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~~TOP SECRET~~

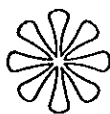
ITEMS SPECIFIED IN THE SPECIAL APPENDIX  
FILED ON JUNE 21, 1971 WITH THE  
UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

II. Portions of Exhibits 7 and 7A the disclosure of which would slow the U.S. program of shifting military responsibility in Vietnam to South Vietnamese forces

7. Sec. VI, C. (2), at pages 1-18

*No argumentation provided  
in source document  
"Special Appendix"*

*Section II Item 7.*



# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967

IV. C. 2. (b)

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

Military Pressures Against North Vietnam

July - October 1964 /

PROLOGUE: ACTIONS AND PROGRAMS UNDERWAY

Several forms of pressure were already being applied against North Vietnam by July of 1964. Moreover, contingency plans for other forms -- should political and military circumstances warrant a decision to use them -- were continually being adjusted and modified as the situation in Southeast Asia developed.

The best known of these pressures was being applied in Laos. Since 21 May, U.S. aircraft had flown low-level reconnaissance missions over communist-occupied areas. 1/ In early June Premier Souvanna Phouma both gave and reaffirmed his permission for armed escort of these missions, which included the right to retaliate against hostile fire from the ground. 2/ This effort was supplemented at the end of the month when the United States decided to conduct transport and night reconnaissance operations and furnish additional T-28 aircraft and munitions to support a Royal Laotian counteroffensive near Muong Soui. This decision came in response to Souvanna's request, in which he equated the protection of Muong Soui with the survival of the Laotian neutralist army. 3/ Air strikes conducted by the Royal Lao Air Force, with T-28s obtained from the United States, were later credited with playing a major role in the success of the RLG's operations.

Other actions obviously designed to forestall communist aggressive intentions were taken in different parts of Southeast Asia. In June, following the Honolulu strategy conference, State and Defense Department sources made repeated leaks to the press affirming U.S. intentions to support its allies and uphold its treaty commitments in Southeast Asia. 4/ U.S. contingency ground-force stockages in Thailand were augmented and publicly acknowledged. 5/ Revelations were made that USAF aircraft were operating out of a newly constructed air base at Da Nang. Moreover, the base was characterized as part of a network of new air bases and operational facilities being developed in South Vietnam and Thailand. 6/ On 10 July, the Da Nang base was the site of a well-publicized Air Force Day display of allied airpower, including aircraft from a B-57 wing recently acknowledged to have been permanently deployed to the Philippines from Japan. 7/

Less known were parallel actions taken within the Government. U.S. resolve to resist aggression in Southeast Asia was communicated directly to North Vietnam by the newly appointed Canadian member of the International Control Commission, Blair Seaborn. Stressing that U.S. ambitions were limited and its intentions were "essentially peaceful," Seaborn told Pham Van Dong that the patience of the U.S. Government was not limitless. He explained that the United States was fully aware of the degree to which Hanoi controlled the Viet

Cong insurgency and the Pathet Lao and might be obliged to carry the war to the North if DRV-assisted pressures against South Vietnam continued. He further cautioned that U.S. stakes in resisting a North Vietnamese victory were high, since the United States saw the conflict in Southeast Asia as part of a general confrontation with guerrilla subversion in other parts of the world, and that "in the event of escalation the greatest devastation would of course result for the DRVN itself." 8/

Also underway were efforts directed toward educating the American public regarding our national interests in Southeast Asia and the extent of the U.S. commitment there. In reporting to the President, Administration officials who participated in the Honolulu Conference stressed the need for a domestic information effort to "get at the basic doubts" of the importance of the U.S. stake in Southeast Asia. The program was to be focused both on key members of the Congress and on the public. 9/ Thereafter, work was begun under State Department guidance to assemble information in answer to some of the prevalent public questions on the U.S. involvement. Of special concern was a recent Gallup poll showing only 37 percent of the public to have some interest in our Southeast Asian policies. Administration officials viewed this group as consisting primarily of either those desiring our withdrawal or those urging our striking at North Vietnam. A general program was proposed with the avowed aims of eroding public support for these polar positions and solidifying a large "center" behind the thrust of current Administration policies. These aims were to be accomplished by directing public comment into discussions of the precise alternatives available to the United States, greater exposure to which it was believed would alienate both "hawk" and "dove" supporters. 10/ Less than a week after this proposal was submitted, the White House published a NSAM, naming its proponent, Robert Manning, as coordinator of all public information activities for Southeast Asia and directing all agencies to cooperate in furthering the Administration's information objectives. 11/ One of the principal foci of the subsequent information program was the compilation of a public pamphlet of questions raised by critics of Administration policy together with answers furnished and coordinated by several interested Government agencies.

Unknown to more than a limited number of Government officials were a variety of covert military or quasi-military operations being conducted at the expense of North Vietnam. U.S. naval forces had undertaken intermittent patrol operations in the Gulf of Tonkin designed to acquire visual, electronic and photographic intelligence on infiltration activities and coastal navigation from North Vietnam to the South. To carry out these missions, destroyers were assigned to tracks between fixed points and according to stipulated schedules. Designated DE SOTO Patrols, the first such operation of 1964 occurred during the period 28 February-10 March. On this patrol the U.S.S. Craig was authorized to approach to within 4 n.m. of the North Vietnamese mainland, 15 n.m. of the Chinese mainland and 12 n.m. of Chinese-held islands. No incidents were reported

as resulting from this action. The next DE SOTO Patrol did not occur until 31 July, on which the U.S.S. Maddox was restricted to a track not closer than 8 n.m. off the North Vietnamese mainland. 12/ Its primary mission, assigned on 17 July, was "to determine DRV coastal activity along the full extent of the patrol track." Other specific intelligence requirements were assigned as follows:

"(a) location and identification of all radar transmitters, and estimate of range capabilities; (b) navigational and hydro information along the routes traversed and particular navigational lights characteristics, landmarks, buoys, currents and tidal information, river mouths and channel accessibility, (c) monitoring a junk force with density of surface traffic pattern, (d) sampling electronic environment radars and navigation aids, (e) photography of opportunities in support of above...."

Separate coastal patrol operations were being conducted by South Vietnamese naval forces. These were designed to uncover and interdict efforts to smuggle personnel and supplies into the South in support of the VC insurgency. This operation had first been organized with U.S. assistance in December 1961; to support it a fleet of motorized junks was built, partially financed with U.S. military assistance funds. During 1964 these vessels operated almost continually in attempts to intercept communist seaborne logistical operations. As Secretary McNamara told Senate committees:

"In the first seven months of this year [1964], they have searched 149,000 junks, some 570,000 people. This is a tremendous operation endeavoring to close the seacoasts of over 900 miles. In the process of that action, as the junk patrol has increased in strength they [sic] have moved farther and farther north endeavoring to find the source of the infiltration." 14/

In addition to these acknowledged activities, the GVN was also conducting a number of operations against North Vietnam to which it did not publicly admit. Covert operations were carried out by South Vietnamese or hired personnel and supported by U.S. training and logistical efforts. Outlined within OPLAN 34A, these operations had been underway theoretically since February but had experienced what the JCS called a "slow beginning." Despite an ultimate objective of helping "convince the North Vietnamese leadership that it is in its own self-interest to desist from its aggressive policies," few operations designed to harass the enemy were carried out successfully during the February-May period. Nevertheless, citing DRV reactions tending "to substantiate the premise that Hanoi is expending substantial resources in defensive measures," the JCS concluded that the potential of the OPLAN 34A program remained high and urged its continuation through Phase II (June-September). 15/ Operations including air-infiltration of sabotage teams, underwater demolition, and seizures of communist junks were approved for the period, and a few were carried by specially trained GVN forces during June and July. 16/

In the process of combined GVN-U.S. planning, but not yet approved for execution, were cross-border operations against VC-North Vietnamese logistical routes in Laos. This planning provided for both air attacks by the VNAF and "ground operations up to battalion size" in the Laotian Panhandle. Preparations for such actions had been approved in principle since March but since then little further interest had been shown in them. Toward the end of July, the air force portion was examined seriously by Administration officials as a means not only to damage the Communist logistical effort but also "primarily for reasons of morale in South Vietnam and to divert GVN attention from [a] proposal to strike North Vietnam." 17/

In addition to both the open and covert operations already underway, a number of other actions intended to bring pressure against North Vietnam had been recommended to the White House. Receiving considerable attention among Administration officials during May and June was a proposed request for a Congressional Resolution, reaffirming support by the legislators for Presidential action to resist Communist advances in Southeast Asia during an election year [Tab A]. In some respects paralleling this domestic initiative, the President was urged to present to the United Nations the detailed case assembled by the Government supporting the charges of DRV aggression against South Vietnam and Laos. He was also urged to authorize periodic deployments of additional forces toward Southeast Asia as a means of demonstrating U.S. resolve to undertake whatever measures were required to resist aggression in that region. Moreover, in OPLAN 37-64, there was fully developed a listing of forces to be deployed as a deterrent to communist escalation in reaction to U.S./GVN actions against North Vietnam. Finally, it was recommended that the President make the decision to use "selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam" if necessary to improve non-Communist prospects in South Vietnam and Laos. 18/

The source documents available to this writer are not clear on the exact decisions made in response to each of these recommendations, or indeed on the precise form or context in which the recommendations were presented. It is evident that the proposal to seek a Congressional Resolution was not favorably received, but as subsequent events indicate neither was it rejected out-of-hand. It proved very useful in largely the same language just two months later. Less certain are the decisions made about the other proposals. Certainly they were not approved for immediate implementation. However, it is not clear whether they were (1) flatly disapproved, (2) merely postponed, or (3) approved in principle, subject to gradual implementation. At the Honolulu Conference, where many of the proposed actions were discussed with U.S. officials from the theatre, many practical considerations were aired which showed that delayed implementation would be a reasonable course of action. 19/ But such factors would have provided equally valid reasons for either deciding against the proposals or for merely deferring a decision until a later, more appropriate time. The most significant point, for an understanding of the events and decisions of the second half of 1964, is that these options remained "on the shelf" for possible implementation should favorable circumstances arise.

THE TONKIN GULF CRISIS

Several of the pressuring measures recommended to the White House in May or June were implemented in conjunction with or in the immediate aftermath of naval action in the Tonkin Gulf. It is this fact and the rapidity with which these measures were taken that has led critics to doubt some aspects of the public account of the Tonkin incidents. It is also this fact, together with later Administration assessments of the Tonkin Gulf experience, that give the incidents greater significance than the particular events seemed at first to warrant.

THE FIRST INCIDENT

What happened in the Gulf? As noted earlier, U.S.S. MADDOX commenced the second DE SOTO Patrol on 31 July. On the prior night South Vietnamese coastal patrol forces made a midnight attack, including an amphibious "commando" raid, on Hon Me and Hon Nieu Islands, about 19° N. latitude. At the time of this attack, U.S.S. MADDOX was 120-130 miles away just heading into waters off North Vietnam. On 2 August, having reached the northernmost point on its patrol track and having headed South, the destroyer was intercepted by three North Vietnamese patrol boats. Apparently, these boats and a fleet of junks had moved into the area near the island to search for the attacking force and had mistaken Maddox for a South Vietnamese escort vessel. (Approximately eleven hours earlier, while on a northerly heading, Maddox had altered course to avoid the junk concentration shown on her radar; about six hours after that -- now headed South -- Maddox had altered her course to the southeast to avoid the junks a second time.) When the PT boats began their high-speed run at her, at a distance of approximately 10 miles, the destroyer was 28 miles from the coast and heading farther into international waters. Two of the boats closed to within 5,000 yards, launching one torpedo each. As they approached, Maddox fired on the boats with her 5-inch batteries and altered course to avoid the torpedoes, which were observed passing the starboard side at a distance of 100 to 200 yards. The third boat moved up abeam of the destroyer and took a direct 5-inch hit; it managed to launch a torpedo which failed to run. All three PT boats fired 50-caliber machine guns at Maddox as they made their firing runs, and a bullet fragment was recovered from the destroyer's superstructure. The attacks occurred in mid-afternoon, and photographs were taken of the torpedo boats as they attacked. 20/

Upon first report of the PT boats' apparently hostile intent, four F-8E aircraft were launched from the aircraft carrier Ticonderoga, many miles to the South, with instructions to provide air cover but not to fire unless they or Maddox were fired upon. As Maddox continued in a southerly direction, Ticonderoga's aircraft attacked the two boats that had initiated the action. Both were damaged with Zuni rockets and 20mm gunfire. The third boat, struck by the destroyer's 5-inch, was already

dead in the water. After about eight minutes, the aircraft broke off their attacks. In the meantime, Maddox had been directed by the 7th Fleet Commander to retire from the area to avoid hostile fire. Following their attacks on the PT's, the aircraft joined Maddox and escorted her back toward South Vietnamese waters where she joined a second destroyer, C. Turner Joy. The two ships continued to patrol in international waters. Approximately two hours after the action, in early evening, reconnaissance aircraft from Ticonderoga located the damaged PT's and obtained two photographs. The third boat was last seen burning and presumed sunk. 21/

On 3 August a note of protest was dispatched to the Hanoi Government, reportedly through the International Control Commission for Indo-China. Directed by the President, the note stressed the unprovoked nature of the North Vietnamese attack and closed with the following warning:

"The U.S. Government expects that the authorities of the regime in North Vietnam will be under no misapprehension as to the grave consequences which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action against U.S. forces."

On that same day, measures were taken to increase the security of the DE SOTO Patrol, the approved schedule of which still had two days to run. At 1325 hours (Washington time) the JCS approved a CINCPAC request to resume the patrol at a distance of 11 n.m. from the North Vietnamese coast. 22/ Later in the day, President Johnson announced that he had approved doubling the patrolling force and authorized active defensive measures on the part of both the destroyers and their escorting aircraft. His press statement included the following:

I have instructed the Navy:

1. To continue the patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam.
2. To double the force by adding an additional destroyer to the one already on patrol.
3. To provide a combat air patrol over the destroyers, and
4. To issue orders to the commanders of the combat aircraft and the two destroyers; (a) to attack any force which attacks them in international waters, and (b) to attack with the objective not only of driving off the force but of destroying it. 23/

#### THE SECOND INCIDENT

Late the following evening the destroyers, Maddox and C. Turner Joy, were involved in a second encounter with hostile patrol boats. Like the first incident, this occurred following a South Vietnamese attack on North



the count reached 22 torpedoes, a total which caused the Commanding Officer, once the engagement had ended, to question the validity of his report and communicate these doubts to his superiors:

"Review of action makes many recorded contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects and overeager sonarman may have accounted for many reports."

In addition to sonar readings, however, the Task Group had also reported intercepting communications from North Vietnamese naval craft indicating that they were involved in an attack on U.S. ("enemy") ships and that they had "sacrificed" two vessels in the engagement. 27/

#### THE RESPONSE IN WASHINGTON

Sometime prior to the reported termination of the engagement, at 0030 hours, 5 August (Tonkin Gulf time), "alert orders" to prepare for possible reprisal raids were sent out by naval authorities to Ticonderoga and to a second aircraft carrier, Constellation, which started heading South from Hong Kong late on 3 August. Such raids were actually ordered and carried out later in the day. "Defense officials disclosed [in public testimony, 9 January 1968] that, when the first word was received of the second attack 'immediate consideration was given to retaliation.'" That apparently began shortly after 0920 hours (Washington time), when the task group message that a North Vietnamese naval attack was imminent was first relayed to Washington. From this time on, amid a sequence of messages describing the attack, Secretary McNamara held "a series of meetings with [his] chief civilian and military advisers" concerning the engagement and possible U.S. retaliatory actions. As he testified before the Fulbright Committee:

"We identified and refined various options for a response to the attack, to be presented to the President. Among these options was the air strike against the attacking boats and their associated bases, which option was eventually selected. As the options were identified preliminary messages were sent to appropriate operational commanders alerting them to the several possibilities so that initial planning steps could be undertaken." 28/

At 1230, the President met with the National Security Council. Having just come from a brief meeting with the JCS, attended also by Secretary Rusk and McGeorge Bundy, Secretary McNamara briefed the NSC on the reported details of the attack and the possibilities for reprisal. Shortly thereafter (presumably during a working lunch with the President, Secretary Rusk and Bundy) and after receiving by telephone the advice of the JCS, McNamara and the others recommended specific reprisal actions. It was at this point that the President approved "a response consisting of an air strike on the PT and SWATOW boat bases and their associated facilities." 29/

Returning from this session shortly after 1500, Secretary McNamara, along with Deputy Secretary Vance, joined with the JCS to review all the evidence relating to the engagement. Included in this review was the communications intelligence information which the Secretary reported, containing North Vietnamese reports that (1) their vessels were engaging the destroyers, and (2) they had lost two craft in the fight. In the meantime, however, messages had been relayed to the Joint Staff indicating considerable confusion over the details of the attack. The DE SOTO Patrol Commander's message, expressing doubts about earlier evidence of a large-scale torpedo attack, arrived sometime after 1330 hours. Considerably later (it was not sent to CINCPACFLT until 1447 EDT), another message arrived to the effect that while details of the action were still confusing, the commander of Task Group 72.1 was certain that the ambush was genuine. He had interviewed the personnel who sighted the boat's cockpit lights passing near the Maddox, and he had obtained a report from the C. Turner Joy that two torpedoes were observed passing nearby. Accordingly, these reports were discussed by telephone with CINCPAC, and he was instructed by Secretary McNamara to make a careful check of the evidence and ascertain whether there was any doubt concerning the occurrence of an attack. CINCPAC called the JCS at least twice more, at 1723 and again at 1807 hours, to state that he was convinced on the basis of "additional information" that the attacks had taken place. 30/ At the time of the earlier call Secretary McNamara and the JCS were discussing possible force deployments to follow any reprisals. On the occasion of the first call, the Secretary was at the White House attending the day's second NSC meeting. Upon being informed of CINCPAC's call, he reports:

"I spoke to the Director of the Joint Staff and asked him to make certain that the Commander in Chief, Pacific was willing to state that the attack had taken place, and therefore that he was free to release the Executive Order because earlier in the afternoon I had told him that under no circumstances would retaliatory action take place until we were, to use my words, 'damned sure that the attacks had taken place.'" 31/

At the meeting of the National Security Council, proposals to deploy certain increments of OPLAN 37-64 forces to the Western Pacific were discussed, and the order to retaliate against North Vietnamese patrol craft and their associated facilities was confirmed. Following this meeting, at 1845, the President met with 16 Congressional leaders from both parties for a period of 89 minutes. Reportedly, he described the second incident in the Gulf, explained his decisions to order reprisals, and informed the legislators of his intention to request a formal statement of Congressional support for these decisions. On the morning following the meeting, The Washington Post carried a report that none of the Congressional leaders present at the meeting had raised objections to the course of action planned. Their only question, the report stated, "had to do with how Congress could show its agreement and concern in the crisis." 32/

In many ways the attacks on U.S. ships in the Tonkin Gulf provided the Administration with an opportunity to do a number of things that had been urged on it. Certainly it offered a politically acceptable way of exerting direct punitive pressure on North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, the U.S. response served to satisfy for a time the growing desire for some action to carry the war to the North. Relative to the election campaign, it provided a means of eliminating any doubts about President Johnson's decisiveness that may have been encouraged by his preferred candidate's image as the restrained man of peace. The obvious convenience and the ways in which it was exploited have been at the root of much of the suspicion with which critics of Administration policy have viewed the incident.

The documents available to this writer are not conclusive on this point, but the evidence indicates that the occurrence of a DRV provocation at this time resulted from events over which the U.S. Government exercised little control. It has been suggested that the incidents were related in some way to pressure coming from the GVN for U.S. action against North Vietnam. However, the patrol was authorized on or prior to 17 July, and General Khanh's oft-cited "Go North" appeal wasn't made until 19 July. The first attack almost certainly was a case of mistaken judgment on the part of the local Vietnamese commander. His probable association of U.S.S. Maddox with the South Vietnamese raiding force is indicated by the circumstances preceding the event, the brief duration and character of it, and the long-delayed (not until 5 August) and rather subdued DRV public comment. Moreover, there is little reason to see anything more than coincidence in the close conjunction between the GVN's maritime operations against the North Vietnamese coast and the scheduling of the DE SOTO Patrol. The two operations were scheduled and monitored from different authorities and through separate channels of communication and command. Higher U.S. naval commands were informed of the operations against the two islands by COMUSMACV, but the task group commander had no knowledge of where or when the specific operations had taken place. As Secretary McNamara told Senator Morse, in response to charges that U.S. naval forces were supporting the GVN operation,

"Our ships had absolutely no knowledge of it, were not connected with it; in no sense of the word can be considered to have backstopped the effort."

In addition, there was no reason on the basis of earlier DE SOTO Patrol experience to even suspect that patrol activity might precipitate hostile action by North Vietnam. 33/

Although the events of the second attack were less clear-cut, the evidence does not support beliefs (which have been expressed) that the incident was staged. On the contrary, the evidence leads readily to other explanations, which are at least equally as plausible.

DRV motivations for the second attack are unclear, but several possibilities provide rational explanations for a deliberate DRV decision. Those given credence at the time -- that the DRV or China wanted to

increase pressures for an international conference or that the DRV was testing U.S. reactions to a contemplated general offensive 34/ -- have lost some credibility. Subsequent events and DRV actions have appeared to lack any consistent relationship with such motives. Perhaps closer to the mark is the narrow purpose of prompt retaliation for an embarrassing and well-publicized rebuff by a much-maligned enemy. Inexperienced in modern naval operations, DRV leaders may have believed that under cover of darkness it would be possible to even the score or to provide at least a psychological victory by severely damaging a U.S. ship. Unlike the first incident, the DRV was ready (5 August) with a propaganda blast denying its own provocation and claiming the destruction of U.S. aircraft. Still, regardless of motive, there is little question but that the attack on the destroyers was deliberate. Having followed the destroyers for hours, their course was well known to the North Vietnamese naval force, and its advance units were laying ahead to make an ambushing beam attack fully 60 miles from shore.

The reality of a North Vietnamese attack on 4 August has been corroborated by both visual and technical evidence. That it may have been deliberately provoked by the United States is belied to a considerable degree by circumstantial evidence. Operating restrictions for the DE SOTO Patrol were made more stringent following the first attack. The 11 n.m., rather than 8 n.m., off-shore patrolling track indicates an intention to avoid -- not provoke -- further contact. On 4 February the rules of engagement were modified to restrict "hot pursuit" by the U.S. ships to no closer than 11 n.m. from the North Vietnamese coast; aircraft were to pursue no closer than 3 n.m. 35/ Given the first attack, the President's augmentation of the patrol force was a normal precaution, particularly since both Ticonderoga and C. Turner Joy were already deployed in the immediate vicinity as supporting elements. Moreover, since the augmentation was coupled with a clear statement of intent to continue the patrols and a firm warning to the DRV that repetition would bring dire consequences, their addition to the patrol could be expected to serve more as a deterrent than a provocation.

The often alleged "poised" condition of the U.S. reprisal forces was anything but extraordinary. U.S.S. Constellation was well out of the immediate operating area as the patrol was resumed on 3 August. In fact, one reason for delaying the launching of retaliatory air strikes (nearly 1100 hours, 5 August -- Tonkin Gulf time) was to permit Constellation to approach within reasonable range of the targets. Target lists from which to make appropriate selections were already available as a result of routine contingency planning accomplished in June and July. In preparation for the resumed DE SOTO Patrol of 3-5 August, the patrol track was moved farther north to make clearer the separation between it and the 34-A operations. 35/ The ways in which the events of the second Tonkin Gulf incident came about give little indication of a deliberate provocation to provide opportunity for reprisals.

#### BROADENING THE IMPACT

There is no question, however, that the second incident was promptly exploited by the Administration. The event was seized upon as an opportunity

to take several measures that had been recommended earlier and which were now seen as useful means of turning an essentially unique and localized incident into an event with broader strategic impact. The extent to which the strategic utility of these actions was perceived during the two days between the incidents is not clear. Certainly the disposition of U.S.S. Constellation does not suggest a picture of intensive preparation for a planned series of new military and political pressures against North Vietnam. Moreover, there is no record in the usual sources of the series of staff meetings, task assignments and memoranda that typically accompany preparations for coordinated political and military initiatives. Whatever was contemplated between 2 and 4 August, the deliberations immediately preceding the reprisal decision seem to have been largely ad hoc, both within DOD and among the President's principal advisers.

The most reasonable explanation for the actions which accompanied the reprisals, and for the rapidity of their implementation, is the fact that each of them had been proposed and staffed in detail months before. These "on the shelf" options had been recommended unanimously by the principal officials responsible for security matters in Southeast Asia. The fact that they were implemented in August indicates that the President did not disapprove of them, but rather that the domestic and international political environments had probably been judged inappropriate earlier in the summer. The measures apparently had been considered either too costly or too risky (perhaps politically or perhaps in terms of communist reactions), given the President's election strategy and his policy theme of "maximum effect with minimum escalation". The kind of circumstances created by the Tonkin Gulf affair enabled them to be carried out at lower cost and with less risk. The promptness with which these actions were to be taken now is perhaps as much a direct result of the President's well-known political astuteness and keen sense of timing as any other single factor.

One of the first actions taken was to deploy additional U.S. military forces to the Western Pacific. This was done in part as a measure to deter any hostile responses by Hanoi or Peking to the reprisal raids. It also enabled making a stronger signal of U.S. resolve to defend its interests throughout Southeast Asia, as recommended at the end of May. Orders directing the deployment of selected 37-64 forces and the alerting of others were dispatched from the Pentagon shortly after the President's meeting with Congressional leaders on the evening of 4 August. Shortly after midnight, on 5 August, and again later in the day, Secretary McNamara announced the specific measures by which U.S. military capabilities around Southeast Asia were being augmented:

"First, an attack carrier group has been transferred from the First Fleet on the Pacific coast to the Western Pacific. Secondly, interceptor and fighter bomber aircraft have been moved into South Vietnam. Thirdly, fighter bomber aircraft have been moved into Thailand. Fourthly, interceptor and fighter

bomber squadrons have been transferred from the United States into advance bases in the Pacific. Fifthly, an antisubmarine task force group has been moved into the South China Sea. 37/

It is significant, relative to the broader purpose of the deployments, that few of these additional units were removed from the Western Pacific when the immediate crisis subsided. In late September the fourth attack aircraft carrier was authorized to resume its normal station in the Eastern Pacific as soon as the regularly assigned carrier completed repairs. The other forces remained in the vicinity of their August deployment. 38/

Other actions taken by the Administration in the wake of Tonkin Gulf were intended to communicate to various audiences the depth and sincerity of the U.S. commitment. On the evening of 4 August, in conjunction with his testing of Congressional opinion regarding reprisal action, President Johnson disclosed his intention to request a resolution in support of U.S. Southeast Asian policy. This he did through a formal message to both houses on 5 August. Concurrently, identical draft resolutions, the language of which had been prepared by executive agencies, were introduced in the Senate by J. William Fulbright (D., Ark.) and in the House by Thomas E. Morgan (D., Pa.) and co-sponsored by bi-partisan leadership. 39/ Discussed in committee on 6 August, in response to testimony by leading Administration officials, the resolution was passed the following day -- by votes of 88 to 2 in the Senate and 416 to 0 in the House [Tab C].

Despite the nearly unanimous votes of support for the Resolution, Congressional opinions varied as to the policy implications and the meaning of such support. The central belief seemed to be that the occasion necessitated demonstrating the nation's unity and collective will in support of the President's action and affirming U.S. determination to oppose further aggression. However, beyond that theme, there was a considerable variety of opinion. For example, in the House, expressions of support varied from Congressman Laird's argument, that while the retaliation in the Gulf was appropriate such actions still left a policy to be developed with respect to the land war in Southeast Asia, to the more reticent viewpoint of Congressman Alger. The latter characterized his support as being primarily for purposes of showing unity and expressed concern over the danger of being dragged into war by "other nations seeking our help." Several spokesmen stressed that the Resolution did not constitute a declaration of war, did not abdicate Congressional responsibility for determining national policy commitments, and did not give the President carte blanche to involve the nation in a major Asian war. 40/

Similar expressions were voiced in the senior chamber. For example, Senator Nelson sought assurances that the Resolution would not be exploited to commit the United States further in the direction of a large land war

in Asia without an expression of specific Congressional approval. In response, Senator Fulbright stated that he did not believe that the Resolution changed in any way the Administration's concept of keeping the conflict in Vietnam as limited as possible. He identified the purposes of the Resolution as being only (1) "to make it clear that the Congress approves the action taken by the President to meet the attack on U.S. forces...." and (2) to declare support for the resolute policy enunciated by the President in order to prevent further aggression, or to retaliate with suitable measures should such aggression take place." 41/ However, in subsequent discussion it was made clear that preventing or retaliating against further aggression was interpreted rather broadly at the time:

"(Mr. Cooper) ...are we now giving the President advance authority to take whatever action he may deem necessary respecting South Vietnam and its defense, or with respect to the defense of any other country included in the [SEATO] treaty?

"(Mr. Fulbright) I think that is correct.

"(Mr. Cooper) Then, looking ahead, if the President decided that it was necessary to use such force as could lead into war, we will give that authority by this resolution?

"(Mr. Fulbright) That is the way I would interpret it. If a situation later developed in which we thought the approval should be withdrawn it could be withdrawn by concurrent resolution." 42/

The Congressional Resolution had several intended audiences. First, it was aimed at the communist powers who might not believe the President would risk legislative debate over strong military actions in an election year. Second, it was intended to reassure our allies, particularly in Asia, who might doubt the ability of the President to rally the necessary public resolve should stronger military measures be needed. Finally it was directed at the U.S. public, whose appreciation of national interests in Southeast Asia might be strengthened through observation of combined executive-legislative and bipartisan political support. 43/

The United Nations was the target of a separate statement, on 5 August, as Ambassador Stevenson described the events in the Gulf for members of the Security Council and specifically related the DRV provocation to the wider campaign of terror and infiltration occurring in South Vietnam and Laos. 44/ This address was designed to establish the legitimacy of our actions in the Gulf under provisions of the UN Charter and to reaffirm that U.S. policy in Southeast Asia had limited aims and was based on upholding provisions of existing international agreements.

The third communication was directed specifically to Hanoi, on 10 August, through the Canadian I.C.C. representative and was intended to strengthen the warning which he conveyed on his initial visit. In

addition to repeating points made earlier, Seaborn's second message conveyed the U.S. Government's uncertainty over DRV intentions in the 4 August attack and explained that subsequent U.S. deployments of additional airpower to South Vietnam and Thailand were "precautionary." In addition, the new message stressed: (1) that the Tonkin Gulf events demonstrated that "U.S. public and official patience" was wearing thin; (2) that the Congressional Resolution reaffirmed U.S. determination "to continue to oppose firmly, by all necessary means, DRV efforts to subvert and conquer South Vietnam and Laos"; and (3) that "if the DRV persists in its present course, it can expect to suffer the consequences." 45/

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the provocation handed the U.S. Government in the Tonkin Gulf, the Administration was able to carry out most of the actions recommended by its principal officials early in the summer. By the same token, it was reducing the number of unused measures short of direct military action that had been conceived as available for exerting effective pressure on the DRV. In effect, as it made its commitments in Southeast Asia clearer it also deepened them, and in the process it denied itself access to some of the uncommitting options which it had perceived earlier as offering policy flexibility. 46/ Meanwhile, other events were also having the effect of denying options which had been considered useful alternatives to strikes against the North.



POST-TONKIN POLICY ASSESSMENTS

The Tonkin Gulf incidents were important not only because of what they enabled the United States to do in response -- but also because of the way what was done began to be regarded by policy-makers. The fact that U.S. forces had responded to hostile acts by making direct attacks on North Vietnam, albeit limited ones under unique circumstances, had rather significant impacts on the Administration's policy judgments. These impacts appeared as it became increasingly evident that the United States actually had fewer options than it once believed available.

DILEMMAS IN LAOS

One of the areas where the Administration first saw its freedom of action being impaired was Laos.

Prior to the events in Tonkin Gulf, the situation in Laos had become increasingly complex, thus making U.S. policy choices increasingly delicate. Since the end of May, U.S. hopes for a stabilized Laos had been based largely on a Polish proposal to convene a preliminary conference among six nations. <sup>47/</sup> Particularly promising was the Soviet Union's willingness to support the proposal. Toward the end of June, as the Laotian government warned of the imminent threat of a major communist offensive near Muong Soui, the Soviet Union asked Great Britain to postpone efforts toward such a conference, and the Poles seemed to back away from their original initiative. On 25 July the Soviet Union announced her return to the 14-Nation formula, and threatened to resign her co-chairman role if a conference were not called. <sup>48/</sup> The Soviet threat to withdraw from the international machinery that is basic to the neutralist Laotian government's claim to legitimacy was a matter of considerable mutual concern in Vientiane and Washington. <sup>49/</sup>

One of the major reasons for U.S. support of the Polish 6-Nation preliminary conference was its value in forestalling pressure for a Geneva-type meeting. It was hoped that such a conference could be prolonged well into the autumn to give the political and military situation in South Vietnam time to be improved, and to build a more favorable political climate for an eventual 14-Nation conference on Laos. The latter could be accomplished, it was hoped, by: (1) demonstrating the extent of communist responsibility for Laotian instability; (2) getting the I.C.C. to function more effectively; (3) strengthening international backing for Souvanna's position; and (4) thereby obtaining support for his insistence on Pathet Lao withdrawal from the Plaine des Jarres as a precondition for a new Geneva settlement. <sup>50/</sup> Insofar as Laos was concerned, the United States recognized that a new conference was probably desirable, as long as it did not occur too soon. However, it also recognized the suspicion with which the GVN would regard any kind of negotiations

over Southeast Asia and the likelihood that back-corridor discussions of the Vietnamese problem would be an almost inevitable by-product. In time such a procedure might be useful, but for the balance of 1964 it was to be avoided in order to promote GVN stability and encourage a more vigorous GVN war effort. 51/

The pressure for a Geneva-type conference had been building ever since the resumption of fighting in Laos in May. The chief protagonist in the quest for negotiations was France, who first proposed reconvening the 14-Nation Conference to deal with the crisis on 20 May. What made French policy so dangerous to U.S. interests, however, was that its interest in a Geneva solution applied to Vietnam as well. On 12 June, DeGaulle publicly repeated his neutralization theme for all Indo-China and called for an end to all foreign intervention there; on 23 July he proposed reconvening the 1954 Geneva Conference to deal with the problems of Vietnam.

The Soviet Union's return to the 14-Nation formula in July (it had endorsed the original French proposal before indicating willingness to support the 6-Nation approach) indicated solidarity in the communist camp. The call was endorsed by North Vietnam on the following day. Communist China first announced support for a 14-Nation Conference (on Laos) on 9 June, repeating this through notes to the co-chairman calling on the 13th for an "emergency meeting." On 2 August, the Chinese urged the USSR not to carry out its threat to abandon its co-chairman role, apparently viewing such a development as jeopardizing the possibilities for a Geneva settlement. 52/

Great Britain also urged the Russians to stay on, and during the last days of July it attempted to make arrangements in Moscow to convene a 14-Nation assembly on Laos. The negotiations failed because Britain insisted on Souvanna's prerequisite that the communists withdraw from positions taken in May and was unable to gain Soviet acquiescence. However, U.S. leaders were aware that Britain's support on this point could not be counted on indefinitely in the face of increasing pressure in the direction of Geneva. 53/

In the meantime, however, Laotian military efforts to counter the communist threat to key routes and control points west of the Plaine des Jarres were showing great success. As a result of a counteroffensive (Operation Triangle), government forces gained control of a considerable amount of territory that gave promise of assuring access between the two capitals (Vientiane and Luang Prabang) for the first time in three years. 54/

In effect, the government's newly won control of territory and communication routes in Central Laos created a new and more favorable balance of power in that country, which in the perceptions of the Administration should not be jeopardized. A threat to this balance from either (1) communist reactions to additional pressure, or (2) Laotian insistence on extending their offensive into the Plaine des Jarres, was cited to discourage proposals near the end of July to permit the VNAF to

bomb infiltration routes in the Laotian Panhandle. 55/ This "don't rock the boat" policy was given added encouragement when, on 1 August, Great Britain initiated a promising effort toward a new diplomatic solution. Acting on Souvanna Phouma's request, the British government urged the I.C.C. members to arrange a meeting among the three Laotian political factions. 56/

Concern over not provoking a communist military escalation that would upset the relatively stabilized situation in Laos figured prominently in a tentative analysis of U.S. strategy for Southeast Asia made and circulated for comment by the State Department in mid-August. It had a significant impact on the Administration's assessment of its options in the post-Tonkin period. Among other effects, this concern caused it to withhold for several weeks its approval of continuing proposals for air and ground initiatives in the Panhandle as means to improve the situation in South Vietnam. 57/ 64

#### CONCERN OVER PRESSURES FOR NEGOTIATIONS

One of the Tonkin Gulf incidents which was perceived within the Administration served to exacerbate its policy dilemmas regarding Laos. Administration officials were apprehensive that the international crisis precipitated by incidents in the Gulf might intensify the kind of Geneva conference pressures generated previously. 58/ Administration concern was apparently well founded. On 5 August UN Secretary General U Thant stated that the 14-Nation assembly should be reconvened to deal with the Tonkin Gulf debate then being urged on the UN Security Council. (He had earlier urged reconvening the 1954 Conference to negotiate a Vietnam settlement.) Two days later, during the debate, the French delegation urged the calling of a conference for the pacification of all of Indo-China. Reports appeared on 10 August that the Chinese People's Daily published an editorial arguing that a Geneva settlement was the only effective way to solve the problem of South Vietnam. On the 19th, in a note rejecting potential UN Security Council findings regarding responsibility for the Tonkin Gulf incidents, North Vietnam declared its insistence on a Geneva conference. 59/

Such was the Administration's concern in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, that it contemplated a diplomatic initiative relating to Laos that was designed to counteract the expected pressure. Reflecting a point of view reportedly also becoming attractive to Souvanna Phouma, the State Department sought reactions to a policy direction that would no longer insist on Pathet Lao withdrawal from the Plaine des Jarres as a precondition to an international conference. The gains recently achieved through "Operation Triangle" were so significant, it reasoned, that they more than offset communist control of the Plaine. And it was clear that any negotiations by which a communist withdrawal might be arranged would include reciprocal demands for the government to relinquish its recently won gains. 60/ Moreover, passage of the Congressional Resolution and the strong DRV naval attacks had accomplished the exact kind of actions believed to be necessary earlier to demonstrate U.S.