Chapter IV

COMPETITION AMONG FEDERAL ACTORS TO INFLUENCE FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING
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In the American system the President is the ultimate decision-maker on defence and foreign policy. He has a team of advisers to help him in determining the national security policy. The most prominent among them are the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defence, the National Security Assistant, the JCS and the CIA Director. He also consults other members of his cabinet, when necessary. The National Security Council is the formal body which provides the forum for these advisers to meet and exchange their views on national security. They present to the President alternative courses of action on any issue under review. The President may also meet them separately outside the NSC. President Johnson reportedly used to discuss more important national security issues in his "Tuesday Lunches." Moreover, the President may seek the advice of his unofficial advisers and Congressional leaders. He generally makes up mind after hearing these people. However, his official advisers are his main advisers irrespective of where issues are discussed.

The President's advisers compete amongst themselves to reach his ear. They have their personal and organizational interests involved. Moreover, each actor is psychologically

motivated to exercise power, and power, here, is the ability of each actor to influence others including the President to accept his viewpoint. The chance of the viewpoint of any agency prevailing upon others may depend upon how well it has been articulated and developed inside the agency, the extent of unanimity that exists in its support in the agency, and how effectively and skilfully it is presented by the head of the agency concerned in inter-agency meetings, formal or informal. Other important variables which influence the degree of success of any agency in this regard is the Presidential style and the personal equation of the actor concerned with the President. Indeed, a main topic of conversation in Washington is who is "in" with the President now. Dean Rusk probably meant the same thing when he talked of "confidence" that "flows down from the President." Another factor that helps one in the bureaucratic competition of decision-making is the drive for power. One has to fight with his colleagues both inside his department and outside. This was probably in his mind when Secretary of State, Dean Acheson mentioned "The Killer Instinct" as the quality that a Secretary of State should possess.

Thus, from our point of view, the Secretary of Defence, in advocating his point of view, has to contend with five forces, namely, his civilian colleagues in the Department, the military, other federal actors, the President and Congress. In the last two chapters the interaction between the Secretary of Defence and the JCS was discussed. The next chapter will deal with the interrelationship between the Secretary and Congress. The present chapter proposes to examine the interaction of the Defence Secretary vis-a-vis other federal actors in the realm of policy-making on Vietnam.

The State Department and the Defence Department are the principal agencies dealing with national security policy. As the Jackson Subcommittee on Governmental Operations said, they constitute the "central partnership" in national policy machinery. They are mainly responsible for advising on and executing national security decisions. Thus the final outcome of any decision in this field is largely influenced by the personal and organizational equations between these two departments.

In order to insure that its views are properly reflected in the making of foreign policy, the Defence Department sought to set up a new bureau inside it. The result was the creation of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defence for International

Security Affairs (ISA). It was primarily intended to enable the Defence Department to play its cards better in its competition with the State Department and in its dealings with Congress. But if unity did not exist in the Pentagon, it would then be inclined to side with the Defence Secretary vis-a-vis his military opponents. Its internal organization on the basis of geographic subdivisions is largely similar to that of the State Department. It is often referred to as the "mini-State Department" of the Defence Department. The Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA) is required to maintain active liaison for the exchange of information and advice with the military departments, the JCS and other Defence Department agencies. He is also required to coordinate relations between the Defence Department and the State Department "in the field of his assigned responsibility." Some of the functions of his office are as follows:

1. Monitor Department of Defense participation in National Security Council affairs....

2. Assist the Secretary of Defense ... and other agencies of the government in establishing defense policy by:

   a. Determining ... the current and emerging international problems of major significance to the security of the United States, and analyzing the range of possible political-military actions for dealing with the long-term aspects of such problems.

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8 The discussion here on the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA) is mainly based on Donald F. Bletz, The Role of the Military Professional in U.S. Foreign Policy (New York, 1972), pp. 95-108.
b. Identifying the national security objectives of the United States and developing the international political-military and foreign economic implications....

c. Initiating appropriate actions and measures within the Department of Defense for implementing approved National Security Council policies....

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA) and its supporting staff is thus a Pentagon device to develop its own resources in terms of expertise that would be mobilized as it bargains with other federal actors and also as it presents its case to Congress. The State Department, which had earlier set up its own Policy Planning Council, sought to reinforce its position by creating the Office of Assistant Secretary for politico-military affairs. The office was created by the State Department to "look at politico-military problems on a world-wide basis ... and provide a central point of focus and coordination, as required, for the politico-military activities being carried on by the geographical bureaus of the Department." This office was abolished in 1969 by the Nixon Administration. But this does not affect the present study which deals with the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. The Policy Planning Council also deals with politico-military problems. But it is purely a planning body. It does not come in the operational channel. A study of the record leads one to conclude that the Office of the Assistant Secretary

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9 However, this formal limitation does not preclude the head of a Council from influencing decision-making by the force of his personality and/or his personal equation with the key actors in the policy process. A Kennan or a Rostow may play a more active role than what he is formally required to do.
of Defence (ISA) which combines both planning and operation, probably played a more important role than its State Department counterpart.

Other important actors in decision-making on foreign policy are the National Security Assistant to the President and the CIA. 10 The National Security Assistant acts as a "filter." He organizes and coordinates the views of other concerned agencies and presents them systematically to the President. When required, he also tenders his own advice to him. After the President makes up his mind, the Special Assistant is to communicate the President's decision to the concerned agencies. The Special Assistant's position assumes crucial significance because often it is he who decides how much of the views of what department is to be sent to the President. The CIA has primarily two functions. It gathers intelligence on foreign countries and feeds them to the President and the National Security Council. Second, it engages in covert activities in other countries, in "the interest of American national security." From time to time it has been subjected to heavy fire of criticism on the ground that on its own


initiative, it often engineers covert activities in other countries and then faces Washington with a *fait accompli*. It has been described as a "state within a state." The Defence Department has to reckon with the strength and influence that the CIA may be able to bring to bear on decision-making on issues of vital concern to the former.

An attempt will be made in the present chapter to study how different bureaucratic actors tried to influence Presidential decisions on Vietnam and where the Pentagon stood. To what extent was the Pentagon able to make its view prevail upon other competitors? How far was it influenced by their postures? To what extent did it succeed in stamping its imprint on Presidential decisions or moderate its own views in line with known Presidential wishes?

**Kennedy's Decision to Increase the Number of Military Advisers**

Some time around the middle of November 1961 President Kennedy took the decision to increase the number of military advisers in South Vietnam. Hilsman suggests that Kennedy was not in favour of sending American ground forces to Vietnam.  

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12 Exressing concern over the activities of the CIA, President Truman said in 1963, "For some time I have been disturbed by the way CIA has been diverted from its original assignment. It has become an operational and at times a policy-making arm of the government." *Washington Post*, 22 December 1963; see also David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, *The Invisible Government* (New York, 1964).

Schlesinger records that Kennedy told him in November 1961 that sending troops to Vietnam was like an alcoholic's first drink. "They want a force of American troops.... But it will be just like Berlin. The troops will march in; the bands will play; the crowds will cheer; and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect was off, and you have to take another," Kennedy said, according to Schlesinger. On the other hand, it has been alleged that the Kennedy Administration transformed the "limited-risk gamble" of the Eisenhower Administration into a "broad commitment" to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam. Within three months of coming to office, the President decided to send 400 Special Forces troops and 100 other American military advisers to South Vietnam. It was in violation of the Geneva Accords which limited the American presence in Saigon to 685-man contingent. The United States had promised to abide by them although she had not signed them. At the same time President Kennedy initiated a number of covert military operations against


North Vietnam. These operations included: dispatching agents to North Vietnam for intelligence gathering; infiltrating teams under light civilian cover to south-east Laos to locate and attack Vietnamese Communist bases and lines of communications, forming networks of resistance, covert bases and teams for sabotage and harassment in North Vietnam; conducting overflights for dropping of leaflets to harass the Communists and to "maintain morale of North Vietnamese population," and "increase gray unidentified source broadcasts to North Vietnam for the same purpose," and training "the South Vietnamese Army to conduct ranger raids and similar military actions in North Vietnam as might prove necessary or appropriate." By the end of the Kennedy Administration, the number of American troops--disguised as military advisers--had risen from 685 to roughly 16,000.

When Kennedy came to power, the major American problem in Southeast Asia was Laos, not Vietnam. The Pathet Lao forces were advancing. The stability of the Vientiene regime was in danger. The outgoing President, General Eisenhower, told Kennedy that Laos would pose the most serious challenge to the US. He advised that if necessary, American forces should be deployed to "save Laos from Communism." The situation in South Vietnam, from the

16 Sheehan, ibid.

17 Memorandum of Conference on January 19, 1961, between President Eisenhower and President-elect Kennedy on the subject of Laos, by Clark Clifford. Sent by Clifford to President Lyndon B. Johnson, 29 September 1967, US House Committee on Armed Services, Committee Print, (Contd. on next page)
American point of view, was deteriorating. Pessimistic reports were being sent home from South Vietnam by American reporters, important amongst them being David Halberstam of the New York Times and Neil Sheehan of the UPI.

Washington continued to be under the spell of the alleged continuing Soviet threat which Walt Rostow described as the third year of the "post-sputnik offensive." In January 1961 there was considerable talk about "closing the missile gap,"—an alleged problem to which Kennedy had devoted a great deal of attention during the election campaign. In the same month, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, announced his pledge to support "wars of national liberation." He also threatened to sign a separate peace treaty with the East Germans.

The Kennedy Administration began with a whimper. The Bay of Pigs invasion proved to be a big disaster for the US. The ill-fated adventure, instead of discouraging the Kennedy Administration from undertaking any so-called counter-insurgency efforts, seemed to encourage it. The major actors in Washington appeared to be in search of a spot where they could be tough with the Communists and regain prestige for their country. Either Laos or South Vietnam would perhaps provide a right place. Another factor that might have prompted Kennedy to take a tough stand against

"Communists" at that time was his bitter encounter with Khruschev at Vienna in June 1961. The "rookie" President had a tough time with the veteran Communist leader. "Roughest thing in my life," Kennedy told James Reston of the New York Times soon after the meeting was over. He felt that Khrushchev "mistook" him as immature and inexperienced. He would have to give him a stand somewhere and make the American power credible. And for that "Vietnam looks like the place," he told Reston. The Bay of Pigs and the Vienna encounter seem to have influenced Kennedy and his advisers to follow an activist policy against "Communists" in Southeast Asia.

When Kennedy began making his initial moves in Vietnam he did not anticipate any serious domestic opposition to his course. There was no organized opposition within the Executive, Congress, or among the public at large to efforts ostensibly aimed to "help" South Vietnam to safeguard herself from Communist "aggression" and subversion. If the effort called for a certain modest American involvement the country was, by and large, apparently willing to go along. J.W. Fulbright (Dem., Arkansas), the Chairman of the

18 David Halberstam, The Best and Brightest (New York, 1972), pp. 76-77; Chester Bowles, Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy Administration, recalls that "following the Bay of Pigs, his confrontation with Khrushchev in Vienna and the resumption of nuclear testing by the Soviets, I sensed that subconsciously at least, he / Kennedy / was searching for some issue on which he could prove at a relatively low cost that he was, in fact, a tough President who could not be pushed around by the Soviets, the Chinese or anyone else."

Chester Bowles, Promises to Keep (Bombay, 1972), p. 408; Emphasis added.
Foreign Relations Committee, threw his weight on 4 May 1961 on the side of sending troops to Vietnam. He was one of the two persons in Washington--the other one was Chester Bowles--who had advised President Kennedy against the Bay of Pigs adventure. Fulbright's support for the deployment of ground troops in South Vietnam might have given an impression to the President that sending troops to Vietnam would not face any serious challenge in Congress.

W.W. Rostow, a senior White House specialist on Southeast Asia, and Brig. General Edward G. Lansdale who was in charge of "special operations" for the Pentagon were probably the first within the Administration to make moves in relation to Vietnam. The general, referred to in Chapter II, was a reputed military activist on counter-insurgency operations. He was also an old hand on Vietnam. Rostow, who was to emerge as one of the most important actors in the Vietnam drama, represented an approach that subsequently came to be characterized as "hawkish." In order to understand his role, one should go back to his Fort Bragg speech of April 1961. He said that "modernization" was a revolutionary process and a transitional society was vulnerable to the guerrilla attack. According to him, the Communists were the "scavengers of the modernization process." His conclusion was that the best way to win a guerrilla war was to prevent it from happening. Extending his logic, Rostow said, it might be necessary to "seek out and engage the ultimate source of aggression."

Rostow, in his memorandum of 12 April 1961 to the President, proposed "gearing up the whole Vietnam operations." He suggested that a visit to South Vietnam by the Vice President and a visit to the US by Nguyen Dinh Thuan, acting Defence Minister of South Vietnam, should be arranged. More important, he proposed that the number of American military advisers in Saigon should be increased. This simply meant that some way should be found to get into Saigon an undetermined number of ununiformed U.S. military personnel. Anticipating the possibility of diplomatic difficulty in initiating such a course, Rostow stated that "an alternative way" might be introduced into the Vietnam operation a substantial number of "Special Forces types." It is important to note that many of these suggestions were soon accepted by the President.

Rostow and Lansdale, the respective counter-insurgency experts of the White House and the Defence Department, met on 13 April and the product of their discussion was a paper which recommended that the President set up a task force for Vietnam. This paper seems to have reached their supervisors, probably including the President. On 20 April Secretary McNamara asked his Deputy Secretary, Roswell Gilpatric, to take the help of other agencies in preparing a report which would contain the current situation and Communist activities in South Vietnam and recommendations to "prevent Communist domination of that country."
memorandum was in line with the Rostow-Lansdale paper. Thus the Defence Department took the initiative in having a report prepared and other agencies were to contribute their inputs to its report.

The task force, headed by Gilpatric, submitted its report on 27 April 1961. It recommended an increase of 100 men in the American Military Assistance Command in Saigon (MACV), more arms and aid for the South Vietnamese Civil Guards and sending General Lansdale, the Operations Officer for the Task Force, to South Vietnam immediately after the programme received the Presidential approval.

In the meantime the situation in Laos had taken a dramatic turn. On 26 April reports reached Washington that the Pathet Lao forces were moving rapidly and most of Laos would fall to them before a ceasefire was enforced. On 27 April—the day the Gilpatric Task Force Report was submitted—Washington was in the grip of a crisis situation—the Principals meeting to devise means for facing the Laotian crisis. For the time being, Vietnam was again relegated to the second place. The possibility seemed to exist that the situation in Laos might have "spill over" effects in Vietnam. So on 28 April, an annexe was added to the Gilpatric Report which recommended an increase of 3,600 men in the MAAG ceiling, instead of the original recommendation for a 100-man

increase.

On 29 April, with Washington still struggling through the Laotian crisis, Kennedy took action on the original report of the Gilpatric Task Force submitted on 27th. He ordered an increase of 100 men in the American advisory mission ceiling. No action was taken on the Laotian annexe of 28th. At this point the State Department sought to get into the act. Up to this point the ball appeared to be passing among McNamara, Gilpatric, Lansdale, and Rostow. On 1 May, a significant revision was made in the Laos annexe. It provided that "the US should be prepared to intervene unilaterally in fulfilment of its commitment under Article IV, 2 of Manila Pact...." The 1 May draft was circulated among the various concerned agencies.

The State Department's revised draft made some significant changes in the Gilpatric report. It recommended that Lansdale's special role--Operations Officer of the Task Force--be deleted and the Gilpatric Task Force, having completed its assignment, be dissolved. A new task force should take its place, with Under Secretary of State George Ball acting as its coordinator. Moreover, the State Department wanted the "unilateral intervention in Vietnam" clause of the original report to be substituted by a "new bilateral arrangement" with South Vietnam. This change was

26 Ibid., p. 34.
27 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
also retained in the final Gilpatric report.

These changes suggested by the State Department are likely to imply that the State Department was taking a more cautious stand as contrasted with the Defence Department. But the reasons cited by it for concluding a defensive alliance with South Vietnam seem to give a different picture. It argued that the Geneva Accords had been violated with impunity by the Communists, but they had so far prevented the US from taking any "dramatic actions" on behalf of South Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries against the Communists. It, therefore, urged that these inhibitions should "not prevent our action" in future. Hence arose the necessity of joining with South Vietnam in "a clear-cut defensive alliance which include stationing of US forces on Vietnamese soil." Thus the State Department was no less in favour of increased military involvement in Vietnam than the Defence Department. The "bilateral arrangement" provision was suggested to meet diplomatic and procedural problems that might otherwise ensue. It is natural that it was the State Department, the diplomatic arm of the government, rather than any other agency which took this aspect into account. Getting the concurrence of Saigon for a "defensive alliance" would not have been deemed to be difficult. The changes suggested by the State Department, apart from other aspects, were clearly intended to put the Department squarely in the picture in regard to policy-making on Vietnam.

28 Ibid., pp. 37-38; Emphasis added.
In the second week of May 1961 President Kennedy sent his Vice-President Lyndon Johnson on a whirlwind tour of some Asian countries, South Vietnam included. On 12 May LBJ, during his talks with President Diem, broached the possibility of American troops in Vietnam. The South Vietnamese leader did not seem to be very interested about getting American troops at present. He would, however, have them "only in case of overt aggression." Diem also did not show any interest in signing a "defensive alliance" with the US.

In his report Johnson stated that American troops would not be welcomed in Asia except on training missions. Because of recent colonial experiences, Asians would tend to view with suspicion the return of western troops, he argued. However, the major thrust of the Vice-President's report was interventionist. "The battle against Communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination to achieve success there--or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores." Johnson concluded his report in a tone of urgency. "The basic decision in Southeast Asia is here. We must decide whether to help these countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel in the area and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and a "Fortress America" concept...."

In the month of June, the Washington principals did not

29 Ibid., Book 11, n. 23, p. 152.

30 Subject: "Mission to Southeast Asia, India and Pakistan," Memorandum from the Vice-President to the President, 23 May 1961, ibid., pp. 159-66.
seem to be in a mood to send ground troops to South Vietnam. In spite of the "lobbying" of pro-troops elements—General Lansdale, General McGarr and perhaps Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., the US Ambassador in Saigon—the proposal to send ground troops to Vietnam did not gain much support. However, there was growing sentiment for substantial preparatory work looking towards possible eventual intervention. A note from Rostow to Secretary McNamara on 5 June probably reflected the dominant attitude in the high echelons of US policy-makers. Because of the importance of the letter, it may be reproduced in full:

Bob:

We must think of the kind of forces and missions for Thailand now, Vietnam later.

We need a guerrilla deterrence operations in Thailand's northeast.

We shall need forces to support a counter-guerrilla war in Vietnam.

cr, helicopters
communications men
special forces
militia teachers
etc.

WWR

This letter was important in the sense that recommendations contained in it were exactly the courses later approved by the President. It is doubtful whether such a development was because of Rostow's personal influence on or standing with Kennedy. Rostow was not that important an actor at that time. The more

31 Ibid., Book 2, n. 20, pp. 67-68.
probable reason was that Rostow represented the prevailing mood of Washington at that time, and the President, because of the Laotian situation and the possible reactions at home and abroad, was not prepared to take the risk of deploying American combat troops in South Vietnam. The letter also indicated the somewhat low place to which Vietnam had perhaps been relegated in America's perception at that time. Thailand was accorded a "higher" place than Vietnam. Vietnam was not in the centre; it had been pushed to the periphery. But at least some of those who were favouring giving Vietnam a peripheral place at this time probably did so in the hope that it was the most feasible way of eventually moving her to the centre. Rostow might also have thought that his present recommendations—sending special forces to South Vietnam—might be pace-setters; they might finally lead to the deployment of American combat troops in Vietnam.

No significant movement was made with regard to Vietnam till October when Rostow and Taylor were sent to Saigon. In the meantime, however, the situation in South Vietnam had considerably deteriorated. The Viet Cong were reportedly increasing their strength. Theodore H. White, a noted American journalist with access to Kennedy, was sending "alarming" reports from South Vietnam to the White House. In September, the Viet Cong dealt a stunning blow to the Saigon regime when they seized Phuoc Thanh, a provincial capital only 55 miles away from Saigon, publicly

32 Ibid., p. 72.
beheaded the provincial chief and left the town before the South Vietnamese forces arrived. These developments might have had some impact upon Washington and might have moved back Vietnam into the centre of the stage. By the month of October, there were four proposals relating to Vietnam to be considered by the National Security Council. One was the JCS plan which advocated sending American ground troops to Laos. Another was the "Rostow Proposal" which favoured the deployment of a SEATO force of 25,000 men in South Vietnam. The JCS rejected the Rostow proposal and submitted a supplementary note which stated that 40,000 US military personnel would be required to mop up the Viet Cong and 128,000 additional men would be needed to fend off possible North Vietnamese and/or Chinese intervention. The third proposal came from U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Under Secretary of State. It was a combination of the first and second.

The last proposal pending for consideration by the NSC was sent by William P. Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA) who frequently sought to feed his inputs into policy-making on Vietnam (he is the elder brother of McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Assistant). William Bundy was not unfamiliar in Washington before he joined the Kennedy Administration. His father, Harvey Bundy, was a close friend of Henry Stimson, one of the great

33 Ibid., pp. 75-76; for the JCS' rejoinder to Rostow's proposal, see JCS Memorandum for Secretary of Defence, JCSM 716-61, 9 October 1961, DOD Documents, Book 11, V.B.4, pp. 297-9.

34 Ibid., Book 2, pp. 77-78.
patriarchs of the Eastern Establishment. Bundy's father-in-law, Dean Acheson, who was the Secretary of State during the Truman Administration, was still a force to be reckoned with both in Washington and in the Democratic Party. Bundy had worked for the CIA during the Eisenhower period. Known to be a favourite of Allen Dulles, the CIA Director, he survived McCarthyite witch-hunting because of the timely intervention on his behalf by his boss. Bundy joined the Kennedy Administration as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA), but he was soon promoted when the Assistant Secretary Paul Nitze, was moved up as the Secretary of the Navy. With these connections with some of the big names of the Establishment, and with his younger brother, McGeorge Bundy in the White House as the National Security Assistant, Bundy was to play the role of an influential insider during both Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

In a note to McNamara on 10 October 1961, described in chapter II, William Bundy stated that "it is really now or never" if the Viet Cong gains were to be arrested. He pointed out that the Viet Cong movement was spreading and they would certainly exploit the "back-the-winner sentiment" as they did against the French in 1954. He advocated "an early and hard-hitting operation" which had, according to him, 70 per cent chance of success. He warned that if a month passed by, it would come down to 60-40, 50-50 and so on.

Bundy Memorandum for Secretary McNamara, 10 October 1961, ibid., Book 11, p. 312.
It is precisely on such occasions that the CIA's input tends to assume considerable importance in decision-making.

The immediate prior record of success or failure of an agency tends to have some effect on the appraisal that it may make on another emergency situation having serious implications. It may tend to make the agency more cautious. A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), dated 5 October 1961, of the possible impact of the deployment of a SEATO contingent of troops in South Vietnam upon the insurgency that had been prepared for the NSC's consideration did not reflect the same confidence as indicated in Bundy's note. It stated that the Viet Cong would mount guerrilla tactics and harass the SEATO forces. The flow of the North Vietnamese "irregulars" into the South would be intensified, it added. The tone of the NIE was in contrast to that of the interventionist proposals of Rostow, the JCS, Johnson and Bundy.

In accordance with the decision of NSC meeting, dated 11 October 1961, General Taylor and Walt Rostow were sent to South Vietnam to make an appraisal of the situation there and to make necessary recommendations. It was originally proposed that Rostow alone would visit South Vietnam. Rostow was known as a "hawk" whose mind was already set on intervention. To mollify those within the Administration who favoured a balanced appraisal of the situation it would be desirable to add


another senior person whose views could command confidence. The man to take the lead in pressing the case for an expanded team was Chester Bowles, the Under Secretary of State. Bowles had serious reservations concerning the thrust towards intervention that Rostow and several others in the Administration represented.

Unlike many others in the Administration, Bowles had his independent political constituency as a veteran liberal and former Governor and Congressman. His sympathy for third world countries was well-known. One of the original candidates for the post of the Secretary of State, he accepted the number two post hoping that he would be enabled to play a responsible role in areas of special interest to him. The number one in State being a "status quo man" with strong views on holding back the "Communists," strain between the two was inevitable. Bowles was one of the few in Washington to have expressed strong concern over the Bay of Pigs adventure. From the very beginning of the Kennedy Administration, he expressed his opposition to any increased American involvement in Vietnam. At the time when the Rostow mission was to be dispatched, he reportedly pressed that a senior man from the State should accompany it but Rusk was apparently not prepared to get his department involved at that stage. However, the upshot of Bowles' fight was the inclusion of General Taylor in the mission to Saigon. Taylor, a member of the so-called "Never Again Club"--a phrase, used in the context of the American war in Korea--

38 Halberstam, n. 18, pp. 155-6; see also Bowles, n. 18, pp. 361, 408.
seemed to be a counter to "hawkish" Rostow and, therefore, was not unacceptable to liberals like Bowles. Two lesser officials of the State Department named Sterling J. Cottrell and William J. Jorden were included in the team—a gesture towards Bowles, the "protester."

The Taylor-Rostow team visited South Vietnam, 18-24 October. They had two meetings with Diem and his advisers. The questions of deploying American ground troops in South Vietnam, and Washington and Saigon signing a military agreement, on the initiative of the American side, were discussed. Diem expressed his interest in the first, but seemed to be cool towards the second. In his cable "Eyes Only" for the President from the Philippines on 1 November 1961, Taylor recommended that the US should "provide a US military presence capable of raising national morale and of showing to Southeast Asia the seriousness of the US intent to resist a Communist takeover." He further recommended that the US should conduct logistical operations in support of military and as he put it, "flood relief operations." He also recommended such "combat operations as are necessary for self-defense and for the security of the area in which they are stationed." (Taylor's report has been referred to in Chapter II). Taylor was aware of the risk that such a commitment would involve. "If the


40 Ibid., pp. 339-40; Emphasis added.
first contingent is not enough to accomplish the necessary results, it will be difficult to resist the pressure to reinforce." At a certain point, there would be "no limit to our possible commitment....," Taylor warned. However, he argued that these risks would be outweighed by the benefits that such a commitment would lead to. The introduction of American troops in South Vietnam, Taylor reiterated, would best convey the American seriousness of purpose and would best give "a much needed shot in arm to national morale."

The two State Department officials who had accompanied the visiting team expressed some doubts about sending American ground troops to South Vietnam. Cottrell, head of the interagency Vietnam task force in Washington, stated in a memorandum dated 27 October that "since it is an open question whether the GVN can succeed even with the US assistance, it would be a mistake for the U.S. to commit itself irrevocably to the defeat of the Communists in SVN." But his position was confused because he added that if the combined efforts of the US and South Vietnam failed in the South, the US should punish North Vietnam by graduated bombing. Jorden reported that many government officials and military officers "have lost confidence in President Diem and his leadership." He advised that the US should not identify herself "with a man or a regime." It may be relevant to point out that as

41 Ibid., p. 338.
42 Ibid., Book 2, n. 20, pp. 105-6.
43 Ibid., pp. 103-4.
contrasted with the views of these State Department officials, some elements of the Defence Department—the JCS and William Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA)—advocated at that time that the US should send ground troops to South Vietnam.

The Secretary of State was away from the capital when the "Eyes only" cables of Taylor were hitting the White House. But he was not kept in the dark about what was happening in regard to Vietnam. Dean Rusk was not a big name in the Democratic Party. But he was not a stranger to Washington—unlike his colleague McNamara—when he joined the Kennedy Administration. In the Truman Administration he had worked under Dean Acheson as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. In the aftermath of the "fall of China," when the "fall" of South Korea to Communists looked probable, Rusk was an advocate of a "tough" posture against the Communists. He continued to maintain broadly a "hard-liner" stance after he became the Secretary of State. But, from time to time, as at this point, he adopted a cautious approach. As early as 29 April 1961 he advocated that American and Thai troops should be placed in Laos. On 4 May he told news reporters with regard to Vietnam, "If you don't pay attention to the periphery, the periphery changes. And the first thing you know, the periphery is the center." But the very next day, the Secretary's tone was restrained and cautious. In a meeting held at the State Department, he said, "We should not place combat forces in South

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44 DOD Documents, Book 11, pp. 63-66.
He recommended that the MAAG in Saigon should be augmented in small increments. However, Great Britain, a member of the International Control Commission, should not be informed of it, he added. The Secretary would approve of "small violations" of the Geneva Accords, care being taken to maintain secrecy. He was not, in principle, against sending American troops to South Vietnam. He would not approve of it just yet because of diplomatic factors—probably keeping the Geneva talks on Laos in view. However, he recommended that the deployment of additional US forces should receive further study and consideration. Rusk's enthusiasm for sending troops to Thailand and his reluctance to do so in the case of South Vietnam probably stemmed from the fact that Thailand was covered by the main provisions of the Manila Pact whereas South Vietnam formed a part of its protocol. Thus, introducing American troops in Thailand could be defended better diplomatically than the same in relation to South Vietnam, Rusk might have reasoned. Once in Thailand, such troops would be conveniently at hand if needed later in Vietnam.

Rusk was visiting Japan when he was informed of Taylor's recommendations. He seemed to be unhappy with Diem's regime which was constantly being charged with nepotism and favouritism. He wished that Diem would bring about some reforms before Washington committed itself to his defence. Otherwise, he stated in a cable

46 DOD Documents, Book 11, n. 23, p. 67.
47 Ibid.
from Japan dated 1 November that he would be "reluctant to see US make major additional commitment of American prestige to a losing horse."

Further opposition to Taylor-Rostow's recommendations in favour of sending American troops to South Vietnam came from the intelligence community. A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) dated 5 November, stated that the proposed step would lead to further increase in the level of Hanoi's support for the Viet Cong. It predicted that bombing of the North—which was being discussed in Washington as a possible course of punitive actions against North Vietnam—would have no significant impact on the nature of the flow of help from the North into the South. This pessimistic report would have made the Washington principals have second thoughts over the proposals of introducing ground troops into South Vietnam and bombing North Vietnam.

Before November 1961 the Defence Secretary does not seem to have come in a big way in decision-making on Vietnam. This was to some extent true of Secretary Rusk too. While Rusk's role did not markedly expand subsequently, McNamara emerged to be the most dominant actor in policy-making on Vietnam. The relatively quiet role played by McNamara during this period may be mainly attributed to two factors. Firstly, he was a stranger to the Washington community and he might have been carefully orienting himself to

48 Ibid., Book 2, n. 20, p. 118.
49 Ibid., pp. 120-1.
the intricacies of how the game was being played. Moreover, he might have felt that initially Rusk should have the opportunity to play the traditional lead role of a Secretary of State. If there was a vacuum in this respect, McNamara was not the kind of man to hold himself back. McNamara also perhaps thought it wise to give first priority to setting his own house in order. After he established his mastery there, he would be ready to deal with his competitors.

On 8 November 1961, McNamara, Gilpatric and the JCS, in a memorandum to the President, stated, they were "inclined to recommend" that the US should commit herself to the objective of "saving" South Vietnam. As pointed out in Chapter II, the document may be deemed to represent the consensus in the Pentagon. In regard, however, to the question of when, how, in what manner and in what numbers and for what missions US military personnel were to be introduced in South Vietnam, the Secretary of Defence had apparently to work out an agreed position with his counterpart who headed the State Department. A Joint memorandum, dated 11 November 1961, signed by both McNamara and Rusk reiterated the Pentagon consensus that the US should "take the decision to commit ourselves to the objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism...."

The Rusk-McNamara memorandum, as pointed out earlier, recommended for the time being, the introduction of American "advisory" and

50 Secretary of Defence Memorandum for the President, 8 November 1961, ibid., Book 11, p. 343.

"support" forces in South Vietnam. The question of injecting American combat forces in South Vietnam was deferred. However, the report did not rule out the possibility of such an eventuality.

Though the time-gap between both the memoranda was only three days and though McNamara was the common signatory to both of them, there were some significant differences between the McNamara-Gilpatric-JCS memorandum of 8 November and the Rusk-McNamara memorandum of 11 November. While the latter recommended categorically that the US should commit herself to the defence of South Vietnam against Communists, the former had some reservations regarding it. The 8 November memorandum stated that McNamara and co-signatories were "inclined to recommend..." Thus, in so far as the American commitment to the objective of "saving" South Vietnam from Communists was concerned, the 11 November memorandum of Rusk-McNamara was more categorical and forthright than the other. On the other hand, in regard to the deployment of American troops in South Vietnam, Rusk-McNamara memorandum was weaker than the other. While the latter had recommended that an American military task force consisting of both "combat" and "support" forces be, without delay, deployed in South Vietnam, the former recommended that only support forces should be sent. The 11 November memorandum appears to have been the product of mutual concessions made by Rusk and McNamara. Rusk was already known to have been an advocate of American commitment to the defence of South Vietnam against

52 Ibid., p. 363.
Communists. But he had not earlier committed himself to the sending of American troops to South Vietnam. Only ten days back he had cabled Washington from Japan warning against the unilateral deployment of American troops in South Vietnam. Thus his support, stated in 11 November memorandum for sending American support troops to South Vietnam was a concession on his part. McNamara who had not categorically committed himself in 8 November memorandum, to the objective of saving the Saigon regime from Communists, did it on 11 November. On the other hand, he came down a little bit in regard to the actual American military commitment in South Vietnam. He agreed to the alternative of sending only "support" troops instead of combat troops which he had recommended on 8 November. It is a different question whether McNamara earlier believed or did not believe in the American commitment to the political objective of defending South Vietnam against Communists. It is possible that his reservation in this regard on 8 November was a deliberate bureaucratic ploy to be used for bargaining with Rusk whose position on this was, by and large, clear.

Was there any other compulsion, besides the bureaucratic compromise, which might have influenced Rusk and McNamara in taking the stand that they took on 11 November? Could they also have taken into account the acceptibility of Taylor's recommendations for sending ground troops to South Vietnam by other actors in Washington including President Kennedy? Does an actor in a policy-making process take into consideration not only his personal and organizational interests, but also the degree of chance of his
position being accepted by his competitors and more importantly, by his supervisors?

The President was the man to take the decision. Memories of the Bay of Pigs and Vienna meeting were undoubtedly fresh in his mind. The President, in his desire for projecting himself as a tough President, was in need of taking a tough stand in Southeast Asia. He was aware of the rift between Moscow and Peking. He could also rely upon the calculation that the Soviet Union, because of her desire to maintain "detente" with the US, would avoid intervening in Southeast Asia against the US. At the same time, he was conscious of the fact that any miscalculations on his part concerning the Soviet response might lead to dangerous consequences. He was aware that the Soviet Union possessed the capability to create complications for him elsewhere if he were to offend her unduly in Southeast Asia. A crisis in Berlin, for instance, of the type that had taken place a month earlier, was not a happy prospect. Even in respect of Southeast Asia, on the international scene, the US, under his leadership, had taken the public posture of seeking a settlement through negotiations that were then in progress in Geneva. Any action in South Vietnam at that stage involving the projection of American military pressure could run counter to his proclaimed effort in the direction of peaceful settlement in Southeast Asia. Because of these considerations, the President might have been led to conclude that the US' objective should be to "save" South Vietnam against the "Communists," but it was not the opportune time for the US to send military troops to
South Vietnam. On 13 November Kennedy accepted all the recommendations of Rusk and McNamara except the one which required the US' unqualified commitment to the goal of saving South Vietnam from Communism. Diem was to be informed that the Pentagon was preparing contingency plans for sending soon combat-support troops to South Vietnam. But he was required to broaden his government and undertake some social and political reforms before the US troops were deployed in South Vietnam.

Inferences

By and large, the President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara and the National Security Assistant McGeorge Bundy subscribed to the "domino" theory. They agreed that the "loss" of South Vietnam to Communists would lead to the spread of Communism in the rest of Southeast Asia. There was no conflict on the perspective.

Concerned agencies of the Executive vie amongst themselves to influence the President's decision-making on defence and foreign policy. Each one of them is alert to ensure that another agency does not steal a march on it in this regard. Whenever one agency feels that its prerogatives are usurped by another agency, it would tend to fight back for their restoration. The dissolution of the Gilpatric Task Force on Vietnam and its substitution by a new task force headed by George Ball, the Under Secretary of State, was a good illustration of it. Another such example was

53 Sheehan, n. 15, p. 112.
the concern of the State Department about original Rostow Mission to South Vietnam. It deemed it derogatory to its position that Rostow, a member of the White House advisory staff, was selected to head the mission.

Neither Rusk nor McNamara seemed to have been the prime moving spirit in policy-making on Vietnam during this period. The reasons for this were manifold. It was the first year of the Kennedy Administration. Both the Secretaries gave first priority to the reorganization of their respective departments and allowed their deputies to carry on dealing with Vietnam in a routine manner. Moreover, in the beginning, the Administration was gripped with more immediate problems like the Bay of Pigs, Berlin and Laos than Vietnam. But once Rusk and McNamara felt that an important decision on Vietnam was about to be taken, they sought to take the reins themselves. In the month of November, they emerged as the prime moving spirits in policy-making on Vietnam. Between the two, one gets the impression that Rusk had an edge over the other. He seemed to be "more equal" than McNamara and other principals in Washington in regard to policy-making on Vietnam.

The 11 November memorandum was a compromise between Rusk and McNamara. Both of them had to give in something in order to reach an agreement. But this compromise was within the general framework of the options left to the President. In a policy-making process, an actor tends to keep in mind not only how much his competitor or competitors can move toward his viewpoint, but also the forces that the helmsman--the final decision-maker, here the
President—to reckon with. The higher an official is placed, the more seriously he is likely to take this aspect into account. That may explain the parallel difference between the positions of McNamara and the JCS, and between those of Rusk and Bowles and Ball.

AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE COUP AGAINST DIEM

The interaction between the civilian and military elements of the Pentagon in regard to the overthrow of the Diem regime was discussed in Chapter II. It is proposed here to deal with the competition among federal actors including the Defence Department to influence the policy to be adopted regarding Diem's continuance.

Discontent against Diem was smouldering in South Vietnam for some time. It was exploded by the Buddhist crises of May and August 1963. Plans for a coup against the Diem regime were being prepared by some top military officers in Saigon. They knew that they could not implement them unless they had indication that the United States could not be averse to their course. Matters began to move fast with the arrival of newly appointed Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, in Saigon on 22 August 1963. Within a few hours of his arrival there, Lodge cabled the State Department that American support of a coup would be a "shot in the dark." This message

which reached Washington on 24 August resulted in what became one of the most "controversial" actions in the Kennedy Administration.

On 24 August 1964, the State Department sent the Ambassador a reply signed by Acting Secretary George Ball. It began by saying that the United States could no longer go along with the powerful role played by Nhus.

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\text{We wish to give Diem reasonable opportunity to remove Nhus, but if he remains obdurate, then we are prepared to accept the obvious implication that we can no longer support Diem. You may also tell appropriate military commanders we will give them direct support in any interim period of breakdown central government mechanism.} \]

This message was drafted by Roger Hilsman, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, W. Averell Harriman, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Michael V. Forrestal, White House specialist on Vietnam and Southeast Asia, and George Ball. President Kennedy, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, General Taylor, the Chairman of the JCS, and CIA Director John A. McCone were out of the town. Hilsman's account says that the cable was cleared by Kennedy and Rusk through several telephone conversations. Roswell L. Gilpatric, the Acting Secretary of Defence, cleared it for the civilian side of the Defence Department. The Acting Director of CIA approved of it, deciding not to disturb his chief's vacation. Taylor cleared it while out to a dinner.

55 State Message 243, State to Lodge, ibid., p. 15.
56 Hilsman, n. 13, p. 488.
However, a slightly different account of the event has been given by Schlesinger and Trewhitt. They suggest that the clearance of the cable was affected by "misunderstanding" among the actors. Schlesinger reports,

The draft was cleared through all the relevant departments but not at the top level. Defence accepted it because it understood that the cable had already gone; McNamara, if he had been consulted, would have opposed it. So also would McCone. No one is sure what Rusk's position would have been. The President saw the draft at Hyannis Port without realizing that the departmental clearances did not signify the concurrence of his senior advisers. 58

This would suggest that there was a "communication failure." All the accounts including that of Hilsman suggest that perhaps the shape of the cable might have been different if the principal actors had been present in the town. This is the kind of situation bringing out the importance of a point connected with

Schlesinger, n. 14, p. 344; Henry L. Trewhitt, *McNamara* (New York, 1971), p. 204. (Trewhitt says that he had several rounds of talk with McNamara while writing this book. He had also worked for McNamara's book, *The Essence of Security*. One wonders if Trewhitt's account is really the one given by McNamara himself to him. For the view that there was some sort of "conspiracy" against Diem in the State Department, and the 24 August message of the State Department was manipulated by the interested few, see Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare* (New York, 1965), pp. 189-201.

Schlesinger, ibid.

Hilsman says, "Back in Washington, General Taylor began to have misgivings. He communicated them to McNamara when he returned, and McNamara shared them. So did John McCone." Hilsman, n. 13, p. 490; Schlesinger asserts that McNamara would have opposed it. So also would McCone Schlesinger, ibid.
with the Model 2, mentioned in our theoretical discussion—the importance of "communication flow" in policy making. It is true that a consensus was reached in the next day NSC meeting in favour of the policy was spelled out in the cable, but that does not mean that an identical consensus could have been possible in a meeting earlier than 24 August. It is more difficult to oppose a policy after it has been decided upon than before.

In an NSC meeting held on 27 August Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., the retiring American Ambassador in Saigon, strongly defended Diem. He expressed his pessimism about the capacity of the Vietnamese generals to rule. The President decided to ask Lodge, the new Ambassador and Harkins (MAAG Chief) to express their views. Later it was discovered that the JCS had sent a telegram to Harkins through their own channels soon after the above NSC meeting which appeared to suggest to him how he should answer the questions put to him by Washington. This suggests the critical role that the military leadership can play in a situation involving tugs with the State Department and the Defence Secretary to influence policy-making. Another instance of interdepartmental differences was revealed in the NSC meeting of 28 August. Rusk was sceptical of an approach to Diem. He feared that Diem and Nhu could indulge in "irrational acts." McNamara favoured such

60  **DOD Documents**, Book 3, n. 54, p. 19.
61  Bilsman, n. 13, pp. 492-3; and Halberstam, n. 18, p. 271.
an approach because he thought that there was no visible alternative to Diem in Saigon.

Another incident would reveal near-polarization of views in the Administration on Vietnam. It was an NSC meeting on 31 August 1963. The President was absent. Secretary Rusk, who chaired the meeting in his absence, called for considering Lodge's cable of the same day suggesting that Nhu should go. He said, he felt that it was unrealistic to start off by asserting that Nhu must go. McNamara supported him. Hilsman, supported by a State Department official, Paul M. Kattenburg, who headed the Vietnam Inter-Departmental Working Group, argued that the United States should not continue supporting a Nhu-dominated regime because it would have a disastrous effect on the war. They also pointed to the growing disaffection and restiveness of middle level bureaucrats and military officers which Secretary McNamara and General Taylor did not seem to share. Kattenburg stated that if the US would continue to support the Diem regime, she would be "thrown out of the country in six months." He proposed that at that juncture it would be better for the United States to "get out honourably." Rusk commented that Kattenburg's recital was "largely speculative." He emphasized that the United States would not pull out of Vietnam until the war was won and that Washington would not run a coup. McNamara, Taylor, Vice President Johnson and Nolting, the ex-Ambassador to South Vietnam, agreed

62 Hilsman, ibid.
with him.

The rift between some elements of the Pentagon and those of the State Department was further revealed when General Krulak and Mendenhall, after their visit to South Vietnam, reported back to the NSC on 10 September 1963. Being seriously concerned over the division within his Administration in regard to Vietnam, Kennedy sent on 6 September General Krulak, the Pentagon's top-ranking expert in counterguerrilla warfare and Joseph A. Mendenhall of the State Department who was a former "political counselor" in the Saigon embassy. Mendenhall talked to people in Saigon whereas Krulak went to the field. On their way back they were accompanied, as instructed by Harriman, by John Mecklin, head of the USIA (United States Information Agency) in Saigon and Rufus Philips who was in charge of the strategic hamlet programme in South Vietnam. Krulak told the NSC that the war was running well. Mendenhall reported that the political situation in Saigon was very bad. On listening to both, the President was provoked to ask, "You two did visit the same country, didn't you?" Mecklin, who, as a news reporter in Saigon in 1950s, was trying to sell Diem to Americans, now recommended a change in government. He also proposed that the US should, if necessary, send combat troops to South Vietnam to "save her from Communists." The last to

63 DOD Documents, n. 54, p. 82.
64 Ibid., pp. 25-26.
report to the NSC was Phillips who challenged Krulak's view that the war was going on well. He said that the Viet Cong forces were making rapid progress in the Delta. This was a very confusing picture—the representatives of the State and Defence Departments challenging each other's view and the members of other civilian agencies attacking the Pentagon line. Had the President hoped to get a clearer view of Vietnam, he would have been terribly disappointed by the Krulak-Mendenhall mission.

How much voice the man on the spot would have in Washington would largely depend upon who he is. Normally an Ambassador is the representative of the State Department on the spot and he would normally be bound by the instructions of the State Department. But, in some cases, the standard equation may not hold true. An Ambassador may prove to be more than something to be taken for granted by his Department. A Nolting may be somewhat of a lightweight in Washington game, but a Lodge or a Taylor is not. Lodge was a top Republican leader with a solid base at home. Moreover, the President would take him seriously for the sake of projecting his Administration as bipartisan. Taylor was already an experienced, principal player in Washington before he was appointed as Ambassador in Washington. In peace-time, such an Ambassador would try to be the real master of his house. He would keep all the components of his mission—both civilian and military—under control. But once shooting starts, the picture may change. With

66 Halberstam, n. 18, pp. 278-9.
war on, the military man-on-the-field tends to be more powerful than before. His equation with his civilian head on the spot—the ambassador—would tend to change. Washington, in such situations, would be inclined to heed more to the field commander than to the ambassador. Even a Lodge or a Taylor would find it difficult to check the increasing power of the field commander. But unless and until a shooting has started, the former is a safe rider. That was the situation in the American mission in Saigon in the middle of 1963.

When Ambassador Lodge joined his post on 22 August 1963, American officials in Saigon were divided amongst themselves in regard to South Vietnam and Diem. The American embassy, the American military mission in Saigon and the Central Intelligence Agency station were the important American agencies which were actively involved with the anti-Diem coup, at its various stages. Richardson, who was the head of the American intelligence branch in Saigon was recalled on 6 October 1963. General Harkins, the head of American Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was there throughout the coup period. Ambassador Lodge arrived at a time when plans for the coup were going on and his attitude towards the Diem regime worked as the catalyst for coup-plotters. Richardson, who was a witness to the August-phase of the coup that ended in a failure, had to leave Saigon when the October phase had taken off the ground. Lodge, for helping those who were planning a coup against Diem, allegedly took the initiative which led to Richardson's recall from Washington at a crucial time.
The anti-Diem Generals of South Vietnam were suspicious of the apparent friendship between Diem and Richardson. They feared that the American intelligence chief of Saigon might leak in advance the coup news to Diem.

The CIA's role in South Vietnam around that time was two-fold, namely, intelligence-gathering and covert political operations. In hindsight, its estimates, made from time to time, were mostly accurate. They were not as optimistic as those reported by the military. The Viet Cong danger was still there and the situation remained "fragile," a national intelligence estimate—the CIA being the dominant component—said in April 1963. In the aftermath of the Buddhist-Pagoda crisis, another NIE stated that unless the President and the Buddhists came to an agreement, chances of a coup against Diem would further brighten. But a coup, if staged, would adversely affect the war effort, it added.

As differences among American officials both in Washington and Saigon sharpened over the advisability of supporting a coup against Diem, the CIA sent a special officer to Saigon to make an independent assessment. His conclusion was that the suspension of aid to South Vietnam by American Government would not have any constructive results, a coup against Diem should not be encouraged and a "business as usual" policy should be followed. Richardson, the Chief of CIA station, Saigon, was also opposed to coup efforts against President Diem.

It is important to note that when the CIA special officer from Washington advised against supporting any anti-Diem coup
attempts, some segments of the CIA station in Saigon were already intimately involved in such efforts. In this connection, special mention may be made of Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Conein, an Indochina veteran who had first come to Vietnam for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA. Under Lodge's instructions, he maintained contacts with Major General Tran Van Don, the acting chief of staff of the armed forces and Lieut. General Duong Van Minh, the military adviser to President Diem. He acted as the go-between between Lodge and the anti-Diem generals, passed over to the latter vital intelligence regarding the pro-Diem forces, and took part in coup-planning. The fact that he was in their midst at Vietnamese General Staff headquarters when the coup was staged indicates the extent of association the CIA had with the coup promoters.

The CIA station in Saigon too was stricken with internal cleavages--some of the CIA personnel there supporting the coup, and others opposing it. Ambassador Lodge and Richardson, the CIA Chief of Saigon, did not see eye to eye in regard to the coup. But the main antagonists in Saigon were Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, the respective heads of American diplomatic and military missions in Saigon. Henry Cabot Lodge, a Boston Brahmin, was an important Republican leader with national appeal. A former Senator and a Vice-Presidential candidate in 1960, he had an

independent political constituency of his own before he accepted
Kennedy's offer of Ambassadorship to South Vietnam. A man of
decision and determination, he fought doggedly to effect a
governmental change in Saigon once he was convinced that it was
right. His voice appeared to weigh heavily in Washington. On
the other hand, General Harkins who was known to be close to
President Diem, had, in course of time, developed some vested
interest in the survival of his regime. He argued that the anti-
Diem generals were themselves greatly divided amongst themselves
and there was little prospect that a successful coup against Diem
would be followed by political stability. On these grounds he
continued to oppose till the end the idea of any coup against
the Diem regime. In the process his relationship with Lodge
deteriorated.

In the last week of August 1963, when a coup against Diem
seemed to be imminent, the differences between Lodge and Harkins
became very sharp. Lodge wrote to the Secretary of State:

We are launched on a course from which there
is no respectable turning back: the overthrow
of the Diem regime. There is no turning back
in part because US prestige is already publicly
committed to this end in large measure and will
become more so as facts leak out. In a more
fundamental sense there is no turning back
because there is no possibility in my view, that
the war can be won under a Diem administra-
tion.... 68

Harkins, on the other hand, had his reservations about the

68 DOD Documents, n. 54, p. 20.
desirability of supporting this. He proposed that at least as a final effort Diem should be approached and induced to make the desired reforms. However, the coup-plan was shelved for the time being because the plotters could not be convinced of the genuineness of the American support for them.

When the coup attempt was revived in the beginning of October, differences again occurred between Lodge and Harkins more intensely than ever before. Harkins continued to express his scepticism about the anti-Diem generals who were a mix of many groups. "Though I am not trying to thwart a change in government, I think we should take a good hard look at the group's proposals to see if we think it would be capable of increasing the effectiveness of the military effort," the general warned Washington in the last week of October. This was not liked by the Ambassador who took exception to Harkin's reservations about a coup and arguing for a policy of "not thwarting."

Differences between Lodge and Harkins tended to slide towards a crisis. The Ambassador seemed to lose his confidence in the MACV. The general was cut off by the Ambassador from the chain of communications relating to the coup between Washington and Saigon. Secretary McNamara and the JCS were seriously concerned about this lack of coordination and the failure of communication between these two high American officials in Saigon. They apparently took the issue to the President and prevailed upon him to interfere on behalf of Harkins as against Lodge. After the

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., p. 44.
71 Ibid., p. 45.
NSC meeting on 29 October, Lodge was directed to show Harkins the relevant cables and to insure that he was kept fully aware of the coup plans. The Ambassador was further instructed to ask Harkins to officiate for him during his absence.  This case indicates how differences at lower levels could spill over to higher levels. It also points out that whenever there is an external challenge to an organization, its members, in spite of their internal rifts, tend to unite and fight for the common cause—the interests of the organization as a whole.

Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins continued to sharply differ almost till the day the coup took place. While the former apparently took all possible steps to insure that the coup succeeded, the latter continued to make the plea that a last approach to Diem should be made and he should not be "ditched." The prospect of a successful coup being followed by confusion and disorder continued to disturb General Harkins. Generals thereafter would fight one another, he feared. In a cable to General Taylor on 30 October, he said, "I have seen no batting order proposed by any of the coup groups." He suggested that the US should not try to "change horses too quickly." On the other side, Lodge made a fervent plea, in his message to the White House on the same day, that the plotters should not be interfered with. The coup was

72 Ibid., p. 47.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., p. 48.
purely a Vietnamese affair and they should be given a free hand, the Ambassador pleaded. In testifying to the force of character of coup leaders, he argued, "I do not know what more proof can be offered than the fact these men are obviously prepared to risk their lives and that they want nothing for themselves." This indicates the high degree of emotional commitment of the Ambassador to the cause of the success of the anti-Diem coup.

It is thus a confused picture that one obtains regarding the circumstances surrounding the overthrow of President Diem. Neither McNamara nor the JCS nor General Harkins seem to have supported the immediate ouster of the South Vietnamese President. Perhaps General Harkins went much further in advocating the continuance of Diem than his supervisors in Washington. This was probably due to the fact that he was the man on the spot, confronted with the seemingly implacable opposition of Ambassador Lodge to Diem. There was no direct conflict between the Secretary of Defence and the Secretary of State because the latter too was not an enthusiast in favour of the immediate overthrow of Diem. However, other subordinates of Rusk, some with access to the President felt that the American objectives in South Vietnam could be attained only if Diem were removed from the scene. The State Department's man in Saigon, Lodge, was convinced that Diem should go.

In the Central Intelligence Agency, the chiefs in Washington

75 Ibid., p. 49.
were apparently not convinced whether the mere ouster of Diem would provide a panacea in Saigon. The CIA man in Saigon, Richardson, was somewhat equivocal on the issue of Diem's ouster. Within the CIA setup in Saigon itself, there were elements which were strongly committed to the idea of supporting a coup against Diem. The principal figure among them was Conein. A high ranking American diplomat who prefers to remain unidentified told the present writer that Conein worked very closely with the coup-group. Out of this confusing welter of circumstances, the only inference that one can possibly hazard is that the Pentagon was probably not the prime mover in instigating the ouster of Diem.

**Inferences**

The Kennedy Administration's policy towards the Diem regime is a good example of "governmental politics" outlined in Model 3. There were interagency cleavages—the conflicting reports of General Krulak and J.A. Mendenhall; differences in the State Department (Rusk Vs. Harriman, Hilsman and Kattenburg) and in the CIA (McCone Vs. Richardson). The US missions in Saigon reflected these differences and to some extent contributed to them. There was no love lost between Lodge and Harkins. At the broader plane, there seemed to be existing two polarized groups (Rusk, McNamara, Taylor, McCone Vs. Harriman, Ball, Hilsman and Forrestal). Because of his increasing number of statements on Vietnam and visits to

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76 Interview with a well-informed former US Foreign Service Officer in Vietnam who did not want his name to be revealed.
South Vietnam and Hawaii, McNamara started to be identified more and more with the American policy in Vietnam. Both the civilian and military elements of the Pentagon had almost the same perception of Vietnam. They believed that from the American point of view, Diem was indispensable in Saigon. They would not accept the suggestion that was lurking in some corner of the State Department in lower levels that the US should "honourably" withdraw from South Vietnam. There is no evidence that there was any friction between them on Vietnam and the Pentagon's cable to Harkins by its private channel shows the anxiety of the Pentagon to influence the policy-making on Vietnam. It sought to oppose American encouragement to the coup group, but it did not push its opposition to a critical point. This leads one to hazard the inference that perhaps the Pentagon read the signs and believed that the President himself had lost faith in the usefulness of continued US support to the Diem regime. A similar appraisal probably lent encouragement to elements in other agencies who believed that "it is time for a change" in Saigon.

THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENT: THE PREPARATION FOR THE LAUNCHING OF ROLLING THUNDER

Within a few days after Diem's overthrow, President Kennedy was assassinated. Ambassador Lodge who was in San Francisco on his way to meet Kennedy heard the sad news. He was asked by McGeorge Bundy to proceed to Washington because the new President was more in need of consultation with him than Kennedy was.
Other principal advisers were present when the Ambassador brie 
Lyndon Johnson on Vietnam. He stated that "hard decisions" wo 
be necessary to "save" South Vietnam. "Unfortunately, Mr Pres 
dent, you will have to make them," he added. The President's 
reported response was, "I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not 
going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China 
went." Thus, barely forty-eight hours after he had taken the 
oath, the "accidental President" committed himself to the "defence" 
of South Vietnam.

Johnson was a great parliamentary politician. A veteran 
of the House of Representatives and Senate, he knew where the 
levers of power lay in Washington and how to manipulate them. 
Like any successful politician, he was a man of the Centre. 
Give something to this faction and give something to the other 
faction and do not fully alienate any group. This was the main 
tactic of Lyndon Johnson as Senate Majority Leader, and President 
Johnson would continue to follow it. He was a "practical" man 
and he "knew" what the people would accept and what they would 
not. In 1954, just before the fall of Dien Bien Phu, he vehemently 
opposed the plan of the Eisenhower Administration to intervene 
militarily on behalf of France. He was afraid that the American 
people would react sharply to the prospect of another land war in

77 Halberstam, n. 18, p. 298; and Tom Wicker, JFK and LBJ, 
The Influence of Personality upon Politics (New York, 

78 Philip Geyelin, Lyndon B. Johnson and the World (New 
the wake of the Korean war. But both during the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations, he was a good friend of the military—especially of the Air Force. It was usually profitable on the part of a member of the House or the Senate to be an ally of the military: one could wrap the flag around and, at the same time, do good "pork barrel" politics. Johnson was very good at that. But the White House and the Capitol were two different places. He would no longer have to deal with only fellow Americans. His adversaries would be foreigners—Russians, Chinese, Vietnamese etc. The game had changed, but he continued to cling to his old rules. If he got into a scrap with the Vietnamese Communists, he knew how to mobilize the support of Congress and country behind him. He did not harbour any serious doubt that he would succeed in his enterprise and he probably believed that he might go down in American history as a great President like Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt and other Presidents who had led the country successfully in wars. He failed to realize that if the Vietnamese adversaries showed no disposition to knuckle under, if his anticipated "victory remained elusive, and if the toll of American lives and treasure continued to mount, his support among the public and in Congress might be seriously eroded. There perhaps lay his failure.

The first priority of Lyndon Johnson was to make himself a "real President." The next November he would have to face an election. He declared that he would continue with "Kennedy policies" in the hope that the Kennedy people would not leave him.
The "best and the brightest" men of Kennedy would be retained so that he could fight the election wearing the "Kennedy mantle." A skilled political strategist, he knew his objectives well and he tailored his strategies to those objectives.

Johnson did not have much knowledge of Vietnam. Kennedy had apparently not regarded his Vice President's trip to Saigon as an assignment of crucial importance. Johnson's Saigon trip would better be remembered for the hyperboles he used---"Diem, Churchill of today," "folding back to Fortress America" etc.---than for any significant impact it had upon America's Vietnam policy. But President Johnson sought to use Vietnam as one of his election instruments. He would allow Rusk, McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy to take charge of Vietnam while he would take care of his election, but both would move in unison. Throughout the campaign, he would portray himself and would be treated as the "man of peace" and "man of prudence." At times, he would not be seriously taken because the other man--Republican candidate Barry Goldwater gave an impression during the campaign that he would not hesitate to go for nuclear strikes, if necessary. Thus, in the 1964 election, Vietnam became the trump card; after four years, it would be his graveyard.

Johnson was a Southerner--a Texan. He was hardly at ease with Easterners. During the Kennedy Administration he felt that he was an "outcast." After he came to the White House he

79 Wicker, n. 77, p. 198.
reportedly said that McNamara was the "ablest" man he ever met. He praised McGeorge Bundy, the "intellectual administrator." He was enthusiastic over Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State. Rusk was another "outcast" during the Kennedy Administration. Rusk had built his base in the East, but he had his roots in the South. He liked Johnson's style of government. The President liked to discuss issues in a closed circle of his top advisers rather than in the NSC or inter-department meetings consisting of second or third level government officials. This new style was to the taste of Rusk who did not like his subordinates arguing with him in the President's presence, or, at times, bypassing him and going straight to the President, as Hilsman often used to do during the Kennedy days. Johnson and Rusk developed mutual liking which proved lasting. Rusk continued in office till the end of Johnson's term whereas both Bundy and McNamara left earlier.

With the broad consensus among his principal advisers in favour of some vigorous moves the new President was in agreement. This lent momentum to preparations which by their nature were military in character. The initiative was thus increasingly taken by the President and the steps that were evolved in the Pentagon have been described in Chapter II.

Contingency planning for bombing operations against North Vietnam seem to have started soon after 17 March 1964 when the NSC accepted McNamara's recommendations for preparing two types

80 Ibid.
of plans to launch bombing—one within 72 hours and the other within 30 days. In a closed session of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Aid, William P. Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, stated, "We are going to drive the Communists out of South Vietnam" even if that eventually involved a choice of "attacking the country to the north"—North Vietnam. By 23 May 1964 Bundy and McNaughton, the Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA), were able to prepare a 30-day programme leading to the full-scale bombing of North Vietnam. Although its scenario was not later implemented in full, some of its elements formed the components of the Tonkin scenario. Rung 4 of the 23 May escalation ladder said, "Obtain joint resolution approving past actions and authorizing whatever is necessary with respect to Vietnam." A draft of a Congressional resolution was prepared by William Bundy on 25 May. The Executive Council of the NSC, consisting of Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy and McCone, the CIA Director, after an examination of the 23 May scenario, decided to recommend only a few of its elements. Important amongst them was the move for a Congressional resolution.

Meanwhile, the situation in South Vietnam was going from

81 DOD Documents, Book 3, IV.C.1, pp. 46ff.
84 Ibid., p. 22.
bad to worse. Big Minh who was one of the coup-leaders against Diem was himself overthrown on 30 January 1964. General Khanh who succeeded Minh seemingly failed to arrest the erosion of political stability. Viet Cong elements were reportedly improving their strength. Communists were doing still better in Laos. On 17 May the Pathet Lao launched a severe assault which threatened the existence of Souvanna Phouma's government, supported by the US. These developments must have disturbed American policy-makers. At home, the election campaign was in full swing. Republicans were attacking the "no-win" policy of the Johnson Administration. Both Goldwater and Nixon were urging that the US should bomb the North. Against this background, all the main actors except the President met at Honolulu to review the Vietnam policy on 1 and 2 June 1964. The new face in the conference was General Westmoreland who had replaced General Harkins as the head of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV).

The two subjects that received the main attention in the Honolulu meeting were the bombing of North Vietnam and getting a Congressional Resolution passed expressing its support for the President to take actions in Southeast Asia in the interest of American security. Ambassador Lodge stated that some "counter-terrorism measures" against North Vietnam would result in diminishing her support for Viet Cong. Admiral Felt, the CINCPAC,

shared this view. But the principal presidential advisers—Rusk, McNamara and McConenot favour any immediate action against North Vietnam. They would like to have first a Congressional resolution in the President's pocket which might serve as a "blank cheque" for American military actions in Vietnam. They were not opposed to taking military steps against North Vietnam as such. They would rather first try to build up the "mood" of the nation for the contingency and in the meantime take preparatory military steps.

While Washington was getting ready to take the plunge, Johnson asked a pertinent question to the CIA, "Would the rest of Southeast Asia necessarily fall if Laos and South Vietnam came under North Vietnam's control?" The CIA's reply on 9 June 1964 was a refutation of the "domino theory." It said that with the possible exception of Cambodia, no other nation in Southeast Asia would come under Communist control as a result of the fall of South Vietnam and Laos. This analysis seems not to have been accepted by other actors including the President. Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Taylor, Rostow and the JCS, all believed in the validity of the domino theory.

Two second level officials in the Administration, Rostow and William Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, worked hard during these critical months for launching the

87 DOD Documents, n. 83, p. 31.
88 Ibid., p. 36.
bombing of North Vietnam. In order to allay the fears and suspicions agitating Washington at that time, Rostow argued that the enemy—North Vietnam and the Viet Cong—was afflicted with anxieties and complications that the Administration tended to underestimate. He urged that the US should behave like the greatest power in the world. On 12 June 1964 William Bundy, in a memorandum, stated that the Administration was immediately in need of a Congressional resolution which would provide it with enough firmness and flexibility to deal with Southeast Asia in near future. In spite of his denial that the Administration was planning to move soon against North Vietnam, it was not difficult to predict in which direction Washington was moving at that time. The last move in Washington to take punitive measures against North Vietnam was apparently made by the JCS. A command and control study of the Tonkin Gulf episode done by the Defence Department's Weapons System Evaluation Group in 1965, reveals that on 25 July 1964, the JCS urged that air strikes by unmarked planes flown by non-Americans against North Vietnam targets should be conducted. This proposal was sent by McNaughton to Secretary Rusk on 30 July, the very day on which the first shot leading to the Tonkin Gulf incident was fired.

One may ask why William Bundy, McNaughton, the JCS and

89 Sheehan, n. 15, p. 264.
90 Ibid., p. 265; and DOD Documents, Book 3, IV.C.1, p. 83.
91 Cited in Sheehan, n. 15, p. 266.
Ambassador Lodge strongly favoured punitive actions against the North whereas Rusk, McNamara, and Mac Bundy were very reluctant to do so. Both at the NSC Executive Council meeting of May and the Honolulu Conference of June 1964, the latter decided against taking such actions forthwith. On the other hand, when the Maddox was attacked in the Tonkin Gulf on 30 July, they "unanimously" recommended that the US should retaliate by bombing North Vietnam.

The election day was round the corner. Johnson was campaigning on a "peace platform" whereas his challenger, Goldwater, appeared to the public as a "war-monger." Johnson sought to maintain this image till November. His best strategy would be to avoid resorting to any escalation in Vietnam. His principal advisers must have been aware of it, as also their deputies. But this awareness tends to be lower as one goes down in the hierarchy. The lower an official is placed, the more he is inclined to be influenced by the organizational interests, bureaucratic rivalry and his personality. The higher an official is placed, the more he tends to take into account, besides the above variables, the domestic and external forces that the helmsman will have to reckon with. The principal advisers of the President appear to have felt that any attack on the North before a "serious incident" would spoil the "dovish image" of Johnson. The "incident" occurred on 4 August. Then the advisers were agreed that inaction on the part of the US after the alleged North Vietnamese attack on the Maddox would damage his prospect because he would be subjected to
Republican charges that he could not stand up to the Communists.

**Inferences**

All the main actors except the CIA continued to subscribe to the "domino theory." The CIA refuted it. It also predicted that the bombing of North Vietnam would not succeed in stopping the flow of men and materials from the North to the South.

The overwhelming concern of the principal advisers was the Presidential election in November. At lower levels, this consideration was less. There was some difference over Vietnam between McNamara and his deputies—McNaughton and the JCS. There was similar difference existing between Rusk and his deputies—William Bundy and Ambassador Lodge. So also did differ between themselves McGeorge Bundy and Rostow.

McNamara had emerged to be the "star actor" in regard to Vietnam. It was the Secretary of Defence and not the Secretary of State or the Director of Central Intelligence Agency who could claim to have made several visits to South Vietnam for "on the spot" examination of the situation. At the Honolulu meetings, it was the Secretary of Defence who set the stage for discussion of future courses of action with the JCS, the CINCPAC and the Chief of the MACV. At these meetings the State Department's representation was on a lower level. Apart from McNamara's personality, the other factor that was responsible for his playing a leading role was perhaps the momentum of onrushing military preparation.

In any politico-military preparation, as the imminence of military
action increases, the lead would progressively pass from the diplomatic branch to the military branch. The debate, if any, at such a time tends to take place within the Defence Establishment. At this point, such differences as existed between the civilian and military components of the Pentagon were of relatively minor order. The Secretary of Defence was clearly seen to be the master in his own house and he had also succeeded in establishing very satisfactory equation with the President.

THE US ENTERS THE WAR: THE LAUNCHING OF ROLLING THUNDER

Operation "Rolling Thunder" was approved on 13 February 1965. But a "general consensus" for bombing North Vietnam some time in future had already been reached in a White House strategy meeting on 7 September 1964. Prior to this, Ambassador Taylor had cabled on 18 August 1964 for "a carefully orchestrated bombing attack on North Vietnam, directed primarily at infiltration and other military targets" with "1 January 1965, as a target D-Day." On 26 August, the JCS sent to the President a memorandum which concurred with Taylor's cable and which was the first "provocation strategy" for the Administration's consideration. The course suggested by the Ambassador who was a former Chairman of the JCS, was endorsed by the JCS and had the support of the Defence Secretary. Other agencies fell in line and there was virtually no opposition from their heads. The reason why the policy-makers, on 7 September meeting, did not immediately go for bombing the North,
apart from the major issue of the national election was, as ex­pressed by McNamara at that meeting, that there was a "clear hope of strengthening the GVN." But he went on to urge that "the way be kept open for stronger actions" even if South Vietnam did not improve or in the event the war was widened by the Communists. The NSAM 214, issued on 10 September, contained some "interim measures" to boost the morale of South Vietnam. It also clearly stated that, if "larger decisions" were required at any time by a change in the situation, they would be taken. It was also decided that the US "should be prepared" to launch Tonkin-type "tit-for-tat" reprisal air strikes, if necessary, against North Vietnam.

The "general consensus" was reached among the principal advisers in 7 September NSC meeting regarding the decision to bomb North Vietnam starting some time after the election. To that course there was one important dissenter in the second level of the State Department -- George Ball, the Under Secretary of State. Ball had strong doubts about the wisdom of the course. The Under Secretary, who had continued to look after European affairs after Johnson succeeded Kennedy had not been actively concerned about Vietnam as Harriman and Hilsman were in the beginning of the Johnson Administration. However, after Harriman and Hilsman were "purged" from the Vietnam decision-making scene, Ball took

93 For the full text of NSAM 214, see Sheehan, n. 15, pp. 368-9.
increasing interest in Vietnam. On 5 October 1964, he sent a long memorandum to Rusk, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy in which he argued that the Saigon regime was capable neither of winning the broad support of the South Vietnamese people nor of undertaking successful military operations against the Viet Cong. On the other hand, he recommended a course of action which would allow a political settlement without direct American military involvement. He sounded a sharp warning against increased US military involvement. He argued that once entangled, it would be very difficult for the US to withdraw. He stated succinctly, "Once on the tiger's back we cannot be sure of picking the place to dismount." Ball's arguments seemed to make little impact upon other key men in Washington who believed that force would work.

The Viet Cong attack on the American air base at Bien Hoa took place on 1 November 1964. The JCS, ignoring the domestic political scene, urged a B-52 attack on North Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor cabled for a more restrained response consisting of "retaliation bombing attacks on selected DRV targets" using both American and South Vietnamese planes. The civilian advisers, especially Rusk and McNamara, as pointed out by Lyndon Johnson in Vantage Point, were opposed to the immediate bombing of the North. In

95 Quoted in Halberstam, n. 18, p. 498.
96 DOD Documents, Book 4, IV.C.2(c), p. 4.
view of the "continuing unsteadiness of the South Vietnamese Government and military assistance" and the concern for safety of US dependents in Saigon, the President decided against a retaliatory attack. But, probably the more compelling reason, which Johnson does not mention in his book, was that the election was only two days away.

An interagency working group, unofficially known as the Bundy Working Group, which the President appointed on 1 November, developed three options for direct action against North Vietnam. These options, which have been described in Chapter II, were described as A, B, and C. On the basis of available documents, it has not been possible to determine the positions pushed by the various actors in this group or the manner in which the three options were evolved. Option B, of course, went the farthest in terms of the military action and appears to be in consonance with the JCS' recommendation of B-52 attacks on targets in North Vietnam. Option C was the only one not envisaging immediate strikes against North Vietnam even though that option contemplated significant ground involvement in South Vietnam. It is noteworthy that the point of view articulated by Ball did not figure at all as a possible option to deal with the situation. Perhaps the signal from above as interpreted by the Bundy Group pointed in the direction of some vigorous actions and they appear to have spelled out the options in that framework.

98 DOD Documents, n. 96, pp. 18-23.
At the meeting of a select committee of the NSC on 24 November, the options put forth by the Bundy Group were discussed. McNamara shared Rusk's concern about the chaos in South Vietnam, but warned that the condition would worsen if no additional steps were taken to reverse the trend. In reply to Ball's query whether bombing North Vietnam could improve the situation in South Vietnam, McNamara said that it could not unless the "bombing actually cut down infiltration into the South." The Pentagon analyst infers that Ball probably favoured Option A whereas Wheeler, the Chairman of the JCS and, possibly McCone went for B. Option C was favoured by McNamara, McNaughton, Rusk and the Bundy brothers. However, the Pentagon analyst adds that McGeorge Bundy and McNamara stood for a "firm C" whereas the other three preferred a more restrained, incremental approach.

On 27 November 1964, Ambassador Taylor expressed his doubt whether bombing would definitely have a favourable effect in South Vietnam. Others including McNamara agreed with him. However, McNamara pointed out that "the strengthening effect of Option C could at least buy time, possibly measured in years." Taylor then recommended the adoption of "Option A plus the first

99 Ibid., p. 46.
100 Ibid., p. 39.
101 Ibid., p. 42.
102 Ibid., pp. 42-46.
stages of Option C" strategy; others agreed.

The opinion of the intelligence community on bombing the North was ambiguous and it contained perhaps elements of contradiction. On the one hand they challenged Rostow's thesis that the destruction of her industries would be a great blow to North Vietnam. "DRV leaders ... would probably be willing to suffer some damage to the country in the course of a test of wills with the US over the course of events in South Vietnam," they stated. On the other hand, they pointed out that the interdiction of imports into the North and the destruction of her industries would seriously affect the capability of the North to supply men and materials to the South. This analysis strengthened the hand of the pro-bombing elements, who, at that time, were seeking to inflict more "pain" on North Vietnam, with a view to inducing her to change her course. Moreover, the prediction of the intelligence community that Russia and China were very unlikely to directly intervene if the North was bombed was a further fillip to these elements. Thus, in the immediate context, the "pessimistic" part of the report was outweighed by its "optimistic" one.

On 20 December, Saigon faced another political crisis. The High National Council, acting as legislature, was dissolved by General Khanh. On Christmas eve, two Americans were killed in Saigon by a bomb explosion. The US Mission in Saigon immediately

103 Ibid., p. 46.
104 Ibid., p. 8; and Sheehan, n. 15, pp. 340-1.
sent a "joint message" to Washington urging the bombing of North Vietnam. The President continued to deliberate. He did not authorize immediate bombing of the North in spite of strong recommendations from Taylor and the JCS. Meanwhile the Administration was trying to "educate" the public by leaking out stories to newspapers on infiltration of the North Vietnamese into South Vietnam.

At this critical point the Secretary of State apparently voiced some serious reservations concerning early intensification of air attack. In such a situation the player representing the Pentagon may feel constrained to take urgent action to induce the President to accept the course strongly urged by his organization, especially if he himself is convinced of the utility of the course. He may seek to reinforce his effort by securing a high ranking and influential ally from outside his organization. In the present situation, the Defence Secretary found such an ally in National Security Assistant, McGeorge Bundy. Bundy sent a memorandum on 27 January 1965 to the President indicating that its contents represented his thinking as well as that of McNamara. The memorandum sought to counter the kind of opinion that Rusk might have expressed to the President. The memorandum stated that Bundy and McNamara had reached a "critical moment" in their thinking. They argued that the time had come to "move out of the middle course" and to use more power than had thus far been employed. Acknowledging that Rusk did not agree with them, they said that Rusk

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105 DOD Documents, ibid., pp. 72-73.
believed that the consequences of both escalation and withdrawal were so bad that they must find a way of making the existing policy work. "This would be good if it is possible. Bob and I do not think it is," it added.

It was one of the decisive points in the history of the American military involvement in Vietnam. Two of the most important actors in Washington joined hands on the side of the use of force. Their alliance was too big a pressure for Rusk to withstand for long. Rusk, of course, was not an opponent of the use of force. His hesitation to go with Bundy and McNamara in favour of immediate air operation was, perhaps, due to his concern over the diplomatic implications of the projected course and the warning signals sent by his deputy, George Ball. The President seemed ready to buy the Bundy-McNamara line. Bundy appears to be the key figure at this point. The President sent Bundy to South Vietnam to assess the position. McNamara could not have been concerned over it because Bundy's line was his own too.

On 6 February 1965, a Viet Cong attack on the US base at Pleiku took place. From Saigon Bundy recommended that the US should go ahead with air strikes at once. When the issue was discussed at a White House meeting, all participants except Senator Mike Mansfield (Dem., Montana) were for the air strikes, President Johnson claims. The President authorized the strikes

106 Johnson, n. 97, pp. 122-3.
107 Ibid., p. 125.
the same day. On 13 February he decided to launch Operation Rolling Thunder, initiating air war against North Vietnam. The only other forces that might have had some impact on the President in taking 13 February decision were McGeorge Bundy's report on his return from South Vietnam in which Bundy had recommended "a policy of sustained reprisal," and Ambassador Taylor's messages to the President on 11 and 12 February. Bundy's key role at this point is also brought out by Johnson's comment in his memoirs that he was "impressed by its Bundy report's logic and persuaded strongly by its arguments."

Mac Bundy, while recommending retaliation, was not very optimistic that success would be early or certain. He thought that while it was possible that at some future time a neutral non-Communist force might emerge in South Vietnam, no such force existed at that time. He warned, "At its very best the struggle in Vietnam will be long." He sought to make it very clear that there was no short cut to success in South Vietnam. His tone of diffidence was further revealed when he said, "...even if it fails, the policy will be worth it. At a minimum, it will damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done, and this charge will be important in many countries, including our own...." This indicates the deep concern of decision-makers regarding the public opinion in their own countries. It may be

108 Ibid., p. 128.
109 DOD Documents, Book 4, IV.C.3, pp. 31-35.
110 Ibid., p. 38.
mentioned that overwhelming support for the Pleiku retaliation was expressed in a Gallup poll held soon after that.

At about the time McGeorge Bundy's recommendation reached the White House, Ambassador Taylor, in a message to the President on 11 February, urged the latter to take "a measured, controlled sequence of actions" against North Vietnam in reprisal for the attack on Pleiku. In this respect his recommendation was similar to that of Bundy who had presumably consulted the Ambassador only a few days earlier in Saigon before sending his recommendation to the President. However, they differed in respect of the objective of bombing. Bundy sought to influence the course of the struggle in South Vietnam, because he thought that the bombing of the North would boost morale in Saigon and provide unity and cohesion to it. Taylor's main objective was to apply more pressure on Hanoi so that it would "cease intervention" and would be amenable to talks for a political settlement.

Inferences

The Harriman Group was almost out of the "power centre." Its views were contrary to the dominant current. George Ball, the lone dissenter, was hardly in a position to influence the rest. His pessimistic assessment of the situation in South Vietnam and of the utility of air strikes probably did not carry much weight except for a while with the chief of his own organization. All other principal actors including the President seemed

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Ibid., pp. 40-41.
to be in favour of bombing North Vietnam. While the JCS favoured launching immediate attacks on the targets in North Vietnam, including the strategic ones in Hanoi and Haiphong, Rusk, McNamara, Mac Bundy, Taylor, McCone, W.P. Bundy and McNaughton were not ready to go as far as the JCS in this regard. They supported the bombing of North Vietnam, but they favoured sparing for the time being strategic targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. While McNamara and Taylor appeared to tilt somewhat in the direction of the JCS, Rusk seemed to oscillate back to the centre.

In the overall perspective, McNamara seemed to be the lead man, though at a critical point he was content to let McGeorge Bundy to carry the ball in order to counter Rusk's diffidence. He appeared to be a more powerful actor than Rusk. In respect of influencing the President on Vietnam, the Defence Secretary was closely followed by McGeorge Bundy and Taylor in that order. However, in the immediate context of President's February decision to launch Rolling Thunder, Mac Bundy seems to have been the most influential actor.

THE BEGINNING OF US COMBAT ROLE IN VIETNAM

There was a substantial measure of agreement between the civilian and military elements of the Pentagon regarding the deployment of ground troops in South Vietnam by the time the first batch of Marines landed at Da Nang on 8 March 1965. From that time till the middle of June 1965 when there was a sharp escalation in the ground war, this harmony between them, broadly speaking
continued to exist. The main opposition to the rise in the level of ground involvement came mainly from George Ball, the Under Secretary of State, and General Taylor, US Ambassador in Saigon. It is interesting to see that General Taylor who, in October 1961 was the first to propose the sending of US military personnel to South Vietnam under the cover of "flood relief operation" was the one who very strongly opposed the increasing US ground involvement in 1965. It is also significant to note that as the shooting intensified, the military man on the field began to exercise more influence than before and his leverage vis-a-vis other players in Washington tended to increase.

The timing of a decision on military involvement abroad, however, is not solely dependent upon the situation on the field in the foreign territory concerned. Significant changes may take place on the field and the military man on the field may request authorization of increased military activity; but it would be difficult to take a decision to that effect if the domestic climate is very unfavourable for taking such a step. The principals in Washington cannot overlook that factor, least of all, the President. But if there is a broad consensus among the principals in favour of adopting an interventionist policy and if the opinion at home is either in its favour or at least not strongly opposed to it, and if the field commander urges the Administration for sending American troops to the field of operation, it becomes relatively easy for the Administration to take a decision to that effect. At the beginning of 1965, such a broad consensus existed
among Washington players and with the elections over and the President returned by a landslide such an opinion prevailed among American people. As a result, the momentum towards an increased ground involvement by the US continued to mount in spite of the strong opposition from Ball and Taylor.

The beginning of American combat involvement in South Vietnam was mostly a continuous battle between Ambassador Taylor and Westmoreland, who headed the American Military Assistance Command, Saigon. Taylor and Westmoreland were two of the brightest West Pointers in the post-war period. They were good friends. In fact, Westmoreland was Secretary of the General Staff under General Taylor when the latter was the Chief of Staff of the Army. Before they were sent to Saigon, the American missions in Saigon were strife-ridden; Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins often were on the "war-path." It was hoped that the atmosphere would change with the change in personnel there, especially with the appointment of two persons who had worked in harmony in the past. Such hope was belied. Sharp differences in relation to men and strategy arose between Taylor and Westmoreland. The problem was complex because though Taylor had put on a civilian cap, he was still regarded in Washington as a brilliant military strategist. Perhaps because of their different constituencies, the general-turned-ambassador and the general on active duty tended to perceive things differently.

When Marines landed at Da Nang, Rolling Thunder had been authorized and was about to be launched. There was some hope that
America could succeed in "bombing Hanoi to the negotiating table." That was probably why Taylor did not express much concern over the arrival of Marines charged with the mission of base security. Rolling Thunder did not yield the expected dividends. Westmoreland, supported by the CINCPAC and the JCS, soon started pressing for more men. He also planned an "aggressive strategy" which would later emerge as "search and destroy" strategy. McNamara extended "qualified support" for Westmoreland's request for more men. Taylor, who was in Washington at the end of March, spoke strongly against these demands. The NSAM 328 which contained the President's decision, made during the NSC meeting of 1-2 April, was a compromise. Johnson approved only two Marine battalions, not all that Westmoreland had asked for. While not accepting the "aggressive strategy," he was not content to retain unchanged the old strategy of base security. "The President approved a change of mission for all Marine battalions deployed to Vietnam to permit their more active use under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State." In other words, the American ground troops could now be used for offensive missions. The thrust of the new mission was discernible--to move forward to a certain extent, not

112 Ibid., IV.C.5, pp. 59-60.

113 For the text of the National Security Action Memorandum 328, 6 April 1965, signed by McGeorge Bundy and addressed to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defence and the Director of Central Intelligence, see Sheehan, n. 15, pp. 452-3.
to stay pat. Thus was initiated the so-called "enclave strategy." Taylor could derive some consolation that the military, because of his opposition, had not succeeded in getting all that they wanted. But, in the bargain, he had to give in something too. In order to kill the "search and destroy strategy," he had to agree to the "enclave strategy" which, as events were to prove, was one step towards the former. The military actors were on offensive and, given the circumstances, it was increasingly difficult to beat down their demands.

Hardly was the ink of the NSAM 328 dry when the CUMUSMACV began his new "push" for more troops--this time for the 173rd Airborne Brigade. To further compound the discomfiture of Taylor, a joint State/Defence message with the blessing of the "highest authority" in Washington was issued to Taylor on 18 April. It recommended the introduction of more ground troops in South Vietnam for "counterinsurgency" purposes. (The phrase "highest authority" apparently included the Secretaries of State and Defence, and the President.) The phrase "counterinsurgency" must have been disturbing to Taylor, because it would include sending American troops beyond the perimeter of enclaves.

A conference of American civil and military officials was held at Honolulu on 20 April. The military again pressed for the

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114 DOD Documents, n. 112, pp. 67-70.
115 Ibid., p. 64.
116 Ibid.
adoption of the "search and destroy" strategy, but they were successfully challenged by Taylor. The "enclave strategy" was retained, but a big rise in the level of American ground troops in Vietnam was approved—from 33,500 to 73,500. Taylor was the lone fighter in the Honolulu meeting against further escalation in ground involvement, but his days as an effective player were numbered. At Honolulu, General Westmoreland emerged as the most influential impressive player.

A look at the persons who attended the Honolulu meeting would suggest that the military was beginning to gain ascendancy in the policy-making on Vietnam. The participants were McNamara, Secretary of Defence, William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA), General Wheeler, Chairman of the JCS, Adm. U.S. Grant Sharp, the CINCPAC, Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland, the CUMUSMACV. Out of seven, three were active military men, one—Taylor—, a retired JCS Chairman, two, top civilians of the Pentagon and the seventh one—Bundy—was till recently, in the Pentagon service. One may hypothesize that the input of the Defence Department vis-a-vis the State Department into decisions having important foreign policy implications tends to increase as a war escalates. At the Honolulu meeting, Taylor won only a partial success in winning approval for the continuance of the "enclave strategy" as against a more aggressive strategy.

117 Ibid., pp. 71-78.
advocated by the military. But the Ambassador could have had little doubt that pressure from the military would continue and increase.

The intra-Administration reactions to the Honolulu recommendations were primarily of three kinds. The dominant group consisting mostly of elements of the State and Defence Departments supported them. The CIA led by Director McCone expressed its reservations about them. The United States would get herself "mired down" in the Vietnamese jungle and it would be difficult for her either to win or get out, McCone had warned on 2 April. He assessed that the US might go for ground war only if it was supplemented by air war. He repeated the same warning in a personal memorandum to the President on 28 April. McCone was not a dove. He would prefer the application of force if the US was willing to employ such force as was adequate to realize her objective—a view not dissimilar to that of the JCS.

The only opposition to the Honolulu recommendations came from George Ball, the "devil's advocate" within "Johnson's court." He argued that sending more American GIs to South Vietnam would be matched by more men from the North to the South. He reportedly warned that the US was at a "threshold" and it was the time for a pause and trying some diplomatic means. Ball's scepticism

118 Ibid., pp. 115-6
119 Ibid.
120 Halberstam, n. 18, pp. 579-81; and Brandon, n. 94, pp. 53-54.
was clearly expressed, but it was contrary to the perception of McNamara and other important actors. McNamara approved of the Honolulu recommendation on 30 April.

In May 1965 Viet Cong forces resumed offensives and dealt severe blows to the South Vietnamese forces. The American officials in Saigon were seriously concerned over the prospect of a total collapse of the Saigon forces. Quick action was needed to stave off the Viet Cong progress. It appeared to be a crisis situation from the American point of view and Taylor could no longer argue that South Vietnam was not in the grip of a crisis as he had contended earlier. Thus Taylor was at last caught in the web; he was willing to adjust himself to circumstances in Saigon as well as Washington. As an experienced player he knew well how far he could move and where he should stop if he were to remain as a player on the board. Beyond a point, opposition might reduce his usefulness and even cost him his position. Deteriorating conditions in South Vietnam might have served to reinforce such coordination and to lead Taylor to the conclusion that the time had come for him to switch. Taylor joined Westmoreland and Alexis Johnson, his deputy in Saigon, in recommending to the State Department on 5 June that in view of the impending collapse of the South Vietnamese forces, the US ground troops might be committed to action. Unlike the previous month, the American mission in Saigon appeared to be united, all going the

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121 DOD Documents, Book 4, IV.C.5, p. 25.
same way—at that point, Westmoreland's way.

By the first week of June, there was virtual unanimity among the principal advisers except Ball as to the advisability of escalating the American ground war in Vietnam. The time was propitious for Westmoreland to make the next move. On 7 June, he sent the "44-battalion request." He asked for 35 battalions to be immediately deployed in South Vietnam. He identified other nine battalions which could be sent later. He argued that the US troops could "successfully take the fight to the VC" and the Viet Cong would be convinced that they could not win. It was exactly the language of the "Victory strategy" which was the consensus reached among the conferees in the Honolulu meeting of 20 April.

While the "44-battalion request" was under active consideration in Washington, Westmoreland was authorized to commit American forces to battle in support of Saigon forces "in any situation ... when, in CUMUSMACV's judgement, their use is necessary to strengthen the relative position of GVN forces." The US forces were no longer required to sit tight in the perimeter of enclaves. They could move beyond them in offensive operations against Viet Cong. The "enclave strategy" was buried and the "search and destroy" strategy was born. Henceforward, the battle would be

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122 DOD Documents, n. 112, pp. 90ff.
123 Ibid., p. 104.
waged not regarding strategy, but on the number of men to be sent to South Vietnam.

Towards the end of June and the beginning of July, the 44-battalion debate was raging up in Washington. The military members were in a confident mood that things would go their way. The principal civilian advisers to the President, Rusk and McNamara, were relatively quiet. Even George Ball did not remain unaffected. His opposition to the military was not complete. He was prepared to go half the way. He would go with the programmed 15 battalions and 72,000 men made public in mid-June by McNamara. But there the US should stop and try for a diplomatic settlement, Ball urged. Otherwise, the US faced the risk of "a costly and indeterminate struggle," he warned in a memorandum to the President on 28 June. By going half-way, he sought to appease the military and its allies. But he could not succeed.

On the same day, William Bundy, the key man in the State Department on Vietnam, wrote a memorandum to the President. His strategy was to hold on without risking a major disaster. His recommendation was to bring the American strength in South Vietnam to 18 manoeuvre battalions and 85,000 men. Bundy was again in the middle. A skilled bureaucratic player, he too tried to bring about a "consensus," because the President was essentially a "consensus man."

125 Ibid., p. 105.
126 Ibid., p. 106.
McNaughton, the Assistant Secretary of Defence (ISA), did not appear to be active in the beginning of the American ground involvement as he was when decisions were being made on beginning the bombing of North Vietnam. However, towards the end of the game, he too made a move which reflected the "action-oriented" mood of that particular time. As has been stated earlier, on 13 July, he recommended to Secretary McNamara that the US should introduce 44 battalions in South Vietnam and be prepared to send more in future. Of three possible courses, namely, success for US/South Vietnam, inconclusive results for either side, and a South Vietnamese collapse and concomitant US defeat, McNaughton indicated that the US should opt for the first. This was the highest point of hawkishness that McNaughton was to touch in relation to military involvement in Vietnam. His recommendation which was hardly different from what the JCS had advocated probably facilitated the acceptance of the JCS point of view by McNamara and by the President a week later. One interesting question arises--why was the usually ebullient Secretary of Defence not as active as he usually was? Others appeared to be having their say while he had not apparently chosen to show himself as the dominant figure.

McNaughton's memorandum appears to have been inspired by his awareness of the position of Defence Secretary on Vietnam. McNamara too was in favour of the American ground involvement in

127 Ibid., p. 127.
Vietnam. But, with things developing in a manner satisfactory from his point of view, he himself did not probably seek to appear as the leader of the pack because of the opposition of Ambassador Taylor with whom his personal equation was very good. Moreover, he might have been concerned about the silence of Rusk on this question. Rusk, by background, was an advocate of strong American military posture abroad as an instrument of her foreign policy. His position on Vietnam so far was not contrary to this image. However, he too was not as vociferous as some other actors in Washington for speedy American military involvement in Vietnam. He was conscious of his responsibility as the head of the diplomatic organ of the government. He would opt for diplomatic settlement, of course, only on American terms. He would go for virtual military solution only if negotiations had no prospect of success. Moreover, his own "house"--the State Department--was somewhat divided on Vietnam. While William Bundy was in favour of American ground involvement, George Ball was opposed to it. It was, thus, not easy for Rusk to decisively throw his weight on any side. On the other hand, it was not difficult for his bureaucratic competitor--McNamara, for example--to neutralise him by not provoking him to choose a side. McNamara probably deemed it prudent to get the desired decision by allowing the battle to be fought at a lower level, instead of raising it to a higher pitch. By adopting personally a low profile he sought to avoid provoking senior players like Rusk from entering the field, thereby making the outcome uncertain.
Inferences

There does not appear to be any basic change in the JCS position. They continued to urge for sending more American forces for South Vietnam. However, the demand for more troops was voiced with increasing vigour by the military commander in the field, Westmoreland. Ball and Taylor continued to oppose the ground involvement, although they, to some extent, modified their stand after some time. Taylor, unlike the military who wanted fast buildup, preferred slow and gradual buildup.

The CIA's McCone was opposed to the buildup of ground forces not so much because he was against the American military involvement in Vietnam, as due to his fear that the US would be "mired down" in Vietnam if combat operations on the ground were not sufficiently supported by heavy bombing and mining of North Vietnamese harbours. William Bundy and McNaughton were for the "middle way." Rusk does not seem to have figured significantly in the present case. He seems to have been largely on the sidelines. The Defence Department appears to have played a more predominant role than the State Department in the field of policy-making on Vietnam. McNamara himself shrewdly kept a low profile, allowing others to perform in the arena.

As actors manoeuvre for the acceptance of their respective positions, there sometimes occurs a situation when the general climate becomes so action-oriented that doubters and 'nay'-sayers tend to go along rather than risk possible isolation. Such a situation appears to have developed at this point in respect of
the demand vigorously pushed forward by the JCS and General Westmoreland. General Taylor and George Ball are seen in such a context to modify their position and McNaughton is seen willing to endorse what the military sought.

ESCALATION AND DE-ESCALATION: PULL AND HAUL WITHIN

With the launching of Rolling Thunder in March 1965 and that of the "search and destroy" strategy in June 1965, American military involvement in Vietnam became very evident. The Rubicon was crossed. The debate within the Administration would no longer revolve round the question of whether to get in or not to get in. Henceforward the debate within the Administration was on whether it was wise to raise the level of American military involvement in Vietnam or not. The interaction within the civilian and military elements of the Defence Department in regard to the question of escalation was discussed in Chapter III. To what extent the role of other federal actors in regard to escalation affected the Pentagon's posture, and equation between the civilian and military components of the Pentagon over that question will be discussed here.

It is important to note that other federal actors—especially, the State Department, the CIA and the National Security Assistant—were apparently more concerned over the air than over the ground war. The number of memoranda that flowed within the Administration in relation to air operations is much larger than that of memoranda touching on land operations. The dramatic and
potentially critical nature of air operations might have accounted for the difference in the response of federal actors to the ground and air wars in Vietnam.

In July 1965 both the civilian and military elements of the Pentagon favoured the intensification of American military involvement in Vietnam. As has been said earlier, McNamara advocated "total quarantine" of the North. Secretary Rusk gave full support to McNamara for escalation. "The integrity of the U.S. commitment is the principal pillar of peace throughout the world," Rusk said. If "the US commitment" were found unreliable, the risk of a general war would increase, he argued...

But the State Department itself was divided over escalation. The principal opposition to escalation came from George Ball, the Under Secretary of State. In a memorandum sent to other "principals" in Washington on 1 July 1965, Ball argued against escalation. He warned that any large-scale American involvement on land would be a "catastrophic error" and would bring humiliation on the United States. He advised that the US should withdraw or go for a limited involvement which could be supported by her capabilities. "This is our last clear chance to make this decision," he asserted. William Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, took a different stand. He did not side fully either with Rusk or with Ball. He sought to take a "middle way"

128 DOD Documents, Book 6, IV.C.7(a), p. 8.
129 Ibid., pp. 6-8.
between them. He was for the intensification of American military involvement in Vietnam, but he would not urge it at present. Some time should be allowed to prepare the American public to accept the fact that the US was engaged in an intense war in Vietnam, Bundy argued. McNamara did not agree with Bundy's plea for delay in bombing on the ground that the situation in South Vietnam was too serious to afford the "luxury of delay."

The intelligence community's assessment was not a very clear-cut assessment. An SNIE on 23 July stated that attacks on military targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area and the interdiction of supplies along the China border would hurt North Vietnam, but it would not have a "critical impact" upon her capability to help the South. Only severe attacks on POLs might inflict substantial damage upon North Vietnam and induce her to agree to negotiate. The thrust of the estimate seemed to favour the intensification of the bombing of North Vietnam.

Towards the end of 1965 there ensued a debate within the Administration whether the US should stop bombing North Vietnam for some time. As noted earlier, McNamara and McNaughton argued for a pause on the ground that it might induce North Vietnam to seek negotiation. The military strongly opposed the move. The proposal for a pause faced stiff opposition from the State

130 Ibid., p. 9.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
Department. In a memorandum to the President on 9 November 1965, the Department pointed out that the US, having stopped bombing the North, would have played the "very important card" without any substantial return. A pause may not win Saigon's acceptance and it might adversely affect the solidarity of the Saigon regime, the State Department argued. If the pause failed, it would be difficult to resume bombing because of the obstacles put in the meantime by Hanoi. The State paper, speaking for Rusk, recommended that the pause should not be undertaken at the present time. Thus, the main difference between the position of the State Department and that of the civilian elements of the Pentagon over the question of a pause was that whereas the former argued that the bombing of North Vietnam was an important card which could be played only once, the latter said that this card could be played several times.

The position of the State Department regarding a pause appears to have changed by the first week of December. William Bundy and Alexis Johnson, in a joint memorandum to the President on 6 December, stated the pros and cons of a pause and then recommended that the President should approve a pause as soon as possible. As the memorandum was addressed to the President, it

133 Ibid., p. 22.
134 Ibid., p. 23.
135 Ibid.
seems that Rusk had, by that time, dropped his objection to the
proposed pause and the memorandum of Bundy and Johnson had the
implicit support and approval of the Secretary. In fact the day
after Bundy and Johnson sent their memorandum to the President,
Rusk, McNamara and Mac Bundy met with the President in his ranch
in Texas and tried to prevail upon him to order a pause. President
Johnson, in his memoirs, says that he was still sceptical
of the utility of a pause. On 18 December, the President again
discussed the matter with his principal associates along with two
of his trusted personal advisers, Clark Clifford and Associate
Justice, Abe Fortas. Rusk argued that by observing a pause the
President would be able to fend off the domestic criticism that
he was not doing enough to reach a peaceful settlement. McNamara,
Mac Bundy, Ball and U.A. Johnson supported Rusk. On the other
hand, Clifford and Fortas advised against a pause. Eventually
as noted earlier, the President decided in favour of a pause and
it started on 24 December 1965 and lasted till 31 January 1966.

A significant aspect of the pause debate was the reason
why Rusk and McGeorge Bundy who were initially opposed to the
pause proposal later changed their mind and vigorously worked for
a pause. A possible factor was the signal they received from two
important diplomatic sources. One day late in November Soviet
Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, assured McGeorge Bundy that a pause

137 Johnson, n. 97, p. 235.
138 Ibid., pp. 235-6.
of "twelve to twenty days" would lead to "intense diplomatic activity." A Hungarian diplomat told Rusk that a pause "for a few weeks would be enough" to start negotiations. The other possible factor was the concern of Rusk and Bundy for getting a bureaucratic consensus. They perhaps did not perceive, by going for a pause, any serious threat to the ongoing Vietnam policy to which they were wedded. On the other hand, they could, by conceding a little at present, hope to wring some substantial concession from McNamara in future in the bureaucratic game.

During the pause there began a debate within the Administration as to the nature of the resumption of bombing if the pause failed to achieve its objective. As pointed out earlier, the military elements of the Pentagon advocated that the bombing should be resumed with a "bang" whereas the civilian elements of the Pentagon argued for a slow start--bombing in a low key. As in many other cases, this intra-Pentagon debate too spilled over to other segments of the Executive, especially the State Department. Writing on 15 January William Bundy extended support to the civilian elements of the Pentagon by proposing that the bombing should not resume in a dramatic fashion. He argued that the resumption of bombing with a bang would add fuel to the charge that the Communists would most likely make that the pause was meant to make way for more fierce and hard strikes by the US. The available data do

139 Ibid., p. 235.
140 Ibid.
141 DOD Documents, n. 128, p. 28.
not help us in knowing the thinking of Secretary Rusk at that time. However, a few days before the expiry of the pause, the second highest official of the State Department came out hard against Rolling Thunder. In a memorandum to the President on 25 January, Ball said "that a sustained bombing program acquires a life and dynamism of its own." He argued that the American "philosophy of bombing requires gradual escalation." He stated that the fundamental assumption of American bombing was that it would one day force Hanoi to stop the war. As long as Hanoi did not stop fighting, the US would have to continue to strike more and more sensitive, strategic targets in the hope that the resultant pain to Hanoi would induce her to stop the war and start talks. This reasoning would lead the US to bomb strategic targets near the Chinese border and those in Hanoi and Haiphong. Ball warned,

Quite clearly there is a threshold which we cannot pass over without precipitating a major Chinese involvement. We do not know—even within wide margins of error—where that threshold is. Unhappily we will not find out until after the catastrophe. 144

Over the question of the resumption of bombing, the State Department did not present a unified stand. There is no evidence to indicate any discord within the Department in so far as the officials in the head office—Washington—were concerned. The

142 Ibid., p. 47.
143 Ibid., pp. 47-48.
144 Ibid., p. 49.
Saigon embassy, however, took an opposite position. Ambassador Lodge stood solidly with the military in urging hard hitting tactics after the pause expired. The difference between the attitude of Ball and Bundy on the one hand and that of Lodge on the other was partly due to their locations. An Ambassador would tend to be more concerned over the happenings in the field and getting a favourable outcome at the earliest than by international diplomacy and domestic debate that are far removed from his immediate environment.

The bombing of the North did not resume in a dramatic manner. The resumption was in a low key as urged by the civilian elements of the Pentagon and their supporters in other agencies of the Executive. The military members were soon provoked to demand the intensification of bombing including strikes of POL targets which they had been urging since the middle of 1965. McNamara and his civilian colleagues in the Defence Department opposed the move for POL strikes. The POL question led to some hectic movements within the Executive till 22 June 1966 when the decision was taken to hit the POLs. During this period, the intelligence community filed several memoranda touching on the benefits to be accrued from bombing and hitting the POLs in particular. The intelligence estimates on bombing were apparently not consistent. Sometimes they were optimistic; some other times they were pessimistic. In reports to the Defence Secretary on 28

145 Ibid., p. 30.
November and 3 December 1965, the intelligence community said that the attacks on POL targets would do substantial damage to the North, but not to that extent as to make it impossible for her to support the Viet Cong. This assessment of the impact of POL strikes might have been of some encouragement to the civilian elements of the Pentagon. But the intelligence estimate seemed to pull the rug from under their feet by further stating that the attack on POL targets was unlikely to provoke China and Russia to intervene. The intelligence community provided further fillip to the military elements of the Pentagon by asserting towards the end of December 1965 that North Vietnam was fast dispersing the POL facilities and unless the US bombed them soon, there would hardly be any POL facility vulnerable to bombing. The intelligence estimates of February 1966 were similar to those of November and December 1965. On balance, the intelligence reports seem to have strengthened the military vis-a-vis the civilian members of the Pentagon.

While the POL debate was in full swing, an inter-agency group consisting of Deputy Secretary Vance and McNaughton of Defence, Ball, Bundy and Leonard Unger of the State Department, and George Carver of the CIA met at the White House on 9 April 1966 to formulate alternative courses of action in Vietnam.

146 Ibid., p. 69.
147 Ibid., p. 85.
148 Ibid., p. 76.
Carver recommended that the current strength of American ground troops in South Vietnam should be maintained and the authorized number should be deployed. He further recommended that, in general, population centres like Hanoi and Haiphong should be spared bombing, but he added that major POL storage depots should be destroyed and the Haiphong harbour should be mined. Thus, in line with the earlier recommendation of the CIA, Carver supported the military's plea for bombing POLs. Unger took a middle stand. He would support a modest rise in ground forces, but no step-up in the air war. Broadly, McNaughton was in agreement with Unger in regard to his military recommendation. Ball's recommendation, which was, in a sense, the opposite of Carver's, was based upon the need for "cutting our losses." He said that the US should put a brake on the deployment of additional US GIs in South Vietnam and reduce the level of bombing on the North. There was no element of surprise in Ball's recommendation. However, the tone of de-escalation present in the recommendation of Unger supported by McNaughton, and that of Ball appeared to prepare the ground for the alliance between the State Department and the civilian elements of the Pentagon vis-a-vis the military in future in regard to Vietnam.

149 Ibid., p. 94.
150 Ibid., pp. 95-96.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., p. 97.
But the "point of convergence" among the civilians as opposed to the military was yet to come. Some elements of the State Department were taking a line which was directly or indirectly helping the position of the military. Important amongst them was William Bundy who, on 16 April 1966, reiterated, in a different name, the domino theory which had virtually disappeared from the lexicon of the civilian elements of the Pentagon. He warned that the US failure in South Vietnam would result in the spread of "shock waves" in all "free countries" of Southeast Asia and the Far East. The military seems to have relished this language very much. It is important to note that on the same day—16 April—McNaughton, in another inter-agency meeting circulated a paper in which he repudiated the so-called domino theory. He stated that "Except for its psychological impact, withdrawal from Vietnam would not affect the present line of containment from its Korean anchor down the Japan-Ryukyus-Taiwan-Philippines Islands chain."

In March 1966, after months of hesitation, McNamara accepted the military's demand for bombing the POL targets and accordingly sent a memorandum to the President. But the President did not immediately approve the proposal. It was probably difficult for him to order the attack on POL storages when President De Gaulle of France and U Thant, the UN Secretary-General, were engaged in efforts to find out some avenue for a peaceful settlement in

153 Ibid., p. 103.
154 Ibid., p. 106.
Vietnam. He faced pressures from within the country and outside to observe another pause which might induce Hanoi to start talks. The hearings held by Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee in February highlighted sentiment in favour of de-escalation and a pause. The ongoing policy seemed to lose support in the press and, to some extent, among the general public. Hard pressed by these factors, the President might have found it difficult to order fresh escalation. At this critical point, however, the President was persuaded by three of his principal advisers to take a tough posture in Vietnam. In a memorandum to the President on 27 April 1966, Maxwell Taylor urged him not to order the cessation of bombing unless there was a reciprocal action on the part of Hanoi. He argued that bombing was a valuable "blue chip" which should not be thrown away unless and until it was accompanied by a corresponding concession by Hanoi and the Viet Cong—for example, cessation of the flow of men and materials from the North to the South and reduction of fighting by Viet Cong. On 4 May, William Bundy, in a memorandum to Rusk, lent staunch support to Taylor's "blue chip" thesis and advised that the US, while going for a pause, must ask for a "price" from Hanoi and the Viet Cong. He said,

155 The Vietnam Hearings, with an Introduction by J.W. Fulbright, Chairman, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (New York, 1966).


157 DOD Documents, n. 128, p. 113.
"...I have myself been more inclined to an asking price, at least, that would include both a declared cessation of infiltration and a sharp reduction in VC/NVA military operations in the South...."

The President, in finally deciding to order the bombing of the POL targets, was probably influenced by his new National Security Assistant Walt Rostow who had replaced McGeorge Bundy on 1 April 1966. In a memorandum to Rusk and McNamara, Rostow urged that the US should immediately attack the oil reserves of North Vietnam.

He said:

With an understanding that simple analogies are dangerous, I nevertheless feel it is quite possible the military effects of a systematic and sustained bombing of POL in North Vietnam may be more prompt and direct than conventional intelligence would suggest.

The persuasion by these three influential advisers to the President seems to have had tilted the scale in favour of attacking the POL targets and the President took the decision to that effect towards the end of May. But the decision could not be implemented because of renewed diplomatic efforts at different levels for starting peace negotiations. On 7 June a Canadian diplomat, Chestor A. Ronning flew to Hanoi to know its mind regarding negotiations. This mission had the approval of the State Department. Rusk who was at that time in Paris immediately cabled to the President to postpone bombing POLs until the Ronning mission was over.

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158 Ibid., pp. 114-5.
159 Ibid., p. 119.
Rusk, left to himself, would prefer a tough posture. But because of mounting pressures from within his Department and outside for a settlement, he advocated the postponement of POL strikes in the hope that peace talks might start or at least no escalation should be initiated until various other possibilities were adequately explored and shown to be unproductive. It suggests that Rusk would opt for a negotiated settlement whenever it was possible on American terms. But failing that, he would choose a military solution. As the peace initiatives did not pay any dividends, the US launched strikes on POLs on 22 June despite a pessimistic report filed by the CIA on 8 June regarding the results of such strikes.

The attacks on POL storages did not prove to be effective and the Secretary sought to take a fresh look at the bombing programme. In the meantime the military was pressing hard for sending more ground troops to South Vietnam and for hitting more sensitive targets like the power plants in Hanoi. As mentioned earlier, the Secretary paid a visit to South Vietnam in the middle of October 1966 and on his return wrote a memorandum to the President. He proposed the stabilization of Rolling Thunder and a small increase in the number of American ground troops in South Vietnam. He also recommended that the US should observe another "pause" some time in future to prepare an atmosphere for the beginning of fresh efforts at negotiation. All these suggestions

161 Ibid., pp. 162-3.
were bitterly opposed by the military. It is not known how the Secretary of State and the National Security Assistant reacted to this new round of the rift between the civilian and military components of the Pentagon. Katzenbach, the Under Secretary of State, seemingly supported the recommendations of McNamara. The CIA disagreed with most of these recommendations. Carver, writing for the Director of the CIA, disagreed with McNamara's indirect assertion that changes in the bombing programme would not be effective. On the other hand, he asserted that the mining of Haiphong and the destruction of rail lines between China and North Vietnam would have a significant impact. Carver did not accept the Secretary's proposal for a pause and initiation of talks. Thus whereas the State Department tended to gradually accept the viewpoints of the civilian elements of the Pentagon, the CIA continued to be pro-escalation in its tone—thereby siding with the military in the intra-Pentagon rift on Vietnam.

Before the year drew to a close, McNamara filed another memorandum in which he repeated his recommendations of October. He repudiated the military's assertion that the war was going well for the US. As pointed out earlier, the Secretary's views invited sharp reaction from the military members who repeated their old arguments against him. As in the case of the October

162 Ibid., p. 169.
163 Ibid., pp. 169-70.
164 Ibid., pp. 174-6.
debate, in this case too, Rusk's reaction is not known. The CIA which had reacted to the October memorandum of the Secretary remained silent this time. On the other hand, Rostow who had not taken part in the October debate joined issue with McNamara in November, expressing his disagreement with the Secretary's gloomy view of the war. McNamara seemed to have succeeded in virtually winning the support of the State Department. But the National Security Assistant and the CIA were not willing to go along with him.

The beginning of 1967 witnessed mounting opposition to the war at home and a flurry of actions within the Administration with many alternative courses in Vietnam coming up for consideration. The line between the civilian and military elements of the Pentagon had been drawn; they continued to oppose each other's course. While the former favoured a truce, the latter opposed it. At this point, W. Bundy, one of the most active actors on Vietnam, threw his weight in favour of a pause. In a memorandum to Katzenbach on 21 January, he strongly urged the Under Secretary to oppose anything that would compromise the scheduled suspension of operations against North Vietnam. Soon after the pause, which began on 8 February and expired on 14 February, the military elements renewed their efforts for further intensification of the war both on land and in the air. In March, Westmoreland made his 200,000

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165 Sheehan, n. 15, p. 534.
166 DOD Documents, Book 6, IV.C.7(b), pp. 4-5.
men request, which dominated the intra-Executive movements for the whole of the year.

Gradually the pro-de-escalation forces gained strength inside the Administration. William Bundy made another turn toward de-escalation in February by expressing his disagreement with the military's request for mining Haiphong. But his switch toward de-escalation was not complete. He said, on the other hand, that the US might mine North Vietnam's coastal waterways which were not used by Soviet ships. Bundy's proposal won the approval of the President the next day. Johnson deferred his decision on mining Haiphong. Besides William Bundy who again registered his opposition to mining Haiphong on 1 May, another recruit to the anti-escalation group was Robert Komer, the special assistant to the President who was in charge of "pacification." He stated that stepped up bombing and mining would raise the level of pain for the North, but would not force her to give up fighting. According to him, Hanoi was unlikely to start negotiations in the near future. Thus, he argued, the fate of the war would be determined in South Vietnam. The critical variables affecting the war would be the erosion of the strength of the Viet Cong and the strength of the Saigon regime. Against this background of the slow increase in the number of supporters of the de-escalation course,

167 Ibid., p. 13.
168 Ibid., pp. 23-25.
169 Ibid.
McNamara and McNaughton wrote the 5 May DPM in which they strongly argued against any intensification of the war. They reiterated their views against escalation in another DPM on 19 May.

These DPMs led to an increased flow of memoranda within the Administration, some of which joined issue with the views expressed in them, and others, supporting them. The sharp reaction of the military to these memoranda has been described earlier. The first amongst the non-Pentagon actors to react was W.W. Rostow, the National Security Assistant. On 6 May, he observed that there were three bombing options before the US which he described as "closing the top of the funnel," "attacking what is inside the funnel," and "concentration on Route Package 1 and 2." The first option required blocking the supply lines through which war material moved into North Vietnam. It would involve attacks on major harbours and the rail lines between Hanoi and China. The second option would include bombing supplying dumps, stockpiles, and fuel storage areas, as well as bridges, railroad yards, and other targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. The third option would call for attacking the lines of communication and infiltration routes in southern North Vietnam and through Laos. After weighing the cost and effectiveness of all the options, he, on balance, favoured the third option while adding that the second option should be kept open. Thus he was now virtually in agreement with McNamara and McNaughton regarding

170 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
171 Sheehan, n. 15, pp. 589-97.
172 DOD Documents, n. 166, pp. 33-37.
bombing as opposed to the military. Rostow's support for de-
escalation was an important development in policy-making on Viet-
nam. He had long been fervently advocating stepped-up bombing
of North Vietnam. His continued support for the strategic bomb-
ing of the North would have been a great obstacle to the de-
escalation forces within the Administration. Because of his key
position as the National Security Assistant, he was well-placed
to significantly influence the President's decisions in regard
to Vietnam. His changed position on bombing was a great gain for
McNamara and his allies who were arguing for de-escalation.

On 8 May William Bundy circulated a memorandum amongst
other actors in which he reiterated his opposition to the mining
of Haiphong. After weighing the pros and cons of five options,
he expressed his preference for the option D which called for
hitting mainly the targets around the 20th parallel. This was
in broad agreement with the recommendation of 5 May DPM on bomb-
ing except that Bundy would recommend a re-striking of some signi-
ficant targets north of the 20th parallel whereas McNamara had
proposed to concentrate fire only to its south. The CIA which
was equivocal and ambiguous in earlier stages in its views on
bombing seemed finally to take a clear stand against the intensi-
fication of bombing. On 12 May it pointed out that the bombing
of the North for 27 months had neither significantly undermined
the morale of North Vietnamese nor had it substantially eroded

173 Ibid., pp. 37-41.
their capability to help the Viet Cong. With Rostow, Bundy and the CIA in their side, the civilian elements of the Pentagon might have felt encouraged to continue their efforts more vigorously against escalation.

As said earlier, the 19 May DPM which restated with more vigour the de-escalation arguments contained in the 5 May DPM, invited bitter criticism of the military. Taking sharp exception to these arguments, the JCS said, "The DPM Not be Forwarded to the President." William Bundy, who had a few days back supported McNamara's views on bombing, disagreed with some elements of 19 May DPM. As contrasted with the pessimistic tone of the DPM, Bundy asserted that American involvement in Vietnam had succeeded in containing Communism in Southeast Asia and laid the foundation for progress in South Vietnam. Taking issue with the DPM, he argued that the US objective was not only to drive North Vietnamese out of South Vietnam but to insure that "the political board in South Vietnam is not tilted to the advantage of the NLF." The shift in Bundy, however, was more apparent than real; it was rather half-hearted in tone. Bundy was careful enough to avoid touching on the specific recommendation of DPM on bombing. On the other hand he accepted the general thrust of the DPM in stating that the massive US intervention in Vietnam had

174 Ibid., pp. 41-42.
175 Sheehan, n. 15, p. 550.
176 DOD Documents, n. 166, p. 60.
resulted in a significant adverse effect in that South Vietnamese tended to think, "Uncle Sam will do their job for them." Indirectly he criticized the military's 200,000 men request on the ground that an additional deployment of such a large number of ground troops in South Vietnam would not make much difference in the war. Thus Bundy's continued support for de-escalation might have further encouraged the civilian elements of the Pentagon who were locked in a grim fight with the military on the issue.

Another actor to give a helping hand to McNamara and his civilian colleagues in the Defence Department was Katzenbach, the Under Secretary of State. He said that the war, from the US point of view, was not going on well, and that the "pacification" programme was in a bad shape. He claimed to take a "middle" road between those who favoured sending 200,000 more GIs to South Vietnam and others who advocated that the existing strength of US troops in South Vietnam should be maintained. Katzenbach recommended an increase of 30,000 more ground troops in South Vietnam. Regarding the war against North Vietnam, he favoured an anti-infiltration barrier and proposed that the US should concentrate bombing on lines of communication throughout North Vietnam and not hit strategic targets. Katzenbach was thus not taking a middle course as he asserted. McNamara himself recommended an increase of 30,000 troops. Similarly, Katzenbach's recommendation on bombing was quite similar to McNamara's. He was virtually one with

177 DOD Documents, Book 5, IV.6(b), pp. 180-1.
the civilian elements of Pentagon in arguing for de-escalation.

Faced with the heavy fire of criticism from the military, the Secretary had requested Richard Helms, the CIA Director, to make his assessment of the bombing of North Vietnam. Helms said that bombing would not be able to reduce the level of the flow of men and materials from the North to the South nor to considerably dampen the spirit and determination of Hanoi to continue to fight. Thus by the middle of June 1967, there was a broad consensus amongst the civilian advisers as to the desirability of de-escalation as opposed to the military advisers who were pressing hard for further intensification of the American involvement in the war. The President sought to adopt a middle course between the contrary views of the rival factions. He approved only a 45,000 increase of ground troops which was closer to McNamara's figure than the military's. On the other hand, he decided that besides the supply lines around the 20th parallel, the other areas of North Vietnam except the air targets within 10 miles of Hanoi would be subject to bombing. Within a short period he ordered attacks on some targets which were within 10 miles of Hanoi. Thus, in respect of the air war, the President went closer to the military than to the civilians in the Pentagon and other agencies.

The Communist offensive in South Vietnam in September 1967 and the urgent appeal by Westmoreland to the President for quick

179 DOD Documents, n. 166, p. 62.
180 Johnson, n. 97, p. 370.
reinforcement on 28 September led to another round of intra-
Executive moves in Washington. McNamara was probably concerned 
over the implications of a possible gradual tilt towards the 
military on the part of the President. On 1 November he recom-
mended that the United States should announce the stabilization 
of her efforts—not expanding her bombing programme and not 
increasing the size of her ground troops. Moreover, the Secretary 
proposed that the US should go for another bombing pause before 
the end of 1967. Rostow, the National Security Assistant, 
broadly agreed with McNamara's recommendation. He, however, did 
not think it prudent on the part of the US to observe an uncondi-
tional bombing halt which, according to him, would signify Ameri-
can weakness. Maxwell Taylor, a special consultant to the 
President, disagreed with both the recommendations of the Defence 
Secretary. In a memorandum to the President on 3 November, he 
described McNamara's proposals as a "pull-back" strategy which 
would "probably degenerate into an eventual pull-out." Clif-
ford and Fortas, Johnson's personal friends and advisers, conveyed 
to the President their total disagreements with McNamara. 
Taylor, Clifford and Fortas did not strictly constitute a part of 
the Executive, but they were important figures in Washington, and  

181 Ibid., pp. 372-3.
182 Ibid., pp. 373-4.
183 Ibid., p. 374.
184 Ibid., pp. 374-5.
were known to be considerably influential with the President. Their stand against McNamara seemed to have been a great asset to the military elements of the Pentagon and, coupled with Rostow’s reluctance to totally support McNamara at this point, might have helped to widen the distance between the President and the Defence Secretary.

The last to enter the debate was the State Department. It was surprisingly this time not Bundy, who, during the previous years, was very active in the field of policy-making on Vietnam. The number one and number two men in the State Department communicated their views to the President in the second half of November. Katzenbach prescribed a "limited" role for the US in Vietnam in providing "military cover and non-military assistance." Responsibility for the military effort should be increasingly transferred to South Vietnam, he said. He expressed his broad agreement with McNamara regarding a pause. He favoured a "qualified but indefinite halt in the bombing." By "qualified" he meant that the US should hit North Vietnam if she tried to expand the resupply to the South or attempted troop concentrations near the demilitarized zone. Katzenbach thus did not falter in his continued support for the course of de-escalation advocated by the civilian elements of the Pentagon.

Dean Rusk preferred to put his views to the President in their private meetings. In official deliberations, he was not

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185 Ibid., pp. 375-6.
conspicuous in his participation. However, he was probably the most active defender of the Administration's policy in Vietnam. He had always been a believer in tough posture. In the past, he compromised here and there, in order to come to terms with the other powerful actors within the Administration and outside. But he hardly effected a major switch as his chief bureaucratic competitor McNamara did. He seldom put his thoughts in writing; but whenever he did, it indicated that the issue involved considerable importance. Because of his official position and personal equation with the President, Rusk's view at that stage might have weighed heavily with the latter. On 20 November, Rusk informed the President of his support for McNamara's proposal for the stabilization of US efforts in Vietnam, but he disagreed with his suggestion of announcing it publicly. He also opposed "an extended pause." He did not think that Hanoi would be persuaded to start talks by a bombing halt. Thus Rusk took a "middle course," as did Rostow, but with a difference. Both of them supported stabilization, and opposed an unconditional pause. Rusk opposed the public announcement of stabilization whereas Rostow remained silent on that. Moreover, Rostow favoured attacking only the supply lines whereas Rusk advocated that the US should hit the northern part of North Vietnam to put extra-pressure on her for beginning negotiation. However, the thrust of the viewpoints of both these actors was the same—partial support for the

186 Ibid., pp. 376-7.
civvillan elements of the Pentagon and partial support for the military.

The State Department spoke with more than one voice. Katzenbach differed from his Chief in some respects, but it was not something new in the Department with Rusk as its head. Katzenbach's predecessors, Harriman and Ball had often acted in similar fashion. Unlike Bundy, Katzenbach was relatively new to the Department. He did not have much past involvement in Vietnam policy from which he had to dissociate himself. It might have been difficult for Bundy to directly disagree with Rusk because of their long association with policy-making in regard to Vietnam and because of the fact that they had long been taking, more or less, the same stance. Soon after he joined the State Department, Katzenbach extended support to the McNamara group and he continued to do so subsequently. That was perhaps the cause of division within the State Department and the silence of Bundy during this round of debate on Vietnam policy.

In the midst of the welter of conflicting advice from his principal advisers stood President Johnson, the ardent believer in consensus. The differences between the civilian and military elements of the Pentagon had gone too far; the political costs were heavy; Congressional critics were increasingly strident; "world public opinion" was turning hostile. The Administration needed to present a unified image of itself in the election year of 1968. Divisions in the country caused directly and indirectly by the prolonged war appeared to increase progressively. Johnson
probably felt increasingly impelled to see his way through to
some course that could reverse the adverse trends and command
increasing public confidence and support. He had tilted towards
the military often in his decisions. He had no complaints
against the JCS and he believed that American officers and sol-
diers had fought and sacrificed valiantly. He had no respect
for "doves" and "nervous nellies," but he was a political realist.
Escalation appeared less and less to be the course that could
reverse the trend. If de-escalation was to be the course, the
President had to bring it about in such fashion as not to offend
the military unduly.

With a political decision of his own in the offing, the
President moved with caution and with his customary skill. Since
he believed that the Secretary of Defence was increasingly moving
in a different track, he prepared the ground for his exit. This
step, among other things, was probably intended by the President
to soften up the JCS for subsequent actions he might have to make.
The President probably took note of the fact that Rusk and Rostow
had not fully identified themselves with the point of view repre-
sented by McNamara. He could count on them to stay the course
with him. In a memorandum for the record that he wrote on 18
December 1967, Johnson expressed his opposition to the proposal
for stabilization and for an unconditional bombing halt. In the
context of the intense conflict between McNamara and the JCS at
that time, the President's disagreement with the proposal of
stabilization and an unconditional pause might have encouraged the
military elements to continue, with more vigour, their fight against the Secretary and might have signalled to McNamara about the direction in which the President was moving.

The civilian and military elements of the Pentagon continued to oppose each other in the beginning phase of 1968 even though McNamara, by that time, had been reduced to be a lame-duck Secretary. In the wake of the Tet offensive which took place on 31 January, the military actors pushed for more reinforcements in South Vietnam and for a call-up of reserves. McNamara did not concede much to the military. He continued to oppose their demand to the very end. On 1 March 1968, Clark Clifford replaced McNamara as Secretary of Defence. Available materials do not tell us the role that the civilian actors of other agencies might have played during this phase. The role of the Clifford group which was formed in the last week of February and which submitted its report in the first week of March does not come under the purview of the present study. However, to provide perspective, a brief reference to it has been made in Chapter III.

Inferences

In a bureaucratic game the players keep in mind the personal values, preferences and choices of the ultimate decision-maker. They would, to a considerable extent, tend to attune themselves to the perceived stance of the latter. Rusk and Rostow
who, since the beginning of the Kennedy Administration had been favouring a tough posture in Vietnam, later began to tone themselves down as they perceived that McNamara and his civilian associates of the Pentagon advocated a de-escalation course which the President seemed willing to consider and accept in part. Rostow, in May 1967, quite unlike his earlier stance, argued for restricted bombing of the North. Rusk chose to remain silent. He did not explicitly support McNamara, but he did not oppose him and that was a significant gain for the Defence Secretary. As Johnson seemed to express his doubts about McNamara's course, the Secretary of State and the National Security Assistant tended to swing back to their earlier position. The inclination of these two important actors either to "tilt" towards the military, or at least not to fully side with McNamara was a serious obstacle to him. The President would have faced a serious dilemma had all the civilian actors aligned themselves against the military in regard to Vietnam. What finally accounted for the "defeat" of McNamara in the bureaucratic fight over Vietnam were the personal preferences of President Johnson which were similar to those of the military and the failure of McNamara to receive the full support and cooperation of his civilian colleagues in other agencies when the chips were down.

In peace time the State Department's input in decision-making in foreign policy is, of course, quite substantial and significant. But as the tension increases in an area and when military preparations are undertaken at a high pitch the Defence
Department's input into policy-making tends to increase. In the Department of Defence the role of the JCS assumes greater significance and its representative in the area of tension is increasingly heard. Once the shooting starts, the role of the Defence Department—both civilian and military elements of the Department—in policy-making becomes quite significant. The JCS and the commander in the field tend to be more insistent in their demands since their personal and organizational interests are profoundly at stake. If the Secretary of Defence does not go along with them, a conflict situation emerges. The search will commence on both sides to influence the President and to enlist the support of other federal actors and external allies. That was broadly the pattern of developments in regard to Vietnam policy since 1965.

Extra-Pentagon federal actors, while trying to promote their own views, were often influenced by their perception of what the President's inclination was in respect of given issues. If they perceived that the President was tilting towards the view urged by the military, rather than by that of the Secretary of Defence, they did not remain uninfluenced, and vice versa. There were, of course, exceptions. Only very few like George Ball displayed the courage and determination called for in propounding a course that can clearly be seen to run counter to the dominant thinking of major actors and even of the President. When in course of time things do not work out as planned, more actors find it possible to muster some courage, though it is usually mixed
with caution. They tend to bear in mind the prevailing direction of the wind in their own organizations and in the White House as they cautiously make their suggestions indicating some support for modifications in an ongoing policy.