Chapter II

CIVILIAN-MILITARY INTERACTION IN THE PENTAGON - I
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When the popular President and old war-hero, Dwight D. Eisenhower, handed over the reins of the presidency to a former lieutenant JG of the US Navy, the Senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, the nation was at peace. In the locked safes of the Pentagon were contingency plans for dealing with situations that might call for US military action in various parts of the world including Southeast Asia. With the outgoing President also departed the civilian Secretary of Defence, Thomas S. Gates, who was in the past a partner of Drexel and Company, and who had earlier served during both Eisenhower Administrations in different capacities including that of the Deputy Secretary of Defence in the Pentagon. The Secretary, a Presidential appointee, left the office along with the man who had appointed him. But the military component of the Pentagon with the Joint Chiefs of Staff at its apex stayed on. These men, veterans of many battles, and with their names widely known to the American public, were General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General George H. Decker of the Army, General Thomas D. White of the Air Force, Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, Chief of Naval Operations and General David M. Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps. The tradition of civilian control over the military was well-established in the United States. But the effectiveness with which the control would be exercised would depend upon the personality and capabilities of the Secretary, his equation with the President,
his capacity to hold the loyalty of his civilian subordinates, his ability to bargain with extra-Pentagon federal actors, his skill in working with Congress, and, importantly, his dexterity in dealing with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The man whom Kennedy picked to preside over the vast American military establishment as Secretary of Defence was Robert S. McNamara, President of the Ford Company.

"McNamara Revolution"

Unlike his predecessors, McNamara was hardly known in Washington. But this "unknown man" was destined to create a lot of "stir" not only in the Pentagon, but also in the whole governmental machinery of the United States. It was not long before the Secretary of Defence, skilfully exercising the powers that were available to him under legislative enactments, succeeded in establishing his authority in so decisive a manner as to compel awe and admiration in the Washington Community. A man of enormous industry, McNamara possessed a sharp eye for detail and extraordinary analytical skill. He was ably served by a group of highly skilled civilian specialists whom he brought into the Department. They introduced or improved several tools of analysis that were regarded by the Secretary as useful in the decision-making process. McNamara never once wilted in the course of numerous appearances before Congressional Committees in the course of which he was subjected to intense questioning on numerous points relating to the huge establishment over which
he presided. The coolness, dexterity, and assurances that he invariably displayed often drew admiration even from Senators who had reservations concerning the correctness of some of his views.

The Secretary's activities attracted attention and discussion and evoked praise as well as blame. By early 1963 Hanson Baldwin, the veteran military editor of the New York Times, was to talk of the "McNamara Monarchy." Eight months after he came into office, the Army, Navy, Air Force Journal said that "the professional military leadership to the nation is being short-circuited in the current decision-making process at the Pentagon." The Washington Post referred to this mode as "the closed door policy of the Defense Department." Daniel Bell spoke of the military leadership as the "dispossessed" and pointed to the increasingly important role of the so-called "technipols" (the military's derisive term for technicians and political theorists whom McNamara had brought into the Department of Defence).

Mark Watson, a military commentator, spoke of "the Pentagon's trend toward constant further depreciation of the military as essential advisers--not on political issues, but on strictly

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3 Ibid.
military issues." Jerry Greene, another military writer, depicted McNamara as a "civilian on horseback," who had mounted the horse from the offside while the Congress had been concerned with preventing the emergence of a General on Horseback. In June 1963 General Thomas D. White who had in the meantime retired as the Air Chief, alleged that "in common with other military men I am profoundly apprehensive of the pipe-smoking, trees-full-of-owls type of so-called defense intellectuals who have been brought into this nation's capital."

The increase in the influence of the Secretary of Defence during the Kennedy Administration was largely due to the manner in which McNamara chose to respond to certain major issues. The Kennedy Administration, at the outset, had to tackle three problems. The "menace" of "missile gap" was very much in the air. This was one of the topics Kennedy had emphasized during his election campaign. President Eisenhower's warning against the "military-industrial complex" in his farewell speech was another problem that he had to face. The third was the relevance of the Dullesian concept of "massive retaliation." McNamara decided to


face them head on. From the very beginning, he took upon the role of an "active" Secretary rather than that of a "passive one." On another occasion, he said, "I see my position here as being that of a leader, not a judge. I'm here to originate and stimulate new ideas and programs, not just to referee arguments and harmonize interests...."

The civil-military equation seems to have been largely influenced by the change in strategic policy and the change in method to implement that policy. The "massive retaliation" doctrine had meant that top priority was to be accorded to the Air Force. The Kennedy Administration set before itself the task of maintaining a "balanced force structure" in line with its concept of "flexible response" to deal with threats of various levels.

McNamara chose the method of the planning-programming-budgeting system (PPBS) to help him in making decisions to implement the new policy. McNamara said that the method demanded a proper balancing of all the elements of the defence effort which could be done only at the Department of Defence level. He favoured "centralized planning" and "decentralized operation." To

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11 Ibid., p. 501.
"coordinate long-range military planning with short-range detailed budgeting," the Secretary required all the proposals of programmes and their costs to be projected over a period of five years. Perhaps the most important technique the Secretary relied upon was that of the System Analysis or Operational Research. He emphasized that while considering the military effectiveness of any weapons system, its cost as well as the effectiveness of alternate systems must be considered. As Hitch said, "military effectiveness and cost are simply two sides of the same coin and must be considered jointly in the decision-making process." Thus, according to this analysis, while taking decision, both the cost and comparative effectiveness of each alternative must be taken into account.

To centralize the intelligence flow to the Secretary of Defence and to mitigate if not overcome the problem created by rival motivations of the various intelligence groups, McNamara created the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). To aid him in the task of analysing in great detail, the various components of issues he brought into the Department a large number of highly competent specialists in Mathematics, Operations Research, and Systems Analysis. These men employed a variety of techniques

involving the extensive use of computers. They not only prepared long critiques of proposals emanating from the JCS, but were ready to initiate presentations of alternative approaches in an effort to focus attention on the concept of cost-effectiveness to which the Secretary attached great importance. The "Whiz Kids," as newspaper reporters called them, were a source of growing concern to the bemedalled senior military leaders who were not accustomed to have their judgement questioned by mere civilians in buttoned-down-shirts, just out of their Ivy League classrooms. It came to surface when Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of the JCS, complained that military leaders were being ignored. There was a growing concern among the members of the military that the bookish knowledge was being preferred over the large military experience in military matters. They feared, the systems analysis would lead to the substitution of "what is cheapest" for "what is best." Worst of all, they charged that the Secretary of Defence

14 In an estimate in August 1965, the Journal of the Armed Forces said, "Of the 27 top officials of the Defence Department--old and new--11 including Secretary McNamara, hold either graduate and/or undergraduate degrees from Harvard: six, including Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, hold graduate and/or undergraduate degrees from Yale: two Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Arthur Sylvester, and Under Secretary of Navy Robert Baldwin, are graduates of Princeton...." Journal of the Armed Forces (Washington, D.C.), 14 August 1965, pp. 1, 21.


was not "delegating authority" to the JCS—thereby creating mutual distrust. They complained against the "danger of over-control and overmanagement." General Wheeler, the Chairman of the JCS, in an attacking mood, bluntly said, "The commander is responsible for military success or lack of it and the manager is responsible to provide maximum efficient support to the commander, not to try to manage him."

McNamara, unlike his predecessors, maintained throughout his tenure a "social distance" between the military and himself. His relationship with the members of the JCS was marked by his studied reserve and detachment. He declined to spend much time in participating in the traditional rituals and ceremonies of the military. He did not add to his popularity when he ordered that no member of the Pentagon should receive "any favour, gratuity, or entertainment" from anyone during business with the department. His tendency to pay attention to detail was yet another irritant. The military complained that the Secretary tended to take decisions even on small matters, which should be

17 For Lemnitzer's address, which was implicitly critical of McNamara, to the graduate class of the Command and General Staff in the fall of 1962, shortly before he was transferred to command the Allied forces in Europe, see Raymond, n. 5, pp. 283-4.

18 The Journal of the Armed Forces, 25 September 1965, vol. 103, no. 4, pp. 6, 32.


decided at lower levels. A more serious charge was that he even tried to involve himself in respect of actual military operations. This happened during the missile crisis of 1962. Much to the resentment of Admiral George Anderson, the Chief of Naval Operations, McNamara insisted on staying in the Navy's Flag Plot, or operation centre and directing the action of American war ships. This incident seemed to exacerbate the anti-McNamara feeling of the JCS that had been building up since the first Cuban crisis of 1961 when the civilian leaders seemed to put some blame for the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs on the military.

Perhaps the most important cause of their friction was what the military considered as the civilian "invasion" of their long-held domain—that is, the development and procurement of weapons. Each service was infuriated by what it considered as the Secretary's bid to question and challenge the development of weapons system recommended by it and particularly when he went to the extent of ordering the cancellation of an entire project. The Air Force, for instance, was angered by McNamara's cancellation of further work on the Skybolt Missile Programme and Dyna-Soar Space Project. The Navy resented his demand that the naval


22 Raymond, n. 5, p. 284.

yards that were shown, on the basis of DOD studies to be unecono-
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momic and inefficient, to be closed. The Secretary's views on
the reduced importance of the manned bomber leading to his deci-
sions to phase out the B-52 and to cut down the appropriations
for the development of the B-70 evoked indignation in the Air
Force and opposition from friends of the Air Force in Congress.
The Army was angered when he resisted its pleas about the vital
necessity of going ahead with the production of the Nike-Zeus ABM
26 system. In all these cases the Secretary defended his decisions
on the basis of cost-effectiveness calculations. As he put it,
his decisions were based on "rational, as opposed to emotional
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foundation of decisions." He felt that B-52, B-70 manned bombers
would be ineffective in view of missile developments. So he
decided to gradually replace these bombers by more effective mis-
siles. In the case of ABM, he argued for postponing the actual
production, because, he felt, if the ongoing talk on disarmament
with the Soviet Union would succeed, then ABM would be unneces-
sary. But all his "rational" arguments failed to convince the
military and increased its apprehensions.

24 Julius Duscha, Arms, Money and Politics (New York, 1965),
pp. 96-97.
26 Ibid., pp. 229-32; Donovan, n. 19, pp. 135-8; and Robert
L. Rothstein, "The ABM, Proliferation and International
Stability," in Burton M. Sapin, ed., Contemporary American
Foreign and Military Policy (Glenview, Ill., 1970),
27 Cited in Duscha, n. 24, p. 100.
The typical example of the civil-military "confrontation" in the post-war history was the TFX airplane contract. Instead of having two different fighters as sought by the Air Force and Navy, McNamara opted for a "common" fighter plane which would meet the manoeuvrability and range specifications of both of them and achieve substantial economy. Against the unanimous recommendation of the military to award contract to Boeing, the Secretary, supported by his civilian colleagues in the Pentagon, opted for General Dynamics. The Senate Permanent Investigation Subcommittee headed by Sen. John L. McClellan (Dem., Arkansas) held a year-long intensive hearings in 1963. It has been alleged that Admiral Anderson was not given another extension because of his testimony against McNamara in TFX hearings. The stage seemed to be set for more intense civil-military confrontation in other areas of the defence and foreign policy during the rest of McNamara's stay as the head of the Pentagon.

It is important to point out that except the TFX case, there was hardly any unanimity till 1964 among the JCS in their opposition to Secretary McNamara in relation to weapons policies.

28 For a detailed and critical account of the TFX controversy, see Robert J. Art, The TFX Decision: McNamara and the Military (Boston, 1968); and Vincent Davis, "The Development of a Capability to Deliver Nuclear Weapons by Carrier-Based Aircraft," in Halperin, n. 23, pp. 262-75.

29 The following discussion of civil-military interaction on weapons policy during the McNamara period has been mainly based on Lawrence Joseph Korb, The Role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Defence Budget Process from 1961 to 1967 (Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York at Albany, 1969).
During fiscal 1963, the Army and Navy did not support the Air Force in its demand for the B-70. Similarly, the Army and Air Force disagreed with the Navy in its claim for eighteen attack carriers. They felt that fifteen attack carriers would be enough. The Air Force did not support the Army in urging the immediate production of ABM. During the fiscal 1964, similar lack of unanimity among the JCS persisted regarding weapons policies. General Maxwell D. Taylor, the JCS Chairman, did not support the Air Force's RS-70 bomber and Skybolt programmes. Similarly, General Curtis LeMay, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, did not extend his support for Army's Nike-Zeus and Navy's SSN's (Nuclear Attack Submarines). A similar pattern was repeated in the fiscal 1965. The JCS again failed to reach unanimity regarding most of the weapons programmes. Both General LeMay and Admiral David J. McDonald who had replaced Anderson as the Naval Chief, were alone in their requests for RS-70, and a new carrier and six SSN's respectively. Neither of them supported Gen. Taylor in his demand for the full scale development of Nike-Zeus. There was a marked change in the attitudes of the JCS towards weapons programmes vis-a-vis the Defence Secretary in the fiscal 1966 which will be discussed later. This might have been partly responsible for having given Secretary McNamara a clear edge over

30 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
31 Ibid., p. 6.
32 Ibid., pp. 11-12.
his military colleagues regarding the defence policy. He could claim that he had not overruled any unanimous opinion of the JCS regarding weapons.

McNamara irked the JCS by issuing a directive informing military witnesses before Congressional Committees that they were not to disclose their disagreements with him, unless pressed by Congress, and in those cases, they were also to give his side of the case. Secondly, the statements of the JCS to be presented to Congressional Committees in closed sessions, were required to be reviewed in advance by the Office of the Secretary of Defence (OSD). It was also provided that a member of the Secretary's staff would be present in these sessions. This directive was another addition to the row of charges that the Secretary was "downgrading" and "muzzling" the military.

In spite of this rider, Gen. LeMay in 1962 carried his battle with the Secretary over B-70 and B-52 to Congress. He attacked the new strategy of flexible response which apparently underplayed the strategic importance of the Air Force. The next year, LeMay repeated his Congressional performance of hitting the Secretary not only regarding B-52 and B-70, but also with regard to the cancellation of the Skybolt programme. Adm.


Anderson charged that McNamara was intervening too much in the details of military matters. During the fiscal 1965, the last year of his service, Gen. LeMay spoke out strongly on McNamara's bombers vs. missile policy. He warned Congress against the Administration's preference for missiles at the cost of bombers: "You have two choices: you push the button and you are at war, or you hold your finger off the button and you are at peace."

In spite of these strong criticisms by top military members, McNamara carried the day till 1964. The President always sided with the Secretary vis-a-vis the JCS, much to the chagrin of the latter.

The Despatch of Combat Troops

A narration of the details of the Kennedy Administration's policy toward Vietnam does not fall within the scope of the present work. It will concern itself with the two most important events of the period--decision to increase the number of American military "advisers" in South Vietnam and the overthrow of the Diem regime. An attempt will be made to identify the pattern of civil-military interaction in foreign policy making--mainly the role of the Secretary of Defence and that of the JCS. Of course,

35 Cited in Raymond, n. 5, p. 286.

at relevant points, the role of other important members of the military and the civilian group—may be, outside the Pentagon—that may bear on the inquiry will be dealt with.

The Bay of Pigs fiasco was the major setback that befell the Kennedy Administration very early in its tenure. The image of a vigorous and a decisive President that had been so laboriously built was seriously tarnished. Understandably the President and his entourage attached the highest importance to the speediest possible rehabilitation of his image and to shift the burden for a failure as much as possible to other shoulders. Several stories that came to be published, perhaps without any opposition from the White House, and possibly with some cooperation from elements in it, sought to convey the impression to the American people that the President failed to receive sound information and advice from the CIA and the JCS. The aftermath of the Bay of Pigs episode resulted in certain other individuals like the Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles falling from official favour because of the suspicion that they had sought to communicate to the public their earlier misgivings over the adventure. The Secretary of Defence was not particularly touched by these developments. Indeed, the fiasco probably contributed to improving his leverage vis-a-vis the JCS.

The President could not afford a setback in another critical spot where Communist forces were reportedly on the move. In Laos the Pathet Lao forces were advancing steadily towards Vientiane. There were clear signs of troubles against Diem in
South Vietnam. The Kennedy Administration sought, to use Rostow's phrase, to "gear up" to avoid another Bay of Pigs in Southeast Asia.

The President wanted a high level appraisal of the situation in South Vietnam. It is noteworthy that in setting up a task force for this purpose, he designated as its head Deputy Secretary of Defence, Roswell Gilpatric. The move is of some significance in indicating the trend of the President's thinking. It was not to the State Department or to the military to which he turned for assigning the responsibility but to the deputy of McNamara. The central issue that the President wanted the task force to clarify for him appeared to be the "possible commitment" of the US troops in South Vietnam. This can be inferred from the fact that Gilpatric, in his letter to the JCS on 8 May 1961, specifically asked their views on that issue. The Deputy Secretary did not seek to spell out what exactly the US objectives in Southeast Asia were. The JCS, at least in Gilpatric communication, were not informed of any "political decision" having already been made. The JCS' reply, sent on 10 May, indirectly indicated no responsibility for any political decision that might be made. They wrote:

"Assuming that the political decision is to hold South East Asia outside the Communist sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that US forces should be deployed immediately to South

37 US House Committee on Armed Services, United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defence, Committee Print (Washington, D.C., 1971), Book 2, IV.B.1, p. 41. (Hereafter this major source will be referred to as USCD Documents.)
Vietnam." In their view, such deployment would serve several important purposes: indicating the firmness of US intent to all Asian nations, training the South Vietnamese forces, providing a nucleus for support of any additional US or SEATO military operation in Southeast Asia, providing a visible deterrent to potential North Vietnam and/or Chinese action and preventing a Laos-type situation in South Vietnam.

It may be relevant to point out that all the military actors were unanimous on the question of the commitment of US troops in South Vietnam. The most active of them in pursuing the proposal of sending American combat troops to South Vietnam was Brig. General Edward Lansdale, Assistant to the Secretary of Defence for Special Operations. Lansdale was not an unknown name in the world of American counter-insurgency policy. He had earned a name for his performance in suppressing Huk insurgents in the Philippines. He had reportedly played a key role in installing Diem in power in Saigon in 1955-1956. He had developed good rapport with the leading figures in the South Vietnamese government. These had probably led to his coming to the notice of Kennedy's talent scouts. The new Administration, just after it came to office, decided to send Lansdale to South Vietnam for an appraisal of the latest developments in Vietnam. In his memorandum for the Secretary of Defence, dated 17 January 1961, Lansdale urged that

38 Ibid., pp. 42-43; see also Mike Gravel, ed., The Pentagon Papers: The Defence Department History of United States Decision-Making on Vietnam (Boston, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 48-49.
Vietnam should be treated as a "combat area of the cold war." He asserted that Diem was the best available South Vietnamese leader to take up the challenge of dealing with the Communists. He further said, "We must support Ngo Dinh Diem until another strong executive can replace him legally ... We have to show him by deeds, not words alone, that we are his friend." Apparently Lansdale's stand as an "expert" on Vietnam was sufficiently high as to result in high level attention being paid to his views. It seems that his memorandum set the ball rolling and soon the President set up a Task Force on Vietnam. He seems to have had contacts with other like-minded advisers who probably made a concerted effort to reach the President's ear. Walt Rostow of the White House, in his memorandum to the President dated 12 April 1961, recommended the appointment of a "full time first-rate back-stop man in Washington." He apparently had Lansdale in mind to deal with Vietnam. In a memorandum to the Deputy Secretary of Defence, dated 25 April 1961, Lansdale reiterated his preference for Diem as the "man of the hour" in Vietnam. He declared: "Here is our toughest ally ... a 60-year old bachelor who gave up romance with his childhood sweetheart ... to devote his life to his country.

President Kennedy's decision on 29 April 1961 not to send immediately US combat troops to South Vietnam might have been a

39 DOD Documents, Book 11, V.B.4, pp. 1-11.
40 Ibid., Book 2, n. 37, p. 23.
41 Ibid., Book 11, n. 39, p. 41.
temporary setback for the military elements in the Pentagon who were advocating the same. They were perhaps further disappointed by Diem's refusal, in the course of his talk with the visiting American Vice President Lyndon Johnson on 12 May, to admit US troops into South Vietnam for the purpose of fighting the "Communists." These disappointments, however, could not make the Washington proponents of sending troops to South Vietnam change their views. On the other hand, they tried to "sell" their viewpoints with more vigour and energy. In a memorandum to Deputy Secretary Gilpatric on 18 May 1961, Lansdale reported that the South Vietnamese President would accept the deployment of American combat troops in his country as trainers of South Vietnamese troops, though not fighters against Communists. It is noteworthy that on the same day--18 May--strong support for the proposal of sending American combat troops to South Vietnam came from other quarters of the Pentagon. The JCS repeated their earlier recommendation of 10 May. General McGarr, the Chief of MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group) in Saigon, recommended that the US should send 16,000 combat troops; if that was not acceptable to Diem, then a 10,000-contingent may be sent there as "trainers." He seems to have partially succeeded in prevailing upon President Diem to accept his proposal. Apparently under his persuasion

42 Ibid., p. 157.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., Book 2, n. 37, p. 65
Diem agreed to send Nguyen Dinh Thuan, "Secretary of Security, Defence, Interior, etc." to Washington to finalize an agreement to this effect.

By the end of September 1961, the situation deteriorated both in Laos and South Vietnam. Communist forces in both these countries were on the offensive. Decision-makers in Washington, in their concern to stem the military progress of the Communists, thought over different strategies. There were mainly two proposals under consideration. One was the JCS-favoured plan to intervene on the ground in Laos and to seize and hold major portions of the country, principally to protect the borders of South Vietnam and Thailand. The other was the "Rostow proposal" which advocated deploying a SEATO force of about 25,000 men into South Vietnam to guard the Vietnam/Laos border between the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and Cambodia. The JCS, on being asked on 5 October to comment on the Rostow Plan, rejected it and argued for concentrating on Laos which could save all or substantially all of Laos and, at the same time, protect Thailand and the borders of South Vietnam. In view of the ongoing diplomatic efforts on Laos, the JCS went on to say that if the Laos Plan was "politically unacceptable at this time," they would favour "a possible limited interim course of action" in South Vietnam. This plan provided for the deployment of about 20,000 troops to the central highlands

46 Ibid., p. 76.
near Pleiku to assist South Vietnamese and free certain South Vietnamese forces for offensive action against the Viet Cong.

Apart from the Rostow Plan and the JCS plan, the NSC which met on 11 October 1961 considered also two other papers prepared by Alexis Johnson, the Deputy Under Secretary of State and William P. Bundy, the acting Assistant Secretary of Defence. Johnson's paper called "concept of intervention in Vietnam" was a mix of the Rostow Plan and the JCS plan. It combined the former's border force and the latter's "possible limited interim course of action."

More important from the point of view of the present study was Bundy's memorandum. He stated that there was a seventy per cent chance that immediate American military intervention in South Vietnam would succeed in doing the job for Diem—defeating the Communists. However, he added that there was thirty per cent risk that the US would face disaster like France in 1954. "On a 70-30 basis, I would myself favour going in. But if we let, say, a month go by before we move, the odds will slide ... down to 60-40, 50-50 and so on...." he asserted.

It is difficult to say, on the basis of available documents, where McNamara and his deputy, Gilpatric, stood on this question. It is clear that the military actors and the middle level of civilian leadership in the Pentagon were almost one in advocating the

48 Ibid., Book 11, p. 299.
49 Ibid., Book 2, n. 39, pp. 78-83.
50 Ibid., Book 11, n. 39, p. 312.
American military involvement, in one way or the other, in South Vietnam. The NSC deferred taking a decision to deploy American combat troops to South Vietnam. It decided that a Presidential mission, consisting of General Maxwell Taylor, Rostow, Sterling J. Cottrell from the State Department and General Lansdale representing the JCS should visit South Vietnam to look into the question of the advisability of military intervention in that country, and to consider the proposal of increasing the US assistance and training of South Vietnam units and supplying more US equipment to her.

Gen. Taylor, considered as one of the few "soldier-scholars" in American history, was appointed by President Kennedy as the latter's military adviser in the beginning of the Administration. He was the Army Chief under President Eisenhower and was at the centre of the controversy around the so-called "New Look" which allegedly imparted pre-eminence to the Air Force at the cost of the Army. After his resignation in protest against the defence policy, he engaged himself in writing a book, The Uncertain Trumpet, which attacked the "massive retaliation" policy and advocated a policy of "flexible response." Gen. Taylor's views formed an integral part of the defence policy adopted by the Kennedy Administration. Against this background, Taylor's return to serve as head of a Presidential mission was of special

51 Ibid., p. 328.
significance. Because of his reputed expertise in defence matters, his views on Vietnam were expected to carry much weight with Kennedy. The Taylor Mission, therefore, gave rise to a lot of speculations about the American policy in Vietnam.

On his way to Saigon, Gen. Taylor met Admiral Harry D. Felt, the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) in Honolulu. Although the Admiral did not at that time express his views on the question of sending American combat troops to South Vietnam, he wrote a memorandum on it after a few days to Washington. After stating both the pros and cons, he recommended against such deployment at the time until all other means of helping Diem had been exhausted. 53 The CINCPAC's position was thus at variance with that of the JCS.

It was Gen. Taylor, not Diem, who broached the issue of the deployment of American combat troops in South Vietnam. This suggests that the General had either been specifically asked by Washington to take up this issue with President Diem or, that he did it on his own initiative because of his support for the contemplated decision or both. While Diem took an evasive stand on this question, fluctuating in his position from time to time, the American actors, both military and civilian, who took part in meetings with Vietnamese, seemed to be very much concerned about securing an "invitation" from Saigon for sending American combat troops there. It is important to note that while the Americans

53  DOD Documents, Book 2, n. 37, pp. 88-90.
54  Ibid., p. 90
and South Vietnamese were still continuing their talks, Gen. MaGarr, the chief of MAAG, sent a cable to Washington on 23 October in which he suggested that US forces could be deployed in the Mekong delta on a "flood relief mission." They could be subsequently retained, if necessary, he added.

After his return to Washington General Taylor made several recommendations the most important of which was that the US should offer to introduce into South Vietnam a "military Task Force." It could conduct, Taylor said, logistical operations in support of military and "flood relief" operations, conduct combat operations in self-defence, provide an emergency reserve for the South Vietnamese armed forces, and act as an advance party of additional US forces which might be deployed in South Vietnam in future. He also recommended that the MAAG be reorganized and increased in size. The General was aware that American military intervention in South Vietnam, once initiated, involved the risk of escalation. But he believed that any large-scale intervention by North Vietnam and China would be countered by the threats of American bombing. His recommendation for dispatching a Task Force was, of course, not accepted, but the very fact that such a senior adviser to the President categorically recommended in favour of sending American combat troops to South Vietnam, might

55 Ibid., p. 91.

have set the ball rolling for the subsequent decision in this direction.

The fact that McNamara did not apparently take any active initiatives in relation to Vietnam need not imply that he was not concerned about it. In fact, as early as April 1961, he seems to have made up his mind in regard to Vietnam. At a high-level meeting held in the State Department on 29 April, Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General, posed the question: what should be the place where the United States should stand and fight in Southeast Asia—"where to draw the line." McNamara replied, "We would take a stand in Thailand and South Vietnam." The situation was worsening by the hour and the US should commit herself "sooner rather than later," the Defence Secretary declared. This clearly indicates the direction in which his mind was working. His relative silence on Vietnam till November might have been due to his preoccupation with the reorganization of his Department, the psychological constraints upon making a new military move in the face of the Bay of Pigs disaster, and his bureaucratic cautiousness in waiting for moves by competitors to which he could adjust his bargaining tactics.

On 8 November 1961, McNamara sent a memorandum to the President on behalf of himself, Gilpatric and the JCS. They stated that they believed that the fall of South Vietnam to Communism would lead to Communist victory in the rest of the

57 Ibid., p. 63.
mainland of Southeast Asia and Indochina. However, they were
not even at this time forthright in their recommendation that the
US commit herself to the objective of preventing the fall of
South Vietnam to Communism by "necessary military actions." They
simply said that they were "inclined" to recommend that the US
should accept the above objective. They asserted that if such a
commitment was agreed upon, they would support the recommenda-
tions of General Taylor as the first steps toward its fulfilment.

The 8 November memorandum, in one sense, went beyond the
earlier position of the JCS on Vietnam; in another sense, it was
a little short of it. The JCS had not earlier themselves defined
the American objective in Vietnam. They had apparently chosen
to leave it to the State Department to take the lead in this
direction. They departed from this position in their 8 November
memorandum. Now they, along with McNamara and Gilpatric, expres-
sed their inclination to adopt the political objective of prevent-
ing South Vietnam from "falling to Communists." On the other
hand, they came down a little bit in their recommendation regard-
ing the sending of troops to South Vietnam. They had earlier
urged that US forces be deployed immediately in South Vietnam.
The 8 November recommendation was for sending a mix of combat and
support forces in the name of "flood relief personnel." It may,
however, be pointed out that the change of language hardly made

58 "Secretary of Defence Memorandum for the President,
8 November 1961," ibid., p. 343.
59 Ibid., p. 344.
any difference in substance. "Flood relief personnel" were in fact the "functional equivalent" of combat troops. The choice of this language might have been made with a view to averting sharp public reaction by providing the public with less than the truth. Although McNamara was not very explicit on 29 April in advocating that the US should immediately commit herself to "save" South Vietnam from the Communists, he implicitly said so. The memorandum of 8 November also did not contain a categorical recommendation to that effect. This might have been due to two factors, independently or in combination. It was perhaps considered prudent by the Secretary not to go all the way with his military colleagues at this preliminary stage itself and to introduce an element of tentativeness, thereby inducing the military to put forth stronger arguments in support of their position and, in consequence, being constrained to assume a greater share of responsibility for the decision. Moreover, McNamara might have adopted this posture in anticipation of bargaining with his bureaucratic rival, Secretary of State Rusk, who was known to support the commitment of American forces to the defence of South Vietnam.

On 11 November 1961, Rusk and McNamara addressed a joint memorandum to the President. It was slightly different from the memorandum of 8 November. Most of the recommendations contained

60 This aspect is dealt in Chapter IV.

in the Rusk-McNamara memorandum were accepted by the President after only three days of its submission.

Inferences

The preceding discussion shows that the JCS were willing to support the deployment of American troops in South Vietnam, in the event that a political decision to that effect were taken by the President. They did not raise any objections on military grounds, though initially they were inclined to favour deployment in Laos rather than in South Vietnam. In the beginning the JCS tended to take the view that the "threat" was greater in Laos than in South Vietnam. If, however, the political decision was to send troops first to South Vietnam, they indicated their willingness to go along with it.

Some members of the JCS had, of course, individually given expression to their views at the 21 April meeting concerning the desirability of early action in South Vietnam or elsewhere and were ready to endorse the acceptance of a possible widening of the area and scope of the conflict. But there is no evidence that there was any JCS document advocating such a position.

The fact that it was General Maxwell Taylor who recommended the US deploy a contingent of combat troops in the Mekong delta under the cover of flood relief operations probably had some

62 The possible reasons for the difference between the memoranda of 8 November and 11 November, and the possible motivations of President Kennedy in taking the 14 November decision to send American military "advisers" will be discussed in Chapter IV.
impact on the JCS. Taylor was known to have very good rapport with the President. The possibility of Gen. Taylor's appointment to some high position might have been known at that time to some segments of the Washington community including the military. (Taylor was shortly thereafter appointed as the Chairman of the JCS.) It is possible that the likelihood of his appointment influenced the JCS in categorically committing themselves, along with the Defence Secretary, in their memorandum of 8 November, to the idea of sending US troops to South Vietnam.

Throughout this period McNamara was very circumspect in his position on sending combat troops to South Vietnam. He would hardly let others know where exactly he stood on this question. He seems to have been watching others in the middle of the stage from the wings. He was more of a listener than a pace-setter in relation to the decision to send US combat troops to South Vietnam.

The most enthusiastic of the Pentagon actors--both civil and military--was General Lansdale. An old hand in counter-insurgency operations and an old friend of President Diem, he tried his best to impress upon the President and his key decision-makers the desirability of not only sending US troops to South Vietnam, but also betting on Diem. He was supported in this direction by Gen. McGarr, the MAAG Chief, Saigon. The solitary voice among the military who opposed deploying immediately US combat troops in South Vietnam was Adm. Felt, the CINCPAC--the person who would have overall military responsibility for the operations that might ensue.
THE OVERTHROW OF DIEM

One of the important elements of the Rusk-McNamara memorandum of 11 November 1961 was that Diem should be asked to undertake reforms before the US committed her troops to South Vietnam. On 13 November President Kennedy took some decisions on Vietnam a summary of which was sent to Ambassador Nolting in Saigon. One of the decisions required "concrete demonstration by Diem that he is now prepared to work in an orderly way with his subordinates and broaden the political base of his regime." Washington, however, had to soften her tough posture towards Saigon after a lapse of a few days. The US demand for reforms was cold-shouldered by Diem. His anger over Washington's demand was enough to force the latter to change her stance and underplay the concern for reforms in Saigon. Washington thought that it needed Diem. For a quite some time thereafter the US did not reopen the issue of reforms with Diem. In May 1963, when the situation in South Vietnam appeared to be unsatisfactory, Washington began to reconsider whether its interests would be advanced or hindered by Diem's continuance as the Chief of state.

One of the issues that figures in inter-agency and intra-agency disputes relating to the implementation of foreign policy concerns the suitability or otherwise, from the point of view of American objectives, of the local leader at the helm. When the situation in the country concerned does not appear to move along

63  DOD Documents, Book 11, n. 39, p. 403.
as favourably as had been expected, different views begin to be expressed on whether American efforts should be directed toward enabling the incumbent to remain in power or toward expediting his exit. The previous services that he might have rendered or his potential for future usefulness tend to be interpreted differently by different interests depending upon whether they want him to be in or out. Thus while in public pronouncements American spokesmen spoke in fervent support of Diem, a debate over his "usefulness" began to gather momentum in the inner councils of the Kennedy Administration by the middle of 1963. An important segment of the State Department appears by that time to have developed serious reservations concerning Diem's leadership and to have begun to advocate a change in Saigon. The interaction between the State and Defence Departments in this regard will be dealt with in Chapter IV. The present discussion seeks to examine whether there were any differences between the civilian and military elements of the Defence Department regarding the continuance or ouster of Diem.

The internal debate on the issue was triggered by repressive action taken by the Diem regime to deal with the growing manifestations of disaffection in the country, especially among the Buddhists. The repressive measures and more particularly the self-immolations of a number of Buddhist monks attracted considerable adverse notice in public opinion in the United States. Reports in American newspapers became increasingly critical of the authoritarian nature of the Diem regime and the dominant influence over
the President of his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu and Madam Nhu. Intelligence reports also highlighted the increasing unpopularity of Diem and his relatives. It was in this context that the State Department brought to the fore the question whether the existing political leadership in South Vietnam could promote American political and military objectives. The matter was brought to a head after the midnight attack on the Buddhist pagodas by the South Vietnamese Special Forces on 21 August 1963. These Special Forces had been trained by American instructors.

By this time the Secretary of Defence was much more deeply involved in decisions relating to Vietnam than had been the case in 1961 when he was relatively passive. Throughout 1962 he had expressed guarded optimism about the counter-insurgency operations in South Vietnam. While emphasizing the "progress" made in that direction, he took care not to under-estimate the Communist opposition. Twice in the year 1962 he met at Honolulu with his military advisers to discuss Vietnam. In his testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on 30 January 1963, McNamara stated that the South Vietnamese struggle against the Communist insurgency, which was supported by the US, was going on well and would eventually...


But in his press conferences on Vietnam in the months of February and July, he expressed his concern that it might take several years to defeat the Communists. Available documents do not indicate any expression of misgivings on McNamara's part concerning Diem's leadership.

In the last week of August there were many rumours floating in Saigon about an imminent anti-Diem coup. But the anti-Diem Generals reportedly called off the plot for the time being because uncertainty about the US attitude toward a change of regime. It was known both in Saigon and Washington that General Harkins, the Chief of the American Military Assistance Command in Saigon was a staunch supporter of Diem. This might have acted as a damper on coup plans till the anti-Diem elements could get some sort of a signal from another equally highly-placed American source that a coup would not be unwelcome. Any indication that the US intended to apply some sort of pressure against Diem would have been a tip-off to a potential coup-group.

On 1 September 1963 the National Security Council met in Washington and the discussion centred around the question: "Where do we go from here?" Neither McNamara nor General Maxwell Taylor who had by this time been appointed Chairman of the JCS, voiced any support for the idea of replacing Diem or giving encouragement

66 Ibid., 31 January 1963.
67 Ibid., 20 July 1963.
to the elements that might lead a coup against him. In another
NSC meeting held on 6 September the Defence Secretary continued
to resist any immediate coup against the Diem regime. He favoured
buying some more time. He suggested that Ambassador Henry Cabot
Lodge should be asked to make another attempt to convince Diem to
bring about the desired reforms.

It was probably because of the reluctance of McNamara and
Taylor to endorse the idea of immediate change of leadership in
South Vietnam that President Kennedy decided to depute them to
make a visit to South Vietnam. He directed them to make the "best
possible on-the-spot appraisal" of the military and paramilitary
effort required to defeat the Viet Cong. They were also instruc-
ted to recommend what steps "Saigon must and Washington should
take to make the anti-Communist efforts more effective." The most
important objective, in the immediate context of the McNamara-
Taylor mission, was to examine with Ambassador Lodge ways of
"tailoring" the American aid to achieve her foreign policy objec-
tives. The team left Washington on 23 September and came back
on 2 October.

While in Saigon, General Taylor wrote a letter to Diem in
response to the latter's request for an appraisal of the South
Vietnamese war effort. Expressing his misgivings about the adver:

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68 DOD Documents, Book 3, IV.B.5, p. 22.
69 Ibid., p. 24.
70 Ibid., pp. 30-31; Emphasis added.
effect of political tensions in Saigon on the war effort, Taylor stressed the importance of the restoration of "political tranquility." The General had consulted the Secretary of Defence before writing his letter. It is not clear whether the reference to the political tensions was his own idea or whether it came from the Secretary who was more exposed than the General to the deep pessimism of some of his colleagues in the State Department concerning the situation in South Vietnam. In any event, the letter was an indication to Diem that the visiting dignitaries were not wholly satisfied with the state of affairs.

The report that McNamara and Taylor submitted to the President was not free of ambiguity and contradictions. The ambiguity was probably deliberate. It was a typical example of bureaucratic compromise that is frequently encountered in decision-making on defence and foreign policy. It was meant to give something to the proponents of rival points of view in Washington and also the American Embassy and the US Military Mission in Saigon. No element was to be left totally disgruntled. The report stated that the military campaign had made good progress and that it was likely to continue to do so. This was a sop to General Harkins. The report went on to warn that the continuing political crisis might erode military effectiveness—a concern voiced by State Department elements and shared by Ambassador Lodge. What then about Diem himself? McNamara and Taylor stated that any effort by the US to

71 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
increase pressure on the Diem regime might lead the latter to harden its own attitude. Nevertheless they added that unless Diem were pressed, he was unlikely to bring about any change in his repressive policies. How much pressure and what sort of pressure were called for? On this critical point the McNamara-Taylor report moved a little toward the point of view of the State Department, but not all the way. They were aware that the service chiefs as well as General Harkins were opposed to the State Department posture. The report recommended that the US should not actively encourage a coup against Diem. It added, however, that the United States should seek "urgently to identify and build contacts with an alternative leadership if and when it appears." The report also identified one instrument of pressure to be applied on Diem—"suspension of aid." At the same time it was not in favour of making such a decision immediately public as some American officials in Washington and Saigon would have liked. Thus, the report was willing to countenance the prospect of a change of leadership in Saigon and the use of suspension of aid as an instrument to prod Saigon to change its ways and, at an appropriate time, stimulate opposition to Diem. McNamara and Taylor could not have been unaware of the fact that the anti-Diem military leaders in Saigon had already indicated in August that they would consider a move in the direction of the

72 Ibid., p. 34.
73 Ibid., p. 33.
aid suspension as a signal that Washington was not opposed to a change of leadership in Saigon.

The McNamara-Taylor report, ambiguous as it was, was a joint report. The question arises as to whether there were some differences of opinion between the two men on any part of the report. Both the Secretary and the General more than once took the same side in discussions on Diem. They opposed encouraging a coup against Diem, certainly they were not for a coup immediately. It is likely that Taylor might not have initiated the recommendation in regard to applying pressure on Diem by means of suspension of aid. It probably originated from the Secretary and Taylor apparently went along with it. The JCS were apparently opposed to such a type of pressure on Diem. McNamara's position on this was not clear. Since the McNamara-Taylor report recommended pressure on Diem in the form of aid suspension, the inference might be made that Taylor went along with McNamara's view on the matter.

On the recommendation that the US should not actively encourage a coup against Diem, it is probable that McNamara

74 Ambassador Lodge argues that the aid cut-off was not meant to encourage the generals to stage a coup against Diem, but to force Nhu to flee the country. Henry Cabot Lodge, The Storm has Many Eyes: A Personal Narrative (New York, 1973), p. 211. Marguerite Higgins of the New York Herald Tribune who was sympathetic towards the Diem regime, says, "At least six of the generals ... told me and others that the reduction in U.S. assistance was the decisive event that persuaded them to proceed with plans and to overthrow the Diem regime."

Marguerite Higgins, n. 64, p. 208.
deferred to Taylor, if he was not wholly in agreement with him. The Chairman of the JCS must certainly have been aware of the sentiment among his military colleagues against "ditching" Diem. When on 7 April 1962 President Kennedy had invited the JCS to comment on the memorandum from Galbraith, critical of Diem, the JCS had cited the President's letter of 14 December 1961 to Diem as a public affirmation of US support for him in his fight against the Viet Cong. The JCS had argued that US policy toward Saigon, as announced by the President in that letter, should "be pursued vigorously to a successful conclusion." This indicates that the JCS favoured continued American support for Diem and not his ouster. There is no indication that the JCS had changed their attitude. The inference might be made that General Taylor was unlikely to have taken a position sharply at variance with his colleagues on the JCS. McNamara himself was not known to have taken a rigid position one way or the other regarding the early removal of Diem. The joint report was a compromise in that it recommended further approaches to Diem. This meant that it did not support any moves for his immediate removal while not ruling out action in the future if the projected approaches failed to yield results.

It is important to point out that it was not only the top leaders of the military who defended continued support for the Diem regime, lower down the ladder, other military actors also

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expressed their consistent support for Diem. The most important among them was General Harkins, the "man-on-the-spot" in Saigon. Till the last moment, he discouraged the coup attempts. In the process he picked up a bitter quarrel with Ambassador Lodge who appears to have evinced a disposition to encourage the anti-Diem elements. General Harkins was so much identified with Diem that the anti-Diem generals in Saigon took special care not to divulge their coup plans to him. It thus appears that the military echelon opposed the idea of ousting Diem at this time and urged that the US should continue her support to Diem in furtherance of her objectives. McNamara appears to have gone along with their position. He supported Diem because he still appeared to be the best horse available and no better one was round the corner. But McNamara gave no indication that he would stick with Diem indefinitely.

In the critical weeks that followed, the point of view expounded by the State Department appears to have gained ground in the Administration. The fact that the documents do not indicate the Secretary of Defence taking any firm line against the encouragement of coup and the further fact that the coup was bitterly opposed to the end by General Harkins indicates that there was possible divergence of opinion between the Secretary of Defence and the military toward the end.

76 The Lodge-Harkins rift on Diem will be discussed in Chapter IV.
THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENT

The next major public development in regard to the American policy in Vietnam was the Tonkin Gulf incident which took place during 31 July-4 August 1964. While the available materials throw some light on the role of civilian and military elements of the Pentagon regarding the evolution of policy culminating in the episode and the aftermath, one important document that is known to exist, the so-called Command and Control report prepared by the Pentagon military officials, is reportedly not yet declassified. This report does not figure in the Pentagon papers published by the House Committee on Armed Services. However, the New York Times which could procure a copy of the study when the Pentagon Papers were leaked to it, made use of the report in its edition of the Pentagon Papers.

There were three main elements in decision-making relating to the Tonkin affair. They were: (1) the planning and launching of covert activities against North Vietnam; (2) preparation of contingency plans in respect of an US response to a Tonkin-type scenario; and (3) the passage of a Congressional Resolution empowering the President to take appropriate military steps to attain American objectives in Vietnam. In studying the role of the Secretary of Defence, the JCS, and other civil-military elements of the Pentagon in respect of these issues, it is appropriate to provide a brief narrative of the Tonkin episode and the domestic and Southeast Asian context at the time when the
episode took place.

In the midnight of 31 July 1964 two South Vietnamese patrol boats fired on Hon Me and Hon Ngu, two North Vietnamese islands. At this time the Maddox, an American patrol boat, was to the south of the Gulf of Tonkin, nearly 100-120 miles away from Hon Me and Hon Ngu. The next night the Maddox approached within four miles of Hon Me before it turned back. On 2 August, at 11 a.m., the Maddox, when 11 miles away from Hon Me, reportedly was chased by three North Vietnamese patrol boats which were fired upon by it. The South Vietnamese patrol boats repeated their raids on North Vietnam in the night of 3 August. The North Vietnamese were provoked to chase the raiders and it was likely that they would confuse the American boats for South Vietnamese ones. The American commanders aboard the Maddox and C. Turner Joy, an American destroyer, were aware of this. It may be relevant to point out that Admiral Thomas Moorer, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet, recommended to his superior, Adm. U.S. Grant Sharp, Pacific Commander-in-Chief, that the American patrol be moved 90 miles to the North to possibly draw North Vietnamese Navy away.

from the area of 34A operations. These operations, otherwise known as "destructive undertakings" included, besides others, commando raids from the sea to destroy North Vietnamese rail and highway bridges and the bombardment of her coastal installations by patrol boats. This gives rise to the suspicion whether the US patrol was first not serving as a "decoy" for South Vietnamese raids and whether she was not enticing North Vietnam into military exchange which the US could use as cover for her pre-planned retaliation.

The second incident in the Tonkin Gulf took place on August 4. It was immediately followed by 64 American air strikes at four patrol boat bases and a major oil storage depot or North Vietnam. The next day the President sent a message to Congress, requesting the passage of a Congressional resolution expressing the support of the Congress for all necessary action to "protect our Armed Forces and to assist nations covered by the SEATO Treaty." The Tonkin Resolution was overwhelmingly passed by both Houses on August 7. The Senate approved it by a vote of 88 to 2, and the House, by a margin of 416 to 0.

To study the role played by civilian and military elements of the Pentagon in the Tonkin episode, we should know the context in which the episode took place. In between November 1963 when Diem and his brother Nhu were killed and August 1964, there

78 Sheehan, ibid., p. 246.

occurred significant changes both in South Vietnam and the United States. Diem was replaced by Ngo Dinh Diem who was subsequently ousted by General Nguyen Khanh. After a few days of the coup against Diem, President Kennedy was assassinated and was succeeded by his Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson.

Nineteen hundred and sixty four was the year of Presidential election and Johnson was seeking re-election. His opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater (Rep., Arizona), was for stronger American action in Vietnam. Both Goldwater and ex-Vice-President Richard M. Nixon continued to urge bombing North Vietnam and "taking the war to the North." Probably, as an election tactic, Lyndon Johnson tried to project himself as the "peace candidate."

However, things were not running well for Johnson in South-east Asia. Washington was very much concerned over the recurrent political instability in Saigon. The Khanh regime was always in danger of overthrow. In his memorandum of 16 March 1964, McNamara reported, "the situation in South Vietnam has unquestionably been growing worse." Equally depressing for the US was the condition in Laos. The Pathet Lao forces were making steady progress. On 17 May 1964, they threatened the collapse of the Souvanna Government. In the context of these internal and external situations, the pre-Tonkin Vietnam policy of the Johnson


Administration may be better understood.

The Tonkin scenario involved primarily three elements. They were: covert actions against North Vietnam, the US retaliation, and the Congressional Resolution. In the context of the origin of these elements, the role of the Defence Secretary, the JCS and other civil-military elements of the Pentagon may be studied.

The covert programme dates back to May 1963 when the JCS asked the CINCPAC to prepare for South Vietnam a plan of "hit and run" operations against North Vietnam. The CINCPAC Operation Plan (OPLAN) 34-63, approved by the JCS on 9 September, was discussed at Honolulu conference on 20 November 1963. According to a decision reached there, a combined MACV-CAS (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam-Central Intelligence Agency) plan was forwarded by the CINCPAC on 19 December 1963 to the JCS. McNamara, after a two-day trip to South Vietnam, submitted a report to the President. He recommended the above plan of covert actions which, according to him, "present a wide variety of sabotage and psychological operations against North Vietnam from which I believe we should aim to select those that provide maximum pressure with minimum risk." The President approved the Plan in its final form on 16 January 1964 and the first 4-month phase began on 1

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83 Memorandum, "Vietnam Situation," from Secretary McNamara to President Johnson, 21 December 1963. Sheehan, n. 77, pp. 279-82.
February. It may be relevant to point out here that McNamara, throughout his secret testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee on 20 February 1968, tried to "duck," to use Senator Morse's phrase, all the questions on pre-Tonkin plans made by the Pentagon. To a question of Senator Fulbright whether the JCS had argued, before the Tonkin incident took place, for taking the war into the North by bombing or any other means, the Secretary replied, "I can't recall." The reply, supplied later for the record, stated, "We have identified no such recommendations."

"OPLAN 34A" was a three-pronged covert offensive against North Vietnam. First, it included the flying of U-2 spy planes over North Vietnam, kidnapping North Vietnamese citizens for intelligence information, and bombarding North Vietnamese coastal installations by PT boats. The 34A attacks were under the control of General Harkins, Chief, MACV, who was to send regularly an advanced monthly schedule of these raids to Washington for approval. (McNamara continued to maintain, during the 1968 Tonkin hearings of the Foreign Relations Committee, that the 34A operations and the De Soto patrols--the patrolling of the Gulf of Tonkin by destroyers--were completely separate and that the Navy had no knowledge of the 34A operations.)

The second segment of OPLAN 34A consisted of air operations

85 Ibid., pp. 91-92.
in Laos. Most of these reconnaissance planes were flown by Air America (a pseudo-private airline run by the CIA) and by Thai pilots under the control of US Ambassador to Laos, Leonard Unger. The third element in the American covert war against North Vietnam was the De Soto patrolling in the Gulf of Tonkin. The patrols were mainly a psychological mission, as a show of force. Moreover, they also collected the kind of intelligence on North Vietnamese warning radars and coastal defences that would help parties or aircraft pilots in the event of a bombing campaign.

In regard to the covert plans the Secretary and the JCS appear to have been in accord. It was understood that the covert actions might lead to certain contingencies. The JCS had prepared in advance a detailed contingency plan to face Tonkin-type situations. The JCS repeatedly urged the Secretary of Defence in February and March 1964 to take stronger military actions against North Vietnam, because they believed "the root of the problem" lay there. They urged direct strikes against North Vietnam.

McNamara, after another visit to South Vietnam, wrote a memorandum to the President on 16 March which the NSC adopted the next day as NSAM 288. The Secretary expressed his opposition to "overt actions" against North Vietnam "at this time" because of military

86 Sheehan, n. 77, pp. 245-8.
87 DOD Documents, n. 82, pp. 11-12; and Gravel, n. 38, p. 159.
88 Ibid., Book 3, IV.C.1, pp. 46-54; ibid., IV.C.2(a), pp. 9-10.
and diplomatic considerations. But he urged that the US should prepare immediately to be in a position on 72 hours' notice to initiate "retaliatory actions" against North Vietnam, and to be in a position on 30 days' notice to initiate the programme of "Graduated Overt Military Pressure" against North Vietnam. He added that the first type would be a reaction on a tit-for-tat-basis, whereas the second one would go beyond that. Next day, being instructed by the JCS, the CINCPAC went ahead with planning of 94 North Vietnamese targets. A ready list of targets was thus available at the time of the Tonkin "reprisal." On these matters too McNamara and the JCS were in accord.

There was another difference between the Secretary and the JCS regarding the Laotian aspect of the second element of OPLAN 34A. The members of the JCS proposed in March that the US should undertake low level reconnaissance flights over Laos. The Secretary did not accept this proposal on the ground that it was very risky. On the contrary, he recommended high level reconnaissance flights over Laos which, he thought, were less risky.

Over the question of bombing the North, some differences cropped up among the members of the military towards the month of June. Just before the Honolulu Conference on Vietnam met on 1-2 June 1964, the JCS recommended that the US military objective in Vietnam should be to seek, through military actions, to destroy the will and capabilities of North Vietnam. In that case, they

89 Ibid., IV.C.2(a), p. 12.
argued, North Vietnam would be forced to stop supporting insur-
gencies in South Vietnam and Laos. As "initial measures," they
recommended that target complexes in North Vietnam, directly
associated with such support, be destroyed. It is important
to note that this recommendation did not have the concurrence of
the Chairman of the JCS. He also opposed this view at Honolulu.
It is one of the few instances in relation to Vietnam where the
Chairman disagreed with the rest of the JCS. The Secretary
went along with Taylor.

On 5 June, General Taylor suggested, in order of the
intensity of force, three courses of action. They were:

a. A massive air attack on all significant
military targets in North Vietnam for the
purpose of destroying them and thereby
making the enemy incapable of continuing
to assist the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao.

b. A lesser attack on some significant part of
the military target system in North Vietnam
for the dual purpose of convincing the enemy
that it is to his interest to desist from
aiding the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao,
and, if possible, of obtaining his coopera-
tion in calling off the insurgents in South
Vietnam and Laos.

c. Demonstrative strikes against limited mili-
tary targets to show U.S. readiness and
intent to pass to alternatives b or a above.
These demonstrative strikes would have the
same dual purpose as in alternative b. 92

Even though he would personally favour the alternative b, he said,

90 Ibid., p. 29.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., p. 37.
in view of "political considerations" which the civilian officials in Washington would take into account, the JCS might be asked to prepare a strike plan assuming that a decision was made to accept the alternative a. It is not clear what were the preferences of McNamara and the JCS. But on the basis of their known views, it may be inferred that while the JCS might have gone for the alternative a, the Secretary of Defence might have opted for a.

The Congressional resolution, the third element of the Tonkin scenario, had also been planned in advance. The Draft Presidential Memorandum (DPM), prepared by William P. Bundy, John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs and William H. Sullivan, Chairman of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, was submitted for the consideration by an executive committee of the NSC on 23 May. Among other things, it had also called for a "Congressional Resolution" supporting US resistance to North Vietnamese aggression in Southeast Asia. The record shows that William Bundy had already drafted a resolution to that effect on 25 May 1964. A Vietnam strategy session of American officials held at Honolulu on 1-2 June 1964 discussed the need of a Congressional resolution at that

93 Ibid., pp. 22-23; and Gravel, n. 38, p. 167.

94 The testimony of William P. Bundy before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 20 September 1966 in which he admitted that he had prepared a draft of the Tonkin-type resolution. Cited in Galloway, n. 77, pp. 101-02.
point. Present in the meeting were Rusk, McNamara, William Bundy, McCon, Sullivan, Ambassador Lodge, General Taylor, Admiral Felt and General William C. Westmoreland who was replacing General Harkins, the head of the American Military Assistance Command in Saigon.

At one stage of the conference, Lodge made a query about the need of a Congressional resolution if the US was to undertake only "tit-for-tat" air attacks against North Vietnam. McNamara, in defence of having such a resolution, stated that such attacks would guarantee South Vietnam's defence against retaliatory actions by Hanoi and Peking. Moreover, he pointed out that "it might be necessary, as the action unfolded ... to deploy as many as seven 95 divisions." It is not clear if the JCS recognized such a need. By 10 June most agencies had expressed their support for a Congressional resolution and except McGeorge Bundy, who sought to defer this question for the time being, no other agency is known to have opposed it. It seems that the JCS went along with the idea of having an advance Congressional resolution on Vietnam.

Inferences

During the period culminating in the Tonkin episode, the Secretary of Defence and the JCS appear to have been quite close in their positions. Both of them were for application of force against North Vietnam. The more the Secretary felt that the

95 DOD Documents, Book 3, IV.C.2(a), p. 31; and Gravel, n. 38, p. 174.
situation in South Vietnam was deteriorating, the more he was prepared to endorse military pressure against North Vietnam. The difference between the Secretary and the JCS seems to have been one of degree—the JCS were in favour of even more forceful and direct action against North Vietnam than the Secretary. The Secretary appears to have moved carefully probably in order to give the impression that while favouring well-planned action he was somewhat less of a hawk than the JCS. While recommending covert military pressure against North Vietnam, he also emphasized "pacific action" programmes in the South. While, in principle, seemingly not opposed to the use of force, he projected himself as the advocate of a gradual increase in application of force. One factor that might have restrained him to a greater extent than the JCS was taking into account the fact that the Presidential election was to be held that year. He might have calculated that the President, as the "peace candidate" of that year, might be inhibited from going too far in the direction of a military solution in Vietnam at least till the elections were over. In a decision-making process, any player, while making a move, probably calculates its chance of being accepted by other players—especially the head of the organization. It is perhaps more true of the Secretary of Defence than of the JCS because of the differences in the nature of their offices and functions—one, "generalized" and the other, "specialized." The more generalist an actor is, the more he is inclined to take into account, while taking a decision, environmental forces, apart from the interest of the
organization he belongs to. The more specialized is the nature of his functions, the more he is prone to be influenced by the organizational interest.

BEGINNING OF WAR

In Vietnam-type operations, it is difficult to identify the exact point of the beginning, but, in the present case, it may be said with some degree of plausibility that the launching of Operation Rolling Thunder on 2 March 1965 and President Johnson's approval for the dispatch of 44 battalions in the middle of July 1965 as requested by General Westmoreland formed two distinct points in the evolution of the Vietnam war.

It has been discussed earlier that the JCS, in the pre-Tonkin period, consistently urged the higher authorities to launch air attacks against North Vietnam. The same pattern continued in the post-Tonkin period too. On 26 August, the Chiefs made a similar recommendation. But this proposal was different from the earlier ones in one respect. Besides recommending the bombing of the North, it envisaged deliberate attempts to provoke the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) into taking actions which could be countered by systematic American air attacks. The same sort of thinking seemed to run in the civilian level of the Pentagon. On 3 September John T. McNaughton, the Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA), proposed varieties of "provocative" and escalation

96 Ibid., Book 4, IV.C.2(b), p. 25.
measures against the North. These measures were meant to make possible the postponement, till November or December, of the initiation of more serious escalation. In spite of this near unanimity between the military and some civilian elements of the Pentagon about the provocation strategy, it was not accepted by the principal advisers of the President. In a White House strategy meeting of 7 September, they rejected the provocative strategy on the ground that the Saigon regime was very weak. But the more important reason which was not said but must have been understood by these advisers, as in the earlier Tonkin episode period, was that the Presidential election was not yet over and no major escalation should be risked on its eve. The principal advisers, however, agreed that provocative and escalatory measures against the North might be launched in future—(in hindsight, after the election was over). For the present, De Soto patrols and 34A operations were recommended. It was also agreed that the Tonkin-type "tit-for-tat" reprisal bombings might be launched against North Vietnam.

As earlier, the "specialist" group, the JCS, kept up the pressure. On 21 and 27 October, the Chiefs revived again the case for the bombing of North Vietnam. They argued that "the source of supply and direction in the North be eliminated or

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 27.
cut off." They reiterated their old, oft-repeated argument that the bombing of North Vietnam would demonstrate American will and capability to escalate if necessary, bolster the morale of allies, and prevent the march of Communism in Southeast Asia. Four days after the JCS made their recommendation and two days before the Presidential election, the Viet Cong forces attacked the Bien Hoa airfield near Saigon resulting in the loss of four American lives and the destruction of five B-57 bombers. The JCS urged the President to take "prompt and strong military actions in reprisal." The destruction of POL (petroleum, oil and lubricants) storages in Hanoi and Haiphong were recommended by them. Secretary McNamara reportedly did not agree with this recommendation. The Secretary might have anticipated that Johnson, just on the eve of the election, would not risk such a widening of the war.

No retaliatory actions were authorized, but the President set up an interagency group headed by William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far Eastern Affairs and Southeast Asia to recommend various political and military steps that might be taken against North Vietnam. The group held its first meeting on 3 November 1964. The immediate concern of Washington was whether

100 Ibid., Book 4, IV.C.2(c), pp. 2-3.
101 Ibid., p. 4.
to initiate punitive measures against the North, as consistently demanded by the JCS, while the Saigon regime was still struggling to stand on its feet. McNaughton devised an argument to get over this dilemma. He pleaded that action against North Vietnam was, to some extent, a substitute for strengthening the government in South Vietnam. According to him, the bombing of North Vietnam would reduce her capacity to help the Viet Cong. In that event, he added, a "less effective GVN" could tackle a "less active VC." Vice Admiral Lloyd Mustin, the JCS representative in the Bundy group, reiterated the prevailing military position that the North should immediately be bombed. For this, he favoured a programme of "progressively increasing squeeze." Thus, with regard to the bombing of North Vietnam, the civilian and military elements of the Pentagon seemed to be approaching a point of convergence. However, at that point, neither McNaughton nor Mustin clearly stated what type of escalation they exactly stood for.

The Bundy group developed three options for air escalation against North Vietnam. Option A required continued emphasis on counter-insurgency efforts in South Vietnam plus intensified 34A operations and reprisals against Bien Hoa-type situations. Option B, described by McNaughton as "a fast/full squeeze" included graduated but steadily escalating air operations against infiltration routes in Laos and North Vietnam. Option C, called

103 DOD Documents, n. 100, p. 8.
104 Ibid., p. 9.
105 Ibid., pp. 18-23.
by McNaughton "a slow squeeze," consisted of graduated but vari­
ably placed military actions against infiltration routes in Laos
and North Vietnam. It would also include diplomatic measures for
negotiating a settlement. All these options were criticized by
the JCS as insufficient. However, if asked to choose among these
three, they would prefer B. McNamara and McNaughton went for C.
The JCS, in their turn, developed five alternatives out of which
option 4 and 5 corresponded to C and B. They seemed to prefer
option 5. Later, McNamara opted for a mix of first phases of A
and C. Though both the civilian and military elements of the
Pentagon were moving in the same direction--hawkish--, there was
some degree of difference between them, principally in respect
of the tempo of escalation. The JCS stood for fast escalation of
the war against the North while the Secretary and his civilian
colleague in the Department of Defence were in favour of slow
escalation.

The NSC, after reviewing the recommendations of the Bundy
group, agreed on a two-phase programme. In the first phase of
30-day duration, slightly increased pressure would be applied
against North Vietnam. Direct air strikes would be initiated in
the second phase. The President, in principle, accepted these
recommendations. However, for the time being, he authorized only
implementation of phase one. This was another disappointment to

106 Ibid., pp. 33-34.
107 Ibid., pp. 39-41.
The elections ended in a landslide victory for the "peace candidate," Lyndon Johnson. The political constraints that operated during the preceding months of the campaign were no longer decisive. And the push for escalation gathered momentum in the Pentagon. In late January Saigon underwent yet another political crisis with General Khanh taking away all powers from the civilian government. This was embarrassing from the point of view of depicting a projected escalation as an attempt to defend "democracy." At this point McNaughton made a new argument, different from the official one, to justify the increased American involvement in Vietnam. On 27 January, arguing in favour of bombing, McNaughton wrote that the US objective in South Vietnam was not to help a friend, but to "contain China." South Vietnam should be viewed as a buffer between China and, Thailand/Malaysia, he said. McNamara had not till this time gone as far as his Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA). He had apparently extended, in some occasions, his "qualified support" for air strikes against the North. But in late January, there occurred a decisive change in the Secretary. On 27 January, he along with McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Assistant, addressed a joint memorandum to the President. They stated that they had reached a "critical moment in their thinking" and they felt that the US should move

108 Ibid., pp. 55-56.
109 Ibid., IV.C.3, p. 14; and Sheehan, n. 77, p. 351.
from the "center" towards taking stronger actions against the
North. The civilian and military elements of the Pentagon
appeared to have reached almost a point of convergence regarding
the bombing of the North. From the point of mobilizing public
support, some onslaught by the Viet Cong would be helpful. The
Viet Cong attack on the US airbase in Pleiku took place on 7
February 1965. The President ordered a reprisal immediately. He
approved Operation Rolling Thunder on 13 February.

The air war was soon followed by escalation of the war on
the ground. The first batch of American marines landed at Da Nang
on 8 March 1965—a fateful step whose ultimate development might
hardly have been foreseen or envisaged by either the civilian or
the military actors in the Pentagon.

Westy—as Gen. William C. Westmoreland was called by his
friends—was not the kind of person to sit for long in the side­
lines and watch others in action. When he joined as the Chief of
the American Military Assistance Command, Saigon, the military
actors in Washington were pushing hard the proposal to bomb North
Vietnam. As a ground soldier, he might have had his reservations
on whether air power alone could turn the scales in South Vietnam.
At that point it was perhaps not prudent on his part to raise
questions relating to ground deployment which might have invited
the wrath of the Air Force led by the powerful General Curtis LeMay.
If air power was shown to be inadequate, his turn would come and

110 Johnson, n. 102, pp. 122-3.
then "Westy" was determined to be heard. At such a time he would not hesitate to cross sword even with his old mentor, General Taylor. The first proposal, from the military side, to send ground troops to South Vietnam was made by the JCS on 11 February 1965—only two days before Rolling Thunder was authorized by the President. The Chiefs, while proposing stronger air strikes against the North, recommended deploying a Marine Expeditionary Brigade in Da Nang to counter retaliatory strikes by DRV/China. The CINCPAC and the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (CUMUSMACV) immediately supported the JCS proposal.

By the middle of 1964 there had occurred a big change in the power-complex of the Saigon Mission. Gen. Westmoreland replaced Gen. Harkins as the Chief of MACV on 25 April 1964 and Gen. Taylor was appointed the Ambassador in Saigon on 23 June 1964. Westmoreland was, like his predecessor, a favourite of Gen. Taylor. In 1955 he served as the Secretary of the General Staff under Taylor, the Chief of the Staff of Army. For three years he was the Superintendent of West Point—a prize post that had been held in the past by MacArthur and by Taylor creditably. The fact that he was a Southerner from South Carolina had probably at least a little weight with President Johnson. For the rest of 1964, Westmoreland played second fiddle first to Ambassador Lodge and then to Ambassador Taylor, a military "hero" in civilian clothes. But in course of time he began to prepare his ground to play a more influential

111 DOD Documents, Book 4, IV.C.4, p. 15.
112 Ibid., p. 4.
role in 1965 and thereafter.

As early as 30 November 1964, a State Department proposal to deploy American ground troops in South Vietnam "in support of diplomacy" was discussed by an NSC Working Group, but no recommendation was made by it. That was probably the only instance, before 8 March 1965, according to the available documents, when the question of the introduction of American GIs in South Vietnam was discussed by civilian advisers. It was later taken up by the military actors who went on pressing their superiors to accept this proposal. On 11 February 1965, the JCS, while proposing air attacks against North Vietnam, also recommended the deployment of a Marine Expeditionary Brigade in Da Nang to counter retaliatory strikes by DRV/China. After a few days, the Da Nang deployment was proposed by Gen. Westmoreland. The CINCPAC, in an urgent message to the JCS on 24 February 1965, urged that two marine battalions be immediately sent to Da Nang. One may remember that in October 1961 the CINCPAC had opposed the immediate deployment of US ground troops in South Vietnam. The one possible factor responsible for this changed attitude of the CINCPAC in 1965 was that Adm. Felt had been succeeded by Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp. On the same day itself, the JCS forwarded this recommendation with their approval. And after two days, the deployment of Marines at Da Nang was authorized by the President.

113 Ibid., p. 15.
114 Ibid., p. 4.
At the eleventh hour, the Marine deployment at Da Nang faced some difficulty. On 2 March, McNaughton wrote to Taylor stating that the 173rd Airborne Brigade, then stationed on Okinawa, would replace the Marines. It was highly resented by Westmoreland and the decision to send Marines to Da Nang was sustained. It is not clear how exactly the civilian elements of the Pentagon reacted to this decision regarding the Marines. McNaughton's cable did not indicate his opposition to the policy of sending American GIs to South Vietnam. He wanted some change only in the type of GIs to be introduced there. The Marines had a long history of intervention abroad and deploying them at Da Nang might give an impression that something bigger was in the offing. This might have been McNaughton's perception and it might have been shared by McNamara. The President opted for Marines, but he did not approve of two battalions as recommended by the military. Only one battalion was sent to Da Nang. President's Strategy was the "middle course"—neither to please all, nor to displease all, but to give some satisfaction to all.

In the beginning, it was mainly the JCS who were advocating increased American ground involvement in South Vietnam. The support for this used to come from the CINCPAC and the Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (CUMUSMACV). But, after some time, the equation was reversed. The "big push" began to come from the CUMUSMACV, and the JCS had to keep pace with it.

115 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
This was due to the difference in their perception of the military need. Once ground troops are deployed for combat, the man-on-the-spot always asks for more while the JCS have to take a larger view, keeping in mind other global commitments. Moreover, the latter would be taking into consideration the domestic reactions while the former often might not. One may refer to a few memorandum of the JCS and Gen. Westmoreland in order to identify the gradual change in their mutual interaction in regard to getting more and more American ground troops deployed in South Vietnam. On 20 March 1965, the JCS proposed sending two American divisions and one South Korean division to South Vietnam with an "offensive" mission. In order to reverse the trend in the military situation of South Vietnam in favour of Saigon, the objective should be, they argued, to destroy the Viet Cong, not merely to keep pace with them or slow down their progress. It is significant to note that Gen. Westmoreland had so far not proposed any offensive strategy, nor had he yet recommended such a big number of American ground troops to be deployed in South Vietnam. Westmoreland, in his "Commander's Estimate of the situation in SVN," dated 26 March 1965, stated that Rolling Thunder was not going to pay dividends within the coming six months. He proposed that the US should send two divisions to South Vietnam by June 1965 and possibly more thereafter in case the bombing failed. He argued that they would help the Saigon force in enjoying favourable ratio vis-a-vis the

116 DOD Documents, Book 4, IV.C.5, p. 92.
Viet Cong. In the aftermath of the Honolulu Conference on Vietnam, held on 20 April 1965, the JCS recommended that 48,000 US and 5,250 "Free World" troops should be deployed in South Vietnam. These troops were not only to protect American bases and installations, but also to do fighting against the Viet Cong. This again indicates that at this stage the JCS were ahead of CUMUSMACV in taking initiative for sending more American troops to South Vietnam with more offensive missions. The next important initiative, however, came from Gen. Westmoreland when he told Adm. Sharp, the CINCPAC, that the US should send "44 battalions" of ground forces to South Vietnam. From that time onwards Gen. Westmoreland emerged to be the most demanding and vigorous advocate of the American ground involvement in South Vietnam.

The gradual change in the American combat role appeared to be directly linked to the change in combat strategies. The initial deployment of ground troops was meant to maintain the security of coastal bases. But the military actors were unhappy with it. Gen. Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, on his return from a trip to South Vietnam, 5-12 March 1965, recommended

117 Ibid., pp. 86-88.
118 Ibid., p. 78.
119 Ibid., pp. 94-104.
120 Ibid., p. 113.
to the President two alternate strategies. One was to deploy US Marines in secure bases on the coast, and the other was to send Marines into high land provinces. Gen. Johnson and Gen. Earle Wheeler, the Chairman of the JCS, supported the second alternative. But this was not accepted by the President. He, however, replaced the original strategy of "base security" by that of "enclave strategy." This new strategy required that the US troops occupy coastal enclaves, accept full responsibility for enclave security, and be prepared to go to the rescue of the South Vietnamese forces as far as fifty miles outside enclaves. The military resented the 50-mile limit. Gen. Westmoreland, in his 7 June message, requested that this limit be lifted. This request was endorsed both by the CINCPAC and the JCS. On 26 June he was authorized to commit American GIs to combat in any situation he deemed appropriate for helping the GVN forces. This brought to an end the "enclave strategy" and launched the "search and destroy" strategy. There was thus increase in the number of American ground forces in South Vietnam in correspondence to the change in their missions. And the man whose strategy finally prevailed was Gen. Westmoreland.

The combined offensive of the military for the deployment of American GIs in South Vietnam need not preclude the possibility

121 Ibid., pp. 113-16.
122 Ibid., p. 104.
that there were intra-military differences. In fact, the available documents record that there existed some inter-service cleavages. The Joint Chiefs were apparently unanimous regarding the desirability of securing American bases in South Vietnam, but beyond that they differed among themselves. The Chief of the Staff of the Air Force and the Commandant of the Marine Corps supported the "enclave strategy" whereas the Chairman of the JCS—an Army man—and the Chief of the Staff of Army, were strong proponents of the "search and destroy" strategy. It is noteworthy that each one of them was propounding a view which was apparently in the interest of the organization that he headed. Colonel James A. Donovan points out that with the launching of the "search and destroy" strategy, there developed strains between the Marines and the Army, and then between the Marines and the Air Force over the question of overall command, roles and operations. This suggests that the interest of an organization—here, an agency—, to some extent, defines its attitude toward policy-matters.

The available records say very little about the role of the Secretary of Defence in decision-making with regard to the sending of American ground troops to South Vietnam. He does not seem to have taken a definite stand on it. He simply reacted to the initiatives taken by military elements. He did not oppose any military recommendations for the deployment of American ground troops.

troops in South Vietnam. They were in conformity with his own broad design. He did, from time to time, suggest some changes in details. With regard to the JCS' three division-drive in March 1965, for instance, the Secretary indicated that in order to fend off domestic reactions, further American troops should be sent along with South Korean contingents. He expressed his agreement with the military's "adverse force ratios" and the latter's proposal for further deployment of American troops in South Vietnam. But, at the same time, he expressed some caveats. He pointed out that such deployments should be conditioned by "political [psychological] absorption capacity," "logistical absorption capacity," and "operational absorption--that is, operational requirements." The NSC which met on 1-2 April 1965, did not accept the three division-proposal. But this proposal was not buried there. McNamara wanted it to remain alive. He asked the Joint Chiefs to continue planning for the earliest introduction of three divisions.

Some of the statements of the Secretary made during the build-up stage were very hawkish. In a memorandum to all departments on 1 March 1965, he stated, "I want it clearly understood that there is an unlimited appropriation available for the financing of aid to Vietnam. Under no circumstances is lack of money

127 Ibid., p. 107.
to stand in the way of aid to that nation." On another occasion he wrote to General Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, "policy is: anything that will strengthen the position of the GVN will be sent." It is not quite clear whether the Secretary's "anything" meant "anything" in terms of money alone or men also. Spending money and sending soldiers to a foreign country to fight are two different things, and one's commitment to the first does not necessarily reflect commitment to the second. The question of more money would arise if more men would be deployed in South Vietnam. McNamara's assurances albeit vague, to spend as much money as required on Vietnam were perhaps a calculated concession on his part to give some comfort to the military who were having a rough time with him at that time regarding their overall budgetary demands for weapons production and procurement. He did not approve of the whole of the military's package. He accepted a part of it--neither complete denial, nor complete acceptance. And his tactic was to ask the JCS to prepare plans for the rest without, however, committing himself in advance on whether his approval would be forthcoming. His options were still kept open.

It seems that Secretary McNamara at this point of time, was not prepared to initiate any positive moves in the direction of troop increases in Vietnam. He was willing to let somebody else take the initiative with possibly some tacit encouragement.

128 Ibid.
129 Ibid., p. 108.
from him. Assistant Secretary McNaughton seems to have had McNamara's blessing when, on 13 July, he recommended to the Secretary that the US should introduce 44 battalions in South Vietnam and be prepared to send more in future. This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that McNaughton hardly differed from his boss on any major issue. McNamara was thus playing a smart game—probably using McNaughton as a "stalking horse."

Ambassador Taylor was at that time opposed to the introduction of American ground troops in South Vietnam and the Secretary probably did not want to be locked into direct conflict with him on the issue at this stage. Both McNamara and Taylor had been very close to President Kennedy and they continued maintaining good relationship with the Kennedy family during the Johnson Administration. The Secretary and Taylor were personally on excellent terms too. Johnson was reportedly suspicious of their friendship with Robert Kennedy. McNamara moved cautiously probably because of his appraisal that President Johnson was going the military's way.

No decision had been taken on the 44-battalion proposal when the Secretary left for South Vietnam in the middle of July. But while he was in Saigon, he was informed by his Deputy Secretary Vance that the President had decided to go ahead with the plan to introduce 34 American battalions. Johnson's account in his memoirs that he took this decision after McNamara returned

130 Ibid., p. 120.
131 Ibid., p. 131.
to Washington seems to be erroneous.

Both the civilian and military elements of the Pentagon were advocates of the deployment of American ground troops in South Vietnam. The only difference between them was with regard to the number and missions of these troops. While the civilian elements seemed to favour a smaller number and less offensive mission, the military pushed for a bigger number and more offensive mission. The military members were also not wholly unanimous. Being seemingly guided by their organizational interests, they differed in regard to the roles and missions of the troops. At the outset, the JCS were in the lead with Gen. Westmoreland expressing his support. After some time, this equation was reversed. The CUMUSMACV began to take the initiative and it was for the JCS to respond to his proposals. Gen. Westmoreland began to emerge increasingly as the most vigorous and assertive of the Pentagon players. Whether there was any equally determined and skilful contender outside the Pentagon will be examined in Chapter IV.

Inferences

There does not seem to have existed a great distance between the civilian and military actors of the Pentagon so far as launching the air offensive was concerned. Both of them were in favour of taking resort to air operations against North Vietnam.

132 Johnson, n. 102, pp. 144-52.
The only difference between them was the degree of intensity of actions they favoured. The military actors were for fast, prompt and very strong operations on a continuous basis whereas the civilians of the Pentagon advocated gradual escalation. To use the jargon of McNaughton, while the former urged "fast squeeze," the latter asked for "slow squeeze," but both of them aimed at "squeezing" the enemy.

In the case of beginning the land war, the military input seems to have been larger and more effective than the civilian one. Secretary McNamara does not appear to have played any significant role. There is hardly anything to show that he was against the ground war. On the other hand, the record shows that he had implicitly supported it. So also had the Assistant Secretary McNaughton. There seems to have existed an important difference between the genesis of the air war and that of the ground war. The Rolling Thunder Operation of February 1965 was the result of a series of actions, originated mostly in 1964, the year in which President Johnson was being hailed as the "peace candidate." That was a great constraint upon the President throughout that year. On the other hand, most of the related steps on ground war were taken in the first part of 1965. By that time the election was over and the President had probably freed himself of the spell of the Kennedy Administration. As it seems, he was closer to the military in his attitude than to the Secretary of Defence. As a result, whereas the military recommendations on air offensive were mostly not approved, most of their recommendations regarding
ground war were accepted by the President--without delay too. This leads us to believe that President's personal philosophy or beliefs (relating to war), and his concern for maximization of his personal benefits (Presidential election) greatly influenced his decisions regarding military actions in Vietnam in 1964-1965.