after the coup, Westmoreland for the first time received permission both to employ B-52 strikes in South Vietnam and to use United States forces "in any situation . . . when in COMUSMACV's judgment their use is necessary to strengthen the relative position of GVN forces."[43] In addition, the JCS advised Westmoreland that he would receive a total of forty-four battalions so that he could begin to "establish a favorable balance of power by the end of the year."[44] The United States appeared ready to back the newest Saigon government with a larger degree of force than it had in the past.

July of 1965 was yet another of those critical months in decision making. The President faced the problem of deciding whether to terminate, reduce or expand this country's involvement in Vietnam. The principal arguments for alternative courses of action were found in Presidential Memorandums prepared by George Ball and Dean Rusk. Both, interestingly enough, were dated 1 July.

Ball recommended that the United States "seek a compromise settlement which achieves less than our stated objectives and thus cut our losses while we still have the freedom of maneuver to do so."[45] He then went on to urge no further troop deployments, a restriction of the United States' ground combat role, a continuance of bombing in the North but the avoidance of the Hanoi-Haiphong areas and a serious diplomatic effort based on a guarantee of self-determination.[46] In summary, he argued for no further escalation combined with a major diplomatic effort.

Dean Rusk countered Ball's memorandum in these words:

> The central objective of the United States in South Vietnam must be to insure that NVN not succeed in taking over or determining the future of SVN by force. . . . The integrity of the U.S. commitment is the principal pillar of peace throughout the world. If that commitment becomes unreliable, the communist world would draw conclusions that would lead to our ruin and almost certainly a catastrophic war. So long as the South Vietnamese are prepared to fight for themselves we cannot abandon them without disaster to peace and to our interests throughout the world.[47]

Rusk's argument was a clear-cut endorsement for containment. In contrast with Ball's short term outlook with its connotation of a controlled retreat in the face of the enemy, Rusk argued for a long term perception of the problem. Ideological, psychological and political goals were of the highest importance in the mind of the Secretary of State. The enemy had to be met and defeated. A withdrawal or a weakening of position would only provide communism with encouragement for further offensive operations on a wider scale elsewhere. What was the President's reaction to the arguments?

Eric Goldman has suggested that Johnson used a jugular approach to foreign affairs and that his cardinal doctrine was "the necessity for Americans to move decisively to protect American interests."[48] As a first action, he replaced Ambassador Taylor with Lodge.[49] Again, hard facts as to the full reasons for this change are unavailable; however, Lodge had avoided the continuous confrontations with the Vietnamese leadership that Taylor had experienced in 1964 and 1965, and therefore would appear to be more readily acceptable to all groups. In addition, Lodge was the United States' country team head during the coup of 1963 which removed the violently anti-Buddhist Diem. Therefore it could be construed that he would also be more acceptable to the persistently dissident Buddhist faction in the country.

Next, Johnson sent McNamara to Saigon for a re-evaluation of the situation. On his return, the Secretary of Defense recommended a troop increase to 175,000 and a bombing halt when the force deployment was completed. The bombing halt was to be used as a lever to open negotiations.[50] The recommendation for a troop increase complemented Johnson's own thinking on a quick, positive reaction. The bombing halt reflected the soft nature of McNamara in that regard; however, Johnson recognized that fact for he once stated, "Rusk and Bundy are always a little bit readier to hit than McNamara."[51]

Finally, after a week long policy review ending on 28 July, the President announced that he was increasing the American commitment in Vietnam to 125,000 ground troops and

that more would be sent if they were needed.[52] This was the culmination of a series of decisions which started with the Flaming Dart strikes in February and continued through the Rolling Thunder and marine deployment decisions in March, the approval of two additional battalions in April, and the broad, sweeping powers provided to Westmoreland in June. The United States had moved to a point of full commitment in South Vietnam. In reflecting on his decision, President Johnson stated:

> In the summer of 1965 I came to the painful conclusion that an independent South Vietnam could survive only if the U.S. and other nations went to its aid with their own fighting forces. From then until I left the Presidency we had three principle goals: to insure that aggression did not succeed; to make it possible for the South Vietnamese to build their own country and their future in their own way; and to convince Hanoi that working out a peaceful settlement was to the advantage of all concerned.[53]

Containment of communism was the over-all objective. United States' forces would be used to accomplish that goal until the South Vietnamese were capable of doing it themselves. The United States thus fully committed itself to a massive ground campaign to complement its continuing and growing air involvement.

From then to the end of the year the military machines of both the United States and North Vietnam operated in high gear. Following the President's decision in July, the JCS issued Memorandum 652-65, which restated the United States' objective in Vietnam as, "a stable and independent non-communist government."[54] This was a mere restatement of goals for the military and not a change in the national objective. In fact,

it reinforced the national objective. The memorandum then outlined: the plans for a continuation of bombing; a Phase I build up of United States forces to 34 battalions by the end of 1965; and a Phase II continued increase of forces to seize the initiative in 1966.[55]

These plans translated into a substantial increase in free world military forces by the end of the year. The total force structure consisted of 184,000 Americans, 21,000 South Koreans, 1,500 Australians and 600,000 South Vietnamese.[56]

Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese continued to accelerate their infiltration and the Viet Cong persisted in increasing their own recruitment and activity. By November, the North had at least six confirmed regiments in the South and possibly as many as nine. The Viet Cong expanded their regimental force structure to twelve. The combined forces had a total of 110 battalions with a strength of 63,500 combatants, 17,000 combat support personnel and 53,600 irregulars. By the end of the year the United States and South Vietnamese forces faced an enemy of over 200,000.[57] The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese displayed a remarkable ability to multiply and expand. This facility was so significant and serious that Westmoreland noted in a dispatch to Washington that, "The VC-NVA build-up rate is predicted to be double that of the United States Phase II forces."[58]

The North coupled this vast military expansion with a continued hard-line, strong-toned position on negotiations. In an interview with a Japanese newspaperman on 4 October 1965,

Premier Pham Van Dong stated that, "The present Vietnam war can never be settled unless the United States accepts the four conditions presented by our side. And without that, there can be no discussions."[59] At approximately the same time that the North Vietnamese Premier made that statement, the Fanfani peace initiative which Johnson had encouraged in May was underway and developing momentum.

During the summer, Fanfani had contacted Georgio La Pira, a well-known Florentine politician, intellectual and old friend of Ho Chi Minh. La Pira agreed to go to Hanoi with the specific purpose of attempting to open negotiations between the North Vietnamese and the United States. Between 11 and 14 November, he visited Hanoi and conducted lengthy discussions with both Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong.[60] On his return, La Pira informed Foreign Minister Fanfani of the results. Fanfani forwarded a letter on 20 November to President Johnson which outlined the North Vietnamese pre-conditions for negotiations. These included: a cessation of all combat operations throughout Vietnam, the cessation of the further debarkation of any additional United States troops; and the acceptance of the North's Four Points as being the authentic interpretation of the Geneva Accords and the basis for negotiations.[61]

Secretary of State Dean Rusk replied on 6 December that the United States was willing to enter negotiations on the basis of the Geneva Agreements without qualification, and that the United States would discuss the North Vietnamese Four Point proposal. But, "if there were a cessation of military

activities on the one side [U.S.] there would have to be an equivalent cessation of military activities on the other [NVN]."[62] Clearly, the United States refused to accept the North Vietnamese Four Points as the basis for negotiations since that acceptance, even in part, would have resulted in the loss of Vietnam. In addition, the United States made it obvious that it would not consider the termination of bombing unless North Vietnam ceased its infiltration and military activities in the South. To have terminated the bombing unilaterally would have encouraged even greater infiltration and left the United States with literally no tool with which it could bargain.

Fanfani forwarded the United States' counter-proposal to Hanoi. David Kraslow reports that on 8 December, as an afterthought, La Pira informed Fanfani that the North Vietnamese also indicated that bombings in or near the cities of Hanoi or Haiphong would close the attempt at negotiations. Fanfani, in turn, informed Ambassador Goldberg. On 15 December the United States attacked the Uong Bi power station fourteen miles from Hanoi. Kraslow claims that this resumption of bombing finished the Fanfani peace initiative. He gives as proof the above mentioned but belated statement by La Pira, plus a statement issued by the North on 18 December which denounced the recent peace feelers as "sheer, groundless fabrication."[63]

The Pentagon Papers and other sources remain unnervingly quiet on this interpretation; however, an analysis is still possible. At that time, United States ground forces were

locked in a bloody campaign with a North Vietnamese Division in the I Drang Valley. In addition, the South Vietnamese 7th Infantry Regiment was overrun by the Viet Cong's 9th Division in a costly battle in the Michelin Rubber plantation northwest of Saigon.[64] The South Vietnamese units were still unpredictable in tough action and the United States' units were just getting their first taste of jungle warfare. The political situation was steady and improving but still uncertain in Saigon.

To have entered negotiations in the fall of 1965 with the pre-conditions stipulated by the North would most probably have resulted in the loss of South Vietnam. To agree unilaterally to cease bombing would also have resulted in the loss of one of the few major psychological weapons and bargaining tools that the United States possessed. Therefore, it appears reasonable to assume that the United States could neither afford to enter negotiations with the pre-conditions of the North Vietnamese nor could it cease the bombing unilaterally. Such actions, if taken, would have severely hampered the chances of achieving the national policy objective of continued containment. Viewed with this logic, the United States actions were consistent.

This is not to insinuate that the United States was not interested in a negotiated settlement, for it certainly was. As a demonstration of this, the President initiated another personal and highly visible appeal for peace negotiations in December.

The impetus for this new effort started in late November following the failure of the Fanfani probe. Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador, informed McGeorge Bundy, the President's National Security Affairs Advisor, that if the United States instituted a bombing pause of "twelve to twenty days," it could expect a period of "intense diplomatic activity."[65] Shortly afterward and in an unrelated memorandum, McNamara strongly recommended a "pause in bombing North Vietnam . . . to lay a foundation in the mind of the American public and in world opinion for an enlarged phase of the war . . . and give the North Vietnamese a face saving chance to stop their aggression."[66] On 6 December William Bundy and Alexis Johnson, apparently speaking for Rusk, forwarded a State Department Memorandum to the President which also recommended a bombing pause as a means to open negotiations, or, if rejected, as a catalyst for future escalation.[67]

Faced with such highly placed recommendations and sensing that a rejection by Hanoi would, to some extent, sway world opinion in the United States favor, the President acted. First, he extended the Christmas bombing halt. Then on 29 December in what can be best described as a Texas fandango, he sent emissaries throughout the world carrying a Fourteen Point peace proposal which had been drawn up by Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Arthur Goldberg went to Rome, Paris and London. McGeorge Bundy went to Ottawa. Thomas Mann went to Mexico. Averell Harriman went to Yugoslavia, Poland, India, Egypt, Japan, Australia, Thailand, Laos and Iran. G. Mennen Williams

went to Morocco and thirteen African states. Each carried copies of the fourteen points and each presented the United States' desire to open negotiations with Hanoi. A copy of the peace proposal was delivered to North Vietnam through the Polish Deputy Foreign Minister.[68]

As published in the Pentagon Papers, the Fourteen Points were:

1. Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962 are adequate basis for peace.
2. We welcome conference on SEAsia or on any part thereof.
3. We welcome "negotiations without pre-conditions."
4. We welcome unconditional discussions.
5. Cessation of hostilities could be first order of business or could be subject of preliminary discussions.
6. Hanoi's Four Points could be discussed along with other's points.
7. We want no U.S. bases in SEAsia.
8. No U.S. troops in South Vietnam after peace is assured.
9. We support free elections in SVN to give the people a choice.
10. Question of reunification of Vietnam should be determined by the Vietnamese through their own free decision.
11. Countries of SEAsia can be nonaligned or neutral as they choose.
12. US prefers to use resources for the economic reconstruction in SEAsia. If there is peace, North Vietnam can share benefits of at least $1B we will contribute.

13. The President: "The Viet Cong would not have difficulty being represented and having their views represented if for a moment Hanoi decided she wanted to cease aggression. I don't think that would be an unsurmountable problem."

14. We could stop the bombing of NVN as a step toward peace although there has been no hint or suggestion from the other side as to what they would do if the bombing stopped.[69]

As is obvious, the United States was prepared to open negotiations under conditions most favorable to Hanoi's demands. It disavowed any intention of permanent bases. It pledged the withdrawal of United States' troops after a peace. It favored the determination of the future of South Vietnam in accordance with popular wishes. It promised one billion dollars in economic aid. However, as is obvious in Points Thirteen and Fourteen, the United States required the cessation of the communist directed aggression before it ordered a permanent bombing halt. This was the key to the proposal and to the United States' position. Overt communist aggression would be countered. Containment of communism would continue.

Philip Geyelin, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal, feels that this initiative of "seeming spontaneity sprang largely from the President's delight in taking people by surprise."[70] Townsend Hoopes, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and an Under Secretary of the Air Force during the Johnson Administration, states in a more unkind vein that the initiative was, "more of a public relations effort than anything else."[71] I disagree with the tone and insinuations of these characterizations. The facts do not bear out their

snide comments. The initiatives were in keeping with Johnson's personality and method of operation in foreign affairs and should be interpreted as a sincere and weighty effort by the President to initiate negotiations.

The year 1965 ended on a hopeful note with the bombing pause and the President's fandango still in progress. Viewed in retrospect, the year reflected a kaleidoscope of frenzied activity. Politically, the Saigon government moved from the Khanh coup, through a period of spasmodic civilian rule, and finally to the seizure of control by Ky and Thieu. Diplomatically, the peace attempts of U-Thant, Tito, Johnson and Fanfani were either frustrated or rebuffed. Militarily, both the United States and North Vietnam shifted to a strategy of full commitment. Throughout this period the United States remained steadfast in its policy of containing communism north of the seventeenth parallel.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III - THE FULL COMMITMENT

1. Gravel III, pp. 685-86.

2. Gravel III, p. 683.

3. Gravel III, pp. 139, 352-53. Schurman, p. 50.

4. Gravel III, pp. 686-87.

5. Geyelin, pp. 206-08. Kraslow, p. 101. Sevareid, p. 84.

6. Westmoreland Report, p. 107. Johnson, p. 138. Schurman, p. 47.

7. Cooper, p. 487. Johnson, p. 122. Westmoreland, p. 107.

8. Kraslow, p. 113.

9. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1966), pp. 535, 548. Goldman, p. 405.

10. USG ed., VI. A., pp. 3-4.

11. Gravel III, pp. 309-12. Johnson, p. 129.

12. Geyelin, p. 44.

13. Gravel III, pp. 332-33, 354. Cooper, p. 488. Heren, p. 74. Geyelin, p. 220. Westmoreland Report, p. 108.

14. Schurman, pp. 57-58. Gravel II, p. 354. Cooper, p. 488.

15. Peking Review, February 12, 1965, p. 6. Note the use of the lower case "n" in north and "s" in south.

16. Peking Review, April 2, 1965, p. 6.

17. Johnson, p. 129.

18. Evans, p. 546. Gravel III, p. 347.

19. Gravel III, p. 406. Johnson, p. 138.

20. Heren, p. 75.

21. Gravel III, pp. 325-26.

22. Gravel III, p. 327.

23. Gravel III, p. 347.

24. USG ed., VI. A., p. 2. Peking Review, November 29, 1964, p. 16; December 11, 1964, pp. 15-20.

25. USG ed., VI. B., p. 193.

26. USG ed., VI. A., p. 6.

27. USG ed., VI. B., p. 13.

28. USG ed., VI. B., p. 13.

29. USG ed., VI. A., pp. 6, 77; VI. B., p. 100. Gravel III, p. 356.

30. Peking Review, April 30, 1965, p. 10.

31. Gravel III, p. 369. Johnson, p. 137. Kraslow, pp. 121-23.

32. Gravel III, p. 366.

33. Gravel III, pp. 371-74, 78-79.

34. Gravel III, p. 381.

35. Gravel III, pp. 406, 450. Johnson, p. 140. This action was promulgated in NSAM 328 on 6 April 1965.

36. Johnson, p. 136.

37. Gravel III, p. 274.

38. Johnson, p. 142.

39. Cooper, p. 277.

40. Kraslow, p. 127.

41. Gravel III, p. 392. Johnson, p. 143.

42. Gravel II, pp. 361-62. Schurman, p. 58.

43. Gravel III, pp. 471-72, 383-84. Johnson, p. 143. Prior to this time U.S. forces were limited to a defensive role.

44. Gravel III, p. 471.

45. Gravel IV, p. 616.

46. Gravel IV, pp. 616-17.

47. Gravel IV, p. 47.

48. Goldman, p. 382. Geyelin, pp. 112-13.

49. Cooper, p. 490.

50. Gravel IV, pp. 26-27. Johnson, pp. 145, 233.

51. Geyelin, p. 297.

52. Johnson, p. 149. Cooper, p. 491. Evans, pp. 548-52.

53. Johnson, p. 232.

54. Gravel IV, p. 300.

55. Gravel IV, p. 300.

56. Johnson, p. 246. Gravel III, p. 417.

57. Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1969), p. 105. Gravel IV, p. 303. Schurman, p. 97. Johnson, p. 233.

58. Gravel IV, p. 306. At that time the Phase II input for 1966 was 28 additional U.S. battalions.

59. USG ed., VI. B., p. 166.

60. Kraslow, pp. 127-30.

61. USG ed., VI. B., pp. 23-24. See reference for text of entire letter.

62. USG ed., VI. B., pp. 23-24.

63. Kraslow, pp. 133-35.

64. Westmoreland Report, pp. 110-11.

65. Johnson, p. 235.

66. Gravel IV, pp. 622-23.

67. Gravel IV, p. 36.

68. Kraslow, pp. 138-40. Johnson, pp. 237-40.

69. USG ed., VI. A., p. 77.

70. Geyelin, p. 298.

71. Hoopes, pp. 48-49.

CHAPTER IV

THE BUILD UP

Throughout the year 1966, the United States expanded its involvement in South Vietnam. Old peace efforts terminated and new peace efforts commenced. The Saigon government suffered through another period of intense political agony. Major conferences convened to analyze past actions and to plan future actions. Both the United States and South Vietnam held noteworthy elections. The United States increased its ground force contingent in Vietnam by approximately 200,000 men and for this fact alone the period merits the title of The Build Up. Below the surface of this frenzied activity; however, the over-all policy and objective of the United States remained constant and unchanged. That policy is, again, best described by the term containment.

In early January of 1966, the United States bombing pause and the complementary peace initiative of President Johnson continued. The first open response to the United States' effort was a North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry statement printed in the 14 January issue of the Peking Review, which rejected it as an effort, "to appease public opinion at home and abroad."[1] As a more formal reply, a letter from

Ho Chi Minh to the Socialist Nations was broadcast from Hanoi on 28 January:

> If the U.S. government really wants a peaceful settlement it must accept the 4-point stand of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government and prove it by actual deeds. It must end unconditionally and for good all bombing raids and other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.[2]

President Johnson construed this as a rebuff of his proposal and initiative. He viewed the North Vietnamese as being persistent "in aggression" and an insistent "on the surrender of South Vietnam to communism."[3] If the President perceived the United States' policy objective as still being containment, he had but one course of action, and that was the resumption of bombing. Accordingly, he ordered the renewal of air activity over the North on 31 January.[4] Thus, the New Year began with the termination of another diplomatic effort and a continuation of containment.

From February through May, the United States pursued both its build-up of forces and a further refinement of its posture in the South. At a Honolulu conference held from 6 to 8 February, Johnson personally emphasized such non-military matters as pacification, and economic and social reform. The principal participants included President Johnson, Ambassador Lodge, General Westmoreland, Agriculture Secretary Orville Freeman, Prime Minister Ky and Chief of State Thieu.[5] The presence of the top leadership from both the United States and South Vietnamese sides was also an obvious attempt by the United States to publically demonstrate support for the Ky-Thieu regime.

Following the conference, the President approved NSAM No. 343 which embodied the principal thrust of the conference conclusions:

> In the declaration of Honolulu I renewed our pledge of common commitment with the Government of South Vietnam to the defense against aggression, to the work of social revolution, to the goal of free self government, to an attack on hunger, ignorance and disease and to the unending quest for peace . . . the war on human misery and want is as fundamental to the successful resolution of the Vietnam conflict as are our military operations to ward off aggression.[6]

This was a minor change in strategy. Major military escalation and involvement would continue; however, it was to be complemented by a new emphasis on pacification and economic assistance. The ultimate objective remained the same, only the means to the end were modified.

In March the United States' military commitment rose to 215,000 with 20,000 additional troops on the way.[7] In April Vice-President Humphrey, in a tour of the Far East received the pledge of 45,000 additional troops from South Korea, 3,000 from Australia and 2,000 from the Philippines.[8] During that same month, the United States used B-52 strikes in North Vietnam for the first time.[9] In early May the President approved plans for the deployment of a total of 383,500 troops by December of 1966 and 425,000 by July of 1967.[10] By early June of 1966, the United States' force level had reached 285,000.[11]

As is obvious from the above figures, the United States moved rapidly to build-up its forces in the first half of 1966. In addition, it complemented those actions with a continuance

of the bombing program in the North. But how did those actions influence the shaky political situation in Saigon and the war resolve in Hanoi? In short, how did it affect those two factors which were the keys to the successful conclusion of the conflict and the achievement of the United States' policy objective?

From the date of their coup in June of 1965, the Ky-Thieu government demonstrated a remarkable degree of stability in comparison with prior governments; however, the threat of further turbulence was always present. In early 1966, a majority of the Buddhist elements within the country clamored for elections and a more representative government. General Ky aggravated this discontent on 12 March 1966 when he maneuvered the Military Directorate into relieving General Nguyen Chanh Tri, the I Corps commander.

Not only was General Tri a powerful Corps commander, but he was also a favorite of the Buddhists and the principal rival to Ky at that time. Following the relief of General Tri, the Buddhists in Da Nang, the major city in I Corps, conducted major demonstrations on 12 and 26 March in support of Tri and against Ky.[12]

General Ky reacted on 5 April by sending two ranger battalions to quell the Buddhists. Three days later he sent two additional battalions. The situation was grave and the stability of the entire governmental structure was threatened. Under pressure from the United States, Ky withdrew the battalions on 12 April and promised elections for a constituent

assembly in three to five months. Then on 4 May he publically reneged on the promise for elections. This time the Buddhists staged major demonstrations in both Da Nang and Hue. Ky again reacted by sending in the ranger battalions.[13]

For the next month civil disorder raged in I Corps and loyalties were split between the pro-Ky and the pro-Tri forces. Finally, on 19 June both Ky and the Military Directorate agreed to elections for a constituent assembly on 11 September.[14] This concluded a period of intense political and civil unrest which had threatened the country since March.

When viewed in retrospect, the United States' ground and air escalation during the first six months served a dual purpose. First, it provided the forces necessary to hinder infiltration and thus prevent North Vietnam and the Viet Cong from militarily overrunning the country. Second, it provided a screen behind which the South Vietnamese government could solve its unique political problems and thus move toward a unified state. In the face of the chronic political turmoil in Saigon, the United States' actions again served to complement the policy objective of containment.

While the United States escalated its involvement and Saigon labored in political evolution during the first six months of 1966, another significant peace effort was initiated. Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson sent Chester Ronning, an experienced diplomat, to Hanoi on 7 March in an attempt to open negotiations. It is unclear to what extent the State Department was involved in this action; however, it is

reasonable to assume that the United States was, at least, informed of the nature and context of that probe. At any rate, the North Vietnamese replied that the cessation of bombing was the key to the opening of discussions. This message was relayed to the State Department.[15]

At that time, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were enjoying a high degree of success in South Vietnam. General Westmoreland reported that "the enemy's forces continued to grow in size, to improve in armament and to reflect an increasingly large North Vietnamese commitment."[16] Additionally, during the same month of the Ronning mission, the United States suffered its most significant setback of the year when two North Vietnamese Regiments attacked and overran a Special Forces' camp in the A Shau Valley in northern South Vietnam. Following this success they moved into the A Shau Valley and commenced "to develop a major logistical base and to construct roads into Laos to tie in with the extensive network of motorable routes leading from North Vietnam."[17]

Bolstered by these military successes it was reasonable to expect the North to maintain a tough negotiating position; however, there was another subtle factor which probably reinforced their hard stand. Commencing in March of 1966 and carrying through to December of 1967, the Peking Review, an official organ of the Chinese government, visibly began to place less emphasis on the combat actions in Vietnam and more emphasis on attacking any attempt to negotiate peace short of total acceptance of the demands of the North Vietnamese.[18] China at that

time was undergoing its great cultural revolution with its return to the purist principles of Marxism and all that implied.[19] It is logical to assume that its great domestic return to fundamentalism was also transferred to its activities in foreign affairs. In particular, this attitude would certainly be felt in North Vietnam. Therefore, by combining the publicized position as reflected in the Peking Review and the known facts and connotations of the cultural revolution, the obvious deduction is that China was pressuring North Vietnam to maintain a hard line and unswerving negotiating position. In short, Peking strengthened Hanoi's resolve and determination. This was the situation, position and attitude in Hanoi which the United States faced in attempting to apply military and political pressures to achieve its national policy objective.

Throughout April and May of 1966, the pressures for negotiations mounted. The President faced two choices: first, he could unconditionally terminate the bombing of North Vietnam and then hope that the North would respond to negotiations; second, he could continue and expand the bombing and hope that this would force the North to the conference table.[20] If he took the first course of action it might lead to talks but it would also most fully serve the needs of the North for they would be able to operate more freely in the South. If he took the second course of action, there would be continued dissent in the United States: however, it would also best serve the needs of the South Vietnamese, be more likely to achieve the

objective of containment, and, finally, place the United States in a more favorable future negotiating position.

There was, of course, a third course of action. This was the use of a temporary bombing halt. This technique was used before, and would be used again as a technique to elicit response from Hanoi or to test their negotiating position. The President persistently retained this as an open option; however, in the late spring of 1966, the major choice was between one of the two courses mentioned above.

Although Johnson delayed his decision, the Administration's position at that time was best revealed in a memorandum prepared by General Taylor entitled Assessment and Uses of Negotiating Blue Chips. In it, he argued against an unconditional bombing halt in these words:

> . . . Such a tabulation of negotiating blue chips and their purchasing power emphasized the folly of giving up any one in advance as a pre-condition for negotiations. Thus if we give up bombing in order to start discussions, we would not have the coins necessary to pay for all the concessions required for a satisfactory terminal settlement.[21]

Apparently the President wanted to try to open negotiations one more time before he decided to escalate the bombing. Chester Ronning, who was unsuccessful in March, went again to Hanoi. This time the State Department was actively involved in his mission.[22]

While Ronning was enroute, the United States' military pressured the White House for approval to strike the major oil storage areas near Hanoi and Haiphong. As a counter to the military's argument, Dean Rusk, who was in Europe at the time,

forwarded a hasty cable to the President which argued a delay of the strikes and further stated:

> A major question in my mind is Ronning's mission to Hanoi occurring June 14 through 18. This is not merely a political question involving a mission with which we have fully concurred. It also involves the importance of our knowing whether there is any change in the thus far harsh and unyielding attitude of Hanoi.[23]

Rusk won out and the strikes were delayed.

Rusk met Ronning in Ottawa on 21 June, the day he returned from Hanoi. The Canadian diplomat informed the United States' Secretary of State that he had, "found no opening or flexibility in the North Vietnamese position," and that they demanded a bombing halt as a prerequisite to negotiations.[24]

The President reacted quickly. He approved the strike on the Hanoi-Haiphong oil storage areas. When completed, these strikes resulted in the destruction of over 70 percent of the North Vietnamese bulk POL storage capacity.[25] They also represented a significant escalation of the air war both because of the nature of the targets and their proximity to major populated areas.

The Chief Executive then forwarded a rare[26] White House memorandum to the Secretary of Defense.

> As you know we have been moving our men to Vietnam on a schedule determined by General Westmoreland's requirements.
>
> As I have stated orally several times this year I should like this schedule to be accelerated as much as possible so that General Westmoreland can feel assured that he has all the men he needs as soon as possible.[27]

Thus by escalating the air action and by insuring that Westmoreland received as many men as he needed, the President

reaffirmed the nation's resolve to maintain South Vietnam as a non-communist state.

The first half of 1966 had been a period of continued diplomatic initiatives, heightened military activity by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong forces, renewed political unrest in Saigon, stiffened resolve in Hanoi, and an increased intensity in the air war over the North. It had also been a period in which the United States deployed 100,000 additional troops to South Vietnam. As the nation entered the second half of the year, that build-up of United States' forces continued at the same remarkable rate.

Although the United States' troop deployment highlighted the last six months of 1966, the significance of that event can be lost by the very fact that it was just a number. Therefore I have elected to use yet another peace initiative as a vehicle both to reveal the importance of that build-up and to expose the other major events which best characterize the United States' policy and position during that period.

The diplomatic initiative, code named Marigold commenced in Saigon in late June. The principals involved were Henry Cabot Lodge, the United States' Ambassador; Giovanni D'Orlandi, the Italian Ambassador and dean of the diplomatic corps in South Vietnam; and, Janusz Lewandowski, a newly assigned Polish member to the Indo-China International Control Commission (ICC). Acting on the initiative of D'Orlandi, who functioned as an intermediary between them, Lodge and Lewandowski began initial talks in D'Orlandi's apartment.

These talks continued intermittently through July. Lewandowski eventually agreed to present the United States' diplomatic position to Hanoi and to inform the United States of Hanoi's reactions to the initiative and any counter offer that the North Vietnamese presented.[28]

During that same month, Washington announced that the United States' troop strength would be increased to 375,000 by December 1966 and 425,000 by the spring of 1967.[29] How did this announcement affect the on-going diplomatic talks? Taken on face value it would appear that such an escalation would reduce the negotiation attempt to insignificance; however, that is a narrow and shortsighted approach, for Lodge continued the discussions and exhibited a great deal of sincere interest in the talks.[30] If Lodge was interested then so was the United States' government. Therefore, a more plausible interpretation is that the United States was seeking negotiations, but at the same time it would continue to take those military actions which best supported its foreign policy and its national objective.

The reaction of China and Russia to the United States' troop escalation and bombing continuation provides an interesting insight into their perception of the situation. Chen Yi, the Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, issued a statement which attacked Russia for assisting the United States in attempting to "force talks through the bombing" of North Vietnam.[31] Pravda, the official voice of Moscow, retaliated in an editorial on 20 July which claimed that there was, "only one

way to settle the Vietnam problem: U.S. cessation of all acts of war and the withdrawal of all forces."[32]

Peking was evidently interested in alienating the relationship between Hanoi and Moscow and thus drawing South Vietnam more firmly within her sphere of influence. Also, it is noteworthy that China directed her remarks toward the cessation of bombing and not toward the United States' troop escalation. She obviously anticipated that the United States would commit additional ground troops to achieve its objective in South Vietnam. On the other hand, Russia demanded the cessation of the bombing of the North and the withdrawal of United States' troops from the South. This was more in line with Hanoi's position. Viewed together, the Russian and Chinese statements exhibit a great deal of support for a hard-line position by Hanoi.

Meanwhile, the Lodge-Lewandowski talks continued through August. As these proceeded the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong military commands maneuvered their forces into striking positions for a major offensive. The 324B NVA Division, 9th VC Division, 2d NVA Division, 3d NVA Division and 101 NVA Regiment moved into assembly areas in the remote western stretches of South Vietnam. Their twofold mission was: (1) to launch an attack which would sever I Corps and portions of II Corps from the remainder of South Vietnam; and, (2) to threaten the security of Saigon from the west. In response to this threat, Westmoreland deployed major United States' elements into the VC-NVA sanctuary areas to conduct

spoiling attacks and to disrupt the enemy's major offensive plans.[33]

During the late summer and early fall, as the ground military forces of both sides engaged in major battles in the western approaches to I Corps, the desolate Highlands of II Corps and War Zone C in III Corps, and as the Lodge-Lewandowski talks continued, four significant events occurred.

First, on 11 September the South Vietnamese elected a 117 man national assembly to draft a constitution and prepare for national elections.[34] This was a major step in stabilizing the South Vietnamese domestic and political scene. Prior to that time the internal organization of that country had been so disrupted by the fact and threat of coups and counter-coups, that effective, central direction and coordination of actions against the communist forces was a virtual impossibility. With the election of a broad-based, constituent assembly, that nation, for the first time since November of 1963, began to act with unity.

The second event was a speech in the United Nations' General Assembly on 21 September by the United States' Ambassador Arthur Goldberg. In it he stated:

> We are prepared to order a cessation of bombing in North Vietnam the moment we are assured privately or otherwise that this step will be answered promptly by a corresponding and appropriate de-escalation on the other side . . . the U.S. stands ready to withdraw its forces as the others withdraw theirs.[35]

This proposal revealed a two step de-escalation program. The United States would stop bombing if the North ceased its

infiltration. The United States would withdraw its troops as the North withdrew its combat elements.

Critics could argue that the speech was a mere propaganda device to gather international support for the United States' activities in Vietnam; however, another interpretation is possible and more plausible. It appears that the speech reflected the United States' pleasure with the recent elections in South Vietnam. This was a real indication that the South Vietnamese were moving to the point where they could begin to handle the problem with less United States' assistance. In addition, the speech could be interpreted as a diplomatic signal that the United States actively and fully supported the current Marigold initiative.

The third event which influenced the Lodge-Lewandowski talks was a memorandum from the Secretary of Defense to the President on 14 October 1966.[36] McNamara had just completed reviewing and analyzing the Jason Study, a report prepared by the Institute of Defense Analysis for the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The most pertinent and startling conclusions of the study were:

> 1. As of July 1966 the U.S. bombing of NVN had had no measurable direct effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South at the current level. . . .
>
> 2. . . . the damage to facilities and equipment in North Vietnam has been more than offset by the increased flow of military and economic aid, largely from the USSR and communist China.[37]

Faced with these facts, McNamara forwarded a most meaningful Memorandum to the President which stated in part:

> 1. . . . I see no way to bring the war to an end soon. . . . Pacification has been a disappointment. . . . Nor has the RT [Rolling Thunder] program of bombing the North either significantly affected infiltration or cracked the morale of Hanoi.
>
> 2. Recommended actions.
>
> a. Stabilize U.S. force levels in Vietnam (at approximately 470,000). . . .
>
> b. Install a barrier. . . .
>
> c. Stabilize the RT program . . . consider terminating bombing in all of North Vietnam, or at least in the northeast zone, for an indefinite period in connection with covert moves toward peace.
>
> d. Pursue a vigorous pacification program. . . .
>
> e. Press for negotiations. . . .
>
> 3. The Prognosis. . . .
>
> The solution lies in girding openly for a longer war.[38]

This was a loaded document which directly reflected McNamara's perception and indirectly reflected some of the Administration's perceptions of the problem and the situation. Certain aspects of the recommendation merit further comment. It is noteworthy that the memorandum recognized the possibility of a long war and the fact that bombing had failed to achieve its immediate objectives of stopping infiltration and breaking the will of the North Vietnamese. By failing to mention the objective of the bolstering of the morale in the South, it can be assumed that it was at least accomplishing that. It also recommended a continuation, without an escalation, of the bombing of the North and a corollary that a bombing halt be used

to stimulate negotiations. Finally, it urged no further United States troop deployments beyond 470,000.

The recommended stabilization of the United States' force level must reflect the author's growing satisfaction with the political and military performance of the South Vietnamese. This reinforces the earlier interpretation of the Goldberg speech. The recommended continuation of the bombing campaign in the face of such poor results must reveal McNamara's recognition that the bombing was a key to both the negotiations and to the nation's ultimate objective. The cessation of bombing was the one real hole-card which the United States could afford to trade in return for the North's termination of infiltration. Whether the North ceased infiltration before, during or after negotiations was immaterial; however, the infiltration had to stop if South Vietnam was to be retained in the free world camp. Infiltration was the major factor which could totally frustrate the United States in achieving its objective of containment. Therefore, a total bombing halt was retained as the trade-off piece for infiltration cessation.

The fourth event, which influenced the on-going Marigold discussions, was the Manila Conference of the seven allied nations, held between 24-25 October 1966. The immediate result of that meeting was a joint communique which stated that the allies would withdraw all forces from Vietnam "six months after the violence subsides, infiltration ceases and the other side begins a withdrawal."[39]

Again the key was infiltration. In addition it is noteworthy that the mutual withdrawal stipulation further reinforced Goldberg's statement in the United Nations one month earlier.

Thus, as the Marigold talks continued intermittently through the early fall, their significance was enhanced by the Vietnamese elections, the Goldberg speech, the McNamara memo and the Manila Conference. The successful Vietnamese elections provided the United States with the beginnings of a degree of flexibility in its diplomatic and military attitude, if it desired to do so. The Goldberg speech established the fact that the United States was prepared to cease the bombing and withdraw its troops if the North responded by de-escalating infiltration and began to withdraw its troops. The McNamara memo reflected the United States' resolve to continue to use the bombing as the trade-off for the North's cessation of infiltration. Finally, the Manila conference reinforced the stated position that the United States would withdraw when the North did likewise. In each case the cessation of infiltration was the key to the United States' position.

On 2 November, W. Averill Harriman, the United States' roving Ambassador, and Chester Cooper, his assistant, met Ambassador D'Orlandi who had returned from Saigon to Rome for a short rest. The Italian Ambassador convinced Harriman that the Marigold initiative appeared more and more lucrative. Harriman followed up this conversation by recommending to

Washington that it encourage Lodge to press the negotiation attempt in Saigon.[40]

Two days later, China revealed its lack of receptivity to peace talks in an editorial in the Peking Review which attacked the joint communique of the Manila Conference in these words:

> The real purpose of the conference was to dramatize a new peace talks fraud--namely the forcing of peace talks through fighting. . . .
>
> . . . They are trying to achieve, through what they call the "search for peace" and "national reconciliation" what they cannot win on the battlefield.[41]

Quite clearly, China was not encouraging North Vietnam to join in any meaningful negotiations at that time.

In the meantime, the Lodge-Lewandowski talks continued through November. Then on the first of December, Lewandowski informed Lodge that the North Vietnamese indicated a readiness to open discussions with the United States; however, "a bombing halt was imperative."[42] He then told Lodge to have a representative at Warsaw on 6 December prepared to initiate negotiations.

It is most important to note at this time that during the entire course of this attempt and particularly during the December first meeting, the United States maintained a position of "willingness to halt all bombing [only] after we [U.S.] had come to an agreement with Hanoi on the steps each side then would take to de-escalate the fighting."[43] This understanding had been formalized in what was called the Phase A-Phase B plan. In that proposal, the United States agreed to cease all

bombing of the North [Phase A], but only after there was a complete agreement on the steps that each side would take to reduce the level of fighting [Phase B].[44] There was no promise to stop the bombing as the first step in opening negotiations. Again, the United States was not prepared to unilaterally cease the bombing as a pre-condition to negotiations unless the North Vietnamese reciprocated by ceasing infiltration or commencing a withdrawal of its forces.

Following the 1 December meeting in Saigon, John Gronouski, the United States' Ambassador to Poland, was directed to open discussions with the North Vietnamese through the Polish Foreign Minister, Adam Rapacki. Meanwhile on 2 and 4 December, the United States conducted bombing strikes near Hanoi. On 5 December, Rapacki informed Gronouski that it had become difficult to open negotiations because of the most recent raids.[45]

Ambassador Gronouski continued to attempt to open discussions; however, the United States again conducted raids in the vicinity of Hanoi on 13 and 14 December. Frustrated by military actions which appeared to be destroying a major diplomatic initiative, Ambassador Gronouski returned to the United States in an attempt to reconcile our military and diplomatic efforts. He was informed that as an indication of positive intentions, the United States would not bomb within ten miles of Hanoi. With these concessions in hand, he returned to Warsaw and informed Foreign Minister Rapacki on 24 December of the bombing limitation. On 30 December, Rapacki

informed Gronouski that the Polish government had ordered him to break off the initiative.[46] The diplomatic overture code named Marigold concluded when this directive was issued.

Numerous authors have claimed that Marigold failed because the United States could not coordinate its diplomatic and military efforts. They even go so far as to insinuate that the bombings near Hanoi during critical stages of the negotiation attempt reflected an obvious disinterest on the part of the United States for peace talks. These authors include: one of the analysts in the Pentagon Papers;[47] David Kraslow and Stuart Loory in The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam;[48] Chester Cooper in The Lost Crusade;[49] and Harrison Salisbury in Behind the Lines--Hanoi.[50]

On the surface, these accusations appear to have been substantiated by two statements which came out of Hanoi during the sensitive pre-negotiation and intensified bombing period in mid-December. In a North Vietnamese News Agency release on 15 December, the DRV government stated that, "the frenzied bombing of Hanoi exposed the United States' peace talks swindle as a move to camouflage the new escalation of the criminal war of aggression."[51] Then on 23 December, the Peking Review printed the following official statement from the Government of North Vietnam:

> Of late the U.S. rulers have been harping on new perfidious talks about peace negotiations. But their frenzied bombings of Hanoi have exposed their swindle.
>
> The U.S. rulers think they can with bombs shake the Vietnamese peoples determination to fight against the U.S. aggression.[52]

An in-depth analysis of the above criticism and comments reveals that they are artificial and did not really attack the heart of the problem. At that time, the North Vietnamese were on the offensive and had the initiative. The Saigon government was only beginning to take a substantive form and could offer only weak resistance. Moreover, the United States was dedicated, in the words of General Maxwell D. Taylor, to "an independent South Vietnam free from attack."[53] Bombing of North Vietnam was considered to be critical to the preservation of morale in the South and hopefully it might also break or arrest the will and determination of the North. In addition, infiltration had to be slowed and the principle tool selected to do this was bombing. Simply stated, Washington was convinced that infiltration was key to the preservation of the South and bombing was the best means of halting or slowing the infiltration. The United States would not stop bombing until North Vietnam gave a positive indication that it would stop infiltration. Conversely, North Vietnam clearly indicated that it would not stop the infiltration and would not enter negotiations until the United States stopped bombing. Therein lay the impasse.

Additionally, President Johnson had his own perception of the situation. Regarding the entire Marigold affair he stated:

> If Lewandowski had reported accurately to Hanoi, the North Vietnamese knew perfectly well that the bombing would not end before the talks began. Knowing that, they could hardly give our bombing as the excuse for not entering negotiations. Nevertheless when the Poles

> advanced this argument we stopped all bombing in the vicinity of Hanoi. But the North Vietnamese's position did not change. The simple truth, I was convinced, was that the North Vietnamese were not ready to talk with us. [Italics mine.] The Poles not only put the cart before the horse, when the time of reckoning came, they had no horse.[54]

The verification of the accuracy of Johnson's perception and a further proof of the invalidity of the critics' comments regarding the United States' action is found in no better a source than a comment by Wilfred Burchett. This Australian newspaper reporter with long time connections in Hanoi and a constant critic of the United States' bombing stated in an interview for the Washington Post in December 1968, "the idea [Marigold] had been concocted by well-meaning friends of North Vietnam as an effort to draw up what might be acceptable to the United States and then sell it to Hanoi."[55] Obviously the sale was a failure.

The purpose of the narration of the entire Marigold incident was to reveal those events which best reflected the path of United States' foreign policy in the last six months of 1966. From the facts presented it is quite obvious that the United States demonstrated determination and resolve in its pursuit. It used almost every available resource to counter the communists and preserve the freedom of South Vietnam. In short, containment remained the ultimate objective and the United States accepted nothing less than that goal. It was not prepared to sell out cheaply as Burchett had insinuated and the communists hoped.

As 1966 came to a close the investment in men, money and material had skyrocketed. The United States had committed over 389,000 men in Vietnam and suffered 6,644 killed and 37,738 wounded. Moreover, the annual cost had risen to over 21.9 billion dollars or 3 percent of the Gross National Product. In addition, China had provided North Vietnam with between 600,000 and 800,000 tons of food and had become the principal supplier of railroad rolling stock, small arms and ammunition. She too then had an immense investment in the war.[56]

In addition, the United States had created in South Vietnam a superb supply and support organization capable of sustaining 1.2 million troops. Each month 550,000 short tons of general supplies and 86,000 short tons of ammunition could be brought into the country. The United States was also capable of employing 256 maneuver battalions with the appropriate tactical fighter and helicopter support, and 725 sorties of B-52's per month.[57]

In 1966 the United States deployed a massive military machine to Vietnam. Because of the dimensions and proportions of that action and because of the speed with which it was accomplished, the period richly and appropriately deserves the title, The Build-Up. The facts and figures of such an accomplishment, however, tend to over-shadow the cause and reason for it.

Simply stated, that build-up was the outward manifestation of the United States' determination and resolve to achieve a foreign policy objective. The foreign policy

objective was the retention of South Vietnam within the free world as an independent, non-communist state. That objective complemented the national objective of continued containment.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV - THE BUILD UP

1. Peking Review, January 19, 1966, pp. 11-12.

2. Kraslow, pp. 150-51. USG ed., VI. A., p. 16.

3. USG ed., VI. A., p. 17.

4. Evans, p. 556. Gravel IV, pp. 58-59.

5. Sidey, p. 82. Johnson, p. 243. Cooper, p. 483. Gravel II, pp. 368-69, 516-1[illegible], 548-54. USG ed., VI. A., p. 18.

6. Gravel II, pp. 567-68.

7. Henry Brandon, Anatomy of Error (Boston: Gambit Incorporated, 1969), p. 68.

8. Johnson, p. 246.

9. Schurman, p. 133. Cooper, p. 66.

10. Johnson, p. 246.

11. Cooper, p. 495.

12. Gravel II, pp. 370-72.

13. Gravel II, pp. 372-78.

14. Gravel II, pp. 377-78.

15. USG ed., VI. A., p. 20. Kraslow, p. 155.

16. Westmoreland Report, p. 115.

17. Ibid., p. 124.

18. Peking Review, March 1966 to December 1967. For examples see following issues: March 4, 1966, p. 5. April 29, 1966, p. 5. May 13, 1966, pp. 45-46. July 15, 1966, pp. 25-29. July 29, 1966, pp. 9-10 and October 14, 1966, pp. [illegible]-[illegible]. For a full appreciation of this phenomenon it is only necessary

to page through the six months prior to March 1966 and then to page through the period March 1966 to December 1967. The change of emphasis is quite obvious.

19. Peking Review, April 29, 1966, pp. 5-10. June 17, 1966, p. 7. July 1, 1966, the entire issue. August 12, 1966, pp. 6-14. September 2, 1966, entire issue. September 30, 1966, p. 24. All subsequent issues carry the cultural revolution theme.

20. Gravel IV, pp. 97-100.

21. Gravel IV, p. 96.

22. Gravel IV, p. 104.

23. Gravel IV, p. 104.

24. Gravel IV, p. 105. Kraslow, p. 156.

25. Gravel IV, p. 106. Kraslow, p. 157. Cooper, p. 496.

26. The term "rare" is used because the President sent only a few memorandums to McNamara. Also it was strange that Johnson would use such a formal memorandum as a means of communication since they were in daily contact. Possibly the President felt that McNamara did not fully support the bombing program and he might drag his feet on the ground force increase. The memo would thus serve as a bureaucratic devise to keep McNamara's feet close to the fire.

27. Gravel IV, p. 323. The President's use of the phrases "as you know" and "As I have stated several times," reinforce the comments in Footnote #26. The message conveys a tone of irritation with McNamara and an anxiousness to have the war quickly resolved. The memo also serves to highlight the beginning of a difference between McNamara and Johnson regarding the conduct of the war. This disagreement did not come to a formal head until November 1967 when Johnson appointed McNamara to the World Bank.

28. Johnson, p. 251. Kraslow, pp. 14, 17-18. Cooper, p. 495.

29. Cooper, p. 496.

30. Kraslow, pp. 17-18. Johnson, p. 251.

31. Peking Review, July 22, 1966, p. 19.

32. USG ed., VI. A., p. 26.

33. Gravel IV, pp. 331-37.

34. Gravel II, p. 299.

35. USG ed., VI. A., p. 31.

36. Gravel IV, pp. 348-52.

37. Gravel IV, p. 116.

38. Gravel IV, pp. 348-52.

39. Johnson, p. 248. Heren, p. 127. Sidey, pp. 146-47. Gravel II, pp. 288, 387-88, 518, 608 (text of communique). USG ed., VI. A., p. 35.

40. Kraslow, pp. 21-22.

41. Peking Review, November 4, 1966, pp. 35-36.

42. Kraslow, pp. 33-39.

43. Johnson, p. 251.

44. Ibid.

45. Kraslow, pp. 39, 55, 56, 60-62. Johnson, p. 251.

46. Gravel IV, p. 135. Cooper, p. 500. Kraslow, pp. 67-73.

47. Gravel IV, p. 135.

48. Kraslow, pp. 63-88.

49. Cooper, pp. 334-342.

50. Salisbury, pp. 60-66.

51. USG ed., VI. A., p. 39.

52. Peking Review, December 23, 1966, p. 9.

53. Maxwell D. Taylor, Swords and Plowshares (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1972), p. 368. See also his analysis of the situation at that time, pp. 368-73.

54. Johnson, pp. 251-52.

55. Ibid., p. 252.

56. Westmoreland Report, p. 129. Cooper, p. 501. Hoopes, p. 57. Heren, pp. 99, 138. Salisbury, p. 182.

57. Westmoreland Report, pp. 114, 131. Hoopes, pp. 58-59. Heren, p. 133.

CHAPTER V

THE OFFENSIVE

Nineteen hundred and sixty-seven was the year of the military, political and diplomatic offensive in South Vietnam. Militarily, United States' forces were assigned the mission of carrying the bulk of the offensive effort against the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main-force units. In accomplishing this role, they initiated twenty-seven major operations and engaged in the bloodiest fighting of the war to date.[1] Little else will be mentioned regarding that aspect of the war in 1967; however, it is important that the reader keep in mind that large scale military operations continued throughout the year and supported the nation's objective of maintaining South Vietnam as a non-communist, pro-United States nation.

While the United States' forces engaged in large unit operations, the South Vietnamese' forces assumed the role of securing the populated areas and supporting the government sponsored pacification program.[2] This was an essential mission which both complemented the role of the United States' forces and helped to bolster the strength of the South Vietnamese government.

Politically, the South Vietnamese government actively stabilized itself by a series of elections which culminated in

the presidential election in September. This process of legitimization terminated years of political unrest and provided Saigon with the popular base from which it could begin to act with unity to solve its own problems.

Diplomatically, the United States moved aggressively through direct and indirect channels in a constant attempt to open negotiations. Each of these diplomatic attempts reflected the consistent character of the United States' objective.

Throughout this year, the diplomatic, military and political factors worked both individually and in interaction with the other factors to produce a picture of continued and dynamic resolve. The objective remained containment and all actions were directed to achieve it.

Prime Minister Ky set the political tone for the year on 7 January by announcing that nationwide spring elections would be held in 1,000 villages and 4,000 hamlets.[3] At approximately the same time, Harry Ashmore, a writer and intellectual, and William Baggs, a newspaper editor, established the diplomatic tenor by conducting a personal peace mission to Hanoi with State Department approval. They discussed negotiating terms with Ho Chi Minh on 12 January and returned to the United States on 15 January.[4] It was at this time that the diplomatic situation became extremely muddled because the fruition of the Ashmore-Baggs' effort coincided with the initiation of two other major diplomatic moves.

While Ashmore and Baggs were in Hanoi, United States' government representatives established a direct line of

communication with the North Vietnamese representatives in Moscow. This action had nothing to do with the Ashmore-Baggs' effort. In fact, it had two other purposes. First, the United States anticipated that the subject of peace negotiations might be discussed in the up-coming Prime Minister's Conference between Harold Wilson and Alexi Kosygin in London. If a mutually acceptable agreement could be arranged through these third parties, then the United States could contact North Vietnam directly through Moscow. Second, the President planned to send a letter to Ho Chi Minh outlining the United States' negotiating position. This message would coincide with both the traditional TET bombing halt in February and with the Wilson-Kosygin talks. Again, the Moscow channel would be used.[5]

Meanwhile, on 30 January the Vietnamese News Agency in Hanoi broadcasted the following statement from Nguyen Duy Trinh, the Foreign Minister:

> It is only after the unconditional cessation of United States' bombing, and all other acts of war against the DRV that there could be talks between the DRV and the U.S.[6]

The implication was quite clear. The cessation of bombing was an absolute pre-condition for opening discussions with the North.

In early February, the Ashmore-Baggs' effort, the Wilson-Kosygin Conference and the Johnson letter became intertwined and interrelated. Following their return to the United States, Ashmore and Baggs went to Washington where they were debriefed in the State Department by Under Secretary Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, roving Ambassador Averill Harriman and

Assistant Secretary William Bundy. They then prepared and forwarded on 5 February, a private letter to Ho Chi Minh which stated in part:

> . . . In our several discussions with senior officials of the State Department . . . they emphasized that the U.S. remains prepared for secret discussions at any time, without conditions. . . .
>
> They expressed particular interest in your suggestion to us that private talks could begin provided the U.S. stopped bombing your country and ceased introducing additional U.S. troops into Vietnam. They expressed the opinion that some reciprocal restraint [italics mine] to indicate that neither side intended to use the occasion of the talks for military advantage would provide tangible evidence of the good faith. . . .[7]

The key point in this message was that the United States continued in its desire to open negotiations without pre-conditions and that it was prepared to institute a bombing halt to start the talks if the North demonstrated reciprocal restraint. This reciprocal restraint must be interpreted as meaning the cessation of infiltration by the North which the United States had demanded so often before.

On the following day, 6 February, Premier Kosygin arrived in England to commence talks with Prime Minister Wilson. In anticipation that the subject of Vietnam peace negotiations might arise, the State Department had sent Chester Cooper, a former White House aide and then an assistant to Averell Harriman, to London to act as an intermediary between Washington and Wilson, and to present the United States' position to him. During their initial conversations, Wilson indicated to Kosygin that the upcoming TET bombing halt provided an excellent opportunity to initiate negotiations. He then outlined

the Phase A-Phase B plan which had been developed in the early fall of 1966 and which he had received from Cooper. Phase A referred to a United States' bombing halt and Phase B referred to a mutual de-escalation. However, Phase B, the de-escalation, must be agreed to before Phase A, the bombing halt, was implemented.[8]

While these discussions proceeded, President Johnson sent a letter on 8 February through the Moscow channel to President Ho. The letter, as was the intent, coincided with the TET bombing halt and with the Wilson-Kosygin talks. It stated in part:

> I am prepared to move even further toward an ending of hostilities than your government has proposed through public statements or through private diplomatic channels. I am prepared to order a cessation of bombing against your country and the stopping of further augmentation of U.S. forces in South Vietnam as soon as I am assured that infiltration into South Vietnam by land and seas has stopped.[9]

There was a very subtle but most significant difference between the Johnson letter and the Phase A-Phase B plan as presented to Kosygin. The President in his letter demanded the cessation of infiltration as a prerequisite to a bombing halt; however, the Phase A-Phase B plan required only an <u>agreement</u> to de-escalate, i.e., cease infiltration; and not an <u>actual</u> de-escalation.

This important distinction did not become obvious until 10 February when the President received a copy of the written proposal that Kosygin was presented. He reacted immediately and instructed the State Department to inform Cooper to change the wording in Phase B from an <u>agreement</u> to de-escalate to an

actual de-escalation, i.e., a movement on the part of Hanoi to cease infiltration.[10] Why was there a difference in positions and what caused it?

President Johnson claimed that the mix-up was caused by Cooper's failure to clear the document first with Washington and by both Cooper's and Wilson's misinterpretation of our intentions. He also exonerated both by declaring that they had "acted in good faith."[11]

There is no indication that Cooper carried written instructions from Washington. Moreover, as Cooper admits, he prepared the proposal that was submitted to Kosygin, based upon his interpretation of the Phase A-Phase B plan. In addition, he did not clear it first with Washington.[12] The British actions were based upon guidance from Cooper, so they should receive no blame for the difference in positions.[13] It thus appears that the misunderstanding was caused by a misinterpretation by Cooper.

There is one additional factor that can be applied to this situation and that is the test for consistency. As will be recalled from Chapter IV, the United States in the Marigold effort, the Goldberg speech, the Manila Conference communique and the Ronning initiative constantly demanded a cessation of infiltration as a trade-off for a total bombing halt. In addition, the Johnson letter and even the Ashmore-Baggs message quite clearly indicated that a bombing halt would only occur if the North reciprocated. The time of the reciprocal action was not specified in the Ashmore-Baggs' letter but the

intent was obvious. The fact that the North had to cease its infiltration before the United States instituted a bombing halt was quite clear in Johnson's letter. Therefore, the consistency of the United States' position weighs heavily against Cooper and reinforces Johnson's statement that Cooper had acted in haste. This consistency also serves to reinforce the fact that the United States remained constant in its goal of continued containment in Vietnam. It did nothing to jeopardize its efforts in that respect.

It is also significant to note that on the same day that Cooper was instructed to correct the negotiation proposal, the United States' Defense Intelligence Agency reported that North Vietnam was moving vast quantities of supplies to the South during the TET cease fire. They further estimated that North Vietnam could move more than "34,000 tons of supplies during the cease fire--the equivalent of 340 division-days of supplies."[14] No doubt these figures only served to reinforce the resolve of the United States in its negotiating stance.

Back in London, Prime Minister Wilson presented the corrected negotiating position to Kosygin. He also obtained Washington's agreement to delay the initiation of the scheduled post-TET bombing until after Kosygin's return to Moscow in hope that even Washington's changed position might draw a positive response from Hanoi. Kosygin returned to Moscow on 13 February, and with no positive response from Hanoi, the United States reinstituted bombing of North Vietnam on the same day.[15]

On 15 February President Johnson received from Ho Chi Minh a formal reply to his letter of 8 February. Ho stated that,

> It is only after the unconditional cessation of the U.S. bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States could enter into talks and discuss questions concerning the two sides.[16]

Ho's letter was dated 10 February, three days before the United States reinstituted bombing.

This terminated the diplomatic initiatives of citizens Ashmore and Baggs, Prime Minister Wilson and President Johnson. Each of the attempts demonstrated that the United States was prepared to open negotiations but was not prepared to sacrifice its bombing program to do so. It remained dedicated to the preservation of a non-communist South Vietnam. It would only cease bombing if the North ceased its infiltration. Therefore, it can be deduced that the United States considered infiltration to be the most serious threat to the security of South Vietnam. Again, the infiltration was the key to negotiations and to the war.

As was obvious from Ho's letter, the North Vietnamese remained as equally adament. This position was publically reinforced by Chinese government statements on 24 February, 25 April and 5 May, which supported the North Vietnamese' negotiating position and attacked Russia for attempting to act as an intermediary between North Vietnam and the United States.[17] The North Vietnamese had a strong, contiguous, encouraging and vocal ally in China.

After a month's cooling off period, the President focused again on the diplomatic aspect of the war in a major foreign policy speech in Nashville, Tennessee on 15 March:

> The United States is ready at any time for discussions of the Vietnam problem or any related matter with any government or governments. . . .
>
> We also stand ready to advance toward a reduction of hostilities without prior agreement. The road to peace could go from deeds to discussions or it could start with discussions and go to deeds. . . .
>
> The United States cannot and will not reduce its activities unless and until there is some reduction on the other side.[18]

The themes of unconditional discussion and reciprocal de-escalation continued as cornerstones of United States' foreign policy.

North Vietnam replied in a predictable manner by describing the demand for reciprocity as "gangster logic."[19]

Following the early year period in which diplomacy held the center stage, the Vietnam war moved into a phase in which politics and pacification stole the spotlight. The VC-NVA had reached a force level of 287,000 and Westmoreland reported to Washington that that figure was their peak point.[20]

With the United States' military offensive doing well, President Johnson flew to Guam for a meeting with Prime Minister Ky and Chief of State Thieu on 20 March. At this conference the President presented Ellsworth Bunker as the replacement for Henry Cabot Lodge. The new ambassador was a tough, successful diplomat and crisis negotiator who had skillfully handled the difficult Dominican situation in the

summer of 1965. Other new appointments included: Robert Komer as a Deputy to Westmoreland for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development; and, General Creighton Abrams, as Westmoreland's Deputy for Vietnamization.[21] This change in the composition of the country team merits additional comment.

The retention of Westmoreland reflected a satisfaction with the scope and direction of the United States' military effort. The military offensive would be continued. The appointment of Bunker, Komer and Abrams revealed a new emphasis. The United States wanted to launch a complementing offensive in the area of civilian operations and to increase the Vietnamese participation in the war.

At that same Guam Conference, Prime Minister Ky presented President Johnson with a copy of the new constitution which the constituent assembly had just completed. He also outlined the scheme for the series of elections which would terminate in a presidential election in September.[22] This was a significant step in the Vietnamese government's long search for stability.

The Guam Conference was a turning point in the United States' strategy in the war. United States' military offensive operations would continue at a high level; however, they would be complemented by and integrated with an increased South Vietnamese participation. This action was made possible by a major improvement in the political situation in the South. The strategy may have changed, but the objective did not.

Throughout the spring and early summer the new country team settled into its job in Saigon, the United States continued its offensive operations in the South and the bombing of the North, and the South Vietnamese government moved slowly but steadily toward unity. The President was pressured by two opposing but impressive groups to change the nation's bombing program. One group headed by McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara, Cyrus Vance, Walt Rostow and John McNaughton sought to reduce the bombing in the North.[23] Another group headed by William Bundy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff lobbied for an expanded bombing program. In response to these pressures, Johnson ordered on 22 May a cessation of all bombing within ten miles of Hanoi.[24] This created a security belt around that city. Obviously, the President hoped that this would reduce or eliminate civilian casualties and would also work to dampen any unfavorable world press regarding the bombing program. Save for one attack in mid-June, the ban continued until 9 August.[25]

Meanwhile, the war continued into the sixth month of 1967. The United States, while continuing to press the military and political offensive in Vietnam, launched a new diplomatic effort in Paris, France and Glassboro, New Jersey.

The principal characters in France were: Dr. Henry Kissinger, a Harvard professor and a part time advisor to the Departments of State and Defense since 1965; Professor Herbert Marcovich, a French scientist and an acquaintance of Kissinger's since 1966; and finally, Raymond Aubrac, also a Frenchman who

was the director of the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization, and a friend of both Marcovich and Ho Chi Minh.[26]

These three met at an international conference of intellectuals and scientists in early June in Paris. Under the urging of Kissinger, the two Frenchmen, Aubrac and Marcovich, agreed to quietly fly to Hanoi and to present the United States' negotiating position. They were then to return and advise Kissinger of Ho's reply.[27]

It is unclear as to who actually initiated this move. President Johnson's account is frustratingly vague.[28] The Pentagon Papers make no mention of the incident and refer to Kissinger as merely a "semi-official observer" in 1965 and 1966.[29] David Kraslow and Stuart Loory in their account suggest that the two Frenchmen may have initiated the peace move, but they also acknowledge that Kissinger did encourage it and act as a go-between with the United States' government.[30] Leslie Gelb, the director of the Pentagon Paper project, claims that the "Kissinger-French initiative in the summer of 1967 was presidential directed and nurtured."[31] Based on Kissinger's governmental contacts before the initiative and upon his actions afterward, it is reasonable to assume that he went to the meeting with United States' government support to seek a diplomatic channel to Hanoi, and to develop and exploit it if he could. There is no question that once the initiative started to materialize, Kissinger acted as a sanctioned agent of the United States' government.[32]

As Aubrac and Marcovich formalized their arrangements to go to Hanoi, President Johnson met Premier Kosygin in Glassboro, New Jersey on 23 June. This was a major summit conference which included such subjects as the Middle East crisis, nuclear non-proliferation, and the anti-ballistic missile race; however, it also significantly touched on Vietnam.[33]

During their first meeting Kosygin informed Johnson that he had received a message from Hanoi in which they agreed to begin talks within two days after the United States stopped its bombing. Johnson took this offer under advisement and on 25 June he informed Kosygin that the United States would terminate the bombing if it received an assurance that this would lead to "immediate discussions." The President then added that:

> If the proposed talks did not lead to peace or if they were used by Hanoi to achieve a "one sided military advantage," we would have to resume "full freedom of action."[34]

In other words, if the North continued to infiltrate troops during the bombing halt, the United States would resume the bombing. There was no reply from either Moscow or Hanoi.

In analyzing Johnson's offer two significant factors emerge. First, the direct trade-off of a permanent bombing halt for a cessation of infiltration remained the constant factor as it had in the past. Second, Johnson modified his tone and tenor from his 8 February letter to Ho in which he required a visible cessation of infiltration before he would consider lifting the bombing. In this latest offer, Johnson

only required an assurance that talks would begin and then he would agree to order a temporary halt. In February he accepted nothing short of a total cessation of infiltration in exchange for a bombing halt. This radical change from the February position probably reflected a pleasure with the military and political advances and achievements in South Vietnam during the past five months.

Regarding Kosygin's offer, there is the possibility that he was lying either as to the message from Hanoi or at least to the specific terms. That Johnson received no formal reply to his offer from either Moscow or Hanoi seems to substantiate that fact. Hanoi never missed an opportunity to publicize, reject and propagandize any peace offer.

China's reaction to the Glassboro Conference was an editorial which stated:

> . . . but a host of signs indicated that one of the main topics of the Kosygin-Johnson meetings was precisely increased U.S.-Soviet collaboration in a new scheme to stamp out the Vietnamese peoples struggle against U.S. aggression.[35]

This editorial was another obvious slap by China at its ideological opponent and it reflected the logical deduction that Vietnam negotiations were a subject during the conference; however, it made no reference either to the terms of a new peace offer or to the alleged initial effort by the North Vietnamese. Therefore, it also seems to substantiate the supposition that Kosygin was operating out of his hip pocket when he made the proposal to Johnson.

Nevertheless, the United States' counter-offer reflected only a minor change in diplomatic position. The over-all national objective remained the defense and protection of a non-communist South Vietnam.

In late June and early July, the political and military aspects of the war returned to the forefront. On 30 June Prime Minister Ky announced that he would run as a vice presidential candidate behind Thieu, the Chief of State.[36] This eliminated the possibility of a bitter and devisive campaign battle between them and insured continued political stability in Saigon.

In mid-July, Maxwell Taylor and Clark Clifford went on a tour of the allied nations in Southeast Asia. During this trip, they secured the promise of substantial troop increases from Korea and Thailand and representative increases from Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines.[37] One could interpret this as an attempt by the United States to begin a withdrawal of its support for South Vietnam and to substitute additional regional support; however, that was not the case. The United States was, of course, interested in additional regional support but it was more interested in winning the war. As a demonstration of that fact, it increased its own troop ceiling from 470,000 to 525,000 during that same time. The South Vietnamese complemented this with an increase of their forces to 685,000.[38]

With these announced increases the emphasis again shifted to the diplomatic scene. Aubrac and Marcovich had

traveled to Hanoi on 27 July and held discussions with the North Vietnamese President. On returning they informed Kissinger that Ho Chi Minh agreed to talks but only after the bombing stopped. Kissinger provided them with a reply from the United States in mid-August which declared that the United States would halt the bombing if this would lead "promptly to productive talks" and the North Vietnamese did not take advantage of the halt.[39]

This was, in fact, a restatement of the private reply which Johnson made to Kosygin in June and which he would publically offer again in September.

The two Frenchmen applied for visas to return to Hanoi but were refused. They then passed the United States' proposal to Mai Van Bo, the North Vietnamese representative in Paris. Two weeks later the North Vietnamese formally rejected the United States' proposal in a note which demanded the cessation of bombing, the withdrawal of all United States' forces and the recognition of the National Liberation Front.[40] The North Vietnamese continued in their resolve and determination to win the war.

Back in the United States, Senator John C. Stennis was presiding over hearings on Vietnam in his Armed Services Preparedness Committee. During the course of the investigation Robert McNamara testified that while North Vietnam had the capability of importing over 14,000 short tons per day, she was currently receiving only 5,800. Of this latter figure she needed only 550 short tons to support her operations in the

South. In addition, North Vietnam had a primitive agricultural society with few industrial and military targets and a highly diversified transportation system.[41] The obvious conclusion of the Secretary of Defense's testimony was that heavy bombing had had and would have little effect on North Vietnam's ability to conduct warfare in the South. Bombing had certainly served as a psychological tool, a real threat, a diplomatic device, and as a hindrance to infiltration, but it did not appear that it could thwart a determined enemy.

In opposition to McNamara, ten high ranking military men argued its continued use and advocated a program of even heavier bombing.[42] The military won the day for the final Committee Report concluded:

> It is not our intention to point a finger or to second guess those who determine policy. But the cold hard fact is that this policy (i.e. shackling the true potential of air power) has not done the job and it has been contrary to the best military judgment. What is needed now is the hard decision to do whatever is necessary, take the risks that have to be taken and apply the force that is required to see the job through. . . .
>
> It is high time, we believe, to allow the military voice to be heard in connection with the tactical details of military operations. . . .[43]

This was an open endorsement of the Administration's bombing program and a volatile encouragement to go even further. Johnson welcomed Senate Committee reports of this nature; however, he recognized that the war was as much political as it was military. The nation's objective was not the destruction of North Vietnam. It was the preservation of

South Vietnam; and, in that light, he would apply only the amount of gradual force necessary to achieve it.

On 3 September the South Vietnamese held the long awaited Presidential election and Nguyen Van Thieu was elected President.[44] That nation finally had the semblance and form of a democracy. The Vietnamese government could operate from a broad popular base and with renewed vigor and confidence. This action formally terminated years of instability, unrest and internal turmoil which had rocked the nation and almost defied correction. It also successfully concluded the political offensive which Nguyen Cao Ky had started in January.

With the major political battle won, President Johnson launched another diplomatic offensive in a major policy speech in San Antonio on 29 September 1967. In what has since become known as the San Antonio formula, the Chief Executive stated:

> The United States is willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam when this will lead promptly to productive discussions. We of course assume that while discussions proceed that North Vietnam will not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation.[45]

As is obvious, this was nothing more than a public utterance of the terms that Johnson had offered through Kosygin in June and through the Kissinger-Aubrac-Marcovich channel in August. As with the past proposals, the United States continued to protect its vital interests in South Vietnam. Also, as with the most recent attempts, Hanoi rejected it.[46] Again, China supported the North Vietnamese stance in an editorial which characterized the President's effort as, "more tricks of

peace talks to deceive the world public and force the Vietnamese people to negotiate according to terms favorable to themselves."[47]

Throughout the month of October, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong increased the level of their ground force activity. They launched regimental size attacks throughout South Vietnam; however, in each case they were successfully repulsed. Toward the end of the month, the United States' intelligence apparatus detected two fresh North Vietnamese divisions moving toward South Vietnam through Laos. This caused increased concern in Washington and Saigon. Westmoreland requested an acceleration of the arrival schedule for the forces that he was then authorized but had not yet received. Johnson approved.[48]

In an extraordinary memorandum on 1 November, Secretary of Defense McNamara recommended to the President that the United States not expand its then present force levels in South Vietnam, that the United States give more responsibilities to the South Vietnamese in order to reduce United States' casualties, and that the United States institute a total bombing halt before the end of 1967 to stimulate negotiations.[49] This memorandum revealed McNamara's disenchantment with the bombing and the progress of the war and his sentiment that the combination of troop stabilization and a bombing halt might lead to negotiations.

Faced with a Secretary of Defense who astonishingly was becoming more <u>dovish</u> as time went on, the President took

two actions which revealed both the inner workings of the decision making process and the administration's over-all attitude toward the war.

First, on the following day, the President assembled in the White House a distinguished group of private citizens, called the Wise Men. This group included Dean Acheson, George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Douglas Dillon, Arthur Dean, Henry Cabot Lodge, Robert Murphy, Clark Clifford, General Bradley and Justice Abe Fortas. After lengthy discussions they endorsed the President's prosecution of the war and especially the bombing of the North. Maxwell Taylor reports that there was only one dissenter from this group opinion but he does not name the individual; however, based on past performance it is logical to assume that George Ball was the maverick. It is important to note that this same group met again in March of 1968 and arrived at a vastly different conclusion.[50]

The President's second action was to have selected members of the White House staff, the Cabinet and the Country Team in Saigon review and assess McNamara's memorandum. He received replies from Rusk, Katzenbach, Rostow, Taylor, Bunker and Westmoreland. As with the Wise Men, they generally agreed on the leveling-off of the United States' troop build-up and a transference of responsibility to the South Vietnamese. This was in keeping with the current United States' strategy. Moreover, they all opposed a unilateral and total bombing halt.[51]

Armed with this support for his program and faced by a Secretary of Defense who demonstrated reluctance, President

Johnson on 22 November nominated Secretary of Defense McNamara as President of the World Bank.[52] Although the Secretary did not leave until 28 February 1968, it was clear that he was fired.

Following the McNamara incident, the President prepared a rare memorandum for his files. In it he described McNamara's memorandum and the action that he took after receiving it. The most significant paragraph stated:

> I have concluded that under present circumstances a unilateral and unrequited bombing stand-down would be read in both Hanoi and the United States as a sign of weakening will. It would encourage the extreme doves; increase the pressures for withdrawal from those who argue "bomb and get out"; decrease support from our most steady friends; and pick up support from only a small group of moderate doves.[53]

Quite clearly, the Johnson memorandum was a justification for his decision and a document that he expected would be used by future historians to evaluate and judge his actions. This historian judges his staffing action as being excellent and his decision as being within keeping of the continued national objective of containment.

Meantime, yet another peace initiative was undertaken by the roving Ambassador Averell Harriman. He visited Bucharest in late November and expanded the San Antonio formula by stating that, "We do not expect North Vietnam to cease resupply of its troops, merely to stop further infiltration."[54] The United States thus made another major concession. Under Harriman's urging, the Roumanians delivered this new offer to Hanoi in December. There was no immediate reply from the North

Vietnamese; however, in a speech on 29 December at a reception at the Mongolian Embassy in Hanoi, the North's Foreign Minister Tinh stated, "After the United States has ended the bombing and all other acts of war, North Vietnam will [italics mine] hold talks with the United States on questions of concern. . . ."[55] This was a significant change in the tense of a similar statement that he had made in January. At that time he had used the form could rather than will hold talks. Therefore, it appeared as the year ended, that the United States' and North Vietnamese' negotiating positions were moving closer together.

Diplomatically, the year of 1967 was one of a continued offensive for the United States. It started with the Ashmore-Baggs mission and rapidly progressed through the Wilson-Kosygin talks, the Johnson letter, the Glassboro Conference, the Kissinger-Aubrac-Marcovich attempt, the San Antonio formula and finally the Harriman initiative. Throughout each of these efforts the United States maintained the resolve and position to protect South Vietnam and thus insure continued containment in that region. As the year ended, a favorable and acceptable reconciliation appeared more possible than when it had begun.

Politically, South Vietnam had launched an offensive which was successfully terminated in the presidential elections in September. This achievement reinforced the year's military and diplomatic offensive and complemented the United States' national objective.

Militarily, the year was one of heightened and escalated action both on the ground and in the air. The investment in men, money and materials had grown immensely for both sides. North Vietnam had developed an army of 470,000 of which 55,000 were in South Vietnam and 18,000 were in Laos. The total enemy force in South Vietnam included 118,000 main force Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, 75,000 guerrillas and 40,000 political cadre. This was a force four times larger than 1965. Moreover, working from a population base of 19 million, the North Vietnamese were capable of easily increasing their force by 200,000 each year.[56] At least militarily, the North was also on the offensive.

The allied forces had also grown significantly. The combined United States-South Vietnamese force was over one million. The combined third country forces, including Koreans, Thailanders, Australians, New Zealanders and Filipinos totaled an additional 60,000. Yet casualties were running extremely high. In 1967, the United States lost 9,000 killed and 60,000 wounded.[57] But this was to be expected for the United States' ground forces were engaged in a major offensive which complemented the diplomatic and political offensives. Their mission was to "neutralize enemy base areas and prevent replenishment of material."[58] In accomplishing this, they had moved to the highlands and the border sanctuaries to meet the enemy on his own ground while the South Vietnamese forces concentrated on pacification in the populated areas.

In the air war, the United States had continued and expanded its offensive over the North and in the South. The United States lost 950 tactical aircraft over North Vietnam and 900 tactical aircraft and helicopters over South Vietnam. As a direct result of the bombings, the North Vietnamese had lost over 400 million dollars in material and equipment. However, China and Russia had increased their total economic and military aid to 1.6 billion dollars.[59] Thus, it appeared that not only were the bombing losses compensated for, but the North Vietnamese were dollars ahead.

Complicating the subject of the bombing of the North, a new Jason Study, similar to the one completed in the summer of 1966, was issued in mid-December 1967. The study concluded in part:

> As of October 1967 the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam has had no measurable effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The bombing campaign against North Vietnam has not discernibly weakened the determination of the North Vietnamese leaders to continue to direct and support the insurgency in the South.[60]

The stated objectives of the bombing campaign had been: (1) to lift the morale of the South; (2) to break the will of the North; and, (3) to reduce the flow or increase the cost of infiltration.[61] The morale of the South had been fairly well bolstered by the U.S. ground troop presence and by the achievement of political stability. The objectives of breaking the will of the North and seriously hindering infiltration had not been achieved, and it didn't appear that they could be without

an even greater bombing campaign. The objective of increasing the cost of infiltration had been accomplished.

The major question then remaining was whether it was necessary to continue the bombing. Viewed in perspective, the bombing campaign was a foreign policy tool used to achieve a national objective. That objective continued to be containment and the guaranteed survival of South Vietnam as a non-communist state. The manner in which that question of continued bombing was handled and answered will be addressed in the next chapter.

In 1967, the United States mounted major diplomatic, political and military offensives. As it moved into 1968, the military offensive continued and the President moved to a decisive decision regarding the war.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER V - THE OFFENSIVE

1. Westmoreland Report, pp. 131, 281-86.

2. Ibid., p. 131.

3. Gravel II, p. 301.

4. Harry S. Ashmore and William C. Baggs, Mission to Hanoi (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), p. 6. Hoopes, pp. 120-21. USG ed., VI. B., p. 241.

5. USG ed., VI. B., p. 246.

6. USG ed., VI. A., p. 43. VI. B., p. 179.

7. USG ed., VI. B., pp. 238, 241-42.

8. Harold Wilson, "February 1967: When the War in Vietnam Might Have Ended," Life, May 21, 1971, pp. 56-66. Cooper, pp. 350-68. Brandon, p. 58. Kraslow, pp. 190-92.

9. USG ed., VI. B., pp. 45-46. Kraslow, p. 204. Hoopes, pp. 122-23.

10. Johnson, pp. -54.

11. Ibid., p. 254

12. Cooper, pp. 357-62.

13. Wilson, p. 60.

14. Gravel IV, p. 144.

15. Wilson, pp. 56-66. Cooper, pp. 350-68. Kraslow, p. 210. Johnson, p. 254.

16. USG ed., VI. B., pp. 47-48.

17. Peking Review, February 24, 1967, p. 30; April 28, 1967, p. 24. May 5, 1967, pp. 18-21.

18. USG ed., VI. A., p. 55.

19. USG ed., VI. A., p. 55.

20. Gravel IV, p. 479.

21. Johnson, pp. 198, 203-04, 259-60. Gravel II, p. 400.

22. Gravel II, p. 400. Westmoreland Report, p. 135.

23. Johnson, pp. 367-68. Gravel IV, pp. 159, 168-69, 171-75.

24. Johnson, pp. 367-68. Gravel IV, pp. 177-78, 181-83.

25. Johnson, p. 368.

26. Kraslow, pp. 219-22.

27. Ibid., p. 222.

28. Johnson, p. 266.

29. Gravel II, p. 564.

30. Kraslow, p. 221.

31. Leslie H. Gelb, "The Pentagon Papers and the Vantage Point," Foreign Policy, VI (Spring, 1972), p. 36.

32. Johnson, p. 23.

33. Heren, p. 166.

34. Johnson, p. 257.

35. Peking Review, June 30, 1967, pp. 45-46.

36. Gravel II, p. 402.

37. Hoopes, pp. 168-70. Taylor, pp. 375-76.

38. Gravel IV, p. 527. Cooper, p. 508.

39. Johnson, p. 266. Kraslow, pp. 219-24. Cooper, p. 508.

40. Johnson, pp. 266-67.

41. Hoopes, p. 87. Gravel IV, p. 203.

42. Hoopes, p. 87.

43. Gravel IV, p. 204.

44. USG ed., VI. B., p. 236. Gravel II, p. 303.

45. Krasiow, p. 226. Johnson, p. 267. Hoopes, p. 123. Cooper, pp. 381-82. Heren, pp. 172-73.

46. Gravel IV, pp. 206-07.

47. Peking Review, October 27, 1967, pp. 35-36.

48. Westmoreland Report, p. 155. Johnson, p. 371.

49. Henry L. Trewhitt, McNamara (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), p. 244. Johnson, p. 372.

50. Taylor, pp. 377-78.

51. Johnson, pp. 373-77.

52. Hoopes, p. 90. Trewhitt, p. 274. Johnson, p. 20.

53. Johnson, pp. 600-01.

54. Ibid., p. 268.

55. Gravel IV, p. 233.

56. Hoopes, pp. 105-07. Heren, p. 178.

57. Westmoreland Report, p. 156. Hoopes, pp. 106-19. Raphael Lattauer and Norman Uphoff, eds., et al., The Air War in Indo-China (Revised Edition; Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 268.

58. Gravel IV, p. 402.

59. Hoopes, pp. 76, 106. See Lattauer and Uphoff, pp. 267-69 for details of air losses from 1966 through 1968.

60. Gravel IV, pp. 223-24.

61. Gravel IV, pp. 171-75.

CHAPTER VI

THE DECISIVE DECISION

During the first three months of 1968, weighty and decisive diplomatic and military events occurred. The nation's decision making process was again put into operation and tested. In addition, the period terminated with the President's historic speech on 31 March which culminated a major phase of United States' involvement in the Vietnam conflict.

For the reasons enumerated above and because of the scarcity of source material following that period, I have elected to terminate this thesis with a critical evaluation of the first quarter of 1968. In viewing this period, I will again identify the most significant events, analyze each incident individually and in relation to other major events, and, finally, continue to test the theory that containment remained the ultimate United States' objective in South Vietnam.

Early in January the United States' intelligence apparatus determined that the North Vietnamese infiltration had increased to a rate three to four times higher than the prior year.[1] This was particularily alarming to Washington, especially since the United States' ground and air campaign had been operating at an intense level.

At the same time, the Roumanians returned from their negotiation attempt in Hanoi. This was the probe which had resulted from Harriman's efforts in Bucharest in late November of 1967. Unfortunately, they carried neither an acceptance of the United States' offer nor a counter-offer. The North Vietnamese continued to demand an unconditional cessation of bombing. Washington, however, was pleased that the channel remained open, so they were asked to again return to Hanoi to seek "further clarification" of Hanoi's position. The Roumanians agreed and flew to North Vietnam during the third week in January.[2]

On 23 January, the North Koreans captured the United States' intelligence gathering ship, the Pueblo.[3] This was a decisive communist coup which instantly diverted the attention of Washington and the world from Vietnam to Korea. It was unquestionably a military victory for the communist nations since it succeeded in demonstrating a degree of vulnerability in that area. Of even greater significance, however, was the fact that it set the United States up for the shock of the TET offensive which soon followed.

Three days after the Pueblo incident, the Administration's world wide concerns were somewhat abated by the tone and tenor of General Westmoreland's Year End Assessment on Vietnam. He stated, in part:

> During 1967 the enemy lost control of large sections of the population. He faces significant problems in the areas of indigenous recruiting, morale, health and resources control. . . . The year ended with the enemy increasingly resorting to desperation tactics in attempting to achieve military/psychological

> victory; and he has experienced only failure in these attempts. Enemy bases with sparse exception are no longer safe havens and he has necessarily become increasingly reliant on Cambodian and Laotian sanctuaries.[4]

This report served to lessen the anxiety which had arisen after the capture of the Pueblo, but it also acted to create a false sense of security which made the Tet offensive seem even more unreal than it actually was.

On the night of 30-31 January 1968, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese launched their massive and historic Tet attacks. This was a three-pronged operation designed to seize Saigon and the major southern cities, to isolate and destroy the United States' forces at Khe Sanh in I Corps, and, finally, to occupy the rural areas which the Viet Cong estimated would be abandoned by the South Vietnamese troops who would be moved to defend the major cities.[5]

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese employed 84,000 troops in this attack. At the peak of their success they managed to seize 5 of the 6 autonomous cities, 64 of the 242 district capitals, and 36 province capitals.[6] Initially, it was a major psychological and military victory for them.

The fighting raged for weeks. By mid-February the combined Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces had lost 33,000 killed and 6,700 captured. Approximately one-half of their entire attacking force was destroyed. For their part, the allies lost 3,400 killed of which 1,100 were Americans.[7] Westmoreland requested the immediate deployment of six battalions which had been scheduled for later in the year. Johnson approved.[8]

Even with the high losses that they had sustained the enemy was not defeated. A JCS Assessment of the situation, also in mid-February, stated in part:

> Thus far, he [the enemy] has committed only 20 to 25% of his NVA force. . . . Since November, he has increased his NVA battalions by about 25. The bulk of these and the bulk of the uncommitted NVA forces are in the I Corps area.[9]

In this regard, Westmoreland was convinced that the VC-NVA planned to launch another major offensive in the Khe Sanh area in I Corps and attempt to sever the two northern provinces from South Vietnam.[10] This caused additional consternation and concern in Washington.

In retrospect, what was the immediate effect of Tet? In response to this question, two eminent authorities have offered their comments.

Professor Henry Kissinger, writing in Foreign Affairs in 1969, stated:

> . . . But in a guerrilla war, purely military considerations are not decisive. Psychological and political factors loom at least as large.
>
> On that level the Tet offensive was a political defeat in the countryside for Saigon and the U.S.-- The U.S. and Saigon promised that they could protect the villages. The Viet Cong merely asserted that they were the real power in the countryside and they proved it by destroying the village protection.[11]

The professor was quite correct in asserting that psychological and political factors were as important in a guerrilla war as was the military factor. However, he overlooked the obvious fact that when the NVA-VC launched the Tet offensive, they raised the level of conflict from a guerrilla war to a large formation conventional one. In that respect they were

defeated and subsequently forced to revert again to the guerrilla stage. That was as much a political and psychological defeat for them as their initial assaults were a defeat for the United States. Additionally, as Professor Kissinger and as any rice tilling Vietnamese knows, a military force, provided it has the assets and is willing to sacrifice them, is capable of achieving a temporary victory, whether it be seizing a hamlet or a town. The key is to achieve a lasting victory, even if it takes a long time. This last factor is the universal cornerstone of the entire war for national liberation concept.

Furthermore, the VC-NVA psychological and political achievements, to which Kissinger alludes, are questionable. The facts are that: they lost over one-half of their attacking force; they left numerous cities in ruins; they temporarily disrupted the lives of millions of South Vietnamese; they committed unpardonable mass atrocities in Hue; they sacrificed the core of their Viet Cong political cadre; and, most important, they hastened and increased the political unity and military fighting ability of the South Vietnamese. Following the shock of the initial attacks, the Saigon government pulled itself together and slowly returned to regain control of the countryside. This was a gradual and painstaking process, but it was done. The fact that Saigon did this was a political victory for the central government. It demonstrated an unprecedented level of political unity and purpose. Psychologically, it vividly portrayed to the rice farmer that the

South Vietnamese government was stable, decisive, capable of reacting and geared to long term security.

The second significant comment on the result of the Tet offensive was offered by General Westmoreland in his Report on Operations in Vietnam in the summer of 1968. In a simple but poignant sentence he stated, "The Vietnamese Army stood fast--fought back and came of age."[12] The implications of this statement were far reaching. It meant that the Vietnamese Army had advanced to the point where they could begin to bear a greater burden of the combat load. The years of training, equipping, advising and nurturing them had finally paid off. Unquestionably it took the impetus of the Tet attacks to do it. Ironically, that incentive was provided by that force which had hoped to destroy the South Vietnamese Army. After recovering from the initial assaults, the South Vietnamese Army responded with organization, unity and purpose. Out of this, there developed a new confidence, elan, and resolve which had been lacking for years.

In addition, the reaction of the South Vietnamese Army reflected and reinforced the new found political stability in the capital. If the army had "stood fast--fought back and come of age," then so too had Saigon. For the army was nothing more than a mirror of the central government.

But these analyses and criticisms were offered more than six months after Tet. What was the immediate reaction in Washington and what occurred diplomatically to influence the actions of the United States?

Shortly after the Tet attacks commenced, the Roumanians informed Washington that Hanoi had rejected their last attempt to open negotiations.[13] This could well be expected based on the nature of the fighting at that time.

Then, during the remainder of that month, Washington received three unexpected diplomatic probes from Hanoi. On 4 February, two envoys from North Vietnam visited Foreign Minister Fanfani in Rome and expressed an interest in opening discussions with the United States. On 21 February, United Nations' Secretary U-Thant informed Johnson that he had received a peace feeler from Hanoi which indicated that they might open negotiations following a bombing halt. Finally, on 28 February an Indian diplomat informed Washington that the North Vietnamese were prepared to enter "prompt" and "substantive" discussions when the United States stopped the bombing. In each case, Washington attempted to confirm that the source of the position statement came from a responsible official in Hanoi and not from a minor official; however, it was unable to do so.[14]

Although unmentioned in any source document, Hanoi knew at the time of the second and third probes that she had lost approximately 40,000 men and had been forced out of every major city in the South except portions of Saigon and Hue. This fact had to lend a degree of greater credibility at least to the two latter probes.

Meanwhile, on 21 February, President Johnson dispatched General Earl G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

to Saigon to assess the situation, to confer with General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker and, most important, to get their comments, additions, deletions and concurrence on a contingency plan which could change the over-all United States' strategy in the war and its defensive posture throughout the war.[15]

This contingency plan, and contingency was the key word, called for a large increase in the then present force level both in Vietnam and the United States. It was based on the following assumptions, and again assumptions was a key word, that: (1) The South Vietnamese were unable to rapidly and fully mobilize; (2) The South Koreans withdrew all or a portion of their 48,000 man force from Vietnam; (3) The North Vietnamese heavily reinforced their forces in South Vietnam; and, (4) Westmoreland was given the approval to mount an all-out counter-offensive to include operations in Cambodia and Laos. Furthermore, it was influenced by: (1) the reality of the critically reduced General Reserve in the United States; (2) the possibility of a renewed conflict in Korea following the Pueblo incident and the attempted assassination of President Chung Hee Park; (3) and, fresh saber rattling over the Berlin Wall.[16] In short, the United States faced a re-evaluation of its world-wide military posture.

On his return, Wheeler presented the President with a plan which called for a 206,000 man increase in the United States' force level in South Vietnam over the next ten months and a 200,000 man increase in the Strategic Reserve force

level in the United States. To accomplish this, it necessitated a call up of 250,000 Reservists and an extension of all current military enlistments by six months.[17]

After analyzing the cold, hard facts of a best case military situation, the most recent third party diplomatic probes from Hanoi, and the burning reality of the Tet offensive, the President acted. On 28 February he ordered Clark Clifford, the Secretary of Defense designate, to form an ad hoc task force and to conduct an "A to Z Review" of the United States' policy in Vietnam.[18]

A unique combination of factors had forced this action. Neither the Tet offensive, the third party probes, the Korean situation, nor the fear of a renewed Berlin crisis would probably have precipitated the major review by themselves; however, by acting in concert, they compelled the Administration to take a fresh look at Vietnam, and to assess the United States' involvement and objective in that area.

On 1 March, the same day that he formally assumed office, Clifford convened his task force. It consisted of: Dean Rusk, Nicholas Katzenbach and William Bundy from the State Department; Paul Nitze and Paul Warnke from the Defense Department; Henry Fowler from the Treasury; Richard Helms from the CIA; and, finally, Walt Rostow and Maxwell Taylor from the President's Staff.[19] Following three days of discussions and debate the task force presented its recommendations to the President. The principal points included:

> An immediate decision to send approximately 23,000 additional men to Vietnam;
>
> Early approval of a reserve call up of about 245,000 men;
>
> Reserving judgment on the total 205,000 package and examination of requirements "week by week";
>
> An in-depth study of possible new "political and strategic guidance" for our operations in Vietnam and of our over-all Vietnam policy;
>
> No new peace initiative on Vietnam.[20]

The main points of this recommendation are fairly clear; however, two demand additional comments. By the term "no new peace initiative" they clearly meant to continue the diplomatic posture as presented in the modified San Antonio formula. Second, by recommending an in-depth study of possible new "political and strategic guidance" they admitted their failure to accomplish the objective for which they had been formed. The President had called for an A to Z policy review and all he received were recommendations regarding and relating to the proposed force increase. In addition, the committee opinions were clearly divided on the recommended intensity of the bombing program, a subject which was crucial and basic to the nation's present and future actions and its foreign policy objective in that area.[21]

The President took these recommendations and directed the deployment of only 22,000 additional combat and support troops; however, he delayed his decision on the remainder of the proposals.[22]

During the next few weeks, the President entered a period of re-evaluation and rethinking of the Vietnam policy.

When the period began, he faced the known facts of the Tet offensive, the recommended force increase, the intangible third party negotiating probes from Hanoi and the conclusions of the Clifford-Group Policy review. As the period progressed he was subjected to a new series of recommendations and events which reshaped his attitude toward and perception of the war.

On 8 March, Clark Clifford confided to Johnson that although he had chaired the ad hoc committee, he did not fully agree with their recommendations. He felt that more time was needed to study the problem and he also thought that a modified bombing halt might help open negotiations. He also argued that,

> Nothing [now] required us to remain until the North had been ejected from the South, and the Saigon government had been established in complete military control of all of South Vietnam. . . . The more we continued to do in South Vietnam, the less likely the South Vietnamese were to shoulder their own burden.[23]

The new Secretary of Defense was clearly pressing for negotiation and de-escalation. His point of departure, however, was optimistic. He plainly felt that the South Vietnamese were then prepared to begin to bear the burden of the war. This could release American forces to return to the States.

Three days later, President Johnson just barely defeated Senator Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire Primary.[24] This was clearly a reversal for the Administration hawks and a triumph for the anti-Administration doves. This set back in the States, however, was off-set somewhat by a victory in South Vietnam in which President Thieu agreed to increase his

nation's forces by approximately 125,000 over the next six months. This provided the President greater latitude and freedom of action in future decisions.

Meanwhile, recommendations continued to flow in as the time for a decision neared. On 14 March, Townsend Hoopes, the Under Secretary of the Air Force, forwarded a memorandum which urged that: (1) the United States stop the bombing and troop escalation in order to encourage talks; (2) United States' troops be moved to protect the populated areas; (3) the United States consider recognizing the NLF and accepting a coalition government; and, finally, that the United States consider the neutralization of all of Indo-China.[25] This was a definite vote for disengagement.

On the following day, Arthur Goldberg, the United States' Ambassador to the United Nations, sent a memorandum which exhorted the President to order an unconditional bombing halt as a stimulant for negotiations. Four days later, Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State and an Administration super-hawk, pressed the President to order a de facto bombing halt above the panhandle to see if the United States would receive a de facto response from Hanoi.[26] Quite obviously, the pressure on the President to take some positive action was at a fever pitch and, most important, the pressure was coming from the right places.

The forces advocating a revision in the United States' attitude toward Vietnam netted their first victory on 22 March, when the President announced that General Creighton Abrams

would replace General Westmoreland in Vietnam.[27] This was a most significant change. Westmoreland had been in Vietnam since January of 1964, almost as long as Johnson had been President. Johnson had personally approved his assignment as the over-all military commander in Vietnam. He had been the President's man on the scene in that country. His program and concepts of operations had visibly reflected the Administration's thinking for the past four years. Westmoreland's announced reassignment was a definite indication that Johnson was preparing to alter the Administration's strategic policy toward the conduct of the war.

Three days later, on 25 March,[28] the President again called for a White House conference with the Wise Men, similar to the one he had called in November of 1967. The participants included Dean Acheson, George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Douglas Dillon, General Omar Bradley, General Matthew Ridgeway, General Maxwell Taylor, Robert Murphy, Henry Cabot Lodge, Abe Fortas and Arthur Goldberg. They were again asked their opinion on the Administration's prosecution of the war.[29]

Following a day of briefings and intense periods of open discussion, they presented their recommendations to the President. In direct contrast to their advice of November 1967, the majority favored a de-escalation of the military aspects of the war and a strong move to seek a political solution at the conference table.[30] Viewed in retrospect, their recommendation focused on strategy and not on the ultimate objective.

Even so, this abrupt turn-about in the opinion of the Advisory Group in a period of only four months was somewhat of a shock to the President; however, it should not have been totally unexpected. The recommendations of Clifford, Goldberg and Rusk had been similar in nature.

After a few more days of reflection and analysis, the President delivered his now famous abdication speech on 31 March 1968, which included the following passage:

> We are prepared to move towards peace through negotiations.
>
> So, tonight in the hope that this action will lead to early talks, I am taking the first step to de-escalate the conflict. We are reducing--substantially reducing the present level of hostilities.
>
> And we are doing so unilaterally and at once.
>
> Tonight I have ordered our aircraft and our naval vessels to make no attacks on North Vietnam, except in the area north of the Demilitarized Zone where the continuing enemy build-up directly threatens allied forward positions and where the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to that threat.[31]

He then went on to voice the hope that the North Vietnamese would match the United States' restraint so that even the limited bombing could be halted and both sides could sit down to negotiations. He discussed the United States plans to assist in the expansion and strengthening of the South Vietnamese Army. Finally, he concluded with his statement of intention not to run for re-election.[32] This last statement merely served to underline the sincerity and resolve of the prior remarks.

On 3 April the North Vietnamese formally accepted the President's offer to meet in conference and the long struggle to reach the negotiating table had ended.[33] A major phase in the United States' involvement in South Vietnam had terminated. The longer and more difficult task of successfully concluding negotiations had just begun.

But a vital question remains. Did the President modify the United States' objective in South Vietnam? To answer that question I will analyze those factors which influenced his decision and the decision itself.

Initially the Tet offensive was a military set back both in Saigon and Washington. However, after recovering from the initial shocks, the South Vietnamese made a fairly good accounting of themselves. This demonstrated a great deal of permanency, stability and unity at both the political and military levels in South Vietnam. It also allowed Washington to view those aspects of the Vietnam war with more assurance.

Quickly following on the heels of the Tet offensive, the North Vietnamese put out negotiating feelers through three different sources: U-Thant in the United Nations; Foreign Minister Fanfani in Italy; and, an Indian diplomat in the United States. The timing, frequency and the thrust of the probes seemed to indicate a degree of sincerity on their part. Their demands had apparently been reduced to the single requirement that the United States cease the bombing of the North. In short, the diplomatic situation looked favorable.

Furthermore, the large troop loss which the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong suffered in the first weeks of the offensive was a factor which lent even further credence to the North's probes. Although undocumentable, it was logical to assume that the North Vietnamese political structure contained both pro-negotiation as well as anti-negotiation elements. Clearly the anti-negotiation element was fully in power before the Tet offensive. However, the tragic losses of the Tet offensive had to serve as a stimulant for the pro-negotiating element and thus put the North Vietnamese government under pressure to open discussions.

In this regard, the pressures applied by China to North Vietnam were significant. Again, a full documentation is impossible; however, it is possible to analyze China's public position as revealed in the Peking Review. On 12 April it acknowledged Johnson's speech of 31 March. Then on 19 April it editorially attacked the President's effort as another "peace talks fraud."[34] Other than that, there was no major Chinese government position statement on Johnson's offer and Ho's acceptance during the period 1 April 1968 through 31 May 1968.[35] From this it is logical to assume that China backed off, at least to a small degree, in its anti-negotiation position.

Moving on to the activity in Washington, there is no question that the President was under a great deal of pressure to change the United States' strategy in Vietnam. The Tet Offensive, the unfavorable domestic political results of the proposed 400,000 man force increase, the inconclusive A to Z

review, the private recommendations of Clifford, Hoopes, Rusk and Goldberg, and, finally, the majority opinion of the council of Wise Men all served to focus on a strategy oriented on reduced bombing, de-escalation and negotiation. In addition, the possibility for a major change was greatly enhanced by President Thieu's agreement to increase the South Vietnamese force by 125,000 men. This provided the American President a greater freedom of action in his decision making.

March of 1968 was an historic month. A unique combination of factors acted individually and upon the others to create a decision environment. Those factors included: the shock of the Tet offensive; the third party diplomatic probes and the renewed hope for the opening of negotiations; the huge losses suffered by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong; the unexpected high level of political unity and military fighting capacity as demonstrated by the South Vietnamese; the internal pressures in the United States' government to de-escalate; and, Thieu's promise of a major troop increase.

Acting under pressure from those factors, the President made the decision to de-escalate unilaterally the air and naval attacks on the North and this led to the long awaited opening of negotiations.

Now, I must address the question of whether that decision changed the United States' national objective in South Vietnam? The answer to that question is found in several passages of the President's speech which have been overlooked up to this time. They have, in fact, been overshadowed by the

unilateral de-escalation decision and the announcement that the President would not run for re-election.

In the first passage, the President voices a warning to North Vietnam and indirectly renews the nation's pledge to the defense of South Vietnam:

> But if peace does not now come through negotiations, it will come when Hanoi understands that our common resolve is unshakable and our common strength is invincible.[36]

He then goes on to restate the national objective in South Vietnam:

> Our objective in South Vietnam has never been the annihilation of the enemy. It has been to bring about a recognition in Hanoi that its objective--taking over the South by force--could not be achieved.[37]

In short, communist expansion would not be tolerated and containment would be continued.

Later on in the speech he stated:

> Throughout this entire long period I have been sustained by a single principle:
>
> --that what we are doing now in Vietnam is vital not only to the security of Southeast Asia, but it is vital to the security of every American.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The heart of our involvement in South Vietnam--under three Presidents, three separate Administrations--has always been America's own security.[38]

Quite clearly, containment was to be continued in South Vietnam, as anywhere else, because it was essential to the national security of the United States.

Thus, the President's decision to de-escalate the bombing in North Vietnam and to level off the troop commitment in South Vietnam did not change our national objective on containment. His decision was a change in strategy based upon

the then present political, military and diplomatic climate. It reflected a belief that South Vietnam, politically and militarily, could begin to bear a greater burden of the war. It was based on that logical assumption that negotiations would most probably result. He took no action to reduce either the United States' force levels or the nation's support for South Vietnam in the South. The United States continued in its full commitment to the preservation of South Vietnam. The national objective remained containment.

President Johnson had assumed a commitment to Vietnam that had been passed on to him by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. That commitment to the defense and continued existence of that small Southeast Asian state as a non-communist entity was, in reality, an outward manifestation of the policy of containment.

During the Johnson Administration, the nation's commitment assumed various forms based upon the situation that it faced. In 1964, the United States supported South Vietnam with increased advisors and air support during a period of intense and devisive political crises and in the face of an increasing insurgent opposition. In 1965, the United States deployed ground combat troops and escalated its air involvement to a stage of full military commitment to the defense of South Vietnam and the containment of communism. In 1966, the United States increased its forces to counter a corresponding build up of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troop levels. In 1967, the United States launched a major ground and air

offensive while the South Vietnamese forces concentrated on securing and pacifying the populated areas. In early 1968, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attempted to achieve a major military victory in their Tet offensive. After some initial successes, however, they were defeated and forced to return to their sanctuary areas. The United States, seeing the possibility of a favorable settlement, then moved for a diplomatic solution to the conflict while maintaining a full force level in South Vietnam. The continued presence of United States' troops and air power reflected a continued resolve and dedication to the objective of containment.

Throughout the period, the political situation in Saigon was a significant factor which influenced both the diplomatic posture and military decisions of the United States. In turn, the diplomatic position reflected both the political and military situation. Thus, the over-all political, military and diplomatic stance was a unique blend of each of these factors. The United States employed a flexible strategy based on the demands of the situation. Although the strategy changed, the national objective did not. That objective was containment.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER VI - THE DECISIVE DECISION

1. Clark M. Clifford, "A Vietnam Reappraisal," Foreign Affairs, XLVII (July, 1969), 611.

2. Johnson, p. 268. It is unknown at this time what exactly was meant by the term "further clarification."

3. Heren, p. 188. Johnson, p. 385.

4. Gravel IV, pp. 230, 538-39.

5. Hoopes, p. 140. Gravel IV, pp. 234-35. Cooper, p. 515.

6. Westmoreland Report, p. 158.

7. Hoopes, p. 142. Westmoreland Report, p. 161. Heren, p. 187. By 28 February, the VC-NVA lost 45,000 killed and 12,500 weapons captured.

8. Johnson, p. 386. Hoopes, p. 148. This was in actuality the mere fleshing-out of the then authorized force level in South Vietnam. There were 500,000 men in Vietnam and Westmoreland was authorized a total of 525,000.

9. Gravel IV, p. 539.

10. Westmoreland Report, pp. 161-62, 183-85.

11. Henry Kissinger, "The Vietnam Negotiations," Foreign Affairs, XLVII (January, 1969), 215.

12. Westmoreland Report, p. 170.

13. Johnson, p. 269.

14. Gravel IV, p. 237. Kraslow, p. 232. Johnson, p. 395.

15. Taylor, pp. 386-87. Johnson, p. 388.

16. Johnson, pp. 388-91. Taylor, pp. 386-87. Westmoreland Report, p. 156.

17. Gravel IV, p. 239. Hoopes, p. 148. Brandon, p. 124. Johnson, p. 386. Cooper, p. 516.

18. Gravel IV, p. 239. Johnson, p. 393. Hoopes, p. 172.

19. Taylor, p. 387.

20. Johnson, p. 397. Brandon, p. 121. Clifford, pp. 609-10. Gravel IV, pp. 252-53. Hoopes, pp. 177-79. For an in-depth analysis of the detailed recommendation see Gravel IV, pp. 575-84.

21. Johnson, p. 397. Gravel IV, p. 584.

22. Johnson, p. 399.

23. Clifford, p. 613. Hoopes, p. 181.

24. Gravel IV, p. 17. Johnson, p. 405.

25. Hoopes, pp. 195-96.

26. Hoopes, p. 184. Johnson, pp. 408-09. Taylor, p. 391.

27. Gravel IV, pp. 17, 269. Heren, p. 202.

28. Gravel IV, pp. 18-19, 266-68. USG ed., IV. C. 7. (a), p. 25; IV. C. 7. (b), p. 190. Hoopes, p. 215. Johnson, p. 416. Taylor, p. 390. There is some disagreement on the actual dates of this meeting. The Gravel and USG editions date the meeting on 18 and 19 March. The books by Johnson, Taylor and Hoopes date it on 25 and 26 March 1968. Since Johnson and Taylor were participants, and Hoopes was indirectly involved, I believe their dating is more accurate. Furthermore, the March 1968 period was at the very end of the Pentagon Study time frame and source material was less available to the analysts; therefore their dating could be inaccurate.

29. Hoopes, pp. 214-15. Taylor, p. 390.

30. Gravel IV, p. 266. Johnson, pp. 416-18. Taylor, pp. 390-91. Those who opposed de-escalation were Robert Murphy, Abe Fortas and Maxwell Taylor.

31. Gravel IV, p. 272.

32. Gravel IV, pp. 272-75.

33. Kraslow, p. 235. Gravel IV, pp. 290-91. Hoopes, p. 266.

34. Peking Review, April 12, 1968, p. 14; April 19, 1968, p. 12.

35. Peking Review, April 1, 1968 through May 31, 1968. See all issues.

36. Gravel IV, p. 272.

37. Gravel IV, p. 273.

38. Gravel IV, p. 273.

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CONTAINMENT CONTINUED:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE VIETNAM WAR DURING THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION

by

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The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the Johnson Administration's approach to and management of the Vietnam War from 22 November 1963 to 31 March 1968.

On becoming President, Johnson assumed a commitment to Vietnam that had been passed on to him by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. That commitment was in reality an outward manifestation of the national policy of containment. In essence, it focused on the defense and maintenance of that small Southeast Asian state as a non-communist entity.

During the Johnson Administration the commitment took on various forms. In 1964, the United States supported South Vietnam with increased advisors and air support. This was a period of intense and decisive political crises and an era of increasing insurgent opposition. In 1965, the United States deployed ground combat troops and escalated its air involvement to a stage of full military commitment to the defense of South Vietnam. In 1966, the United States increased its forces to counter a corresponding build up of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troop levels. In 1967, the United States launched a major ground and air offensive while the South Vietnamese concentrated on pacifying the populated areas. In early 1968, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attempted to achieve a major military victory in their Tet offensive. After some initial successes; however, they were forced to return to their

sanctuary areas. The United States then moved for a favorable diplomatic settlement while maintaining a full force level in the country. The continued presence of United States' troops and air power reflected a continued resolve and dedication to the objective of containment.

Throughout the period, the political situation in Saigon was a significant factor which influenced both the diplomatic posture and the military decisions of the United States. In addition, the diplomatic position reflected both the political and military situation. Thus, the over-all political, military and diplomatic stance was a unique blend of each of these factors.

Numerous autobiographies, bibliographies, monographs, studies, papers and articles have been published on the period. However, none has achieved the distinction of presenting an objective, integrated overview. Some of the references used, such as, Lyndon B. Johnson's Vantage Point, and Townsend Hoopes' The Limits of Intervention, were specifically selected to furnish an insight into the perceptions of primary and secondary participants. Other books, such as David Kraslow and Stuart Loory's The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam, and Chester Cooper's The Lost Crusade, provided information that was not available in primary sources. Finally, and most significantly, I leaned heavily on the three published editions of the Pentagon Papers: the Times edition, the U.S. Government edition and the Gravel edition. In this paper I have attempted

to meld the best of the published sources and thus present a fresh and original view.

The conclusion that I have drawn is that the United States maintained a remarkably consistent policy toward Vietnam. To be sure, the means used to achieve that policy changed as the exigencies of the situation changed. The United States' government was not faced with a static situation in which a single most desirous and effective means to accomplish an objective could be devised and implemented. The methods employed were as flexible as the conditions required; however, the United States' over-all objective and policy remained constant. That policy is best described by a single word, containment.