

(TS) Although the Air Force Chief of Staff concurred with JCS proposals to revitalize the counterinsurgency program, he urged still bolder U.S. measures. A 12 February intelligence report, General LeMay observed, warned that without a marked improvement in efficiency, the Vietnamese government and armed forces "at best had an even chance" of withstanding the Viet Cong in the coming weeks and months. Regardless of the threat of escalation, LeMay thought that the time for a military showdown had arrived, and that the U.S. government should explain to the American people the extent of Communist subversion in South Vietnam and announce its determination to defeat it.¹⁵

Plans to Increase Pressure on North Vietnam

(S) With its hopes raised by the seemingly strong Khanh government, the administration was not ready to follow LeMay's counsel. However, on 21 February, McNamara asked the JCS to assess ways to apply more pressure on North Vietnam to persuade it to end support of the insurgents in the South and in Laos. They were to include actions such as special air and sea nonnuclear attacks which would be least likely to escalate the conflict and cause adverse third country reaction. In addition, he asked them to suggest how best to deter Hanoi and Peking from dispatching troops throughout Southeast Asia.¹⁶

(TS) In a partial reply on 2 March the JCS recommended selected air attacks immediately on North Vietnam for "shock" effect as part of a coordinated diplomatic, psychological, and military program. These attacks could be followed by additional air and amphibious attacks,