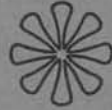


IV.B Evolution of the War (26 Vols.)

Counterinsurgency: The Kennedy Commitments, 1961-
1963 (5 Vols.)

4. Phased Withdrawal of U.S. Forces in Vietnam, 1962-64

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UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

1945 - 1967



VIETNAM TASK FORCE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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IV. B. 4.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

PHASED WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES

1962-1964

Foreword

This monograph traces planning for cutting back numbers of U.S. military personnel in Vietnam.

- Summary and Analysis
- Chronology
- Table of Contents and Outline
- Footnotes

SUMMARY
AND ANALYSIS

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

SUMMARY

A formal planning and budgetary process for the phased withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam was begun amid the euphoria and optimism of July 1962, and was ended in the pessimism of March 1964. Initially, the specific objectives were: (1) to draw down U.S. military personnel then engaged in advisory, training, and support efforts from a FY 64 peak of 12,000 to a FY 68 bottoming out of 1,500 (just HQ, MAAG); and (2) to reduce MAP from a FY 64 peak of \$180 million to a FY 69 base of \$40.8 million. South Vietnamese forces were to be trained to perform all the functions then being carried out by U.S. personnel. What the U.S.G. was actually trying to accomplish during this period can be described in either or both of two ways: (1) a real desire and attempt to extricate the U.S. from direct military involvement in the war and to make it a war which the GVN would have to learn to win, and (2) straight-forward contingency planning and the use of a political-managerial technique to slow down pressures for greater U.S. inputs. A blend of the wish embodied in the first explanation and the hard-headedness of the second seems plausible.

Needless to say, the phase-out never came to pass. The Diem coup with the resulting political instability and deterioration of the military situation soon were to lead U.S. decision-makers to set aside this planning process. An ostensible cut-back of 1000 men did take place in December 1963, but this was essentially an accounting exercise -- and the U.S. force level prior to the reduction had already reached 16,732 in October 1963. By December 1964, U.S. strength had risen to 23,000 and further deployments were on the way.

What, then, did the whole phased-withdrawal exercise accomplish? It may have impeded demands for more men and money, but this is doubtful. If the optimistic reports on the situation in SVN were to be believed, and they apparently were, little more would have been requested. It may have frightened the GVN, but it did not induce Diem or his successors to reform the political apparatus or make RVNAF fight harder. It may have contributed, however, to public charges about the Administration's credibility and over-optimism about the end of the conflict. Despite the carefully worded White House announcement of the phase-out policy on October 2, 1963, tentative Johnson Administration judgments came to be regarded by the public as firm predictions. While this announcement made clear that the U.S. effort would continue "until the insurgency has been suppressed or until the national security forces of the GVN are capable of suppressing it," the public tended to focus on the prognosis which followed -- "Secretary McNamara and General Taylor reported their judgment that the major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965...." In

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

2. -
August 1964, Mr. McNamara further explained the policy: "We have said -- as a matter of fact, I say today -- as our training missions are completed, we will bring back the training forces."

Quite apart from what was actually accomplished by the phase-out policy and the costs in terms of domestic political perceptions of Administration statements on Vietnam, there are some important lessons to be learned from this exercise. What was the U.S. rationale behind the policy? Was it sound, feasible, and consistent with statements of national objectives? By what policy and programmatic means were we trying to bring about the desired results? Were these, in fact, the most appropriate and effective vehicles? How did the intelligence and reporting system in Vietnam help or hinder policy formulation? Why was not the Diem coup in its darkening aftermath grasped as the opportunity to re-examine policy and unambiguously to decide to phase out, or to do whatever was deemed necessary?

The rationale behind the phased withdrawal policy was by and large internally consistent and sensible.

- To put Vietnam in the perspective of other U.S. world interests. Vietnam, at this time, was not the focal point of attention in Washington; Berlin and Cuba were. Part of this exercise was to make clear that U.S. interests in Europe and in the western hemisphere came first. Even in terms of Southeast Asia itself, Laos, not Vietnam, was the central concern. So, the phase-out policy made the kind of sense that goes along with the structuring of priorities.
- To avoid an open-ended Asian mainland land war. Even though violated by U.S. involvement in the Korean war, this was a central tenet of U.S. national security policy and domestic politics. The notion of the bottomless Asian pit, the difference in outlook about a human life, were well understood.
- To plan for the contingency that events might force withdrawal upon us. Seen in this light, the planning process was prudential preparation.
- To treat the insurgency as fundamentally a Vietnamese matter, best solved by the Vietnamese themselves. Most U.S. decision-makers had well-developed doubts about the efficacy of using "white faced" soldiers to fight Asians. This view was invariably coupled publicly and privately with statements like this one made by Secretary McNamara: "I personally

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

3
believe that this is a war that the Vietnamese must fight...I don't believe we can take on that combat task for them. I do believe we can carry out training. We can provide advice and logistical assistance."

- To increase the pressure on the GVN to make the necessary reforms and to make RVNAF fight harder by making the extent and future of U.S. support a little more tenuous. This was explicitly stated in State's instructions to Ambassador Lodge on how to handle the White House statement of October, 1963: "Actions are designed to indicate to Diem Government our displeasure at its political policies and activities and to create significant uncertainty in that government and in key Vietnamese groups as to future intentions of United States." In other words, phased withdrawal was thought of as a bargaining counter with the GVN.
- To put the lid on inevitable bureaucratic and political pressures for increased U.S. involvement and inputs into Vietnam. It was to be expected and anticipated that those intimately involved in the Vietnam problem would be wanting more U.S. resources to handle that problem. Pressures for greater effort, it was reasoned, eventually would come into play unless counteracted. What Secretary McNamara did was to force all theater justifications for force build-ups into tension with long-term phase-down plans. On 21 December, 1963, in a memo to the President after the Diem coup, Mr. McNamara urged holding the line: "U.S. resources and personnel cannot usefully be substantially increased...."
- To deal with international and domestic criticism and pressures. While Vietnam was not a front burner item, there were those who already had begun to question and offer non-consensus alternatives. During 1963, for example, both General de Gaulle and Senator Mansfield were strongly urging the neutralization of Vietnam.

It is difficult to sort out the relative importance of these varying rationales; all were important. Paramount, perhaps, were the desires to limit U.S. involvement, and to put pressure on the GVN for greater efforts. And, the rationales were all consistent with one another. But they did not appear as being wholly consistent with other statements of our national objectives in Southeast Asia. For example, on July 17, 1963, President Kennedy said: "We are not going to withdraw from bringing about a stable government there, carrying on a struggle to maintain its national independence". In my opinion, for us to withdraw from that effort would mean a collapse not only of South Vietnam, but Southeast Asia." He added: "We can think of Vietnam as a piece of strategic real estate. It's on the corner of mainland Asia, across the East-West trade routes, and in a position that would

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

make it an excellent base for further Communist aggression against the rest of free Asia." In a September 9, 1963 interview, the President stated: "I believe [the domino theory]. I think that the struggle is close enough. China is so large, looms up high just beyond the frontiers, that if South Vietnam went, it would not only give them an improved geographic position for a guerrilla assault on Malaya, but would also give the impression that the wave of the future in Southeast Asia was China and the Communists." One could argue that such an unequivocally strong statement of strategic importance would not be consistent with any sort of phase-out proposal short of a clear-cut victory over the communists. Despite the caveats about it being essentially a South Vietnamese struggle, President Kennedy's statements were very strong. And, insofar as the U.S. was interested in greater leverage on the GVN, these statements tended to reduce U.S. bargaining power because of the explicit and vital nature of the commitment.

The rationales behind the phased withdrawal policy were incorporated into a formal programming and planning process that began in July 1962 and ended on 27 March 1964. It was at the Honolulu Conference on 23 July 1962, the same day that the 14-nation neutralization declaration on Laos was formally signed, that the Secretary of Defense on guidance from the President put the planning machine in motion. Noting that "tremendous progress" had been made in South Vietnam and that it might be difficult to retain public support for U.S. operations in Vietnam indefinitely, Mr. McNamara directed that a comprehensive long range program be developed for building up SVN military capability and for phasing-out the U.S. role. He asked that the planners assume that it would require approximately three years, that is, the end of 1965, for the RVNAF to be trained to the point that it could cope with the VC. On 26 July, the JCS formally directed CINCPAC to develop a Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam (CPSVN) in accordance with the Secretary's directives. Thus began an intricate, involved and sometimes arbitrary bargaining process, involving mainly MACV, the Joint Staff, and ISA. There were two main pegs that persisted throughout this process: MAP planning for the support and build-up of RVNAF, and draw-downs on U.S. advisory and training personnel.

The first COMUSMACV CPSVN was floated on 19 January 1963. It envisioned MAP for FY 1963-1964 at a total of \$405 million. The total for FY 1965-1968 was \$673 million. The RVNAF force level was to peak in FY 64 at 458,000 men. U.S. personnel in SVN were to drop from a high of 12.2 thousand in FY 65 to 5.9 thousand in FY 66, bottoming out in FY 68 at 1.5 thousand (Hq MAAG). No sooner was this first CPSVN cranked into the policy machinery than it conflicted with similar OSD/ISA planning. This conflict between ISA/OSD guidance and COMUSMACV/Joint Staff planning was to be continued throughout the life of the CPSVN.

Secretary McNamara opposed General Harkins version of the plan for a variety of reasons: (1) it programmed too many RVNAF than were trainable and supportable; (2) it involved weaponry that was too sophisticated; (3) it did not fully take account of the fact that if the insurgency came into control in FY 65 as anticipated, the U.S. MAP investment thereafter

5.-
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

should be held at no more than \$50 million per year; (4) the U.S. phase-out was too slow, and the RVNAF training had to be speeded up. In other words, Mr. McNamara wanted both a more rapid U.S. withdrawal of personnel, and a faster reduction in U.S. military/economic support.

The Secretary's views prevailed. The embodiment of Mr. McNamara's desire to quicken the pace of phase-out planning was embodied first in a Model M plan prepared by the JCS and later in what came to be called the Accelerated Model Plan of the CPSVN. The Accelerated Plan provided for a rapid phase-out of the bulk of U.S. military personnel. It also provided for building up GVN forces at a faster pace, but at a more reduced scale. MAP costs for FY 1965-1969 totaled \$399.4 million, or nearly \$300 million lower than the original projection.

All of this planning began to take on a kind of absurd quality as the situation in Vietnam deteriorated drastically and visibly. Strangely, as a result of the public White House promise in October and the power of the wheels set in motion, the U.S. did effect a 1000 man withdrawal in December of 1963. All the planning for phase-out, however, was either ignored or caught up in the new thinking of January to March 1964 that preceded NSAM 288. The thrust of this document was that greater U.S. support was needed in SVN. Mr. McNamara identified these measures as those that "will involve a limited increase in U.S. personnel and in direct Defense Department costs." He added: "More significantly they involve significant increases in Military Assistance Program costs....," plus "additional U.S. economic aid to support the increased GVN budget." On 27 March 1964, CINCPAC was instructed not to take any further action on the Accelerated Plan. Quickly, requests for more U.S. personnel poured into Washington. The planning process was over, but not forgotten. Secretary McNamara stated in his August 1964 testimony on the Tonkin Gulf crisis that even today "if our training missions are completed, we will bring back the training forces."

While the phase-out policy was overtaken by the sinking after-effects of the Diem coup, it is important to understand that the vehicles chosen to effect that policy -- MAP planning, RVNAF and U.S. force levels -- were the right ones. They were programmatic and, therefore, concrete and visible. No better way could have been found to convince those in our own government and the leaders of the GVN that we were serious about limiting the U.S. commitment and throwing the burden onto the South Vietnamese themselves. The public announcement of the policy, on October 2, 1963, after the McNamara-Taylor trip to Vietnam was also a wise choice. Even though this announcement may have contributed to the so-called "credibility gap," publication was a necessity. Without it, the formal and classified planning process would have seemed to be nothing more than a drill.

While the choice of means was appropriate for getting a handle on the problem, it proceeded from some basic unrealities. First, only the most Micawberesque predictions could have led decision-makers in Washington to believe that the fight against the guerrillas would have clearly turned the corner by FY 65. Other nations' experience in internal warfare pointed plainly in the other direction. With more propitious

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

circumstances, e.g. isolation from sanctuaries, the Philippine and Malayan insurgencies each took the better part of a dozen years to bring to an end.

Second, there was an unrealistic contradiction within the CPSVN itself. As directed by Secretary McNamara, U.S. MAP was to decrease as RVNAF increased. In practical terms, MAP costs should have been programmed to increase as the South Vietnamese Army increased, and as they themselves began to bear most of the burden. The desire to keep MAP costs down after FY 65 could, at best, be perceived as a budgeting or program gimmick not a serious policy.

Three, the political situation in South Vietnam itself should have prompted more realistic contingency plans against failure of the Vietnamese, in order to give the U.S. some options other than what appeared as precipitous withdrawal. The intelligence and reporting systems for Vietnam during this period must bear a principal responsibility for the unfounded optimism of U.S. policy. Except for some very tenuous caveats, the picture was repeatedly painted in terms of progress and success.

In the July 1962 Honolulu Conference the tone was set. Secretary McNamara asked COMUSMACV how long it would take before the VC could be expected to be eliminated as a significant force. In reply, COMUSMACV estimated about one year from the time RVNAF and other forces became fully operational and began to press the VC in all areas. Mr. McNamara was told and believed that there had been "tremendous progress" in the past six months. This theme was re-echoed in April of 1963 by COMUSMACV and by the intelligence community through an NIE. All the statistics and evaluations pointed to GVN improvement. While noting general progress, the NIE stated that the situation remains flexible. Even as late as July 1963 a rosy picture was being painted by DIA and SACSA. The first suggestion of a contrary evaluation within the bureaucracy came from INR. Noting disquieting statistical trends since July, an unpopular INR memo stated that the "pattern showed steady decline over a period of more than three months duration." It was greeted with a storm of disagreement, and in the end was disregarded.

The first, more balanced evaluation came with the McNamara-Taylor trip report late in September and October, 1963. While it called the political situation "deeply serious," even this report was basically optimistic about the situation, and saw little danger of the political crisis affecting the prosecution of the war.

Not until after the Diem coup, the assassination of President Kennedy, and the December Vietnam trip of Secretary McNamara was the Vietnam situation accurately assessed. In Secretary McNamara's December memo to the President, after his trip, he wrote: "The situation is very disturbing. Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2-3 months, will lead to a neutralization at best and more likely to a communist-controlled state." One of the most serious deficiencies he found was a "grave reporting weakness on the U.S. side." Mr. McNamara's judgment, apparently, was not

7.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

predominant. He noted in the concluding paragraph of his memo that he "may be overly pessimistic, inasmuch as the ambassador, COMUSMACV, and General Minh were not discouraged and look forward to significant improvements in January."

By 6 March 1964 when another major Secretary of Defense Conference convened at CINCPAC Headquarters, the consensus was the the military situation was definitely deteriorating. The issue was no longer whether there was or was not satisfactory progress; the question was how much of a setback had there been and what was needed to make up for it. Mr. McNamara observed that attention should now be focused on near term objectives of providing for necessary greater U.S. support. It was finally agreed that the insurgency could be expected to go beyond 1965.

The intelligence and reporting problem during this period cannot be explained away. In behalf of the evaluators and assessors, it can be argued that their reporting up until the Diem coup had some basis in fact. The situation may not have been too bad until December 1963. Honest and trained men in Vietnam looking at the problems were reporting what they believed reality to be. In retrospect, they were not only wrong, but more importantly, they were influential. The Washington decision-makers could not help but be guided by these continued reports of progress.

Phased withdrawal was a good policy that was being reasonably well executed. In the way of our Vietnam involvement, it was overtaken by events. Not borne of deep conviction in the necessity for a U.S. withdrawal or in the necessity of forcing the GVN to truly carry the load, it was bound to be submerged in the rush of events. A policy more determined might have used the pretext and the fact of the Diem coup and its aftermath as reason to push for the continuation of withdrawal. Instead, the instability and fear of collapse resulting from the Diem coup brought the U.S. to a decision for greater commitment.

CHRONOLOGY

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

PHASED WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES: 1962-1964

Date	Event or Document	Description
23 Jul 62	Geneva Accords on Laos	14-Nation declaration on the neutrality of Laos.
23 Jul 62	Sixth Secretary of Defense Conference, Honolulu	Called to examine present and future developments in South Vietnam - which looked good. Mr. McNamara initiated immediate planning for the phase-out of U.S. military involvement by 1965 and development of a program to build a GVN military capability strong enough to take over full defense responsibilities by 1965.
26 Jul 62	JCS Message to CINCPAC, 262318Z	CINCPAC was formally instructed to develop a "Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam" (CPSVN) in line with instructions given at Honolulu.
14 Aug 62	CINCPAC Message to MACV, 140428Z	MACV was directed to draw up a CPSVN designed to ensure GVN military and para-military strength commensurate with its sovereign responsibilities. The CPSVN was to assume the insurgency would be under control in three years, that extensive US support would be available during the three-year period; that those items essential to development of full RVNAF capability would be (largely) available through the military assistance program (MAP).
Oct-Nov 1962	GVN National Campaign Plan developed	In addition to the CPSVN, MACV prepared an outline for an integrated, nationwide offensive military campaign to destroy the insurgency and restore GVN control in South Vietnam. The concept was adopted by the GVN in November.
26 Nov 62	Military Reorganization Decreed	Diem ordered realignment of military chain of command, reorganization of RVNAF, establishment of four CTZ's and a Joint Operations Center to centralize control over current military operations. (JOC became operational on 20 December 1962.)
7 Dec 62	First Draft of CPSVN Completed	CINCPAC disapproved first draft because of high costs and inadequate training provisions.
19 Jan 63	MACV Letter to CINCPAC, 3010 Ser 0021	MACV submitted a revised CPSVN. Extended through FY 1963 and concurred in by the Ambassador, it called for GVN military forces to peak at 453,000 in FY 1964 (RVNAF strength would be 230,900 in FY 1964); cost projected over six years would total \$973 million.
22 Jan 63	OSD(ISA) Message to CINCPAC, 222243Z	MAP-Vietnam dollar guidelines issued. Ceilings considerably different from and lower than those in CPSVN.
25 Jan 63	CINCPAC Letter to JCS, 3010, Ser 0079	Approved the CPSVN, supported and justified the higher MAP costs projected by it.
7 Mar 63	JCSM 190-63	JCS recommended SecDef approve the CPSVN; supporting the higher MAP costs, JCS proposed CPSVN be the basis for revision of FY 1964 MAP and development of FY 1965-69 programs.
20 Mar 63	USMACV "Summary of Highlights, 3 Feb 62-7 Feb 63"	Reported continuing, growing RVNAF effectiveness, increased GVN strength economically and politically. The strategic hamlet program looked especially good. MACV forecast winning the military phase in 1963 -- barring "greatly increased" VC reinforcement and resupply.
17 Apr 63	NIE 53-63	Although "fragile," the situation in SVN did not appear serious; general progress was reported in most areas.
6 May 63	Seventh SecDef Honolulu Conference	Called to review the CPSVN. Largely because of prevailing optimism over Vietnam, Mr. McNamara found the CPSVN assistance too costly, the planned withdrawal of US forces too slow and RVNAF development misdirected.
3 May 63	Buddhist Crisis Begins	GVN forces fired on worshipers celebrating Buddha's birthday (several killed, more wounded) for no good cause. Long standing antipathy toward GVN quickly turned into active opposition.
8 May 63	Two SecDef Memoranda for ASD/ISA	<p>First: Directed joint ISA/JCS development of plans to replace US forces with GVN troops as soon as possible and to plan the withdrawal of 1,000 US troops by the end of 1963.</p> <p>Second: Requested the Office, Director of Military Assistance, ISA, "completely rework" the MAP program recommended in the CPSVN and submit new guidelines by 1 September. The Secretary felt CPSVN totals were too high (e.g., expenditures proposed for FYs 1965-68 could be cut by \$270 Million in his view).</p>

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

9 May 63	JCS Message 9320 to CINCPAC	Directed CINCPAC to revise the CPSVN and program the withdrawal of 1,000 men by the end of 1963. Force reduction was to be by US units (not individuals); units were to be replaced by specially trained RVNAF units. Withdrawal plans were to be contingent upon continued progress in the counterinsurgency campaign.
11 May 63	CINCPAC Letter to JCS, 3010 Ser 00447-63	CINCPAC recommended some changes, then approved MACV's revision of the CPSVN and the MACV plan for withdrawal of 1,000 men. As instructed, those 1,000 men were drawn from logistic and service support slots; actual operations would be unaffected by their absence.
17 May 63	ASD/ISA Memorandum for the Secretary	ISA's proposed MAP-Vietnam program based on the Secretary's instructions was rejected as still too high.
29 May 63	OSD/ISA Message to CINCPAC, 291752Z	CINCPAC was directed to develop three alternative MAP plans for FYs 1965-69 based on these levels: \$535 M (CPSVN recommendation) \$450 M (Compromise) \$365 M (SecDef goal) MAP for FY 1964 had been set at \$180 M.
16 Jun 63	GVN-Buddhist Truce (State Airgram A-731 to Embassy Saigon, 10 June)	Reflected temporary and tenuous abatement of GVN-Buddhist hostilities which flared up in May. The truce was repudiated almost immediately by both sides. Buddhist alienation from the GVN polarized; hostilities spread.
17 Jul 63	DIA Intelligence Summary	Reported the military situation was unaffected by the political crisis; GVN prospects for continued counterinsurgency progress were "certainly better" than in 1962; VC activity was reduced but VC capability essentially unimpaired.
13 Jul 63	CINCPAC-proposed MAP program submitted to JCS	CINCPAC suggested military assistance programs at the three levels set by the JCS but recommended adoption of a fourth Plan developed by CINCPAC. "Plan J" totalled \$450.9 M over the five-year period.
4 Aug 63	DIA Intelligence Bulletin	Rather suddenly, Viet Cong offensive actions were reported high for the third consecutive week; the implication was that the VC were capitalizing on the political crisis and might step up the insurgency.
14 Aug 63	SACSA Memorandum for the Secretary	Discounted the importance of increased VC activity; the comparative magnitude of attacks was low; developments did not yet seem salient or lasting.
20 Aug 63	Dien declared martial law; ordered attacks on Buddhist pagodas	This decree plus repressive measures against the Buddhists shattered hopes of reconciliation, and irrevocably isolated the Dien government.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

20 Aug 63	JCSM 629-63	<u>TOP SECRET - Sensitive</u> Recommend SecDef approve the CINCPAC/MACV proposed plan for 1,000-man withdrawal in three to four increments for planning purposes only; recommended final decision on withdrawal be delayed until October.
21 Aug 63	Director, DIA Memorandum for SecDef	Estimated that Diem's acts will have "serious repercussions" throughout SVN; foresaw more coup and counter-coup activity. But reported military operations were so far unaffected by these events.
27 Aug 63	JCSM 640-63	JCS added yet a fifth "Model M" Plan to CINCPAC's four alternative MAP levels. Providing for higher force levels termed necessary by the JCS, the Model M total was close to \$400 M. JCS recommended the Model M Plan be approved.
30 Aug 63	OSD/ISA Memorandum for the Secretary	Recommended approval of JCSM 629-63. But noted many "units" to be withdrawn were ad hoc creations of expendable support personnel, cautioned that public reaction to "phony" withdrawal would be damaging; suggested actual strength and authorized ceiling levels be publicized and monitored.
3 Sep 63	SecDef Memorandum to CJCS	Approved JCSM-629-63. Advised JCS against creating special units as a means to cut back unnecessary personnel; requested the projected US strength figures through 1963.
5 Sep 63	ASD/ISA Memorandum to the Secretary	Concurred in JCS recommendation with minor reservations that the Model M Plan for military assistance to SVN be approved.
6 Sep 63	SecDef Memorandum for CJCS	Approved Model M Plan as the basis for FY 65-69 MAP planning; advised that US materiel turned over to RVNAF must be charged to and absorbed by the authorized Model M Plan ceilings.
11 Sep 63	CJCS Memorandum for SecDef	Forwarded the military strength figures (August thru December) to SecDef; advised that the 1,000-man withdrawal would be counted against the peak October strength (16,732). First increment was scheduled for withdrawal in November, the rest in December.
21 Sep 63	Presidential Memorandum for the SecDef	Directed McNamara and Taylor (CJCS) to personally assess the critical situation in SVN -- both political and military; to determine what GVN action was required for change and what the US should do to produce such action.
27 Sep 63	ASD/ISA (ODMA) "MAP Vietnam: Manpower and Financial Summary"	Approved MAP totals reflected the Model M Plan: FY 1964 : \$180.6 M FY 1965-69: \$211.6 M Total: \$392.2 M The GVN force levels proposed were substantially below those of the January CPSVN (from a peak strength in FY 1964 of 442,500, levels were to fall to 120,200 in FY 1969).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

26 Sep - 2 Oct 63	SecDef/CJCS Mission to South Vietnam	Positive detailed evidence presented in numerous briefings indicated conditions were good and would improve. Hence, the Secretary ordered acceleration of the planned U.S. force phase-out.
2 Oct 63	McNamara-Taylor Briefing for the President, and later, the NSC	Concluded the military campaign has made great progress and continues to progress, but warned that further Diem-Nhu repression could change the "present favorable military trends."
5 Oct 63	McNamara-Taylor met with President and NSC	The President approved the military recommendations made by the Secretary and Chairman: <ul style="list-style-type: none">-- that MACV and Diem review changes necessary to complete the military campaign in I, II, and III Corps by the end of 1964, in IV Corps by 1965:-- that a training program be established to enable RVNAF to take over military functions from the US by the end of 1965 when the bulk of US personnel could be withdrawn:-- that DOD informally announce plans to withdraw 1,000 men by the end of 1963. No further reductions in US strength would be made until requirements of the 1964 campaign were clear.
11 Oct 63	NSAM 263.	Approved the military recommendations contained in the McNamara-Taylor Report; directed no formal announcement be made of implementation of plans to withdraw 1,000 men by the end of 1963.
22 Oct 63	State Department INR Memo RFE-90	Assessed trends since July 1963 as evidence of an unfavorable shift in military balance. (This was one of the first indications that all was not as rosy as MACV <u>et al</u> had led McNamara and Taylor to believe.)
1 Nov 63	Diem Government Overthrown	The feared political chaos, civil war and collapse of the war did not materialize immediately; US Government was uncertain as to what the new circumstances meant. General Minh headed the junta responsible for the coup.
20 Nov 63	All-agency Conference on Vietnam, Honolulu	Ambassador Lodge assessed prospects as hopeful; recommended US continue the policy of eventual military withdrawal from SVN. said announced 1,000-man withdrawal was having salutary effects. MACV agreed. In this light, officials agreed that the Accelerated Plan (speed-up of force withdrawal by six months directed by McNamara in October) should be maintained. McNamara wanted MAP spending held close to OSD's \$175.5 million ceiling (because of acceleration, a FY 64 MAP of \$197.7 million looked possible).
22 Nov 63	President Kennedy Assassinated	One result: US Government policies in general were maintained for the sake of continuity, to allow the new administration time to settle and adjust. This tendency to reinforce existing policies arbitrarily, just to keep them going, extended the phase-out, withdrawal and MAP concepts -- probably for too long.
23 Nov 63	SecDef Memorandum for the President	Calling GVN political stability vital to the war and calling attention to GVN financial straits, the Secretary said the US must be prepared to increase aid to Saigon. Funding well above current MAP plans was envisaged.
26 Nov 63	NSAM 273	President Johnson approved recommendations to continue current policy toward Vietnam put forward at the 20 November Honolulu meeting: reaffirmed US objectives on withdrawal.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

3 Dec 63	Director, Far East Region/ISA Memorandum for the ASD/ISA	In response to the President's wish for a reappraisal of Vietnam developments, for a "fresh new look" at the problem, second-echelon leaders outlined a broad interdepartmental "Review of the South Vietnam Situation." This systematic effort did not culminate in high level national reassessment or specific policy re-orientation.
5 Dec 63	CINCPAC Message to JCS	Submitted the Accelerated Model Plan version of CPMV. From a total of 15,200 in FY 1964, US military strength in Vietnam would drop to 11,500 in FY 1965 (vice 13,100 recommended by the Model M Plan), to about 3,200 in FY 1966 and 2,600 in FY 1967. GVN force levels were a bit lower but GVN force build-up a bit faster than recommended by the Model M Plan. MAP costs for FYs 1965-1969 totalled \$399.4 million (vice \$392.2 million under Model M plan).
11 Dec 63	CM 1079-63 for SecDef	The adjusted year-end strength figure was 15,394. Although 1,000 men were technically withdrawn, no actual reduction of US strength was achieved. The December figure was <u>not</u> 1,000 less than the peak October level.
13 Dec 63	Director, DIA Memorandum for the Secretary	Reported the VC had improved combat effectiveness and force posture during 1963, that VC capability was unimpaired. (Quite a different picture had been painted by SACSA in late October: "An Overview of the Vietnam War, 1960-1963," personally directed to the Secretary, was a glowing account of steady military progress.)
30 Jan 64	Second Coup in Saigon	General Minh's military regime was replaced by a junta headed by General Khanh.
10, 11, 14, 13 Feb 64	Deputy Director, CIA Memoranda for SecDef, SecState, et al	Suspicious of progress reports, CIA sent a special group to "look at" South Vietnam. Its independent evaluation revealed a serious and steadily deteriorating GVN situation. Vietcong gains and, significantly, the quality and quantity of VC arms had increased. The Strategic Hamlet Program was "at virtual standstill." The insurgency tide seemed to be "going against GVN" in all four Corps.
6 Mar 64	Eighth SecDef Conference on Vietnam, Honolulu	Participants agreed that the military situation was definitely deteriorating, that insurgency would probably continue beyond 1965, that the US must immediately determine what had to be done to make up for the setback(s).
3-16 Mar 64	McNamara/Taylor Trip to Vietnam	Personally confirmed the gravity of the Vietnam situation.
16 Mar 64	SecDef Memorandum for the President: "Report on Trip to Vietnam"	Mr. McNamara reported the situation was "unquestionably" worse than in September. (RVNAF desertion rates were up; GVN military position was weak and the Vietcong, with increased GVN support, was strong.) Concluding that more US support was necessary, the Secretary made twelve recommendations. These included: <ul style="list-style-type: none">-- More economic assistance, military training, equipment and advisory assistance, as needed.-- Continued high-level US overflights of GVN borders; authorization for "hot pursuit" and ground operations in Laos.-- Prepare to initiate - on 72 hours' notice - Laos and Cambodia border control operations and retaliatory actions against North Vietnam.-- Make plans to initiate - on 30 days' notice - a "program of Graduated Overt Military Pressures" against North Vietnam. Mr. McNamara called the policy of reducing existing US personnel where South Vietnamese could assume their functions "still sound" but said no major reductions could be expected in the near future. He felt US training personnel could be substantially reduced before the end of 1965.
17 Mar 64	NSAM 293	The President approved the twelve recommendations presented by Mr. McNamara and directed all agencies concerned to carry them out promptly.

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27 Mar 64	OSD Message 963023 to CINCPAC	Formally suspended five-year MAP program planning until further notice; said the previous plans for phasing down US and GVN forces was superseded by the policy of providing South Vietnam assistance and support as long as required to bring aggression and terrorism under control (as per NSAM 298).
6 May 64	CINCPAC Message to MACV (062145Z)	Indicated growing US military commitment: this 1500-man augmentation raised the total authorized level to 17,000.
1-2 Jun 64	Special Meeting on Southeast Asia, Honolulu	Called in part to examine the GVN National Campaign Plan -- which was failing. The conferees agreed to increase RVNAF effectiveness by extending and intensifying the US advisory effort as MACV recommended.
25 Jun 64	MACV Message 325330 to JCS	Formal MACV request for 900 additional advisory personnel. His justification for advisors at the battalion level and for more advisors at district and sector levels was included. Also, 30 USN advisors were requested to establish a Junk Force and other maritime counterinsurgency measures.
4 Jul 64	CINCPAC Message to JCS (042320Z)	CINCPAC recommended approval of the MACV proposal for intensification of US advisory efforts.
15 Jul 64	Saigon EMBTEL 103	Ambassador Taylor reported that revised VC strength estimates now put the enemy force between 23,000 and 34,000. No cause for alarm, he said the new estimate did demonstrate the magnitude of the problem and the need to raise the level of US/GVN efforts. Taylor thought a US strength increase to 21,000 by the end of the year would be sufficient.
16 Jul 64	MACV Message 6130 to CINCPAC (161045Z)	MACV requested 3,200 personnel to support the expansion (by 900) of US advisory efforts -- or 4,200 more men over the next nine months.
17 Jul 64	EMBTEL (171210Z)	Ambassador Taylor concurred in MACV's proposed increase, recommended prompt approval and action.
21 Jul 64	State 205 to Saigon	Reported Presidential approval (at the 21 July NSC meeting) of the MACV deployment package.
Dec 64	Further increases	Total US strength was 23,000: further deployments were on the way.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

IV. B. 4. PHASED WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES

1962-1964

TABLE OF CONTENTS and OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
The Secretary of Defense Honolulu Decisions of July 1962	3
National Campaign Plan	5
Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam	6
Secretary of Defense Honolulu Decisions of May 1963.	12
MAP Planning	13
1000-Man Withdrawal.	15
The Buddhist Crisis.	16
McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam, October 1963	18
The November Coup and Overthrow of Diem.	24
Assassination of President Kennedy	25
Accelerated Model Plan of the CPSVN.	26
The 1000-Man Withdrawal of December 1963	30
The Vietnam Situation Worsens.	30
Demise of the CPSVN	37
Build-Up of the U.S. Force Commitment	37
Postscript to Withdrawal Planning	39

FIGURES

1. CPSVN - Total U.S. Supported Forces	8
2. CPSVN - Forecast of Phase-Out of U.S. Forces.	10
3. CPSVN - Phase Down of U.S. Forces	27
4. CPSVN - Phase Down of GVN Forces.	28
5. CPSVN - MAP Cost.	29

15
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

IV. B. 4.

PHASED WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES
1962-1964

INTRODUCTION

From mid-1962 to early 1964 the U.S. government went through a formal planning process, ostensibly designed to disengage the U.S. from direct and large-scale military involvement in Vietnam. In retrospect, this experience falls into place as a more or less isolated episode of secondary importance; eventually abortive, it had little impact on the evolution of the Vietnam war. It does, however, serve as a vehicle for understanding one long phase of the war and the U.S. role in it.

The genesis lay in a conjuncture of circumstances during the first half of 1962 that prompted the U.S. to shift its Vietnam perspective from the hitherto restricted one of largely tactical responses to current, localized, and situational requirements, to fitting these to more strategic and purposeful long-range courses of action. The expanded perspective was programmatic in outlook, and oriented toward specific goals -- end the insurgency and withdraw militarily from Vietnam.

At the outset, the motivation for the idea of phased withdrawal of U.S. forces was threefold: in part, the belief that developments in Vietnam itself were going well; in part, doubt over the efficacy of using U.S. forces in an internal war; and in part, the demands of other crises in the world that were more important to Washington than Vietnam. In the course of materializing into policy and assuming form as plans, these premises were transformed into conclusions, desiderata institutionalized as objectives, and wish took on the character and force of imperative.

For example, in March 1962, Secretary McNamara testified before Congress that he was "optimistic" over prospects for U.S. success in aiding Vietnam, and "encouraged at the progress the South Vietnamese are making." He expressed conviction that the U.S. would attain its objectives there. But he emphasized that the U.S. strategy was to avoid participating directly in the war while seeking an early military conclusion: 1/

"I would say definitely we are approaching it from the point of view of trying to clean it up, and terminating subversion, covert aggression, and combat operations....

"...We are wise to carry on the operations against the Communists in that area by assisting native forces rather than by using U.S. forces for combat.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

16.

"Not only does that release U.S. forces for use elsewhere in the world or for stationing in the United States, but also it is probably the most effective way to combat the Communist subversion and covert aggression. To introduce white forces -- U.S. forces -- in large numbers there today, while it might have an initial favorable military impact would almost certainly lead to adverse political and in the long run adverse military operations. And therefore, we think the program we are carrying out is the most effective one and certainly it is directed toward termination of operations as rapidly as possible."

In late spring of 1962, the military situation in South Vietnam showed hopeful signs of at last having turned a corner. The various programs under way, initiated the previous fall as a result of decisions in NSAM No. 111, appeared to be bearing out the basic soundness of the new approach. Assessments and evaluations being reported from the field indicated a pattern of progress on a broad front, and their consistency through time reinforced the impression. By mid-year the prospects looked bright. Continuing favorable developments now held forth the promise of eventual success, and to many the end of the insurgency seemed in sight. This optimism was not without the recognition that there were unsolved political problems and serious soft spots in certain areas of the military effort. But U.S. leadership, both on the scene in Vietnam as well as in Washington, was confident and cautiously optimistic. In some quarters, even a measure of euphoria obtained.

At the same time, events outside Vietnam, some of them ostensibly unrelated, were asserting a direct and immediate relevance for U.S. policy and strategy in Vietnam. As competing priorities, they far overshadowed Vietnam. In the larger scheme of things, an indefinite military commitment in Southeast Asia was being relegated perforce to a parenthetical diversion the nation could then ill afford. More central issues in Berlin, Cuba, and in Laos were at stake, perhaps even to the extent of survival.

Looming foremost was the Berlin problem. Fraught with grave overtones of potential nuclear confrontation with the USSR, it reached crisis proportions in the spring of 1962 over the air corridor issue, and after a temporary lull, flared anew in early summer. By the first of July it was again as tense as ever. U.S. reserves had been recalled to active duty, additional forces were deployed to Europe, and domestic Civil Defense activities, including shelter construction programs, were accelerated.

The burgeoning Cuba problem too was taking on a pressing urgency by virtue of both its proximity and growing magnitude. The Castro aspects alone were becoming more than a vexing localized embarrassment. Given the volatile Caribbean political climate, Cuban inspired mischief could raise tensions to the flash point momentarily. Moreover, by early summer of 1962 increasing evidence of Soviet machinations to exploit Cuba militarily was rapidly adding an alarming strategic dimension. Though the

17.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

nature and full significance of these latter developments would not be revealed until the climactic Cuban Missile Crisis a few months later, the U.S. was already apprehensive of serious danger on its very doorstep. Official interpretive evaluations at the time saw an intimate causal nexus between Berlin and Cuba.

Finally, another set of factors altering the strategic configuration in Southeast Asia and affecting the U.S. position there also came to a head in mid-summer of 1962. These were developments regarding Laos, which impinged upon and helped reshape the U.S. relationship toward Vietnam. In the fall of 1961 and through the spring of 1962 the U.S., its objectives frustrated in Laos, had decided to salvage as much as possible by settling for neutralization. After lengthy and complex diplomatic maneuvering, this was essentially achieved by early summer. On 23 July 1962 the 14-nation declaration and protocol on the neutrality of Laos was signed formally, ending the 15-month Geneva Conference on Laos. The outcome had at once the effect of extricating the U.S. from one insoluble dilemma and serving as a stark object lesson for another. The Laos settlement now both allowed the U.S. a free hand to concentrate on Vietnam and provided the incentive and determination to bring to a close its military commitment there as well -- but this time successfully.

It was in this spirit and context that the U.S. decided to pursue actively the policy objective of divesting itself of direct military involvement of U.S. personnel in the Vietnam insurgency. The aim was to create militarily favorable conditions so that further U.S. military involvement would no longer be needed. To this end, two prerequisites had to be satisfied: bringing the insurgency effectively under control; and simultaneously, developing a militarily viable South Vietnam capable of carrying its own defense burden without U.S. military help. In phase with the progress toward both these goals, there then could be proportionate reductions in U.S. forces.

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE HONOLULU DECISIONS OF JULY 1962 2/

In July 1962, as the prospect of the neutralization of Laos by the Geneva Conference became imminent, policy attention deliberately turned toward the remaining Vietnam problem. At the behest of the President, the Secretary of Defense undertook to reexamine the situation there and address himself to its future -- with a view to assuring that it be brought to a successful conclusion within a reasonable time. Accordingly, he called a full-dress conference on Vietnam at CINCPAC Headquarters in Hawaii. On 23 July, the same day that the 14-nation neutralization declaration on Laos was formally signed in Geneva, the Sixth Secretary of Defense Conference convened in Honolulu.

The series of briefings and progress reports presented at the conference depicted a generally favorable situation. Things were steadily

18.
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

improving and promised to continue. Most programs underway were moving forward, as the statistical indicators clearly demonstrated. Those directly related to prosecution of the counterinsurgency effort showed measurable advances being made toward winning the war. Programs for expanding and improving RVNAF capability were likewise coming along well, and in most cases, were ahead of schedule. Confidence and optimism prevailed.

Impressed, Mr. McNamara acknowledged that the "tremendous progress" in the past six months was gratifying. He noted, however, that these achievements had been the result of short-term ad hoc actions on a crash basis. What was needed now was to conceive a long-range concerted program of systematic measures for training and equipping the RVNAF and for phasing out major U.S. advisory and logistic support activities. The Secretary then asked how long a period it would take before the VC could be expected to be eliminated as a significant force. COMUSMACV, in reply to the direct question, estimated about one year from the time the RVNAF, the Civil Guard, and the Self-Defense Corps became fully operational and began to press the VC in all areas.

The Secretary said that a conservative view had to be taken and to assume it would take three years instead of one, that is, by the latter part of 1965. He observed that it might be difficult to retain public support for U.S. operations in Vietnam indefinitely. Political pressures would build up as losses continued. Therefore, he concluded, planning must be undertaken now and a program devised to phase out U.S. military involvement. He, therefore, directed that a comprehensive long-range program be developed for building up South Vietnamese military capability for taking over defense responsibilities and phasing out the U.S. role, assuming that it would require approximately three years (end 1965) for the RVNAF to be trained to the point that they could cope with the VC. The program was to include training requirements, equipment requirements, U.S. advisory requirements, and U.S. units.

For the record, the formulation of the decisions made and the directives for action to be taken resulting from the Conference was as follows:

- a. Prepare plans for the gradual scaling down of USMACV during the next 3-year period, eliminating U.S. units and detachments as Vietnamese were trained to perform their functions.
- b. Prepare programs with the objective of giving South Vietnam an adequate military capability without the need for special U.S. military assistance, to include (1) a long-range training program to establish an officer corps able to manage GVN military operations, and (2) a long-range program and requirements to provide the necessary materiel to make possible a turnover to RVNAF three years from July 1962.

19.
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, had been augmented in 1961 by aviation, communications, and intelligence units, as well as by Special Forces and other advisers. The Secretary of Defense plainly intended that plans be devised for terminating the mission of the augmenting units.

Three days later on 26 July, the JCS formally directed CINCPAC to develop a Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam (CPSVN) in accordance with the Secretary's decisions of 23 July. ^{3/} CINCPAC, in turn, so instructed COMUSMACV on 14 August, at the same time furnishing additional guidance and terms of reference elaborating on the original SecDef decisions at Honolulu and the JCS directive. The stated objective of the CPSVN was given as:

Develop a capability within military and para-military forces of the GVN by the end of CY 65 that will help the GVN to achieve the strength necessary to exercise permanent and continued sovereignty over that part of Vietnam which lies below the demarcation line without the need for continued U.S. special military assistance.

Development of the plan was to be based on the following assumptions:

- a. The insurgency will be under control at the end of three years (end of CY 65).
- b. Extensive U.S. support will continue to be required during the three year period, both to bring the insurgency under control and to prepare GVN forces for early take-over of U.S. activities.
- c. Previous MAP funding ceilings for SVN are not applicable. Program those items essential to do this job. ^{4/}

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN PLAN

Planning, in two complementary modes, got underway immediately. Concurrently with development of the unilateral U.S. CPSVN, USMACV planners prepared a concept and proposed outline of a GVN National Campaign Plan (NCP) for launching an integrated nation-wide campaign of offensive military operations to eliminate the insurgency and restore the country to GVN control. A central purpose was to reorganize and redispense the VNAF and streamline the chain of command, in order to improve responsiveness, coordination, and general effectiveness of the military effort against the VC. Greater authority would be centralized in the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS); Corps Tactical Zones (CTZs) would be increased from three to four; and each CTZ would have its own direct air and naval support.

20.
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Over and above organizational considerations, the NCP provided for systematic intensification of aggressive operations in all CTZs to keep the VC off balance, while simultaneously conducting clear and hold operations in support of the expanding Strategic Hamlet Program. Priority of military tasks was first to concentrate on areas north of Saigon, then gradually shift toward the south to Saigon and the Delta. 5/

The proposed NCP was submitted to the GVN in October and a month later was adopted in concept and outline. On 26 November, President Diem promulgated the necessary implementing decrees and directives to effect the reorganization of the SVN armed forces and realign the chain of command. An integrated Joint Operations Center (JOC) was also established and became operational on 20 December, with representation from JGS and its counterpart in USMACV to centralize control over current operations. The following January the draft of a detailed implementing plan for the NCP itself was completed and subsequently approved. 6/

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR SOUTH VIETNAM

Meanwhile, the first cut at the CPSVN was also completed by the MACV planners. It was forwarded to CINCPAC on 7 December, but CINCPAC, upon reviewing the proposed plan, considered it infeasible because of the high costs involved and the marginal capacity of the RVNAF to train the necessary personnel in the required skills within the time frame specified. As a result of CINCPAC's reaction to the initial version, the CPSVN was revised and resubmitted by COMUSMACV on 19 January 1963. 7/ The new CPSVN covered the period FY 1963-1968. In transmitting it, COMUSMACV recommended that future Military Assistance Programs (MAPs) be keyed therefore to the CPSVN. He also indicated that the CPSVN had been coordinated with the Ambassador, who concurred in it. 8/

Force levels laid out in the CPSVN provided for total personnel increases reaching a peak of 458,000 (regular and para-military) in FY 64, with RVNAF manning strength raised from 215,000 to a peak of 230,000 in the same FY period and remaining on that plateau thereafter. Order of magnitude costs (in \$ millions) of the CPSVN would come to:

<u>FY 63</u>	<u>FY 64</u>	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
187	218	153	138	169	113	978

CINCPAC approved the CPSVN as submitted and sent it on to the JCS. However, in the interim, OSD had issued dollar guidelines for MAP planning for Vietnam. The ceilings indicated therein were significantly at variance with the costing figures employed by MACV in developing the CPSVN. 9/ When CINCPAC forwarded the plan, therefore, he went to considerable lengths to explain the discrepancies and to support and justify the higher costs. Comparison of the DOD dollar guidelines with the CPSVN, projected through FY 69, showed a net difference of approximately 66 million dollars, with

21.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the preponderance of the increase occurring in FY 64. 10/ Most of this difference was accounted for by additional Packing-Crating-Handling-Transportation (PCHT) costs associated with the CPSVN but not accommodated in the DOD guideline figures.

The body of the CPSVN laid out the costs in relation to the DOD dollar guidelines, as follows:

CPSVN - DOD DOLLAR GUIDELINES COST COMPARISON (\$ millions)

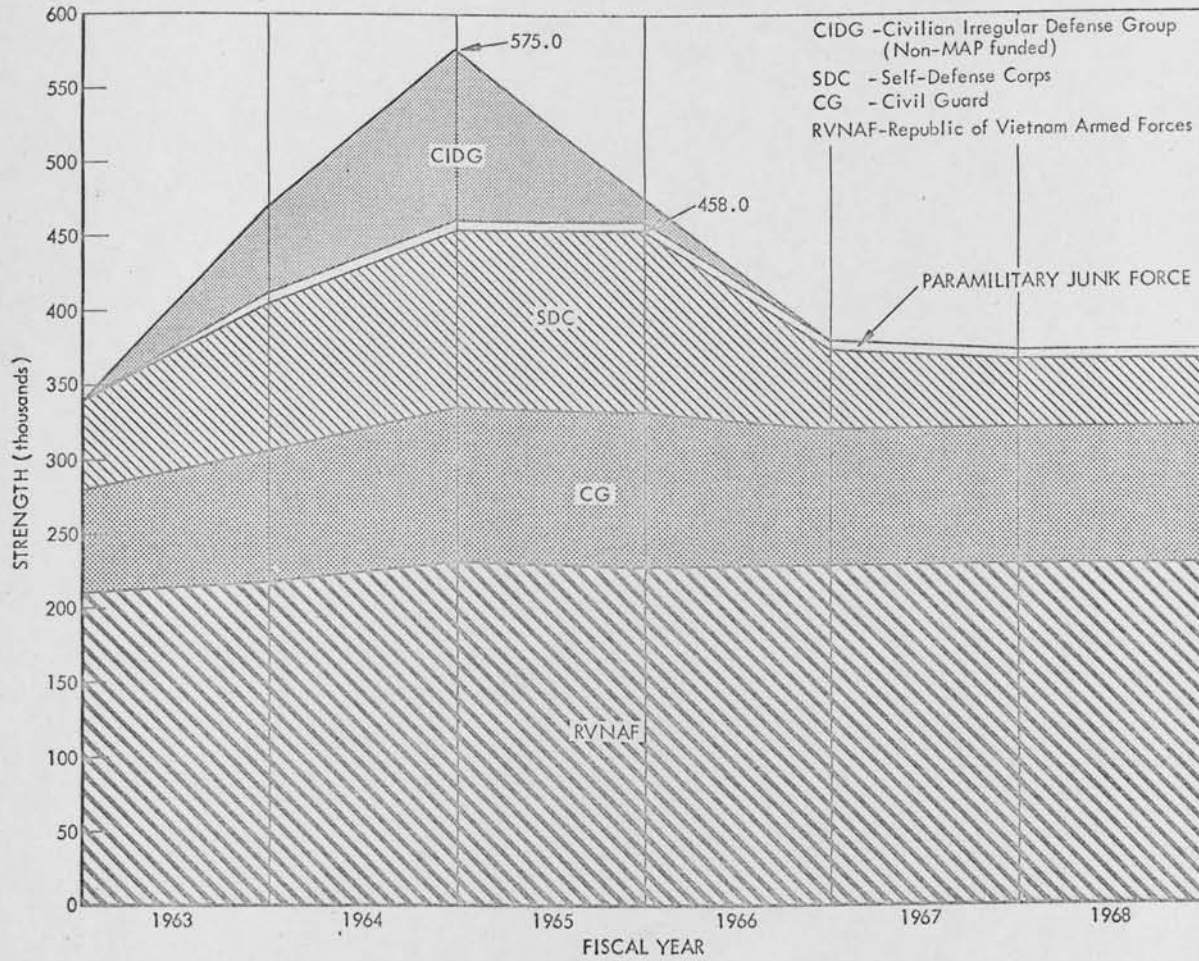
	<u>FY 64</u>	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>FY 69</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
CPSVN*	<u>218</u>	<u>153</u>	<u>138</u>	<u>169</u>	<u>113</u>	<u>110</u>	<u>901</u>
DOD Guidelines	<u>160</u>	<u>165</u>	<u>160</u>	<u>150</u>	<u>140</u>	<u>122</u>	<u>897</u>
Difference	<u>+58</u>	<u>-12</u>	<u>-22</u>	<u>+19</u>	<u>-27</u>	<u>-12</u>	<u>+4</u>
PCHT Added	<u>+11</u>	<u>+11</u>	<u>+11</u>	<u>+11</u>	<u>+10</u>	<u>+8</u>	<u>+62</u>
Difference	<u>+69</u>	<u>-1</u>	<u>-11</u>	<u>+30</u>	<u>-17</u>	<u>-4</u>	<u>+66</u>

*Excludes PCHT.

The rationale offered was that, in order to prosecute the counter-insurgency to a successful conclusion, while at the same time building up GVN capability to allow early withdrawal of U.S. forces, the major costs of the program had to be compressed into the FY 63-65 time frame, with a particular increase in FY 64 and another following U.S. withdrawal in FY 67. 11/ But clearly most of the greater cost throughout the period reflected PCHT.

The pattern of force levels for all South Vietnamese forces that the CPSVN provided for, including the separate non-MAP funded Civilian Irregular Defense Group, is shown in Figure 1.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive



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FIGURE 1 CPSVN - Total U.S. Supported Forces (U)

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Since the ultimate objective of the CPSVN was early withdrawal of U.S. special military assistance, the plan provided for phasing out U.S. advisory forces. The affected major commands of USMACV that would largely not be required after FY 66 were:

1. The U.S. Marine Element which provided helicopter transportation support.
2. The 2d Air Division which provided the USAF portion of the special military assistance support performed in SVN. This support included "Farmgate" (Fighter), "Mule Train" (Transportation), and "Able Mable" (Reconnaissance). It also provided USAF administration and logistical support for USAF personnel and equipment engaged in special military assistance to SVN.
3. U.S. Army Support Group Vietnam (USASGV) which provided the U.S. Army portion of the special military assistance support for SVN (except that performed by MAAG and Headquarters MACV), including helicopter and fixed wing air transportation, signal communications, and special forces. It also provided U.S. administrative and logistical support for assigned and attached personnel and equipment engaged in the special military assistance.
4. Headquarters Support Activity Saigon (HSAS) which provided administrative support to the U.S. Headquarters and other U.S. government sponsored agencies and activities located in Saigon.
5. MAAG Vietnam would have its strength reduced by one-half after FY 65. Only 1,500 MAAG personnel were to remain in country after FY 68.

The target schedule for U.S. force withdrawal, as then forecast, is contained in Figure 2. 12/

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(thousands)

ORGANIZATION	FY63	FY64	FY65	FY66	FY67	FY68
HQ USMACV	.3	.4	.4	.1	.0	.0
HQ MAAG	3.0	3.0	3.0	1.7	1.6	1.5
2D AIR DIV	2.2	2.3	2.3	1.1	.0	.0
USASG (V)	5.1	5.5	5.5	2.7	.0	.0
USMC HELICOPTER UNIT	.5	.5	.5	.0	.0	.0
HSAS	.5	.5	.5	.3	.0	.0
TOTAL	11.6	12.2	12.2	5.9	1.6	1.5

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FIGURE 2 CPSVN - Forecast of Phase-Out of U.S. Forces (U)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

On 7 March 1963, the JCS accepted the MACV CPSVN in toto and forwarded it to the Secretary of Defense. They recommended approval, and proposed that it be the basis for both revising the FY 64 MAP and development of the FY 65-69 MAPs. They requested an early decision on the CPSVN because the greatest increase would occur in the FY 64 MAP. The JCS fully supported the higher costs of the CPSVN above the DOD dollar guidelines. 13/

In OSD, the proposed CPSVN underwent staffing review in ISA MA Plans and elsewhere. Draft responses to the JCS were prepared and then withdrawn. Secretary McNamara was not satisfied with either the high funding levels or the adequacy of the plan regarding exactly how the RVN forces were to take over from the U.S. to effect the desired phase-out of the U.S. military commitment. In mid-April he decided to withhold action pending full review of the CPSVN at another Honolulu conference which he expressly scheduled for that purpose for 6 May. Meantime, the various OSD agencies concerned were instructed to prepare detailed analyses and background studies for him. 14/

The main focus of interest of the Secretary of Defense was on the policy objective behind the CPSVN, namely, to reduce systematically the scale of U.S. involvement until phased out completely. However, the beginnings of a counter-current were already evident. New demands for increases all around were to overwhelm the phasing out objective. Ad hoc requirements for more U.S. forces were being generated piecemeal, each in its own right sufficiently reasonable and so honored. This current, counter-current dynamic can be illustrated well by Mr. McNamara's decisions of late March. As part of the Secretary's policy of demanding strict accounting and tight control on authorized U.S. in-country strength ceilings, he asked for the latest reading on projected U.S. military strength to be reached in Vietnam. He was reassured by the Chairman, JCS, that the estimated peak would not exceed 15,640 personnel. Yet, on this very same day, the Secretary approved a substantial force augmentation, requested earlier, for FARMGATE and air-lift support, involving 111 additional aircraft and a total of approximately 1475 additional personnel. 15/ Other similar special requirements and ad hoc approvals soon were to follow.

Assessments of continuing favorable developments in the improving Vietnam situation in the spring of 1963 seemed to warrant more than ever going ahead with the planned phase out. The general tenor of appraisals at the USMACV level were that the RVNAF had regained the initiative from the VC and that the GVN position had improved militarily, economically, and politically. Evaluations expressed in the "Summary of Highlights" covering the first year of MACV's existence cited in detail the record of the increasing scale, frequency, and effectiveness of RVNAF operations, while those of the VC were declining. Casualty ratios favored RVNAF by more than two to one, and the balance of weapons captured vs weapons lost had also shifted to the GVN side. Cited as perhaps the most significant progress was the Strategic Hamlet Program. The future looked even brighter, e.g., "...barring greatly increased resupply and reinforcement of the Viet Cong by infiltration, the military phase of the war can be virtually won in 1963." 16/

26
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Other evaluations, though more conservative, still tended to corroborate this optimism. NIE 53-63, issued 17 April 1963, found no particular deterioration or serious problems in the military situation in South Vietnam; on the contrary, it saw some noticeable improvements and general progress over the past year. The worst that it could say was that the situation "remains fragile." 17/

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE HONOLULU DECISIONS OF MAY 1963.

At the 6 May Honolulu Conference, briefing reports again confirmed gratifying progress in the military situation. Addressing the CPSVN, Mr. McNamara questioned the need for more Vietnamese forces in FY 68 (224.4 thousand) than the present level of 215 thousand. His reasoning was that a poor nation of 12 million like Vietnam could not support that many men under arms. Qualitatively, furthermore, the planned evolution of VNAF seemed overambitious in terms of sophisticated weaponry such as fighter aircraft. In sum, the Secretary felt the CPSVN assumed an unrealistically high force level for the SVN military establishment and assigned it equipment that was both unduly complicated to operate and expensive to procure and maintain.

Based on these considerations, the Secretary of Defense concluded that, if the insurgency came under control in FY 65 as anticipated, the U.S. MAP investment in SVN thereafter should not be more than at the rate of about \$50 million per year. In his view, thus, the \$573 million MAP proposed in the CPSVN for the period FY 65 through FY 68 was at least \$270 million higher than an acceptable program.

With regard to phasing out U.S. forces, the Secretary of Defense stated that the pace contemplated in the CPSVN was too slow. He wanted it revised to accomplish a more rapid withdrawal by accelerating training programs in order to speed up replacement of U.S. units by GVN units as fast as possible. While recognizing that the build-up of RVNAF was inherently a slow process, he stressed that in the instance of some U.S. units which had been in SVN since 1961, it would be possible more rapidly to transfer functions to Vietnamese. Specifically toward this end, he decided that 1,000 U.S. military personnel should be withdrawn from South Vietnam by the end of CY 63 and directed that concrete plans be so drawn up. 18/

On returning to Washington the Secretary of Defense instructed the ASD(ISA) on 8 May to develop, in coordination with the Joint Staff, a plan for replacing U.S. forces currently deployed in Vietnam with indigenous SVN forces as rapidly as possible, and particularly, to prepare a plan for withdrawing 1,000 U.S. troops before the end of 1965. In another memorandum the same day to the ASD(ISA) regarding the MAP, he noted that "the plan needs to be completely reworked." He therefore instructed ISA also to develop a new, lower MAP for Vietnam for the period FY 65 through 69, requesting that the ISA recommendations be submitted by the first of September. 19/

27.

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A day later, on 9 May, the JCS formally directed CINCPAC to take the necessary actions resulting from the Honolulu Conference and revise the CPSVN. Guidance and terms of reference were provided reflecting the Secretary of Defense reactions and specifying the decisions reached. Singled out especially was the requirement for U.S. force withdrawal. The JCS directive read:

As a matter of urgency a plan for the withdrawal of about 1,000 U.S. troops before the end of the year should be developed based upon the assumption that the progress of the counter-insurgency campaign would warrant such a move. Plans should be based upon withdrawal of US units (as opposed to individuals) by replacing them with selected and specially trained RVNAF units. 20/

COMUSMACV in turn was tasked to draft the revised CPSVN and prepare a plan for the 1000-man reduction. CINCPAC, after some changes and revisions, concurred in the proposed plans and forwarded them to the JCS on 11 May. The revised outline CPSVN now provided for the following SVN force levels (in thousands):

	<u>FY 64</u>	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>FY 69</u>
Total Military and Para-military	447.4	445.5	362.9	317.1	268.8	214.7

MAP levels provided for were as follows (in \$ millions):

<u>FY 64</u>	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>FY 69</u>	<u>Grand Total</u>
178.9	149.0	130.3	120.4	100.5	85.0	764.1

The proposed plan for withdrawal of the first increment of U.S. forces, in compliance with instructions, emphasized units rather than individuals, but the list of so-called "units" scheduled to be included were all smaller than company size. All Services were represented. The criteria employed, also based on earlier guidance, were to select most of the personnel from service support and logistics skills most easily spared and whose release would have least effect on operations. The total came to 1,003 U.S. military personnel to be withdrawn from South Vietnam by the end of December 1963. 21/

MAP PLANNING

ISA meanwhile developed tentative dollar guidelines for MAP planning for Vietnam. The first cut, based on the Secretary of Defense's own suggested total for the FY 65-69 period, was rejected by the Secretary of Defense as too high and returned, with various desired reductions entered by the Secretary of Defense. 22/ Reconciling the MAP with the CPSVN proved to be a difficult problem. As CPSVN succeeded, it was logical that MAP would have to increase; yet CPSVN tried to cut back MAP as well. For instance, the contemplated phase-out of U.S. artillery-spotter aircraft squadrons entailed an add-on to MAP to accommodate the squadron's equipment and maintenance after transferral to the Vietnamese.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Toward the end of May the MAP dollar ceiling for FY 64 was established at \$180 million. But for the period after FY 64 both the MAP and the CPSVN were far from being settled. On 29 May CINCPAC was directed to develop three alternative plans in comparative terms based on the following total dollar levels for the FY 65-69 period:

- a. \$585 million (derived from the current proposed CPSVN).
- b. \$450 million (compromise).
- c. \$365 million (SecDef goal).

Funding guidelines for each of the three versions were provided as follows:

<u>Plan (\$ millions)</u>	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>FY 69</u>
585	150	130	120	100	85
450	150	120	70	60	50
365	125	90	50	50	50

Implied was that a choice would be made somewhere within this range. 23/

A new, complex MAP-CPSVN planning cycle was thus set in motion that would not fully run its course for almost a year longer. CINCPAC responded by preparing the comparative analysis of the alternative MAP levels, as instructed, but besides the three plans required, introduced a fourth version developed by the Joint Staff and identified as "Plan J," which fell mid-range and came to \$450.9 million. Submitted to the JCS on 18 July, the four plans were reviewed at length, with the upshot that the JCS added a fifth plan identified as the "Model M Plan," the total cost of which fell closer to the bottom-range figure but still came to \$400 million. It provided for higher force levels deemed necessary during the critical period FY 65 and FY 66, and thus go above the Secretary of Defense desired ceiling of \$365 million. The breakout of the Model M Plan was as follows:

	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>FY 69</u>
SVN military strength (thousands)	225.5	225.5	148.8	122.0	121.2
MAP costs (\$ millions)	145.2	117.2	51.2	45.1	41.3

All five plans were forwarded by the JCS on 27 August, with the recommendation that the Secretary of Defense approve the Model M Plan. 24/

ISA concurred in the JCS recommendation with certain minor reservations, 25/ and on 6 September, the Secretary of Defense accordingly approved the Model M Plan as a basis for development of the FY 65-69 MAPs. However, the Secretary at the same time advised the JCS that U.S. materiel turned over to SVN units would henceforth be charged to the MAP. Such costs

29.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

therefore would have to be absorbed within the authorized Model Plan ceilings. 26/

Nonetheless, there were still further refinements made. As finally published, the approved MAP reflecting the Model M Plan version of the CPSVN provided for the following SVN active military strength levels (in thousands):

	<u>FY 64</u>	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>FY 69</u>
ARVN	207.5	201.3	177.5	124.5	104.8	103.9
Total (All Services regular and para-military)	442.5	437.0	340.2	142.1	122.2	120.2

Costing levels were as follows (in \$ millions):

<u>FY 64</u>	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>	<u>FY 69</u>	<u>Total</u>
180.6	153.0	107.7	46.2	44.6	40.7	392.2

This final product represented a radical reduction in both force levels and financial investment after FY 66, consistent with the Administration's original policy goal of ending the war and the U.S. military involvement by December 1965. 27/

1000-MAN WITHDRAWAL PLAN

Meanwhile, planning for the 1000-man withdrawal directed by the Secretary of Defense on 6 May was split off from the CPSVN proper and the MAP, and was being treated as a separate entity. On 20 August, the JCS, concurring in the proposed plan developed by COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, forwarded it to the Secretary of Defense. They recommended approval at this time for planning purposes only; final decision was to depend upon circumstances as they developed. The JCS also seconded CINCPAC's added proposal to withdraw the 1000 troops in three or four increments, rather than all at one time. The reasons given were that this would be more practical and efficient for the U.S., would minimize the impact on on-going military operational activities within South Vietnam, and would afford the opportunity for "news prominence and coverage over an extended period of time." 28/

ISA, with certain reservations, recommended approval of the withdrawal plan submitted by JCS. ISA pointed out to the Secretary of Defense that the plan as it stood would not draw all of the 1000 troops from U.S. units that were to be relieved by adequately trained SVN units, as had been intended. Many of the so-called "units" designated therein actually were not bona fide existing units but were specially formed "service support units" made up of random individuals most easily spared throughout USMACV. ISA cautioned that the arbitrary creation of such ad hoc "units" solely for the purpose of the withdrawal might backfire in press reaction. ISA also recommended, in order to show credibly that the final year-end U.S. in-country

36

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

strength had dropped by 1000 from peak strength, that U.S. military strength figures in Vietnam be made public, and that the actual strength as well as the authorized ceilings at any given time be carefully monitored to insure that the desired reductions were indeed achieved. 29/

A few days later the Secretary of Defense approved the 1000-man withdrawal plan forwarded in JCSM-629-63 as recommended. He agreed, however, with ISA and advised the JCS against creating special units if their only purpose was to be a holding unit as a vehicle for withdrawal of individuals. He also requested that he be provided with a projection of U.S. military strength in South Vietnam, by month, for the period September through December 1963. 30/

The following week the Chairman, JCS, responded to the Secretary of Defense's request and furnished the following projection of end-of-month U.S. military strengths in South Vietnam:

August	--	16,201
September	--	16,483
October	--	16,732
November	--	16,456
December	--	15,732

It was noted that the planned 1000-man withdrawal would represent a reduction based on the October peak strength. The first increment of 276 personnel would be withdrawn during November and the remaining increments in December. 31/ This, as it turned out, was destined to be changed somewhat before the withdrawal was executed.

THE BUDDHIST CRISIS

While the CPSVN-MAP and withdrawal planning were going on, significant developments altering the character of the entire situation to which the planning effort was addressed--in fact threatening to invalidate the very premises from which the planning sprung--were occurring within South Vietnam. The Buddhist crisis was rocking the foundations of what precarious political stability the Diem government enjoyed and there was growing concern about its effect on the prosecution of the war against the VC and on improvements of RVNAF.

A series of incidents beginning early in May revealed the deep divisions between militant Buddhist factions, who purported to speak for the bulk of the South Vietnamese population, and the Government. Lack of popular support for the Diem regime had now turned to open opposition. As passions flared

31.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

and Buddhist activism was met with increasingly severe countermeasures, violence spread and grew more serious. A tenuous truce was reached briefly between Buddhist leaders and the GVN on 10 June (formally signed on 16 June) in a mutual effort to reduce tensions--but proved short-lived. Almost immediately the actions of both sides repudiated the agreements. 32/

The U.S. began to be apprehensive about the possible consequences of the Diem government falling as the result of a coup. By early July, the crisis was recognized as serious at the highest levels of the U.S. Government. 33/

Through mid-July assessments remained reasonably reassuring. There was little evidence of impact on the military sector. In fact, indications pointed to the military situation continuing to improve. DIA reported on 17 July that the general level of VC-initiated actions during the first six months of 1963 was considerably lower than for the same period the year before. Battalion and company-size attacks were at about half the 1962 level. It was noted, however, that despite reduced activity, VC capability remained essentially unimpaired. Regarding the progress of South Vietnamese counterinsurgency efforts, the DIA evaluation was cautiously optimistic: though there was still a long way to go, GVN prospects "are certainly better than they were one year ago." 34/

Quite abruptly, a disturbing element began to emerge. Little more than two weeks later, the DIA Intelligence Bulletin of 4 August reported a significant increase in the level of VC offensive actions. Moreover, the rate was high for the third week in a row since mid-July. 35/ The clear implication was that the VC at last were taking advantage of the opportunity presented by the Buddhist crisis. It had been expected--and feared--that they would seek to hasten political collapse and exploit whatever military vulnerabilities there were. The U.S. was thus justifiably concerned lest the recent revived VC aggressiveness be the opening phase of a stepped up insurgency. Within ten days of this DIA report, however, a reevaluation of the significance to be attached to the increased rate of enemy actions allayed fears somewhat. On 14 August, SACSA, reporting to the Secretary of Defense, discounted the upsurge in VC activity over the past month. Its magnitude, comparatively, was below the average of the preceding year and fell far short of the previous high. In this perspective, SACSA saw no cause to read undue implications into developments that were as yet neither particularly salient nor of long duration. 36/

The political crisis meanwhile took a turn for the worse. President Diem, in an attempt to regain control, declared martial law on 20 August. The decree was accompanied by forcible entry into pagodas and mass arrests of Buddhist leaders and laity, and was immediately followed by a series of preemptory repressive measures. Any hope of reconciliation was now shattered, and the Diem government was irrevocably isolated.

32.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The Director, DIA, in a special report to the Secretary of Defense, expressed concern that the declaration of martial law "will have serious repercussions throughout the country." He foresaw further coup or counter-coup activity in the making, though for the time being the military had effectively assumed full control. So far, he saw little military effect on the war effort; relatively few troops had been withdrawn from normal missions. ^{37/} At an August 31 review of the problem for Vice President Johnson, Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary McNamara agreed that U.S. planning had to be based on two principles--that the U.S. would not pull out of Vietnam until the war were won, and that it would not participate in a coup d'etat against Diem. ^{38/}

For the next month, as the precarious political situation balanced on the brink of imminent disaster, U.S. anxieties mounted. The Administration was confronted by a dilemma. It was helpless to ameliorate conditions as long as Diem remained in power--nor did it want to approve and support such a regime. Yet at the same time, it was equally helpless to encourage a change of government--there was no feasible replacement anywhere on the South Vietnamese political horizon. The upshot was an ambivalent policy of watchful waiting toward the GVN, while the main preoccupation and focus of attention was on the conduct of the South Vietnamese military forces and the progress of the counterinsurgency programs. These still remained the first order of business.

McNAMARA-TAYLOR MISSION TO SOUTH VIETNAM, OCTOBER 1963

By the middle of September, the President was deeply concerned over the critical political situation, but more importantly, over its effect on the war. A decision juncture had been reached. At issue was the U.S. military commitment in South Vietnam; a redirection of U.S. policy and objectives might be required. On 21 September, the President directed the Secretary of Defense, in company with the Chairman, JCS, to proceed to South Vietnam for a personal examination of the military aspects of the situation. The President gave as the purpose of the trip ". . . my desire to have the best possible on-the-spot appraisal of the military and paramilitary effort to defeat the Viet Cong." He stated that there had been, at least until recently, "heartening results," but that political deterioration since May had raised serious questions about the continued effectiveness of these efforts and the prospects for success. The President, therefore, needed an assessment of the present situation, and if the McNamara-Taylor prognosis were not hopeful, they were to recommend needed actions by the SVN and steps the U.S. should take to bring about those actions. ^{39/}

The Secretary of Defense and the CJCS, accompanied by a team of civilian and military assistants to help in the survey, arrived in South Vietnam on 26 September and returned to Washington on 2 October. During their visit, detailed data were compiled for them, presentations prepared, extensive briefings given, conferences convened, and consultations held. Emerging from the investigations and appraisals was a body of positive evidence

33.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

indicating that conditions were good and prospects improving. In fact, in the course of these reassurances, the Secretary of Defense decided to order a speed up of the planned program for release of U.S. forces. In guidance furnished at the time, he directed that the projected schedules for force reduction provided for in the currently approved Model M Plan version of the CPSVN be accelerated by approximately six months. Accordingly, necessary planning revisions were undertaken immediately on a priority basis.

In contrast to the generally favorable military situation, however, there were grave misgivings about the political state of affairs. Earlier, a draft text of a proposed letter from the President of the United States to President Diem of the RVN had been forwarded by cable to the Secretary of Defense and the Ambassador, with a request for their reaction and comments. President Kennedy himself thought the letter too extreme, and would reluctantly resort to it only if the situation was found so serious that such direct US Presidential pressure was necessary. The text of the proposed letter was characterized by harsh, blunt candor. In effect it laid down an ultimatum: unless the GVN changed the repressive policies, methods, and actions practiced by some individual officials and gained for itself a broad base of popular political support, the United States might have to consider disassociating itself from the Diem Government, and further US support of Vietnam might become impossible. The Secretary of Defense and the Ambassador promptly responded with a strong recommendation against transmitting the proposed letter. Both agreed that the situation was indeed very serious, but that it was not likely to be influenced by such a letter to Diem.*

The proposed Presidential letter was not sent. Instead, many of the points were conveyed in conversations with Diem,** and, just before the departure of the McNamara-Taylor Mission from Vietnam, another letter to President Diem was composed and sent in its place. The new version was not only much softer in tone and more circumspect but went out over the signature of General Taylor as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. The letter was dated 1 October 1963, but was delivered on 2 October, with the approval of the Secretary of Defense and with the concurrence of the US Ambassador to Vietnam (Lodge).

In this letter the CJCS offered his personal, professional comments on the military situation, in response to Diem's earlier expressed interest in receiving them. After acknowledging the encouraging military progress over the preceding two years, the CJCS stated, "It was not until the recent political disturbances beginning in May and continuing through August and beyond that I personally had any doubt as to the ultimate success of our campaign against the Viet Cong." He then added:

* Msg State 476 to Saigon, 24 Sep 63, TOP SECRET EYES ONLY for AMBASSADOR LODGE and SECRETARY McNAMARA; MSG Saigon 593 to State, 24 Sep 63, TOP SECRET EYES ONLY for PRESIDENT FROM McNAMARA.

** Airgram, Saigon A-244 to State, 3 Oct 63, Subj: "McNamara-Taylor Mission Memo of Conversation with President Diem, Sep 29, 1963," SECRET.

34

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"Now, as Secretary McNamara has told you, a serious doubt hangs over our hopes for the future. Can we win together in the face of the reaction to the measures taken by your Government against the Buddhists and the students? As a military man I would say that we can win providing there are no further political setbacks. The military indicators are still generally favorable and can be made more so by actions readily within the power of your Government. If you will allow me, I would mention a few of the military actions which I believe necessary for this improvement."

The Chairman noted that though the military situation in I, II, and III Corps areas was generally good, some of the hard-core war zones of the Viet Cong remained virtually untouched. There were not enough offensive actions against the enemy in the field and, in his opinion, the full potential of the military units was not being exploited, for "...only a ruthless, tireless offensive can win the war."

The principal military problems, he pointed out, were now in the Delta, and the time had come to concentrate efforts there. An overhaul of the Strategic Hamlet Program was needed. For it to succeed, there must be a related clear-and-hold campaign by the combat units of IV Corps, and the tactics should be oriented to the waterways that were a natural characteristic of the region. Furthermore, infantry line units would have to operate at full strength, without diversion of combat power to rear echelon functions. The CJCS suggested that this latter problem was the case in ARVN generally, which President Diem might want to examine closely.

Finally he summed up what was intended as the statement of the US position:

"In closing, Mr. President, may I give you my most important overall impression? Up to now, the battle against the Viet Cong has seemed endless; no one has been willing to set a date for its successful conclusion. After talking to scores of officers, Vietnamese and American, I am convinced that the Viet Cong insurgency in the north and center can be reduced to little more than sporadic incidents by the end of 1964. The Delta will take longer but should be completed by the end of 1965. But for these predictions to be valid, certain conditions must be met. Your Government should be prepared to energize all agencies, military and civil, to a higher output of activity than up to now. Ineffective commanders and province officials must be replaced as soon as identified. Finally, there should be a restoration of domestic tranquility on the homefront if political tensions are to be allayed and external criticism is to abate. Conditions are needed for the creation of an atmosphere conducive to an effective campaign directed at the objective, vital to both

35

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of us, of defeating the Viet Cong and of restoring peace to your community."*

The results of the survey conducted by the McNamara-Taylor mission were consolidated into a lengthy, formal report to the President containing specific findings, general evaluations, and recommendations. The substance of the report was presented in an hour-long, oral briefing to the President immediately upon the return of the mission on the morning of 2 October. Attending the briefing were the Under Secretary of State, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the Director of the CIA, and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Following the personal report, the President called for a special meeting of the full National Security Council, which was held from six to seven that same evening.

The McNamara-Taylor Report generally was optimistic about the military situation and saw little direct effect of the political crisis on the prosecution of the war. Their conclusions, inter alia, were that despite serious political tensions and the increasing unpopularity of the Diem-Nhu regime, "The military campaign has made great progress and continues to progress." GVN military officers, though hostile to the government and its repressive policies, continued to perform their military duties in the larger cause of fighting the Viet Cong enemy. This reassuring evaluation, however, was caveated to the effect that "...further repressive actions by Diem and Nhu could change the present favorable military trends."

Specific findings in their appraisal of the military situation bore out the general evaluation. In the body of the report they stated:

"With allowances for all uncertainties, it is our firm conclusion that the GVN military program has made great progress in the last year and a half, and that the progress has continued at a fairly steady rate in the past six months even through the period of greatest political unrest in Saigon. The tactics and techniques employed by the Vietnamese under U.S. monitorship are sound and give promise of ultimate victory."

Especially noteworthy, in their view, was the progress clearly being achieved in the northern areas (I and II Corps). Their appraisal of the progress of the Strategic Hamlet Program was also largely favorable. In both connections, they cited the effectiveness of the U.S. military advisory and support effort.

Included among their military recommendations were:

- a. General Harkins [COMUSMACV] review with Diem the military changes necessary to complete the military campaign in the Northern and Central areas (I, II, III Corps) by the end of 1964, and in the Delta (IV Corps) by the end of 1965.
- b. A program be established to train Vietnamese so that essential functions now performed by U.S. military personnel can be

* Ltr CJCS (Taylor) to President Diem of RVN, 1 Oct 63 (delivered 2 Oct 63), TOP SECRET.

36
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

carried out by Vietnamese by the end of 1965. It should be possible to withdraw the bulk of U.S. personnel by that time.

- c. In accordance with the program to train progressively Vietnamese to take over military functions, the Defense Department should announce in the near future presently prepared plans to withdraw 1000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963. This action should be explained in low key as an initial step in a long-term program to replace U.S. personnel with trained Vietnamese without impairment of the war effort.

Germane to the above recommendations, however, it was stated elsewhere in the report, "No further reductions should be made until the requirements of the 1964 campaign become firm." 40/

Following the NSC meeting of 2 October, the White House issued a formal public announcement of the major policy aspects of the McNamara-Taylor Mission Report. The White House statement is reproduced below.

U.S. POLICY ON VIET-NAM:
WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT, OCTOBER 2, 1963 41/

Secretary [of Defense Robert S.] McNamara and General [Maxwell D.] Taylor reported to the President this morning and to the National Security Council this afternoon. Their report included a number of classified findings and recommendations which will be the subject of further review and action. Their basic presentation was endorsed by all members of the Security Council and the following statement of United States policy was approved by the President on the basis of recommendations received from them and from Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge.

1. The security of South Viet-Nam is a major interest of the United States as other free nations. We will adhere to our policy of working with the people and Government of South Viet-Nam to deny this country to communism and to suppress the externally stimulated and supported insurgency of the Viet Cong as promptly as possible. Effective performance in this undertaking is the central objective of our policy in South Viet-Nam.

2. The military program in South Viet-Nam has made progress and is sound in principle, though improvements are being energetically sought.

3. Major U.S. assistance in support of this military effort is needed only until the insurgency has been suppressed or until the national security forces of the Government of South Viet-Nam are capable of suppressing it.

Secretary McNamara and General Taylor reported their judgment that the major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965, although there may be a continuing requirement for a limited number of U.S. training personnel. They reported that by the end of this year, the U.S. program for training Vietnamese should

37.
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

have progressed to the point where 1,000 U.S. military personnel assigned to South Viet-Nam can be withdrawn.

4. The political situation in South Viet-Nam remains deeply serious. The United States had made clear its continuing opposition to any repressive actions in South Viet-Nam. While such actions have not yet significantly affected the military effort, they could do so in the future.

5. It remains the policy of the United States, in South Viet-Nam as in other parts of the world, to support the efforts of the people of that country to defeat aggression and to build a peaceful and free society.

Considerable emphasis was given to the White House statement, and to the McNamara-Taylor Mission generally, in news media. Played up particularly was the U.S. force withdrawal, especially the prospective 1000-man reduction.

Three days later, on 5 October, in another meeting with the President, followed by another NSC meeting, the McNamara-Taylor recommendations themselves were addressed. The President "approved the military recommendations contained in the report." The President also directed, in line with their suggestion, that no formal announcement be made of the implementation of plans to withdraw 1000 U.S. military personnel from South Vietnam by the end of 1963. 42/

The effect of the McNamara-Taylor mission, thus, was to revalidate the existing U.S. policy position regarding Vietnam. Reaffirmed were the military objectives, courses of action, and programs essentially as they were laid out by the Secretary of Defense at the Honolulu Conference over a year earlier on 23 July 1962. The underlying premises and soundness of the rationale seemed more cogent than ever. In fact, a new impetus was thereby given to pursuing the same goals with even greater thrust and purpose. Such an outcome could have been forecast, as noted earlier, when Mr. McNamara set in motion another CPSVN planning cycle to revise the Model M Plan and develop an accelerated plan to withdraw U.S. forces.

Part of the motivation behind the stress placed on U.S. force withdrawal, and particularly the seemingly arbitrary desire to effect the 1000-man reduction by the end of 1963, apparently was as a signal to influence both the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese and set the stage for possible later steps that would help bring the insurgency to an end. With regard to the SVN, the demonstration of determination to pull out U.S. forces was intended to induce the South Vietnamese to increase the effectiveness of their military effort. 43/ State's instructions to Ambassador Lodge resulting from NSC action on the McNamara-Taylor mission indicated that:

"Actions are designed to indicate to Diem Government our displeasure at its political policies and activities and to create significant uncertainty in that government and in key Vietnamese groups as to future intentions of United States. At same time, actions are designed to have at most slight impact on military or

38.
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

counterinsurgency effort against Viet Cong, at least in short term. . . ." 44/

With respect to Hanoi, it might present an opportunity for a demarche-- exploiting withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam by a specified date as exchange for North Vietnam's abandoning its aggression against South Vietnam. But events were already conspiring otherwise, and would soon frustrate such expectations and intentions as developed. The internal SVN situation was about to undergo rapid transformation.

By late October, there was increasing skepticism in some quarters about the military situation in South Vietnam. Indeed, it was beginning to be suspected that reports of progress by U.S. military sources actually cloaked a situation that was not only bleak, but deteriorating. A State Department intelligence evaluation of 22 October showed markedly pessimistic statistical trends since July 1963, in most areas of enemy-friendly relative progress measurement, indicating an unfavorable shift in the military balance. What was disquieting was that the pattern showed steady decline over a period of more than three months' duration. 45/

Circulation of the INR evaluation occasioned controversy and no little recrimination. Substantive differences degenerated into a procedural issue. The outcome was a personal memorandum from the Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense on 8 November, amounting to an apology for the incident. The Secretary of State stated in regard to INR's RFE-90 of 22 October:

"....it is not the policy of the State Department to issue military appraisals without seeking the views of the Defense Department. I have requested that any memoranda given inter-departmental circulation which include military appraisals be coordinated with your Department." 46/

THE NOVEMBER COUP AND OVERTHROW OF DIEM

On 1 November, the political situation fell apart. The long-anticipated coup occurred. The Diem regime was overthrown, and both Diem and Nhu were assassinated. A military junta of politically inexperienced generals took over the government as their successors.

The significance of the great change, for good or ill, was not readily apparent. Over the next three weeks the feared political chaos, civil war, and collapse of the war effort following a coup did not seem to be materializing. For the United States, the important question was what did the new circumstances mean militarily for existing policy and plans oriented to bringing the insurgency under control and to phasing out US force commitments.

On 20 November, at the President's direction, a special all-agencies conference on Vietnam was convened in Honolulu for a "full-scale review" in depth of all aspects of the situation and to reassess U.S. plans and policies in the political, military, economic and information fields since the change of government. Attending were some 45 senior U.S. officials, military and civilian, including: the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Special Assistant to the President for National

31

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Security Affairs, Chairman, JCS, Director of CIA, CINCPAC, Ambassador to Vietnam, and COMUSMACV. Ambassador Lodge assessed the prospects for Vietnam as hopeful. In his estimation the new government was not without promise. Vietnamese military leadership appeared to be united and determined to step up the war effort. The Ambassador advocated continuing to pursue the goal of setting dates for phasing out U.S. activities and turning them over to the Vietnamese, and he volunteered that the announced withdrawal of 1000 troops by the end of 1963 was already having a salutary affect. COMUSMACV agreed with the Ambassador that the conduct of the war against the VC was coming along satisfactorily. Admitting that the VC-incidents rate shot up 300 to 400 percent after the coup, he noted that since 6 November, however, it had dropped down to "normal" and remained so to the present. Military operational statistics now generally showed a more or less favorable balance. In short, the briefings and assessments received at the conference constituted "an encouraging outlook for the principle objective of joint U.S.-Vietnamese policy in South Vietnam--the successful prosecution of the war against the Viet Cong communists." Moreover, "excellent working relations between U.S. officials and the members of the new Vietnamese government" had been established. All plans for the U.S. phasing out were to go ahead as scheduled.

In this light the U.S. military plans and programs for Vietnam were addressed. The revision of the Model M Plan of the CPSVN, ordered by the Secretary of Defense during his last visit to Vietnam in October was progressing apace and the finished Accelerated Plan was expected to be forwarded shortly. It would cost \$6.4 million more than the Model Plan, however. Indications were that the FY 64 MAP would also cost more because of the acceleration--to a total now of \$187.5 million. The Secretary of Defense made it clear that he felt that the proposed CINCPAC MAP could be cut back and directed that the program be reviewed to refine it and cut costs to stay as close as possible to the OSD ceiling of \$175.5 million. He was equally emphatic, however, that while he would not tolerate fat or inefficiency in the program he was prepared to provide whatever funds might be required under MAP to support the GVN. In fact, he observed that the GVN was already running into "tremendous financial deficits," and opined that neither AID nor MAP had budgeted enough to provide for the emergencies which were likely to arise during 1964. 47/

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY

On 22 November 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated. The consequences were to set an institutional freeze on the direction and momentum of U.S. Vietnam policy. Universally operative was a desire to avoid change of any kind during the critical interregnum period of the new Johnson Administration. Both the President and the governmental establishment consciously strove for continuity, with respect to Vietnam no less than in other areas. In Vietnam this continuity meant that the phase-out concept, the CPSVN withdrawal plan, and the MAP programs probably survived beyond the point they might have otherwise.

40
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

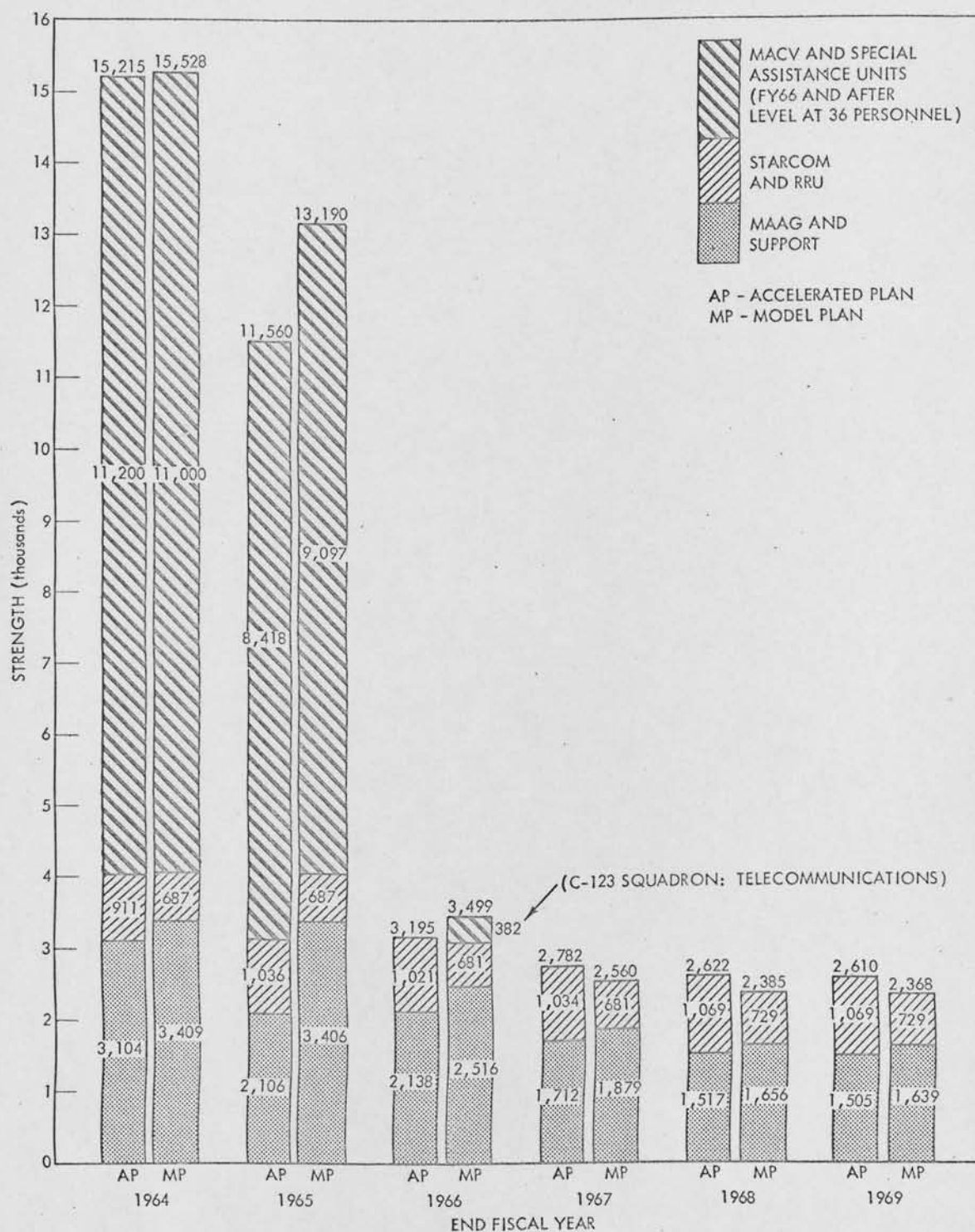
The immediate Johnson stamp on the Kennedy policy came on 26 November. At a NSC meeting convened to consider the results of the 20 November Honolulu Conference, the President "reaffirmed that U.S. objectives with respect to withdrawal of U.S. military personnel remain as stated in the White House statement of October 2, 1963." 48/ The only hint that something might be different from on-going plans came in a Secretary of Defense memo for the President three days prior to this NSC meeting. In that memo, Mr. McNamara said that the new South Vietnamese government was confronted by serious financial problems, and that the U.S. must be prepared to raise planned MAP levels. 49/

In early December, the President began to have, if not second thoughts, at least a sense of uneasiness about Vietnam. In discussions with his advisors, he set in motion what he hoped would be a major policy review, fully staffed in depth, by Administration principals. The President wanted "a fresh new look taken" at the whole problem. In preparation for such a basic reappraisal, an interdepartmental meeting of second-echelon principals accordingly convened on 3 December and laid out a broad outline of basic topics to be addressed and staff papers to be developed by various departments and agencies. 50/ This attempt at a systematic and comprehensive reexamination, however, did not culminate in a fundamental national reassessment.

ACCELERATED MODEL PLAN OF THE CPSVN

With no indication of policy change in the offing, U.S. military planning thus went forward with hardly a break in stride. On 5 December CINCPAC submitted the Accelerated Model Plan to the JCS. It was the revision to the Model M Plan version of the CPSVN that the Secretary of Defense had ordered during his early October visit to Vietnam. The Accelerated Plan provided for more rapid phase-out of the bulk of U.S. military personnel and units and a decrease in the residual strength remaining thereafter (see Figure 3). It also provided for building up GVN forces at a faster pace but on a more reduced scale, then cutting back from the peak sooner and leveling out somewhat lower (see Figure 4). MAP costs for the FY 1965-69 period would be a little higher than the \$392.2 million under the Model M Plan, coming to \$399.4 million in the Accelerated Plan (see Figure 5). 51/

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FIGURE 3 (S). Comprehensive Plan South Vietnam (CPSVN)
 Phase Down of U.S. Forces (U)

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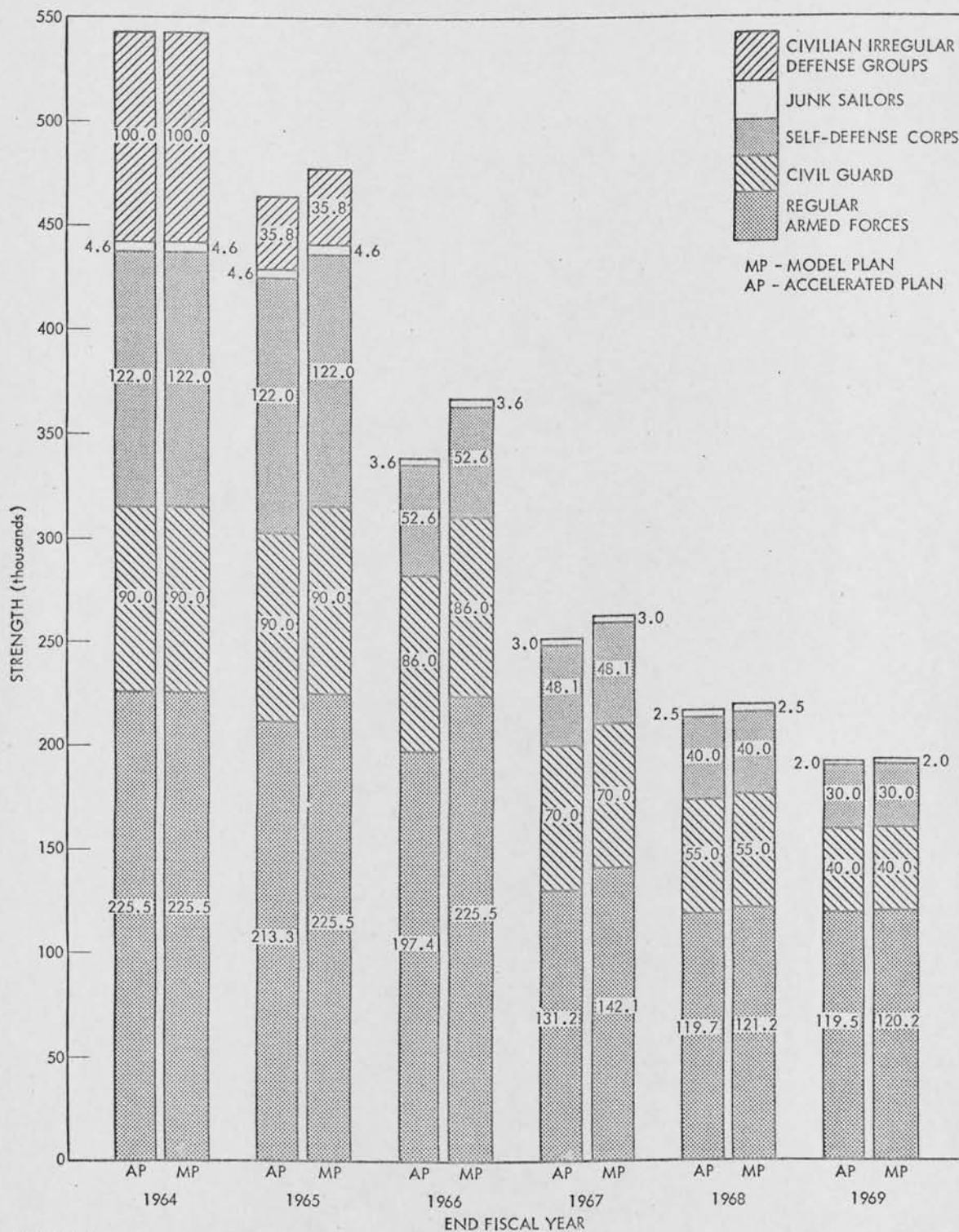
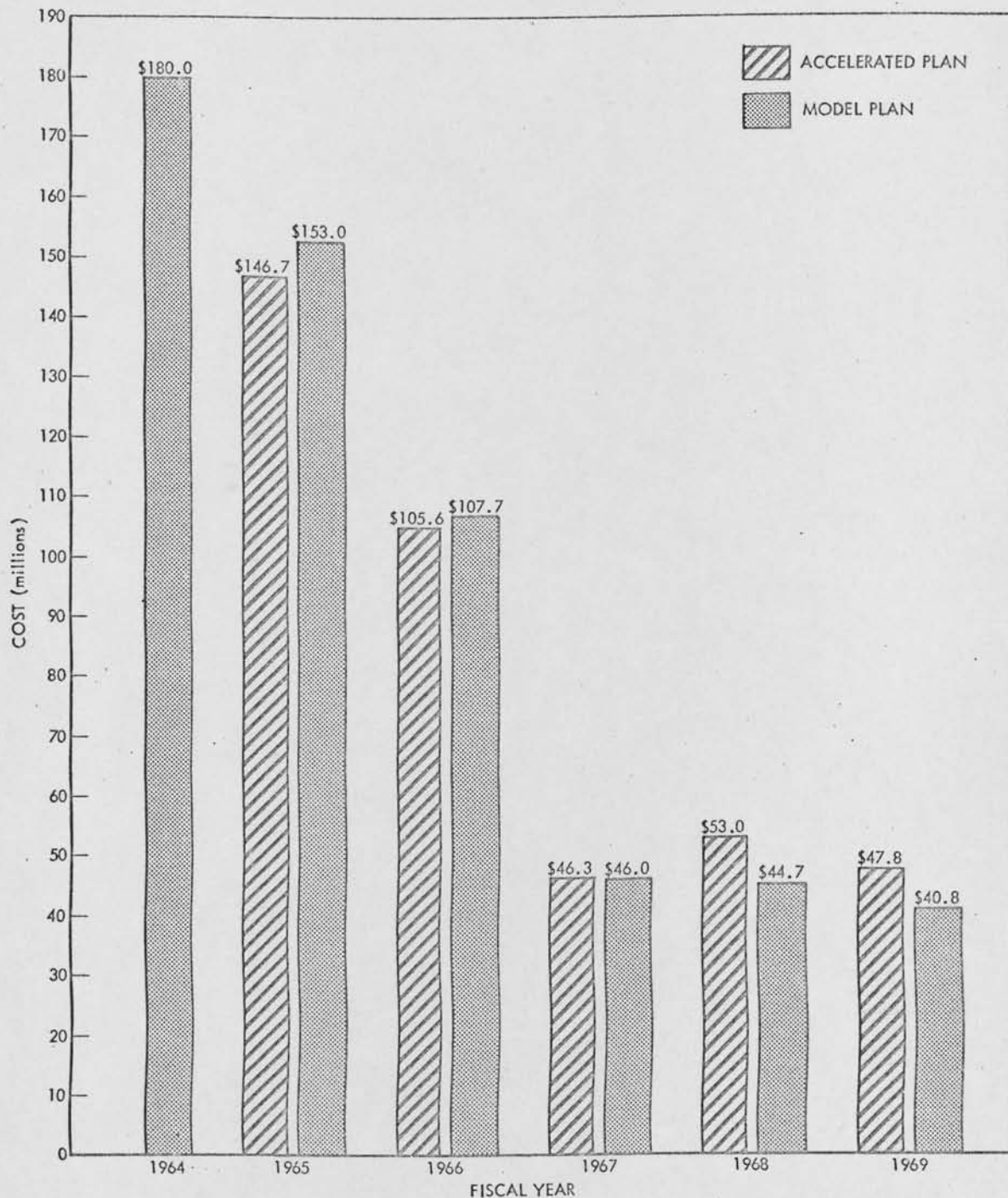


FIGURE 4 (S). Comprehensive Plan Vietnam (CPSVN)
 Phase Down of GVN Forces (U)

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FIGURE 5 (S). Comprehensive Plan Vietnam (CPSVN) MAP Cost (U)

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44

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

THE 1000-MAN WITHDRAWAL OF DECEMBER 1963

During the month of December, the planned 1000-man reduction was executed. It proved essentially an accounting exercise. Technically, more than a thousand U.S. personnel did leave, but many of these were part of the normal turnover cycle, inasmuch as rotation policy alone, not to mention medical evacuation or administrative reasons, resulted in an average rate of well over a thousand returnees per month. Though the replacement pipeline was slowed somewhat, year-end total in-country strength nevertheless was close to 16,000. 52/ This did not even represent a decline of 1000 from the October peak of 16,732.

That the avowed goal of 1000 would not be reached had in fact been anticipated and acknowledged before mid-December. Despite close monitoring of authorized ceilings and actual strengths, the force level kept rising. On 11 December, for example, the estimate of projected year-end U.S. strength in Vietnam had to be revised upward to reflect additional deployments approved since September. The adjusted figure now came to 15,894, a net increase of 162 over the earlier estimate. This new strength ceiling was what would be left after the 1000-man withdrawal then in progress was completed. 53/

THE VIETNAM SITUATION WORSENS

In December conflicting estimates of the situation in Vietnam indicated that the bright hopes and predictions of the past were increasingly less than realistic. A McNamara memo to the President written following a trip to Vietnam of 21 December, was laden with gloom. 54/ He wrote: "The situation is very disturbing. Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2-3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a communist-controlled state." He went on to note that "the new government is the greatest source of concern," and that "it is indecisive and drifting." The Country Team, he added, "lacks leadership, and has been poorly informed." One of the most serious deficiencies he found was a "grave reporting weakness" on the U.S. side. "Viet Cong progress has been great during the period since the coup, with my best guess being that the situation has in fact been deteriorating in the countryside since July to a far greater extent than we realize because of our undue dependence on distorted Vietnamese reporting." Mr. McNamara clearly concluded that none of these conditions could be reversed by the influx of more American personnel, nor did he even mention that the U.S. could continue to withdraw troops at all or as scheduled. His proposal was to hold the line: "U.S. resources and personnel," he said, "cannot usefully be substantially increased..." although he did announce his intention to increase staffs "to sizes that will give us a reliable, independent U.S. appraisal of the status of operations." In his concluding paragraph, however, the Secretary of Defense admitted that his own estimate "may be overly pessimistic," inasmuch as the Ambassador, COMUSMACV, and General Minh were not discouraged and looked forward to significant improvements in January. 54/

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TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Vestiges of optimism still persisted in one degree or another in some quarters. The earlier sense of confidence that had been established was deep-rooted and not easily shaken. A retrospective evaluation of the Vietnam situation ostensibly covering the period 1960 through 1963, prepared by SACSA (General Krulak) is indicative. Although intended as a broad overview (and so called), and though actually cut off as of some-time in October 1963, it was forwarded in late October or November directly to the Secretary of Defense. The SACSA report presented nothing less than a glowing account of steady progress across the board in the military situation. Significantly, it contained no hint that the rate of progress possibly might have temporarily slowed somewhat in the second half of 1963, despite the fact that it expressly treated events as late as October. 55/ Yet by this time, other evaluations giving a quite different picture were already asserting themselves. Near the close of 1963 the Director, DIA, reported to the Secretary of Defense that year-end review and reassessment of the enemy situation revealed VC capabilities had not been impaired over the past year. On the contrary, the VC had in many regards improved in combat effectiveness and now enjoyed a generally improved force posture for insurgency. 56/

Hopeful bias alone does not explain the endurance of past firmly rooted optimism--such as the SACSA overview. The difference between those who stressed the positive and those who saw decline was, in part, the product of viewing the situation in greater or shorter time frames. Those who applied a macroscopic perspective, believed--and not without certain logic--that current unfavorable reports were, at worse, a temporary lapse in the larger curve of progress over the years. Those who took spot checks tended to be more impressed by the immediate situation, and at this time, the immediate situation was critical. The feelings of this latter group were buttressed when on 30 January another coup, this time largely bloodless, ousted the ruling Minh government. It was a factional power struggle in which one military group replaced another, this time with General Khanh emerging as Premier. The latest development held forth little promise of giving the country the political stability so desperately needed in the midst of a war for survival. The event would prove only symptomatic as part of a sequence of similar government upheavals that were to follow.

In the U.S., the coincidence of domestic tragedy and patent instability in Vietnam evoked a chorus urging a Laos-like resolution of the Vietnam conflict. In late August, 1963, President de Gaulle had issued a policy statement on Vietnam which was subsequently officially interpreted as a proposal for "independence and neutrality" for Vietnam--meaning eventual U.S. withdrawal. In the aftermath of the assassinations, speculation turned increasingly to this solution. For example, Senator Mansfield wrote to President Johnson to propose a division of Vietnam between the GVN and the Viet Cong, coupled with a U.S. withdrawal. In early January, 1964, Secretary McNamara furnished the President the following counters to Senator Mansfield's arguments:

46
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"1. We should certainly stress that the war is essentially a Vietnamese responsibility, and this we have repeatedly done, particularly in our announced policy on U.S. troop withdrawal. At the same time we cannot disengage U.S. prestige to any significant degree....

"2. The security situation is serious, but we can still win, even on present ground rules....

"3.Any deal either to divide the present territory of South Vietnam or to 'neutralize' South Vietnam would inevitably mean a new government in Saigon that would in short order become Communist-dominated.

"4. The consequences of a Communist-dominated South Vietnam are extremely serious both for the rest of Southeast Asia and for the U.S. position in the rest of Asia and indeed in other key areas of the world....

"5. Thus, the stakes in preserving an anti-Communist South Vietnam are so high that, in our judgment, we must go on bending every effort to win....And, I am confident that the American people are by and large in favor of a policy of firmness and strength in such situations." 57/

Secretary McNamara in his testimony before Congress on the fiscal year 1965 budget in early February, 1964, declined to link the previously planned U.S. withdrawals with either "pessimism" or "optimism" regarding events in Vietnam, saying simply that the withdrawals had all along been conditioned upon Vietnamese capability to assume full responsibility from the U.S. trainers, and that there would be a "substantial reduction in our force as we train them." Further:

"Last fall...I wasn't as optimistic perhaps about the course of the war as I was about being able to bring back our personnel in certain numbers by the end of last year and also in increments between then and the end of 1965.

"I still am hopeful of doing that. We did, of course, bring back 1,000 men toward the latter part of last year. I am hopeful we can bring back additional numbers of men later this year and certainly next year. I say this because I personally believe that this is a war that the Vietnamese must fight...I don't believe we can take on that combat task for them. I do believe we can carry out training. We can provide advice and logistical assistance.

"But after all, the training, by the very nature of the work, comes to an end at a certain point. We will have started this expanded training and carried it out for a period of 4 years, by the end of next year. We started at the end of 1961. The end of next year will have been 4 years later and certainly we should

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

have completed the majority of the training task by that time. This, in General Taylor's view and mine, is what we should be able to do. If we do, we should bring our men back.

"I don't believe we should leave our men there to substitute for Vietnamese men who are qualified to carry out the task, and this is really the heart of our proposal. I think it was a sound proposal then and I think so now...."

Unsuresness about the actual state of affairs in Washington spread eventually to the highest levels of government, and prompted the dispatching to South Vietnam in early February of a CIA "Special CAS Group" for an independent evaluation of the military situation. A series of four reports, dated 10, 11, 14 and 18 February 1964, were produced, each transmitted by the Deputy Director, CIA, to the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and others as soon as it came out. Instead of finding progress, these reported a serious and steadily deteriorating situation. Cited were VC gains in the past several months, and particularly noted was that VC arms were increasing in quantity and quality. As for the Strategic Hamlet Program, they found it "at present at virtual standstill." The Special CAS Group's concluding appraisal was pessimistic: "Tide of insurgency in all four corps areas appears to be going against GVN." 58/ COMUSMACV (who had no prior knowledge of the Special CAS Group's reports) took issue with the Group's findings, contesting less the data used than the conclusions, especially the "personal" evaluational opinions as to degree of deterioration. He suggested that in the future such reports be first coordinated before being dispatched. 59/

On 6 March a major Secretary of Defense Conference again convened at CINCPAC headquarters for a broad reassessment. The consensus was that the military situation was definitely deteriorating. No longer was the issue whether it was progressing satisfactorily or not. The question now was how much of a setback had there been and what was needed to make up for it. An opinion shared by many was that the insurgency could be expected to go beyond 1965. This general reorientation of perspective was reflected in the Secretary of Defense's observation that attention should be focused on the near-term objectives of providing the greater U.S. support that would be necessary, and suspending for the time being consideration of longer-range concerns such as 5-year MAP projections. 60/ The visit to Vietnam on 8 March corroborated the gravity of the immediate problems at hand.

Following his return from Vietnam, Mr. McNamara, on 16 March, submitted to the President a formal report. In it the Secretary of Defense acknowledged, "The situation has unquestionably been growing worse, at least since September." RVNAF desertion rates were increasing, and the GVN military position generally was weakening noticeably. The VC position, on the other hand, showed signs of improving. He referred pointedly to the increase in North Vietnamese support. The conclusion was that greater U.S. support was needed.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In describing what was required to improve the situation in South Vietnam, Mr. McNamara identified measures that "will involve a limited increase in U.S. personnel and in direct Defense Department costs. More significantly they involve significant increases in Military Assistance Program costs....," plus "additional U.S. economic aid to support the increased GVN budget." The estimated additional annual MAP costs would come to between \$30 and \$40 million each year, plus a one-time additional cost of \$20 million for military equipment. In the recommendation section of the report, the Secretary listed the following 12 items:

1. To make it clear that we are prepared to furnish assistance and support to South Vietnam for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.
2. To make it clear that we fully support the Khanh government and are opposed to any further coups.
3. To support a Program for National Mobilization (including a national service law) to put South Vietnam on a war footing.
4. To assist the Vietnamese to increase the armed forces (regular plus paramilitary) by at least 50,000 men.
5. To assist the Vietnamese to create a greatly enlarged Civil Administrative Corps for work at province, district and hamlet levels.
6. To assist the Vietnamese to improve and reorganize the paramilitary forces and to increase their compensation.
7. To assist the Vietnamese to create an offensive guerrilla force.
8. To provide the Vietnamese Air Force 25 A-1H aircraft in exchange for the present T-28s.
9. To provide the Vietnamese army additional M-113 armored personnel carriers (withdrawing the M-114s there), additional river boats, and approximately \$5-10 million of other additional material.
10. To announce publicly the Fertilizer Program and to expand it with a view within two years to trebling the amount of fertilizer made available.
11. To authorize continued high-level U.S. overflights of South Vietnam's borders and to authorize "hot pursuit" and South Vietnamese ground operations over the Laotian line for the purpose of border control. More ambitious operations into Laos involving units beyond battalion size should be authorized only with the approval of Souvanna Phouma. Operations across the Cambodian border should depend on the state of relations with Cambodia.

44
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

12. To prepare immediately to be in a position on 72 hours' notice to initiate the full range of Laotian and Cambodian "Border Control" actions (beyond those authorized in paragraph 11 above) and the "Retaliatory Actions" against North Vietnam, and to be in a position on 30 days' notice to initiate the program of "Graduated Overt Military Pressure" against North Vietnam.

As for the future of the phased-withdrawal plans, the Secretary of Defense's report contained the following:

"The U.S. policy of reducing existing personnel where South Vietnamese are in a position to assume the functions is still sound. Its application will not lead to any major reductions in the near future, but adherence to this policy as such has a sound effect in portraying to the U.S. and the world that we continue to regard the war as a conflict the South Vietnamese must win and take ultimate responsibility for. Substantial reductions in the numbers of U.S. military training personnel should be possible before the end of 1965. However, the U.S. should continue to reiterate that it will provide all the assistance and advice required to do the job regardless of how long it takes." 61/

By formal decision at the NSC session of 17 March, the President approved the Secretary of Defense report of 16 March 1964 and directed all agencies to carry out the 12 recommendations contained therein. 62/ A White House statement, reproduced below, was issued the same day.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 17, 1964

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, following their initial oral report of Friday, today reported fully to President Johnson and the members of the National Security Council. The report covered the situation in South Vietnam, the measures being taken by General Khanh and his government, and the need for United States assistance to supplement and support these measures. There was also discussion of the continuing support and direction of the Viet Cong insurgency from North Vietnam.

At the close of the meeting the President accepted the report and its principal recommendations, which had the support of the National Security Council and Ambassador Lodge.

Comparing the situation to last October, when Secretary McNamara and General Taylor last reported fully on it, there have unquestionably been setbacks. The Viet Cong have taken maximum advantage of two changes of government, and of more long-standing difficulties,

50.
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

including a serious weakness and over-extension which had developed in the basically sound hamlet program. The supply of arms and cadres from the north has continued; careful and sophisticated control of Viet Cong operations has been apparent; and evidence that such control is centered in Hanoi is clear and unmistakable.

To meet the situation, General Khanh and his government are acting vigorously and effectively. They have produced a sound central plan for the prosecution of the war, recognizing to a far greater degree than before the crucial role of economic and social, as well as military, action to ensure that areas cleared of the Viet Cong survive and prosper in freedom.

To carry out this plan, General Khanh requires the full enlistment of the people of South Vietnam, partly to augment the strength of his anti-guerrilla forces, but particularly to provide the administrators, health workers, teachers and others who must follow up in cleared areas. To meet this need, and to provide a more equitable and common basis of service, General Khanh has informed us that he proposes in the near future to put into effect a National Mobilization Plan that will provide conditions and terms of service in appropriate jobs for all able-bodied South Vietnamese between certain ages.

In addition, steps are required to bring up to required levels the pay and status of the paramilitary forces and to create a highly trained guerrilla force that can beat the Viet Cong on its own ground. Finally, limited but significant additional equipment is proposed for the air forces, the river navy, and the mobile forces.

In short, where the South Vietnamese Government now has the power to clear any part of its territory, General Khanh's new program is designed to clear and to hold, step by step and province by province.

This program will involve substantial increases in cost to the South Vietnamese economy, which in turn depends heavily on United States economic aid. Additional, though less substantial, military assistance funds are also needed, and increased United States training activity both on the civil and military side. The policy should continue of withdrawing United States personnel where their roles can be assumed by South Vietnamese and of sending additional men if they are needed. It will remain the policy of the United States to furnish assistance and support to South Vietnam for as long as it is required to bring Communist aggression and terrorism under control.

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

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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DEMISE OF THE CPSVN

Before the month of March was over the CPSVN, as well as the MAP planning that had been such an integral part of it, finally received the coup de grace. Sacrificed to the U.S. desire "to make it clear that we fully support" the GVN, they were formally terminated, for the record, on 27 March in the OSD message reproduced below:

FROM: OSD WASH DC DEF 963028 Date: 27 March 1964
(Col. W. J. Yates)
TO: CINCPAC
REFS: a. CINCPAC 110626Z Mar 64
b. DEF 959615 DTG 132352Z Mar 64

1. As indicated in ref. b., ceiling for Vietnam FY 66 MAP is \$143.0 million against \$143.1 million for FY 65. Requirements above these program levels should be identified as separate packages.

2. Submission of five-year programs FY 66-70 for Vietnam is suspended until further notice. Your best estimates of FY 66 requirements are necessary inasmuch line detail as feasible by 1 Jul 64 in order that (a) the Military Departments can review for pricing, lead time, availabilities, and prepare for procurement action and (b) requirements can be processed within DoD, State/AID and BoB for budget/Congressional Presentation purposes.

3. Previous guidance re Model Plan projection for phasedown of U.S. forces and GVN forces is superseded. Policy is as announced by White House 17 Mar 64: Quote The policy should continue of withdrawing U.S. personnel where their roles can be assumed by South Vietnamese and of sending additional men if they are needed. It will remain the policy of the U.S. to furnish assistance and support of South Vietnam for as long as is required to bring Communist aggression and terrorism under control. Unquote.

4. No further action required or being taken here relative to accelerated model plan.

Thus ended de jure the policy of phase out and withdrawal and all the plans and programs oriented to it. Shortly, they would be cancelled out de facto.

BUILD-UP OF THE U.S. FORCE COMMITMENT

Soon the whole evolutionary direction of the U.S. military commitment began to change. Rather than diminishing, the magnitude rose thereafter. In early May the approved U.S. military strength ceiling for South Vietnam was raised by more than 1500 so that total in-country authorization came to over 17,000. Further increases were in sight. 63/ As the military situation in Vietnam failed to show signs of ameliorating, pressures

52.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

began to develop in late spring for an even more significant increase in U.S. forces.

A special meeting on Southeast Asia was called at PACOM Headquarters in Honolulu for 1-2 June because of the unsatisfactory progress in execution of the National Pacification Plan. There, COMUSMACV proposed extending and intensifying the U.S. advisory effort in order to improve the operational effectiveness of the VNAF performance generally. The idea was discussed and supported in principle, and a staff working paper outlining the concept was prepared by the conferees. Near the end of June, COMUSMACV submitted to JCS (info CINCPAC, DOD, State, White House) his formal proposal recommending enlargement of the advisory assistance program. He reiterated, and offered further justification for, the need to augment the current advisory detachments at the battalion level and to extend the advisory effort at both the district and sector levels. His detailed breakout of primary personnel requirements came to a total of 900 more advisors as the net in-country increase, but conceded that additional administrative and logistic support requirements would be substantial and would be submitted separately. Also, approximately 80 additional U.S. Navy advisors would be requested, in connection with recommendations made earlier in the "Bucklew Report" for a Junk Force and other measures to counter infiltration by sea. CINCPAC indicated concurrence and recommended approval of the proposal on 4 July. 64/

In the middle of July, the new U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, General Maxwell Taylor, sent an evaluation of the military situation to the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and JCS that lent strong support to COMUSMACV's proposal. The Ambassador advised that formal estimates of regular VC strength in South Vietnam had been revised and now were raised to between 28,000 and 34,000. He explained that this did not reflect a sudden dramatic increase, but had been suspected for the past two or three years, though confirmatory evidence had become available only in the last few months. There was thus no occasion for alarm, but the new estimate emphasized the growing magnitude of the problem and the need to increase the level of U.S./GVN efforts. Therefore, additional requirements were being formulated, including U.S. military personnel requirements, to support U.S. plans during the ensuing months to cope with the new understanding of the realities of the situation. He forecast an increase in U.S. military strength to around 21,000 over the next six-month period to meet projected needs. 65/

Immediately the size of the estimated force requirements connected with the proposed expansion of the advisory effort began to climb. On 16 July COMUSMACV submitted the support requirements associated with the program. For the next year he would need, over and above the original 900 additional advisors requested, more than 3200 other personnel, for a total gross military strength increase of about 4200. 66/ The Ambassador in Saigon concurred in COMUSMACV's proposed increase in U.S. military strength by 4200 over the next nine months, bringing the total in-country to nearly 22,000, and he urged prompt action. The Secretary of State also recommended approval, as did CINCPAC and JCS, and on 20 July, at the JCS-SecDef meeting, overall support was given to the COMUSMACV requested

53
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

deployment package. The following day, at the NSC meeting of 21 July, the President gave it final approval, though that action was not included in the NSAM issued the next day. 67/

As eventually refined, the total force increment actually came to over 4900 U.S. personnel. In addition, other requirements not directly related to the advisory effort itself were being generated and met independently. By the close of 1964 the year-end U.S. in-country strength figure had climbed to approximately 23,000 personnel and further authorized deployments were under way or in preparation.

The actual effect of "phased withdrawals" was minimal. Though 1,000 spaces among the personnel authorized MACV were eliminated in 1963, add-ons overtook cut-backs. As an example, U.S. Army strength in Vietnam--the bulk of the advisory effort--was allocated as follows:

PERCENTAGE OF U.S. ARMY STRENGTH IN VIETNAM 68/

	<u>Total Army Strength</u>	<u>Hq & Spt Units</u>	<u>Aviation Units</u>	<u>Communication Units</u>	<u>Special Forces</u>	<u>Other Advisers</u>
Nov 63	10,000	17	35	15	6	27
Mar 64	10,000	19	34	13	7	27
Nov 64	14,000	28	30	12	8	22

POSTSCRIPT TO WITHDRAWAL PLANNING

The official termination of formal planning towards withdrawal by no means ended its attraction as one issue in the growing public debate over Vietnam policy. In August, 1964, the Tonkin Gulf crisis brought Congressmen back in perplexity to Secretary McNamara's statements on withdrawals, and elicited the following exchange:

"...[Secretary McNamara, you] have again always indicated that you hoped that by the end of this year there would have been a substantial reduction....Where we had a planned reduction of the number of troops, and what appeared to be a withdrawal of the United States from the area, then this attack comes, which would put us firmly in the area, or at least change our mind. The whole thing, to me, is completely, at least, not understanding.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: "The period, December 1961, through the summer of 1963 was a period of great progress within South Vietnam, in countering the effort of the Viet Cong to overthrow that government. However, starting in May, 1963, you will recall, a series of religious riots developed, controversy within the country developed, leading eventually upon November 2nd to the overthrow of the Diem government. Prior to that time in September, 1963, General

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TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Taylor and I had advised and visited that country. At that time, the progress of the counter insurgency effort was so great it appeared that we would be able to withdraw much of our training force by the end of 1965, and not 1964, and we would -- we so stated upon our return. But following that -- and I should also mention that in that same statement, we made in September, 1963, we pointed out the very serious nature of the political difficulties that were building up in South Vietnam, because of the conflict between the Buddhists and the Catholics, and the government.

"In any event, as I say, in November, 1963, the government was overthrown. There was another change of government January 30th, and this completely changed the outlook and the political instability that followed the two coups has given the Viet Cong an opportunity to take advantage of the political and military weakness. They have taken advantage of it. It is now necessary to add further U.S. military assistance to counter that Viet Cong offensive....

"We have never made the statement since September, 1963, that we believed we could bring the bulk of the training forces out by the end of 1965, because the actions in November and January made it quite clear that would not be possible.

"We have said -- as a matter of fact, I say today -- as our training missions are completed, we will bring back the training forces. I think this is only good sense, and good judgment. We have certain training missions that I hope we can complete this year, and others next year, and the forces associated with those missions should be brought back.

"We have forces there training the Vietnamese to fly spotter aircraft, for artillery spotting purposes. I am very hopeful that we can bring the U.S. forces out as the Vietnamese acquire that capability.

"On the other hand, the Vietnamese quite clearly need additional assistance in training for counter guerrilla operations, because of the increased guerrilla activities of the Viet Cong, and we are sending additional special forces to Vietnam for that purpose.

"There will be a flow in both directions, but I am certain in the next several months the net flow will be strongly toward South Vietnam." 69/

After Tonkin Gulf, the policy objective of gradual disengagement from Vietnam was no longer relevant. The hope, as well as the concept of phase out and withdrawal, dwindled, since such withdrawal was now seen as tantamount to surrendering SVN to Hanoi. The issue for the future would no longer be withdrawals, but what additional U.S. forces would be required to stem the tide--and how fast they would have to be thrown into action.

55
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

IV. B. 4.

FOOTNOTES

1. Secretary of Defense McNamara, testimony before the U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, March 16, 1962.
2. CINCPAC Ltr 3010 Ser 000223 to SecDef 26 July 1962, "Record of the sixth Secretary of Defense Conference held 23 July 1962 at Headquarters, Commander in Chief Pacific (U)," Encl. "Summary Record of Conference" (S).
3. Msg JCS 5455 to CINCPAC 262318Z July 1962, SECRET.
4. Msg CINCPAC to COMUSMACV 140428Z August 1962, SECRET.
5. Hq USMACV "Summary of Highlights 8 Feb 1962-7 Feb 1963," 20 March 1963, TOP SECRET; SACSA, OJCS, "An Overview of the Vietnam War (1960-63)," 16 January 1964, SECRET.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ltr COMUSMACV MACJ5 to CINCPAC 3010 Ser 0021 "Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam," 19 January 1963, SECRET.
9. Msg OSD (ISA) DEF 923923 to CINCPAC 222243Z January 1963, SECRET.
10. Ltr CINCPAC 3010 to JCS Ser 0079, 25 January 1963, SECRET.
11. CPSVN, encl to CINCPAC Ltr 3010 to JCS Ser 0079, 25 January 1963, SECRET.
12. Ibid.
13. Memo JCSM-180-63 for SecDef 7 March 1963, SECRET.
14. Memo for Record, MA Planning Div, OASD (ISA), 25 May 1963, SECRET.
15. Memo CM-439-63 for SecDef, 26 March 1963, CONFIDENTIAL; Memo, SecDef for CJCS, 26 March 1963, SECRET.
16. USMACV "Summary of Highlights 8 Feb 1962-7 Feb 1963," 20 March 1963, TOP SECRET.
17. NIE 53-63, 12 April 1963, SECRET.
18. CINCPAC Ltr Ser 000223 to SecDef "Summary Report on Secretary of Defense Conference, Honolulu, 6 May 1963 (U)," 7 May 1963, TOP SECRET.

56.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

19. Two memos SecDef for AsstSecDef (ISA), both 8 May 1963, both SECRET.
20. Msg JCS 9820 to CINCPAC 091805Z May 1963, SECRET.
21. CINCPAC Ltr 3010 Ser 00447-63 to JCS, 11 May 1963, SECRET.
22. AsstSecDef (ISA) Memo for SecDef I-23460/63, 17 May 1963 (with handwritten marginal notations by SecDef on original copy), SECRET.
23. Msg DEF 928638 from OASD (ISA) to CINCPAC 291752Z May 1963, SECRET.
24. Memo JCSM-640-63 for SecDef, 27 August 1963, SECRET.
25. Memo AsstSecDef (ISA) for SecDef, I-23369/63, 5 September 1963, SECRET.
26. Memo SecDef for CJCS, 6 September 1963, SECRET.
27. OASD(ISA)ODMA I-24609/63, MAP Vietnam, "Military Manpower," 16 September 1963, and "Financial Summary," 27 September 1963, both SECRET.
28. Memo JCSM-629-63 for SecDef, 20 August 1963, SECRET.
29. Memo AsstSecDef (ISA) for SecDef, I-26004/63, 30 August 1963, SECRET.
30. Memo SecDef for CJCS, 3 September 1963, SECRET.
31. Memo CJCS for SecDef, 11 September 1963, SECRET.
32. Airgram A-781, State to AmEmbassy Saigon et al, 10 June 1963, CONFIDENTIAL.
33. State Dept Memo of Conversation, Under SecState, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, et al, 5 July 1963, SECRET; State Dept Memo for Record, "Briefing for the President," 4 July 1963, TOP SECRET EYES ONLY.
34. DIA Intelligence Summary Supplement (RVN), 17 July 1963, SECRET.
35. DIA Intelligence Bulletin, 4 August 1963, SECRET.
36. Informal memo SACSA for Secretary of Defense, 14 August 1963, SECRET.
37. Director, DIA, memo for Secretary of Defense, S-18548/P-3, 21 August 1963, SECRET.
38. SACSA, "Remarks at a Meeting on Vietnam with Vice President Johnson, Secretary Rusk, et al, at the Department of State, 31 August 1963, Summarized by General Krulak."
39. Memo President for the Secretary of Defense, 21 September 1963, transmitted as attachment to White House memo McGeorge Bundy for Secretary of Defense, 21 September 1963, TOP SECRET.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

40. Joint Memo, SecDef-CJCS for President, "Report of McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam," 2 October 1963 (TOP SECRET).
41. Department of State Bulletin, October 21, 1963, p. 623.
42. NSAM 263, 11 October 1963, TOP SECRET EYES ONLY.
43. This explanation, retrospectively developed by General Maxwell Taylor during an interview on 18 January 1968, was one of the primary reasons operative at the time.
44. State 534 to Saigon of 5 October 1963.
45. Dept of State INR Research Memo, RFE-90, 22 October 1963.
46. Memo SecState for SecDef, 8 November 1963, SECRET.
47. CINCPAC Ltr 3010 Ser 001218 to SecDef "Record of the Special Meeting on the Republic of Vietnam, held 20 November 1963 at Headquarters CINCPAC...", 22 November 1963, SECRET.
48. NSAM 273, 26 November 1963, TOP SECRET.
49. Memo SecDef for President, 23 November 1963, SECRET.
50. Dir FERISA Memo for AsstSecDef (ISA), "Review of the South Vietnam Situation," 3 December 1963.
51. Tab 14 "Accelerated Model Plan (CPSVN)," Back Up Book Saigon Trip 18-20 December 1963, prepared by OSD for SecDef. TOP SECRET SENSITIVE.
52. NOTE: U.S. in-country strength figures for Vietnam vary widely depending on source. Discrepancies are accounted for by different standards for computing total according to administrative criteria, such as distinctions in personnel assignment category, e.g., Joint Table of Distribution (JTD), Permanent Change of Station (PCS), Temporary Duty (TDY), replacement and rotational pipelines, etc.
53. CM-1079-63 for SecDef, 11 December 1963, SECRET: Msg JCS 3944 to CINCPAC 112148Z December 1963.
54. Memo SecDef for the President, 21 December 1963, SECRET.
55. SACS "An Overview of the Vietnam War (1960-63)," no date (OSD handwritten entry on coversheet giving file date as 16 January 1964) SECRET. Provided to SecDef for use in his December trip to SVN).
56. Dir DIA Memo for SecDef S-18982/P-3, 13 December 1963 SECRET.
57. Memorandum for the President from Secretary McNamara, dated 7 January 1964, subject: "Comment on Memoranda by Senator Mansfield."

58.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

58. DepDir CIA Memos for SecState, SecDef, et al, 10, 11, 14, 18 February 1964, SECRET.
59. Msgs JCS 734 CJCS to COMUSMACV, 18 February 1964 (S); COMUSMACV MAC 610 to CJCS, 19 February 1964 (TS); COMUSMACV MAC 665 to CJCS, 21 February 1964 (TS).
60. Msg CINCPAC to ASD (ISA) 110626/Z March 1964, TOP SECRET.
61. Memo SecDef for the President, 16 March 1964.
62. NSAM 288, 17 March 1964, SECRET.
63. Msg CINCPAC to COMUSMACV 062145Z May 1964, SECRET.
64. Working Paper, Special Meeting on Southeast Asia, Hq. PACOM, 1-2 June 1964, Extension of U.S. Advisory Assistance in RVN, 2 June 1964, SECRET; Msg COMUSMACV MACJ 325380 to JCS, info DOD, State (Sullivan), White House (Forrestal), CINCPAC, DA, 250005Z June 1964, SECRET; Msg COMUSMACV MACJ 325580 to CINCPAC info JCS 272357Z June 1964, SECRET; Msg CINCPAC to JCS 042320Z July 1964, SECRET.
65. Msg AmEmbassy Saigon 108 to SecState (Taylor to Rusk and McNamara) info JCS and CINCPAC 150900Z July 1965, SECRET.
66. Msg COMUSMACV to CINCPAC MACJ-31 6180 161045Z July 1964, SECRET.
67. Msg AmEmbassy Saigon to SecState info White House, DOD, JCS, CINCPAC 171210Z July 1964, SECRET; Msg CINCPAC to JCS 200036Z July 1964, SECRET; Msg SecState 205 to AmEmbassy Saigon 21 July 1964, TOP SECRET; Msg JCS 7492 to CINCPAC 211917Z July 1964, SECRET.
68. Department of the Army, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Periodic Report, Subject: Southeast Asia Military Forces (CFP-ODCSOPS-7), various dates.
69. Secretary of Defense McNamara, Testimony Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, August 6, 1964 (Executive Session).

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