

The Ia Drang Campaign 1965: A Successful Operational Campaign or Mere Tactical Failure?

**A Monograph
by**

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ABSTRACT

THE IA DRANG CAMPAIGN 1965: A SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONAL CAMPAIGN OR MERE TACTICAL FAILURE? by Lieutenant Colonel Peter J. Schifferle, USA, 70 pages

This monograph analyzes the effectiveness of operational campaign design during the initial US ground combat in the Vietnam War. The focus is on the linkage of national strategic ends with military means and ways from the Spring of 1965 through the results of the Ia Drang battles of November 1965. The monograph identifies lessons from this period that are applicable to current US Joint and Army doctrine as well as lessons for planners and executors of US military action under the American system of civilian control of the military.

First, the monograph evaluates current US doctrine for campaigns and identifies the concept of linkage of national strategic ends with military ways and means as critical to successful campaign design. Then the monograph assesses US military doctrine in 1965, identifying the weakness of unconventional warfare capabilities. A detailed discussion of the concept of both limited war and gradualism as national strategies, includes the limits on military action imposed by these strategies. Section III identifies specific military objectives identified by the National Command Authority, including preventing the war in Vietnam from escalating to a general war. The primacy of President Johnson's domestic concerns is also identified.

The monograph then assesses the effectiveness of US military campaign planning and execution in 1965. The conclusion is that the operational ways and means used by General Westmoreland in the conduct of his chosen strategy of attrition were not linked in any way with the national strategic aim of limited warfare. The monograph also identifies a failure in supervision by civilian leaders, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, of the military planning and conduct of the air and ground campaign in South Vietnam. Too little supervision was the cause of failure, not over supervision by the civilian and military leadership.

The monograph concludes with an analysis of the lessons from 1965 that are appropriate for the post-Cold War world. The most important lesson is the need for the military campaign planner to understand the linkage between national strategic aim and military means and ways. The monograph recommends rewriting FM 100-5 to include the doctrine and capability needed by US forces to fight protracted wars. American civilian leaders may commit American forces into a protracted war either through a clear strategic choice or as a result of restrictions on the use of force.

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INTRODUCTION

Campaign design is an integral and critical aspect of the operational art. The finest tactics, the best soldiers, the most modern equipment, the most competent leadership will only accomplish the national strategic objectives if linked with a sound campaign plan which addresses the requirements of the operational level of war. Today the American military is learning valuable campaign design lessons from its successes in Panama in 1989 and in the Persian Gulf War in 1991, but it appears to be ignoring operational lessons from its much more difficult failure in the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1975. This paper analyzes the campaign design for the entry of American combat forces into Vietnam in 1965, both from the perspective of current American joint military operational doctrine and from the perspective of contemporary, 1965, American military operational doctrine.

Section I reviews current U.S. military doctrine for the development of campaign plans at the operational level of war, identifying the essential ingredient of campaign design. Section II assesses the 1965 U.S. military doctrine for campaign planning, identifying strengths and weaknesses of the American approach to operational art in 1965 from the conventional and unconventional warfare aspects. Section III analyzes the strategic environment and the national strategy goals of the Vietnam involvement in the summer of 1965, identifying particular objectives assigned to the military. Section IV offers an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of U.S. military campaign planning in the summer of 1965, ending with the tactical battle of the Ia Drang Valley in

November 1965. The last section provides several lessons from the campaign planning conducted in the summer of 1965, and offers recommendations for current U.S. military campaign planners.

The entry of American combat forces into South Vietnam in the summer of 1965 began America's longest war, a war that killed more than fifty-five thousand Americans, destroyed two American Presidential administrations, and ended in the loss of South Vietnam to the Communist government of the North. It also effectively destroyed the American military as a potent force for nearly a decade. To run the risk of inadequate campaign planning in the near future is to run the risk of similar outcomes with a price America, in the New World Order, may not be able to bear.

THE ART OF CAMPAIGN DESIGN -- 1994

Current US Army doctrine is flawed. FM 100-5, the June 1993 edition, clearly states the need for "quick, decisive victory. . . anywhere in the world and under virtually any conditions."¹ Joint doctrine, the doctrine written under the authority of the US Armed Forces Joint Staff, has also embraced this concept.² This doctrine that quick, decisive wars are the goal of the US armed forces may ignore a type of war likely to be waged by the very political system the American armed forces have sworn to "support and defend."

Future war will not necessarily be limited to just "coup de main" actions like Panama in 1989 or the public image of the seemingly video-game conflict of the Persian Gulf War in 1991. The future is instead the interplay of political and military

factors, the routine subordination of military decisions to political requirements, and the inherent lack of clear and consistent goal development by the American political leadership. Additionally, future wars are at least as likely to be fought by one side striving for a protracted struggle as they are to be waged by both sides striving for rapid victory. The future may indeed not be the future of coherent nation states waging decisive war, but the future of a "clash of civilizations" or "the coming anarchy" of nation-less groups and cultures struggling for survival.³ Given the current doctrine of the American armed forces, these forces are insufficiently prepared for the actual spectrum of future warfare.

The current Joint, and Army, doctrine resulted from the historical experience of American armed forces and contemporary political and military requirements. Partially in an effort to resolve some of the difficulties from the painful loss of the Vietnam War, the American armed forces have developed several new concepts for the conduct of warfare, including the existence of an operational level of war, and the resultant need for specific campaign design.⁴ The operational level of war is the level of war that connects the political realm of constraints and limited objectives with the military realm of tactics. Campaign design, required for the efficient performance of the operational level of war, includes the linkage of ends, ways and means. This linkage is this monograph's framework for analysis of US military planning and execution of the first year in ground combat in Vietnam.⁵

The operational level of war is that level of command that links national military strategy goals with the actual objectives of military operations. This linkage is also critical to the proper, and appropriate, application of military force. This level of war, and its utility, is clearly defined in current doctrine, both Joint and Army.⁶ This level of war is normally characterized by the conduct of campaigns, "A series of related military operations designed to achieve one or more strategic objectives within a given time and space."⁷ Operational art, the execution of campaigns, "governs the deployment of forces, their commitment or withdrawal from battle, and the arrangement of battles and major operations to achieve strategic objectives."⁸

Effective campaign execution is dependent, in part, on effective campaign design, that set of theoretical and doctrinal precepts that define the concerns of the operational planner. The first element of campaign design is to identify an adequate end state, to formulate a set of strategic goals, and to establish effective connectivity of ends to means, including analysis of costs versus gains. Strategic goals, according to Joint Pub 3-0, 1993 and FM 100-5, 1993, are determined by the National Command Authority and then must be integrated into the operational design of the campaign. It is "fundamentally important" to understand that the end state, or conflict termination, "is an essential link between national security strategy, national military strategy and the desired outcome."⁹

The determination of appropriate means, the forces and resources to be used, and the appropriate ways, the military

objectives, techniques and tactics to be used, are done by the commander at the operational level, and integrated, through campaign design, into his plan of operations. These ways and means "may differ significantly for a negotiated settlement than for an imposed one." Doctrine also requires the military commander to notify the political authority of the estimated costs of the campaign, and the military commander is required to "understand the overall political aim and military objectives for termination and should request clarification" if needed.¹⁰ Current doctrine falls somewhat short of the 1985 Weinberger Criteria; however, the requirement that the military commander make clear both the strategic goals and the military ways and means required to achieve these goals is clear in current doctrine.¹¹ However, current doctrine, with its stated goal of quick and decisive victory, does not encompass the entire range of possible, indeed likely, future wars.

Analysis of the efficiency of operational linkage of tactical capabilities with strategic requirements is based, for this monograph, on these concepts: identification of an definable end state and an effective connectivity of ways and means to this end, including analysis of costs versus gains.

THE STATE OF THE ART OF CAMPAIGN DESIGN -- 1964

Like US military doctrine today, the US military campaign design system in 1964 was developed in reaction to the historical events of the two decades since the end of the Second World War. The lessons learned from success in the largest war in history,

followed by the searing reality of combat in the limited war that was Korea, combined with the bureaucratic battles fought over resources in the decade from 1953 to 1963, and the influence of a new generation of civilian and military leadership beginning in 1961, created a military force incapable of dealing with the reality of complex warfare in 1965. Ironically, just as the military forces of the United States were undergoing the most turbulence in their organization and doctrine since 1945, the United States began a new kind of war.¹²

In 1965, the majority of senior armed forces' officers were veterans of the Second World War.¹³ The Korean war may have had an even stronger impact on the military forces of 1965. Not only did many military leaders serve in this conflict, but the bitter lessons of this war became the foundation for conventional doctrine in the decade from 1953 to 1963¹⁴ The most compelling lesson was "never again." Many military leaders believed that a war limited by political constraints should never be fought the same way again; this feeling was particularly strong among Air Force leaders. This experience brought a new theory of warfare into dominance -- the theory of limited war in an era of containment.¹⁵

Limited war theory developed from the general theory of warfare formulated in the decade after the Korean War. The Eisenhower Administration coined the new defense policy the "New Look," a program based nearly entirely on the feasibility of waging and winning a nuclear war.¹⁶ This policy, although promoted as "joint" warfare, actually resulted in the dominance of

the Air Force, particularly the strategic bomber force.¹⁷ The Eisenhower reliance on nuclear deterrence and nuclear victory presented serious problems for the non-nuclear forces, making the decade after the Korean War extremely chaotic. For example, Army and Navy funding, which had been roughly equivalent among the services in 1953, shrank to half the Air Force budget by 1955, and remained this proportion through the 1950s.¹⁸ One result of the battles over budget and over roles and missions was the near total expenditure of intellectual effort by the uniformed leadership on bureaucratic policy instead of military theory and doctrine. The development of ideas on non-nuclear, or limited, war was done primarily by civilian theorists through the decade following the Korean War.¹⁹

Civilian theorists became dominant in non-nuclear war strategy after the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960. The Kennedy administration quickly replaced the "New Look" with the policy of "Flexible Response," a policy dedicated to keeping options open during conflict, and therefore preventing necessary escalation over the nuclear threshold. The theorists brought into the administration in 1961, especially those concentrated in the Defense Department under Secretary of Defense Robert Strange McNamara, brought a rational approach to conflict resolution, and a concentration on "how to do it and do it better" rather than "on what it is that should be done."²⁰ These strategists were also dedicated to models based on "rational actors" on the foreign policy stage. The intellectual dominance of these "whiz kids" was "nearly absolute" in the early 1960s.²¹

The Kennedy administration also began a series of programs designed to increase the readiness and capability of America's non-nuclear forces. The Army, the service most dramatically affected, replaced the Pentomic division organization with the ROAD division and decreased reliance on tactical nuclear weapons while adopting a whole new vocabulary of counterinsurgency, brush-fire wars, and Special Forces, and expanded from eleven combat divisions to sixteen, all in five years.²² These changes were driven by Kennedy's experiences in his first few weeks in office when he was confronted by a speech by Soviet Premier Khrushchev promoting world wide wars of "national liberation," a report from the military in Vietnam recommending a "new" program for counterinsurgency and nation building, and another report from Vietnam that "1961 promises to be a fateful year in Vietnam."²³

Confronted with a dangerous world, JFK turned to his new Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara with a new strategic approach. Kennedy's "Flexible Response" was quickly accepted as the basic concept for national security. This strategy accepted the necessity of containing Communism, the need to develop a non-nuclear program to deter local aggression (since massive retaliation had not worked), and the requirement for the US to minimize risk of escalation beyond the nuclear threshold. Additionally, to prevent uncontrolled escalation, this strategy required that the national intent be communicated to the Communist states, that flexible and capable military forces be able to apply exactly the correct amount of pressure based on the desire to coerce the enemy, and that American public support is necessary to

maintain these capabilities.²⁴ These tenets of "Flexible Response" would permit a conventional war to occur without escalation to nuclear war, but still allow American attainment of policy.

Within "Flexible Response," a system was developed for achievement of national aims without resort to nuclear war. This strategy, which became known as "gradualism," was developed by Thomas C. Schelling, among others. It was based on coercion of the enemy into acceptance of a compromise solution acceptable to both parties, but that accomplished American interests as well. This "diplomacy of violence" depended on enough power to coerce without being so powerful as to cause escalation to nuclear, or even a general non-nuclear, war with either China or the Soviet Union.²⁵ Gradualism gave McNamara the ability to stabilize a crisis at any time, simply by controlling the level of violence being applied. Unfortunately, this strategy did not account for non-rational actors, or actors who appeared non-rational by American standards. It also did not comprehend that coercion can not work if there is no compromise solution acceptable to both or even just one party. Gradualism also suffered from a paralysis of the future. According to Schelling, "the threat of violence in reserve is more important than the commitment of force in the field," therefore, the future always beckoned with the promise of success, regardless of the failures of the present.²⁶

Besides the strategic difficulties inherent in "gradualism," operational doctrine and campaign planning doctrine for waging conventional limited wars were inadequate in the early 1960s.

Although a system existed for joint command and control of operations, and the Defense Department included the Joint Staff and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, there was practically no joint doctrine existent in 1964.²⁷ FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations: Operations, discussed the need for unity of effort in Joint operations, but only devoted seven paragraphs in a 150 page document to joint and combined operations. Several essential characteristics of the operational design of campaigns were, however, included in FM 100-5. In a section entitled "Operational Environment," the manual included national objectives and support of national policy as critical portions of the analysis of a military operation.²⁸ However, limited warfare doctrine was still dominated by the experiences of World War II and Korea.²⁹ The manual mandated the offensive as the key to initiative and that offensive action was "necessary to achieve decisive results."³⁰ The objective of military action, despite the constraints of "gradualism," remained "the destruction of the enemy's armed forces and his will to fight. The objective of each operation must contribute to this ultimate objective."³¹

Despite the widespread criticism of the strategy of gradualism, America by 1964 had endorsed "gradualism" as its national military strategy for limited wars. This was due, in part, to a growing consensus that America could control future crises through diplomatic maneuvering built around flexible conventional forces.³² However, the doctrine of the Army, arguably the military force that required the most flexibility in

limited war, did not accept, or even identify, gradualism as a strategy.

In addition to the theory of conventional but limited war, the Kennedy administration also endorsed the theory of counterinsurgency as a national strategy for successful containment. Despite the personal involvement of the President, the military leadership of all the armed services gave scant attention to the needs of counterinsurgency through 1964.³³ The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff were "unsympathetic" to counterinsurgency and did not accept counterinsurgency as the key to victory in Vietnam, citing the differences between Vietnam and the effective counterinsurgencies in Malaysia and the Philippines. Additionally, counterinsurgency was "low-tech" and did not have the budget appeal of the other forms of war, and therefore was not bureaucratically vital for the services.³⁴

Of the services, the Air Force appeared most eager to endorse counterinsurgency, accepting the need to interdict insurgents as an Air Force mission. Of course, conventional airframes could be used to support counterinsurgency, granting the Air Force bureaucratic advantage in the Pentagon fights over budget, force structure, and counterinsurgency.³⁵ The Marine Corps, in part due to its extensive experience in "Small Wars" in the 1920s and 1930s, made "no major institutional concessions to counterinsurgency until it was deeply involved in Vietnam."³⁶ The Army, the service most involved in counterinsurgency developments, also "never really grappled with the larger issues of strategy for counterinsurgency."³⁷ Counterinsurgency was not only a product of

the "whiz kids" and the new President, not only advocated by the "non-conformists" of the Green Berets, but was also in direct contravention of the "article of faith" of the Army's creed of offensive warfare and conventional combat operations. Pacification was "passive;" war required offensive combat designed to destroy the enemy, not local security forces to guard villages and hamlets.³⁸

Given the obstructionism to counterinsurgency by the uniformed leadership, it is surprising to discover the depth of analysis of counterinsurgency in the 1962 edition of FM 100-5. An entire chapter, some twenty pages long, is devoted to "Military Operations against Irregular Forces." Although some of this chapter is devoted to conventional operations, there is also some sophisticated analysis of the need for integrated military, political, economic and cultural struggle against irregular forces.³⁹ Some of these discussions were very detailed and intuitive, but in the military leadership "confusion reigned" over counterinsurgency. The "crash" nature of the program resulted in the leadership focusing its efforts, such as they were, on tactical issues and the "elusive ideal of identifying the goals of military action within counterinsurgency" was overwhelmed by conventional thinking.⁴⁰ The leadership of the armed services, the officers educated in the cauldrons of World War II and Korea, failed to adapt to counterinsurgency.⁴¹

The military command structure that resulted from these two decades was also encumbered with an unusual amount of friction, using the term as Clausewitz defined it, as the result of

"individuals, the least important of who may chance to delay things or somehow make them go wrong."⁴² Disagreements among the leadership in the Pentagon were legendary by 1964. These disagreements were due in part to the diverse nature of the members of the JCS by 1964, in part to the presence in the highest circles of power of the youthful "whiz kids," the "civilian statisticians" of the McNamara Defense Department, and in part due to the abrogation by the uniformed leaders of strategic leadership.⁴³

The result of this mutual distrust was the concentration of decisions on national military strategy in the White House or in Saigon, since little agreement could be reached in the Pentagon. The military leadership feared the civilian strategists would cause military defeat; the civilian strategists feared the military desire for victory would trigger catastrophic escalation. Although the military leaders understood the "technocratic processes of war" and the civilian leaders understood politics, there was no integration of political and military policy, other than in the White House. This, in turn, created a disunity of effort, since consensus on policy was never achieved, and decisions made below the presidential level were only rarely integrated decisions. Integration, although certainly something that is done at the Presidential level, should also occur at subordinate headquarters as well during a conflict. During the early years of the American Vietnam War this integration in Vietnam, or at PACOM headquarters, did not occur. There was little, if any, consideration of the affect military actions would

have on the American home front, or the Vietnamese home front, during 1964 and 1965 at either MACV, the US embassy in South Vietnam, or PACOM.⁴⁴

The challenges presented for campaign planning by the command relationship in Washington were aggravated by a disunity of effort and disunity of command imposed upon the commanders in Vietnam itself. The structure for command of US forces in Vietnam violated the JCS principle of unity of command: the commander of all military forces was the US Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) based in Hawaii, but the command of forces in South Vietnam was delegated to the US Military Assistance Command - Vietnam (MACV), however, the US Ambassador to Vietnam was also given military authority over US forces.⁴⁵ This difficult command system was never resolved, despite efforts to create a unified command for Vietnam.⁴⁶

The result of this tradition, mutating strategy, and indifferent doctrine was an inefficient and convoluted command structure based on incomplete and poorly standardized doctrine, combined with the recent experience of political-military disagreement over strategy. Campaign design is very difficult even with a cogent joint doctrine to support the efforts of the commanders, but in 1964 no practical joint doctrine existed. To some extent this was not a decisive hindrance to the conduct of campaign design, however, since to many strategists the counterinsurgency war "belonged to the army" anyway. Of course this attitude itself was self-destructive to a coherent campaign plan, since it left far too many decisions to the MACV leadership

in Saigon. The outlook for effective and efficient campaign planning for the American combat involvement in Vietnam was not auspicious.

THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, 1964

The developing conflict in Vietnam was not the strategic priority for the national command authority of the United States in 1964. The objectives and capabilities of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China were the primary strategic concerns; prevention of a general thermo-nuclear war was the primary goal. A second, but still very potent concern was the need to prevent successful communist destruction of friendly governments throughout the world.⁴⁷ However, the overriding consideration in 1964 for the President, Lyndon B. Johnson, and his most intimate advisors, was the success of the domestic programs of Johnson's *Great Society*. Although Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, were primarily concerned with foreign threats to national security, the driving factor for policy formulation through the period was President Johnson's concern for domestic policy reforms.⁴⁸

Essential to the accomplishment of the *Great Society* was his re-election as President in November 1964, his continued support by both houses of Congress, and his avoidance of any foreign policy embarrassment. Arguably the quickest way to lose the election and the support of Congress would be for Johnson to be

labeled as the next president to "lose" a country to the Communists.⁴⁹

The fear of communist insurgencies supported and fostered by the great communist hegemony of the Soviet Union and Red China, was no longer endemic in the foreign policy apparatus inherited by Johnson. Estimates of Soviet and Communist Chinese capabilities and intentions by the State Department and the National Security Council were no longer uniform; differing opinions on the reality of the split in Sino-Soviet relations existed. However, communism was still identified as the source of the revolts, coups, and insurgencies rampant in the world, with Chinese Communism prevalent in Asia and Soviet Communism prevalent in Europe and Africa.⁵⁰ Linked with US opposition to Communism everywhere was the ideal of US credibility anywhere. If the US failed to support a client state, regardless of the quality of that state, it was assumed that other client states would lose their faith in future US support. The domino effect was not just South-East Asia, but the entire free world.⁵¹

The most obvious "hot spot" in the winter of 1963-1964 was the former French Indochina. Having already "lost" North Vietnam to the communists, and with the Kennedy administration's "neutralization" of Laos in 1962, Johnson could not afford to lose South Vietnam. However, Johnson understood, with brilliant clarity, that the American people would not support massive American bloodshed on the continent of Asia either, although polls clearly showed the American people did not want to lose any more countries to communism.⁵² The dilemma was how to prevent the

"loss" of another country, without losing the support of the American voter. Johnson's search for a solution to this dilemma is the story of America's search for strategic policy in Vietnam.

President Diem of South Vietnam had been overthrown in a US supported coup, and had been assassinated on November 1, 1963. After his death, the domestic political turmoil in South Vietnam increased, and so did the attacks by the Viet Cong insurgents.⁵³ Within four days of assuming the Presidency upon the assassination of John F. Kennedy, President Johnson had confirmed US policy for Vietnam in National Security Council Action Memorandum (NSAM) 273.⁵⁴ By late December, McNamara warned the President that South Vietnam was in danger of being overwhelmed by Communist attack. On January 29, 1964 yet another US sanctioned coup paralyzed South Vietnamese execution of the counter-insurgency.⁵⁵

The effectiveness of South Vietnamese counter insurgency efforts had evaporated over the winter of 1963-1964, and American policy advisors differed over the proper US response. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended strong US commitment of air and ground forces to assist the counter-insurgency effort, but President Johnson restated US policy as advisory and economic support only.⁵⁶ A change did occur, however, in the American approach to the war in the Spring of 1964. Concern over the increasing aggression of North Vietnam, as opposed to the war of insurgents in South Vietnam, began to become the focus of attention of the policy makers.⁵⁷

The identification of South Vietnam's failing war against the insurgents, which triggered decisions in Washington, also

triggered decisions in Hanoi. By the Spring of 1964, the South Vietnamese government controlled fewer than 40 per cent of its population, the Viet Cong was growing daily in personnel strength, skill, and power, and the government of South Vietnam seemed impotent to stop the insurgency.⁵⁸ At the same time Johnson was being advised that he needed to bring the war to Hanoi to prevent a defeat, Ho Chi Minh was being advised that the time was ripe for the final overthrow of the corrupt South Vietnamese government. In response to increasing bellicosity from Hanoi, the US government considered a series of military options, including a "full scenario of graduated overt pressure" against Hanoi.⁵⁹ However, the scenario was not implemented over concerns that expanding the war in Vietnam in the summer of 1964 would endanger pending civil rights legislation, as well as the pending Presidential election.⁶⁰

In the late summer of 1964, in the Tonkin Gulf, North Vietnamese torpedo boat attacks on American destroyers had three major results. The first was the first American use of force directly against North Vietnam, the second was the acceptance by Johnson of the need to retaliate for selected North Vietnamese provocation, and the last, and most important, was the permission given by the Congress of the United States for Johnson to pursue the war as he saw fit, without a declaration of war. President Johnson, after ordering the "Pierce Arrow" retaliation strikes by US Navy aircraft from carriers in the Tonkin Gulf, asked Congress for authority to take actions as necessary in Vietnam to prosecute American interests. Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution

August 10, 1964, unanimously in the House and with only two dissenting votes in the Senate. Although this was not a blank-check from Congress for the duration of the Vietnam War, Congress did not impose any limitations on the President's use of military force through the remainder of 1964 and all of 1965. Johnson again asked Congress for approval of his military actions on May 4, 1965 with a request for an additional \$700 million in military appropriations. Johnson publicly tied this monetary request with approval of the military course in Vietnam; Congress overwhelmingly approved this request also.⁶¹

On November 1, 1964, the Bien Hoa air base was mortared, with four Americans killed and five obsolescent bombers destroyed. There was no reaction, this time because of the proximity of the Presidential elections.⁶² Discussions on the use of air power in the fall of 1964 developed into three competing proposals. The JCS supported a decisive air campaign against North Vietnam to drive them out of the war.⁶³ Ambassador Taylor recommended a slow and careful approach to widening the war.⁶⁴ The Pentagon civilian strategists pressured for the use of gradualism against Hanoi.⁶⁵ President Johnson continued to believe the war could be won, or at least stabilized, without overt US combat force involvement, but fear of an intervention by the Chinese continued to be the "ultimate problem," not the fall of South Vietnam.⁶⁶

Except for the initiation of limited attacks by air on the infiltration routes through Laos, named "Barrel Roll," that, in strict secrecy, were initiated in December, President Johnson decided not to decide. On Christmas Eve, a Vietcong bomb exploded

in a bachelor officer's quarters in Saigon, killing two Americans and wounding thirty-eight others. Johnson was advised to launch reprisals, if not a general attack, but he declined.⁶⁷

In February, a series of Vietcong attacks crossed the threshold for US intervention. On February 7, 1965, the Vietcong killed nine Americans and wounded more than one hundred in an attack on the airfield at Pleiku and the helicopter base at Camp Holloway, South Vietnam. Johnson ordered reprisals, code-named "Flaming Dart," and air strikes from three carriers were launched at military targets in North Vietnam not, according to Secretary McNamara at a press conference to brief the raids, as a "tit-for-tat raid. . . but as a clear and necessary response to a test and challenge of our will and purpose and policy."⁶⁸ Three days later, the Vietcong attacked an Army barrack at Qui Nhon in South Vietnam, killing twenty-three Americans and wounding twenty-one. "Flaming Dart II hit the skies immediately" after a three and a half hour meeting of the National Security Council in the White House. These strikes were followed by warnings to the North Vietnamese that future strikes would not just be reactions to Vietcong attacks.⁶⁹

Pressure on President Johnson now reached a crescendo, pressure calling primarily, and nearly unanimously, for air strikes against the North in keeping with Phase II of the November 1964 policy proposal. A leading advocate was the new Air Force Chief of Staff, GEN John P. McConnell, who proposed a campaign of twenty-eight days to obliterate ninety-four strategic targets in North Vietnam. In late February, McNamara had proposed his own

plan to Johnson, and this plan had already been approved, in general, by the President before the Joint Chiefs proposed the McConnell plan.⁷⁰

"Rolling Thunder" was secretly approved by Johnson on February 13, 1965, was formally begun on March 2, and a Presidential order was issued regularizing the campaign on April 6, 1965. The restrictions placed on the Air Force plan were primarily Phase II of the November proposal, limited to attacks on only selected targets south of the 19th parallel. The selection of targets, the decisive campaign element in a strategy of gradualism, would be personally approved by the President and Secretary of Defense, and only with two weeks notice.⁷¹ "Rolling Thunder" was not a campaign of strategic bombing, it was the strategy of gradualism taken to its rational conclusion by policymakers who believed in the tenets of limited war in an age of nuclear confrontation. Precise application of power, with the strongest capability held back for the future, with clear delineation to the world of the self-imposed limits, and with the goal of coercing bargaining, was the essence of "Rolling Thunder," and of gradualism.

It did not work.

PLANNING THE 1965 CAMPAIGN

Rolling Thunder came at a price: the need to protect aircraft stationed at airfields in South Vietnam. The price, initially two USMC infantry battalions, eventually grew to include more than 100,000 US combat troops by the end of 1965, along with

a perceived entirely new mission for MACV. The incremental increase in troop strength and mission from March through July 1965 was partially a result of three misunderstandings between Washington and Saigon: the end to be achieved by ground forces, the means those ground forces were to use, and the eventual cost of a United States commitment to a land war on the Asian continent.⁷²

In the mind of the American commander on the ground, GEN William C. Westmoreland, the United States became committed to military victory in Vietnam when the first aircraft of Rolling Thunder began their bombings from bases in South Vietnam.⁷³ Authorization for two battalion landing teams of US Marines was received from the President on 25 February, however, this initial force was not authorized to conduct "day to day" operations against the Viet Cong.⁷⁴ The remainder of the story until July 28, 1965, was the continued attempts by GEN Westmoreland to get more troops and more freedom of action from Washington, attempts fraught with misunderstandings of the strategic goals set by the President of the United States.

This entry of US ground troops into harms way was over the objections of Ambassador Taylor. He was concerned that the South Vietnamese might abandon aggressive war prosecution if the Americans appeared willing to take over the war.⁷⁵ Taylor submitted a counter proposal, which he presented to the President during a trip to Washington in March 1965, including broad ranging political, economic, and social reform program for South Vietnam, and a single inter-agency control mechanism for pacification.⁷⁶

On March 20, Westmoreland requested two American divisions, one USMC division for the Marine area around Da Nang, the other an Army division for the Central Highlands.⁷⁷ GEN Harold K. Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, was dispatched by President Johnson to Vietnam to get some answers and come up with some solutions. The President, while thumping GEN Johnson on the chest with his index finger, ordered "You get things bubbling, General."⁷⁸ GEN Johnson sided with the commander on the ground and, upon his return on March 20, in coordination with the JCS, recommended to the President the entry of US troops into open, offensive ground combat roles in Vietnam. Johnson's recommendation included the use of an American division in the Central Highlands, well away from the coast and the most densely populated areas of South Vietnam.⁷⁹

The need for large numbers of American troops, and particularly for a division with an offensive mission in the Central Highlands, stemmed from the concern of the MACV commander and staff that the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) conventional units were preparing an offensive. This offensive was to either destroy the South Vietnamese government, cut South Vietnam in half along Highway 19 in the Central Highlands, or carve out an autonomous district in the Central Highlands, and the establish a communist government on the soil of South Vietnam.⁸⁰

In an attempt to resolve the issue, a meeting of the National Security Council was held on April 1. At this meeting, attended by the President, Taylor presented his argument, and the meeting adjourned with partial agreement that ground troops, in

divisional strength, were not yet needed. The President agreed to two more USMC battalions, and to a slightly less restrictive mission statement. In addition, the President approved 18,000 service support troops, logisticians and engineers, for South Vietnam. These troops were assumed by General Westmoreland to be the support elements for the entry of numerous ground combat forces yet to be authorized. These approvals were issued in National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 328 on April 6, 1965.⁸¹

However, yet another conference was called for April 20, 1965 in Honolulu to resolve the continuing difference of opinions over troop strength and mission requirements.⁸² This conference, attended by McNamara, MacNaughton, William Bundy, Wheeler, Taylor, Sharp and Westmoreland, resulted in a consensus that US forces would be needed soon to stabilize the precarious situation of the South. Forces totaling 82,000 were approved, including the brigade to secure Bien Hoa, and an additional brigade for Qui Nhon, but these forces would be used for defensive missions, with only local security authorized. The force level was now double NSAM 328 of April 6, but the mission statement was still acceptable to Ambassador Taylor.⁸³

On May 4, President Johnson requested seven hundred million dollars in additional funds to support the effort in Vietnam. His proposal to Congress phrased a vote in support of the funding to be a vote in support of his policies in Vietnam. The authorization passed overwhelmingly.⁸⁴ One day after Johnson sent the authorization request to Congress, the 173d Airborne Brigade arrived at Bien Hoa, the first US Army combat unit in Vietnam.⁸⁵

On May 13, Operation Mayflower, the first official bombing pause in Rolling Thunder, was announced by President Johnson, without effect.⁸⁶

In May and June, a series of proposals were made by the Joint Chiefs, each one larger and more aggressive than the last. The Honolulu conference consensus was for some 82,000 troops, on June 11, the JCS recommended 116,000 troops, and on July 2, the JCS recommended 179,000 troops.⁸⁷ These requests were driven by the Viet Cong attacks that began on May 11 and soon reached a tempo that the ARVN could not withstand, according to Westmoreland.⁸⁸ By the end of May, there were now reports that a second NVA division, the 304th, was in Laos and on its way into South Vietnam.⁸⁹

On June 12, the situation changed dramatically. South Vietnamese Prime Minister Quat resigned and was replaced by Prime Minister Ky and President Thieu.⁹⁰ On June 25, three days before Taylor's meeting, an NVA regiment attacked and seized a RVN district headquarters in Kontum province, in the central highlands. For Westmoreland and the MACV staff, this "signaled the long awaited" communist offensive aimed at dividing South Vietnam in two.⁹¹

These three months were the most critical months in the entire American involvement in the Vietnam War. The period most historians focus on, the month of July, was actually when the President merely agreed to abide by his decisions made in April, May, and especially, June to pursue a ground war in South Vietnam. Although Westmoreland clearly stated in a June 24, 1965 message

that the forces he identified in his June 7 and June 13 messages, were only a "stop-gap measure to save the ARVN from defeat," and "the premise must be that we are in for the long pull . . . it is time all concerned face up to the fact we must be prepare for a long war which will probably involve increasing numbers of troops," the President agreed to give authority for offensive combat and agreed to resolve further troop strengths rapidly.⁹² This was the critical decision, not the decision in July to send two divisions.

By July 1965 Rolling Thunder was a failure. Although the bombing had only lasted for four months, consensus had been reached by President Johnson's advisors that the North Vietnamese were not willing to be coerced into abandoning the struggle for unification.⁹³ Westmoreland's June 13 request for additional troops offered another opportunity for coercion in the context of limited war. Westmoreland also warned of possible military defeat by North Vietnamese forces if the troop request was not granted. To determine the course of action open to him, and to show to Congressional leaders that he was willing to listen to a complete discussion of the options, President Johnson sent McNamara to Saigon in mid July and convened a series of top-level meetings in the last week of July.⁹⁴ The McNamara trip to Saigon and the top-level advisory meetings with President Johnson resulted in a Presidential announcement to the nation on television on June 28,

1965. President Johnson's announcement listed two goals for the war.

"First, we intend to convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated by force of arms or by superior power. I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. We will meet his needs. Second, once the Communists know, as we know, that a violent solution is impossible, then a peaceful solution is inevitable. . . We are ready to discuss their proposals and our proposals. . . For we fear the meeting room no more than we fear the battlefield.⁹⁵

President Johnson's decision in July 1965 to commit an additional 100,000 American ground forces to Vietnam was made fully in keeping with the tenets of limited war theory.⁹⁶ His earlier decision to initiate Rolling Thunder had been made over the objections of some advisors that a bombing campaign of the North would trigger an invasion of the South by the NVA. Indeed, Ambassador Taylor warned that initiating Rolling Thunder, with its resulting NVA invasion, before the South Vietnamese were stable could lose the war. In June, when the President authorized Westmoreland to conduct offensive operations, the NVA were invading the South in response to Rolling Thunder.⁹⁷ This is incremental response to increasing levels of violence and cost, a basic tenet of limited war.

Johnson felt, understandably, that the wider war was his fault, and that domestic political critics would make very short work of his *Great Society* if it was discovered that, having caused a wider war, he then failed to respond with American troops as asked for by the military commander on the ground. This decision

was also fundamental American politics of domestic survival, an element always present in American President's foreign policy decisions.⁹⁸

Additionally, President Johnson was influenced by the successful intervention in the Dominican Republic. The apparent ease with which the American military was able to quell a civil war and impose an acceptable political solution convinced the President that commitment of military force could be a solution.⁹⁹

The misunderstanding over ends, ways, and means in the summer of 1965 came not only from the misunderstood theory of limited war and the effects of domestic politics, but also from the divided nature of the decision making and planning. The decisions were made in Washington, but the planning was done in Saigon, and communication between the planners and the decision makers was ineffective. The White House, the Pentagon civilian leadership, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff all deferred in the critical months of 1965 to the commander on the ground, GEN William C. Westmoreland.¹⁰⁰ His efforts were the result of the worsening military and political situation in South Vietnam, the existent contingency plans in MACV and PACOM, and his personal idea that victory could be achieved in the South, using the firepower and skill of American ground forces.

Westmoreland's concept, forwarded through CINCPAC on May 8, included three stages and four phases for military victory in South Vietnam. The three stages were to secure bases for deployment of forces, conduct deep patrolling in vicinity of the base areas, and then conduct decisive long range search and

destroy operations to destroy enemy forces. This was seen to occur in four phases.¹⁰¹

Westmoreland understood that he was faced not only by a conventional threat from the NVA forces and a large scale guerrilla war with main force Viet Cong units, but also a continuing insurgency among the South Vietnamese rural population. Rolling Thunder also had added the requirements to both guard and logistically sustain the bombing campaign against North Vietnam.¹⁰² However, Westmoreland clearly committed US forces into primarily a conventional, big-unit war. He neglected the pacification efforts as a result of prioritizing the conventional attacks on main force NVA and VC. This was a considered choice, due, in part, to Westmoreland's belief that the ARVN would be better able to conduct pacification than US forces. US forces could replace ARVN units fighting the conventional war, therefore making more ARVN units available for the counterinsurgency. He believed, based on his experience, that American troops, using the tactical advantage of airmobility and firepower, would win nearly every tactical battle.¹⁰³ He was right, but, as Harry Summers quotes a North Vietnamese officer, he was also irrelevant. Gaining only tactical victories is irrelevant when the enemy is gaining strategic victories.¹⁰⁴

The big-unit war was contrary to the stated objective of the national strategy to achieve a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. The President's objective was to prove to the VC and NVA that victory would not come on the battlefield in the South, while additional pressure would be applied from the air in the North.

Eventually, certainly before the American people lost their will to fight, the North Vietnamese would settle for some sort of diplomatic stalemate based on the temporary borders of the 1954 agreement. For the President, this was success. The military needed to apply the appropriate amount of coercive pressure in the air and *prevent defeat on the ground*, and the diplomats would achieve a settlement.

Westmoreland, Sharp and the JCS, believed victory was the destruction of NVA and VC main force units in South Vietnam. Sharp admitted this, in precise language, not in his memoir but in a booklet published in 1977. He stated that his reading of the Pentagon papers "contained some surprises for me." He had discovered that the President and his civilian advisors desired a graduated program of pressure for coercion combined with a strategy in the South of proving to the North that military victory was impossible, all ending in a negotiated settlement. He concluded that the "unified commander was not informed of this change in strategic thinking. I could detect it only by inference."¹⁰⁵

Westmoreland wanted to pursue a big-unit strategy, including the high costs in casualties and funding, because he honestly thought, and had been trained all his career, that victory in war came from maintaining the initiative, driving the enemy from the field, and destroying his armed forces. Westmoreland's discussion in his memoirs of the big-unit battles always hold a certain glamour and glory that he does not attach to the pacification effort. He did not understand the constraints and limits on the

means and ways available with a national strategic end of limited war to achieve a negotiated settlement.¹⁰⁶

Westmoreland's strategy for the use of American ground forces was a combination of crisis management and existing contingency plans (CONPLANS and OPLANS) from MACV and PACOM. These plans were all based on a large scale conventional war, with an NVA and Chinese invasion of South Vietnam, not on limited war fought for a negotiated settlement.¹⁰⁷ Westmoreland lost sight, in the late summer and fall of 1965, of the strategic ends required by the President. In pursuit of conventional military victory in Vietnam, which he thought was attainable in approximately three years, Westmoreland developed an attrition strategy, which relied on the tremendous American firepower advantage of airpower and artillery to produce a loss ratio acceptable to America but unacceptable to the North Vietnamese.¹⁰⁸ Although this seems acceptable as an operational objective for the conduct of limited war, the costs for the American people, without national commitment to the war and without tangible military successes, were higher than the President was willing to force on the American people and Congress. Westmoreland's chosen strategy of attrition was too costly for America in a limited war. He also pursued this strategy too aggressively, resulting in casualty figures that were unacceptable to the Washington decision makers by the end of 1965. By the spring of 1966 the NVA gained the initiative, choosing the timing and location for the remainder of the big battles.¹⁰⁹

The first large American operation was *Operation Starlite*, conducted by the USMC forces in the northern provinces of South Vietnam in August. During this operation, involving two USMC battalions, 614 VC were reported killed by "body count" but only one hundred weapons were collected. The American casualties were 45 killed (KIA) and 203 wounded (WIA). Several South Vietnamese "villages were completely destroyed by supporting arms," and the South Vietnamese local leadership was "less than enthusiastic" over the outcome of the operation, according to the Marine Official History.¹¹⁰ This operation also resulted in *CBS Evening News* coverage, complete with commentary by Morley Safer, on August 5, 1965 of American Marines burning South Vietnamese huts with Zippo lighters, something the American public had difficulty understanding.¹¹¹

The second major operation was the Ia Drang campaign of October-November 1965, conducted as a search and destroy operation using all available assets of the 1st Cavalry Division, Airmobile. This operation, the aim of Westmoreland's months long struggle to deploy the Airmobile division into the Central Highlands, also resulted in high American casualties, and a disconcerting lack of tangible military success. Indeed, the American press was misled by MACV personnel over American casualties and military success in the second major fight in the Ia Drang, Landing Zone Albany. Even the reported casualty figures, 230 American KIA and 271 WIA in only four days, shocked both the American people and the decision makers in Washington.¹¹²

Secretary McNamara was the most deeply shocked. After notification of the losses in Ia Drang, and the battle's proximity to Laos, McNamara commented to an aide, "We can't run this war from Washington, let Westmoreland run it."¹¹³ On November 23, Westmoreland requested double the agreed upon deployments of US troops for 1966. McNamara went to Saigon. On this trip he learned he had "made an enormous miscalculation in July when he promised that the US intervention would be limited and controlled." Westmoreland requested forces to an end strength of 400,000 by the end of 1966, Prime Minister Ky "hope(d) to increase (government control of the population) to 50% two years from now," and the Air Force was incapable of effective interdiction of supplies to the NVA and VC in the South.¹¹⁴

Two weeks before the fight at Albany, the Secretary of Defense had estimated for President Johnson that by early 1967 American KIA could become 500-800 per month. After the fight at LZ Albany, McNamara, given "the increased willingness of the Communist forces to stand and fight," now believed that "US KIA can be expected to reach 1,000 a month." He reported to President Johnson on November 30 that the "odds are even that we will be faced in early 1967 with a 'no-decision' at an even higher level."¹¹⁵ Less than a week later, he revised his estimate.

The odds are about even that, even with the recommended deployments, we will be faced with a military standoff at a much higher level, with pacification still stalled, and with any prospect of military success marred by chances of an active Chinese intervention.¹¹⁶

Why did McNamara continue to support the war, even after he had changed his estimate of the controllability of the conflict? His biographer believes he "was committed to it, politically, publicly, and emotionally. Giving up was not in his program or temperament. And he believed the cause was just."¹¹⁷ However, Shapley does show that McNamara clearly and unequivocally warned President Johnson, after McNamara made his post-Ia Drang trip to Saigon and "looked into the abyss and saw three years of war leading only to a stalemate."¹¹⁸

GEN Johnson's first reaction was "elation" over the victory, believing that "after Ia Drang, the worst was behind us."¹¹⁹ However, to determine the true nature of the war, after receiving a "glowing briefing" from MACV after Ia Drang, Johnson went to Vietnam in December 1965. He met with junior officers to get a sensing of how the war was being conducted and "concluded that it had not been a victory at all and that Westmoreland's big-unit strategy was misconceived." He returned to Washington and began arranging for Westmoreland's replacement by General Creighton Abrams.¹²⁰ Johnson did not react quite as forcefully as McNamara, since he continued to press for economic and national mobilization. However he, and other senior Army leaders, were concerned that the NVA and the VC controlled the tempo, and therefore believed that Westmoreland's strategy of attrition could not work.¹²¹ Even as early as December 1965, the senior US Army officer believed that the Westmoreland strategy could not work, indeed that it was destined to fail since Westmoreland could not control the pace of attrition, and therefore could never make the

North Vietnamese lose more men and material than they were prepared to lose. General Johnson believed the enemy had gained the initiative, and would keep it.

General Westmoreland, however, was enthusiastic, and considered Ia Drang a verification of his strategy. According to a statement released after the battle, Westmoreland believed "the ability of American troops to meet and defeat the best troops the enemy could put on the field of battle was once more demonstrated beyond any possible doubt, as was the Army's airmobility concept."¹²² Westmoreland, and MACV, saw Ia Drang as a fine example of how attrition as a strategy worked in Vietnam. An NVA force of division strength had stood "toe to toe with the Americans" and then were smashed by American firepower. In his memoir, Westmoreland draws one distinct lesson from Ia Drang - the M16 rifle was a fine weapon that should have been issued more quickly and in greater numbers. He clearly states that in Vietnam there were no "Kasserine Passes as in World War II and no costly retreats." He does not mention LZ Albany at all.¹²³ Even in his memoir he does not see the effect of more than three hundred KIA on America or his political superiors. He failed to see how his chosen strategy of attrition cut both ways. The commander on the ground felt, in the words of the primary historian of the Army in Vietnam, that "no alternative strategies need be explored."¹²⁴

Indeed, after Ia Drang the bifurcated nature of the war became increasingly obvious. The commander on the ground, Westmoreland, pursued battlefield victory with ever-increasing vigor, using ever-increasing American forces, with ever-increasing

American casualties. In Washington, at Westmoreland's putative headquarters, the decision makers were convinced that a military solution was no longer cost-effective and probably no longer even possible.

LESSONS FOR FUTURE US INITIAL CAMPAIGNS

The failure of military planning conducted by MACV in the spring and summer of 1965, and approved by the Defense Department civilian and military leadership, occurred because the military planners never understood the goals as expressed by President Johnson. Victory was not the goal. The military planners based all their plans on a battlefield victory to be achieved by force of arms. For the President, the goals of the ground war and Rolling Thunder were identical -- pressure the North Vietnamese into accepting a negotiated settlement that accepted the existence of a sovereign South Vietnam, without any requirement for a battlefield victory to drive this coercion. Coercion would occur because the North would fear greater destruction from the air and would see the impossibility of a victory by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army in South Vietnam.

This misunderstanding was driven by General Westmoreland's, and the Joint Chiefs' of Staff, desire to prosecute the war to military victory. Although American doctrine in 1965 clearly stated the primacy of political goals over military success, and although the basic fundamental doctrine of conventional war through the decade from 1955 to 1965 was limited war, complete with the primacy of political requirements over military needs,

the generals and admirals still best understood the military needs, and only gave passing interest to the political requirements as expressed by the President and the Secretary of State, and the doctrine of limited war.

The clearest example of this misunderstanding is evident in McNamara's report to the President on his trip to Saigon in July 1965. In President Johnson's words, McNamara reported that during his meetings with Ambassador Taylor, Ambassador-designate Lodge, Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland, and Admiral Sharp, "all concurred in the military elements of (my) recommendation, although some of them did not fully support his proposal to try to inaugurate negotiations."¹²⁵ If the diplomats and the military leaders responsible for the operational level of war in South Vietnam did not "fully support" McNamara's plan to achieve negotiations, they did not support the President's goal in pursuing the war. Johnson did not believe in a battlefield success. According to his memoirs, he believed in a capacity to coerce North Vietnamese agreement to a negotiated settlement. The President and the Secretary of Defense were in agreement; the uniformed leadership did not understand the strategic requirements.

This failure to understand the end state inherent in gradualism, battlefield coercion versus battlefield victory, stimulated a series of misunderstandings over the ways and means appropriate for the war. In a national strategy of gradualism, battlefield success could not achieve decisive victory since this could cause escalation to nuclear war. Strategic success could

only be attained by hurting the enemy enough to coerce him into acceptance of defeat without endangering his existence. Just right use of force, enough to coerce but not so much as to endanger the enemy's national existence, was the requirement of gradualism. This was never understood in PACOM or MACV as the strategic aim of the ground war in Vietnam.

President Johnson never understood how Westmoreland saw the war on the ground in South Vietnam. Johnson was briefed numerous times about the possible, indeed probable, increases needed for 1966 and 1967, but he did not believe they would be necessary. The recent positive experience of the Dominican Republic intervention, the "can-do" attitude of the uniformed chiefs and General Westmoreland, and the sheer need to give the commander on the ground what he had requested to prevent absolute military defeat, forced Johnson's hand. He believed, in July 1965, that the air and ground forces of the United States and its allies, could coerce that little "piss-ant" country into peace long before the American people could slip from his control. He retained his faith in himself as an astute politician; however, he failed to understand that the military, by seeking battlefield victory would call for the commitment of forces in excess of the ways and means possible in the limited war Johnson was willing to fight. The situation in Vietnam, despite his enormous efforts, slipped from his control.

His military chiefs, in turn, felt that with more means authorized, which they felt the President would eventually agree to, and with wider ways approved, which they too would be able to

successfully push for, battlefield victory was possible.

Incrementalism, the basic requirement of Schelling's limited war theory, itself gave the generals the impression that sooner or later, but certainly soon enough, the President would agree to the force levels, the means, and the freedom of action, the ways, necessary for victory.

A product of the division between the President and Secretary of Defense and the uniformed chiefs, including MACV, was the concept that the political will of the American people was a concern of the President, not the uniformed chiefs. President Johnson refused to let the military chiefs even worry about American public opinion, saying to GEN Johnson "you leave the American people to me."¹²⁶

A problem MACV never resolved was understanding the possibility of defeat. MACV and the JCS reflected the tradition of victory the American military had inculcated since 1865. Defeat, either a military defeat on the battlefield, or the loss of political support, was considered unlikely, and received no attention until after the Ia Drang Campaign. Proper military planning requires the assessment of the chances of defeat, as well as pursuing the way's achievement of the political objectives. Doctrine today is clear on this point; doctrine in 1965 was silent.

A lesson from the 1965 experience that is directly transferable to 1994 is the need to develop a doctrine, and appropriate force structure and training base, for whatever type of warfare the political leaders believe is necessary. In 1994,

peace operations are one of the essential tasks given to the military by the political leadership. Although new doctrine is being written, there appears to be a general attitude that conventional forces, with conventional equipment and training, and perhaps a couple of weeks added peace training, can effectively conduct peace operations.¹²⁷ The 1993 edition of the US Army's capstone document, FM 100-5, discusses the environment of operations other than war (OOTW), including peace operations, and discusses new principles for OOTW. However the manual also, in its only comment on force structure and training in the chapter on OOTW, states "the leadership, organization, equipment, discipline, and skills gained in training for war are also of use to the government in operations other than war."¹²⁸

The lesson of the 1961-1965 experience with counterinsurgency is clear: conventional forces will most likely be used conventionally and military leadership will be reluctant to accept military techniques they have not been fully resourced and trained to use. If America's political leaders are serious about peace operations, the military should develop force structure and training to support our political superiors. Doctrine is essential, but it, like tactical victory, is irrelevant unless fully supported by both force structure and training appropriate to the doctrine.

Perhaps a harsher lesson, but more dangerous, is that American military leaders cannot count on precise statements of strategic goals from their political leaders. If such a precise statement is not given to the military officer responsible for

operational planning and execution, he must do everything in his power to define such a statement, and then gain approval from the President and Secretary of Defense. Military action taken without a clear statement of strategic ends, is guaranteed to cause serious problems for both the military executor and the political decision maker. The lack of such clarity could, again, lead to a series of misunderstanding and the loss of yet another American war.¹²⁹

CONCLUSION

The Vietnam War was a political and military strategic and operational defeat for the United States and both Vietnams. Poorly planned, poorly executed, with ineffective political and military leadership, and with inadequate linkage of strategic ends with military means and ways, Vietnam was destined to be a debacle.

The summer of 1965 presented some opportunities for successful political strategic and military operational planning and execution. Congress, expressing the public opinion reflected in polls, completely supported President Johnson's military policy in two major votes, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and the May 1965 emergency funding bill. Overwhelming American air power, coupled with well trained and equipped American conventional ground forces, were prepared to answer the President's call for action. The call came, but it was an "uncertain trumpet."

Without commitment to a clear end state acceptable to the American people, and effective linkage of this end state with

ways, military objectives, and means, military forces, America lost this war six months after American ground forces began offensive operations. Secretary of Defense MacNamara, the original believer in systems analysis and control over power, presented with the casualty figures from the "victories" at Ia Drang, commented that the war was uncontrollable from Washington. The Chief of Staff of the Army, confronted with the results of the Ia Drang campaign, began a behind-the-scenes campaign to replace General Westmoreland. The casualties, and the lack of battlefield decision, in Operation Starlite and at Ia Drang, identified the failure of effective connection of military operations and objectives with the strategic goals established in limited war theory, and the President's objectives. It was also recognized by the end of 1965 that the price was probably too high for the United States to endure, given the military strategy of attrition brought to the war by General Westmoreland.

Given a plan without linkage of ways, means, and ends, failure was very likely. Given a military strategy of attrition in a war where the enemy was willing to pay a higher price, success was very unlikely. The uniformed planners, the civilian advisors, the civilian decision makers, all failed the American people in the sixteen months from August 1964 to November 1965. The legacy of this defeat faces the United States still.

¹ United States, Department of the Army. Operations, FM 100-5, June 1993. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1993, iv.

² United States, Department of Defense, The Joint Staff. Doctrine for Joint Operations, Joint Pub 3-0, 9 September 1993. Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1993, II-1.

³ Unconventional warfare in the future may be much more unconventional than we can imagine. Although Sun Tzu clearly stated "no country has ever profited from protracted warfare," the future as prophesied by Robert D. Kaplan, and to a lesser extent by Samuel P. Huntington, is the future of nation-less conflict, struggle between autonomous groups striving for survival in a post-nation state environment. See Ralph D. Sawyer, translation and commentary, The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993) 159; Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," The Atlantic Monthly Vol 273 No 2 (February 1994) 70 and Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," Foreign Affairs Vol 72 no 3 (Summer 1993) 22.

⁴ For an example of the effect of recent history and political requirements on the development of US Army doctrine as reflected in FM 100-5; see Paul H. Herbert, Deciding What Has to Be Done: General William E. Depuy and the 1976 Edition of FM 100-5, Operations; Leavenworth Paper Number 16, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988).

⁵ David M. Barrett, Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and his Vietnam Advisors, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993) 191 posits a theory of rationality that includes three aspects: ability to clearly relate means to the ends desired, the prudent consideration of a large range of options, and ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The relation of means and ends is the critical criteria for this monograph.

⁶ See, for example, United States, Department of Defense, The Joint Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations, Joint Pub 3-0, 9 September 1993, Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1993), II-3 defines the operational level as the linkage of "tactical employment of forces to strategic objectives." FM 100-5, June 1993, 6-2, states "the operational level is the vital link between national- and theater-strategic aims and tactical employment of forces on the battlefield."

⁷ FM 100-5, June 1993, Glossary-1.

⁸ Joint Pub 3-0, 9 September 1993, II-3.

⁹ Joint Pub 3-0, 9 September 1993, I-11-I-12.

¹⁰ Joint Pub 3-0, 9 September 1993, I-13.

¹¹The Weinberger Criteria, promulgated by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger in 1985, gave six requirements before the use of military force should be ordered by the National Command Authority. The engagement must be vital to national interests; the goal must be victory -- if it is not, do not commit; there must be clearly defined political and military objectives, with properly tailored military ways and means; there must be continual reassessment of the situation, and adjustment of ends, ways, and means; the support of the American people and Congress is required; and the use of force should always be a last resort. See David T. Twining, "Vietnam and the Six Criteria for the use of Military Force," Parameters 15 (Winter 1985) 10-18. Many Army officers think the Weinberger criteria is appropriate. This monograph points out that these criteria can be used as a goal, but using these six criteria as a necessary pre-condition for military commitment is wishful thinking.

¹²A. J. Bacevich, The Pentomic Era: The US Army Between Korea and Vietnam, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1986) 8. Bacevich discusses the army, in particular, as suffering from the decade 1953 - 1963. This period was one of isolation, prolonged adversity, shrinking manpower, reduced budgets and "widespread doubts about future utility." Phillip B. Davidson, Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988) 337 discusses the turmoil in the armed forces as a result of the revolution in leadership, doctrine and organization begun by President Kennedy in 1961. Robert A. Doughty, Evolution of U.S. Army Tactical Doctrine, 1946-1976, Leavenworth Paper Number 1, August 1979, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1979) 29, inaccurately credits the Army with remarkable accomplishments "considering the sweeping nature of the changes." One of the Army's accomplishments Doughty discusses was the use of the airborne concept as a counter guerrilla tactic, which, as described below, is an error.

¹³General William C. Westmoreland, the commander of the US forces in South Vietnam in 1965, for example, graduated from West Point in 1936, served in World War II as a lieutenant colonel artillery battalion commander (1943) and a full colonel, division chief of staff (1945). His experiences in World War II were of large scale conventional forces fighting a large scale, seemingly unlimited, total war. GEN Westmoreland's experiences as a twenty-nine year old combat battalion commander formed many of his conceptions about leadership and warfare, as similar experiences formed similar concepts for his peers and senior subordinates. Davidson, Vietnam at War, 371. Also see the book jacket for biographical information on LTG Davidson, GEN Westmoreland's J2. LTG Davidson graduated from West Point in 1939, and served in World War II in Europe as a cavalry battalion commander and regimental executive officer. Also see Doughty, Evolution, 2 on influence of European Theater World War II experiences.

¹⁴Westmoreland, again for example, served in the Korean war as the regimental commander of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team,

but only in 1952, rather late in the war. He was promoted to Brigadier General before leaving Korea. David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, (New York: Penguin, 1969), 676.

¹⁵Davidson, Vietnam at War, 338; William W. Momyer, Air Power in Three Wars, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1978) 6; Earl H. Tilford, Jr., "Setup: Why and How the US Air Force Lost in Vietnam," Armed Forces and Society 17 no 3 (Spring 1991) 328; Andrew F. Krepinevich, The Army and Vietnam, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), 16. Mark Clodfelter, The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam, (New York: Free Press, 1989) x, 3, 12-26, discusses the impact of the "aberration" of Korea on the Air Force leadership.

¹⁶Bacevich, 15.

¹⁷Bacevich, 35-36, for joint warfare role under Eisenhower. Tilford "Setup," 330-331 for results of decade on Air Force. Clodfelter, 26-37, discusses the impact of Korea on Air Force Doctrine.

¹⁸Bacevich, 16.

¹⁹Bacevich, 151, 141; Doughty, 25. For an analysis of the changing strategic concepts from the late 1950s through the early 1960s, see Collin S. Gray, "What Rand Hath Wrought," Foreign Policy, No. 4 (Fall 1971) 112.

²⁰Paul M. Kattenburg, "Reflections on Vietnam: Of Revisionism and Lessons Yet to be Learned," Parameters 14 (Autumn 1984) 44-45.

²¹Gray, 119, 111-112; Nicholas J. Pappas, "The Academic Strategists and the Vietnam War," Naval War College Review 36 (July-August 1983) 34. Their dominance may have been due to the effects of the National Security Act of 1947, and subsequent decisions by Secretary of Defense Forrestal. Forrestal issued a directive in 1949 which resulted in a diminished desire for serving uniformed leaders to write articles about policy without receiving prior authorization. See Tilford, "Setup," 331-332. For an example of the rational approach to conflict resolution, see the modeling described in Theodore J. Rubin, et al., Mobility: Context, Concepts and Application to Counter-Guerrilla Warfare, (Santa Barbara, CA: General Electric Company, July 1, 1962). This GE study used nuclear war terminology and modeling to analyze counterinsurgency operations at the village level.

²²Bacevich, 142-143 and George C. Herring, "The 1st Cavalry and the Ia Drang Valley, 18 October - 24 November 1965," in Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, eds., America's First Battles, 1776 - 1965, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986) 302.

²³James R. Arnold, The First Domino: Eisenhower, the Military and America's Intervention in Vietnam, (New York: William Morrow, 1991) 398-399; Doughty, 26.

²⁴Wesley K. Clark, "Gradualism and American Military Strategy," Military Review 55 (September 1975) 5-6. "Flexible Response" was the message of Maxwell Taylor's Uncertain Trumpet published in 1959. Taylor, as described below, was a critical figure in the US involvement in Vietnam. Also see Grey, 116-117 and Krepinevich, 29-30.

²⁵Wendell John Coats, Jr., "Malingering McNamara Model for the Use of U.S. Military Force," Strategic Review 17 (Fall 1989) 19. For an analysis of the various limited war theorists, see the scholarly monograph by Michael W. Cannon, "The Development of the American Theory of Limited War, 1945 - 1963," US Army Advanced Military Studies Program, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Term II, Academic Year 1988 - 1989.

²⁶Thomas Schelling, Arms and Influence. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1966) 12, 143; Coats, 20; Richard K. Betts, "Misadventure Revisited," in Peter Braestrup, ed., Vietnam as History, (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1984) 9-10. Clodfelter, 15, notes that none other than General of the Army Omar N. Bradley observed in November 1952 that "air power constitutes the most potent means (to) impel the communists to agree, finally, to acceptable armistice terms." Clodfelter, 34, also quotes Bernard Brodie from a 1958 study, "Airpower properly employed permits a graduated or mounting application of force and persuasion . . . by striking as necessary and withdrawing repeatedly without the stigma of retreat ever being an issue."

²⁷See for example, United States, Department of Defense, The Joint Staff, Unified Action Armed Forces, Joint Pub 2, November 1959, (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1959). This document, one of the very few publications of the Joint Staff in the early 1960s, is concerned only with command and control systems and procedures. There was no system of joint publications to develop doctrine for multiple services, and this system would not come into existence until the legislative requirements of the Goldwater-Nichols act of 1986. See United States Department of Defense, The Joint Staff, Joint Publication System: Joint Doctrine and Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures Development Plan, Joint Pub 1-01 (with changes 1 & 2), April 1988, (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1988), I-2.

²⁸United States, Department of the Army. Field Service Regulation, Operations, FM 100-5, 1962. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 19 February 1962) 24, 15. Although a change was issued to the 1962 edition of the manual in 1964, it was only cosmetic. The 1962 edition was the basic operations manual for the first year of American involvement in ground combat in Vietnam. See Jack E. Pattison, "Something Old, Something New, Something Tactics in Vietnam." (US Army Advanced Military Studies Program, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Term II, Academic Year 1988 - 1989) 12. A

discussion of the effects of this doctrine on American campaign planning is given below.

²⁹Herring, "Ia Drang," 302-303

³⁰FM 100-5, 1962, 63.

³¹FM 100-5, 1962, 46.

³²A. P. Sights, Jr., "Graduated Pressure in Theory and Practice," US Naval Institute Proceedings 96 (July 1970) 42.

³³The military leadership remained convinced that either nuclear war or conventional limited war were the primary threats to national security, and they devoted their attentions to the more likely threats. Lawrence J. Bassett and Stephen E. Pelz, "The Failed Search for Victory: Vietnam and the Politics of War," in Thomas G. Paterson, ed., Kennedy's Quest for Victory, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 231; Andrew J. Pierre, "America Down, Russia Up: The Changing Political Role of Military Power," Foreign Policy 4 (Fall 1971) 168-169; Doughty, 26; Ernest Evans, Wars Without Splendor: The US Military and Low-Level Conflict, (New York: Greenwood, 1987) 94, describes the attempts to adopt counterinsurgency as "largely unsuccessful." Krepinevich discusses what he calls the "Army Concept" of conventional and successful wars, a concept adhered to by the Army leadership throughout the 1950s and 1960s. See Krepinevich, 5-6.

³⁴Bassett and Pelz, 242, 238-239; Evans, 96.

³⁵A. H. Peterson, G. C. Reinhardt and E. E. Conger, eds. Symposium on the Role of Airpower in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional Warfare: The Philippine Huk Campaign. (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1963) iii, 57 for example discussed the power, and limitations of air power in support of counterinsurgency. Clodfelter, 34-35, states the counterinsurgency program of Kennedy had "no effect" on the Air Force. Larry E. Cable, Conflict of Myths: The Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War. (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 174-177 discusses the Air Force doctrinal changes under counterinsurgency, such as they were.

³⁶Allan R. Millett, "Lessons Learned From Vietnam: Book Review Essay," Marine Corps Gazette 64 (September 1980) 75. Cable, Conflict of Myths, 160-171 gives a view of the "Small Wars" nature of the USMC.

³⁷Herring, "Ia Drang," 304-305.

³⁸Mark Perry, Four Stars: The Inside Story of the Forty-Year Battle between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and America's Civilian Leaders, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986) 150; Doughty, 26. See also Davidson, Vietnam at War, 346 and 358. Davidson,

who served as GEN Westmoreland's J2 in 1966 and 1967, misquotes Sun Tzu on 353. He quotes one of the commentators, Ho Yen-hsi, in The Art of War as if the commentator was Sun Tzu. This may be indicative of the quality of education of senior Army officers on the strategic theories of the Orient during the Vietnam era. Krepinevich, 31-36, believes much of the unwillingness of Army leadership to indorse counterinsurgency was the "lack of expertise" of Kennedy's advisors who were responsible for the development of Presidential oversight over counterinsurgency.

³⁹FM 100-5, 1962, Chapter 11. Chapter 10 discusses "Unconventional Warfare," but Chapter 11 is the detailed analysis of counterinsurgency. For a discussion of doctrinal development in the era of counterinsurgency, see Cable, Conflict of Myths, 113-180. Additionally, numerous studies emerged from both civilian and military organizations, and with increasing frequency, as Kennedy continued his emphasis on counterinsurgency. See, for example, the very intuitive and thought-provoking study by James Farmer, Counterinsurgency: Principles and Practice in Vietnam. (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1964) 10-11.

⁴⁰Doughty, 26 and Krepinevich, 38-42.

⁴¹This failure is exemplified by the misunderstandings of revolutionary war by senior military officers writing about the Vietnam experience after it was finished. See Momyer, 10. He states that by 1961, the fighting in South Vietnam had "passed through that stage of conflict." Momyer failed to understand, even from the perspective of 1978, that revolutionary war can react to situational changes and mutate back into previous stages. Revolutionary war is not perfectly cyclic and is not deterministically uni-directional, as Momyer, the commander of the Air Force forces in Vietnam for much of the early war years, believed. Krepinevich, 46-56, discusses the role of officer education on counterinsurgency in the 1960s. In addition to the failures of the educational reform sponsored by President Kennedy, a simple fact is that the senior leaders during 1965 were beyond the grasp of the Army officer education system in the early 1960s. There did not exist, and still does not, any formal educational programs for general officers in the United States Army.

⁴²Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) 119.

⁴³See Perry, Chapter 5, for a journalists account of the lack of historical stature of the JCS by 1964. Indeed, GEN Wheeler, the Chairman in 1964, was not even a veteran of combat. Perry, 135 and Davidson, Vietnam at War, 340-341 discuss the "fervid political environment and the "whiz kid" mentality. The abrogation of military strategic thought and leadership is discussed in Kattenburg, "Reflections," 44. Kattenburg overstates the case for civilian control, however. He incorrectly believes "all the key decisions were made by civilians."

⁴⁴Perry, 133-134; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 340-341; Tilford, 333; Michael W. Davidson, "Senior Officers and Vietnam Policymaking," Parameters 16 (Spring 1986) 59.

⁴⁵When GEN (Ret) Maxwell Taylor, retired from the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff position, became US Ambassador to Vietnam, he carried authorization from President Johnson to command all US forces engaged in the fight in South Vietnam. See Davidson, "Senior Officers," 58-59. Krepinevich, 94-95, gives an excellent analysis of the negative influence a retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Taylor, had over the command system in Vietnam. Taylor, with his extensive military background, tended to view resolution of the Vietnam problem as primarily a military role, he consistently down-played the role of economics and politics and emphasized military involvement, although with more limits than GEN Westmoreland preferred. The failure to place all airpower assets under one commander in Vietnam was equivalent to a similar failure experienced in the Korean War, Clodfelter, 21.

⁴⁶MACV became operational on May 15, 1962 under the command of GEN Paul D. Harkins. The earlier command, Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) which had been formed from the Military Advisory Group (MAG) in 1955, became a subordinate command to MACV. See Momyer, 66-69; Charles J. Timmes, "The Naive Years," Army 27 (May 1977) 36. Momyer, 75-80, discusses the requested changes to the command structure in the early 1960s. Arthur T. Frame, "Unity of Command: The Failure to Achieve Unity of Command in Vietnam," in Roger J. Spiller, ed., Combined Arms in Battle Since 1939, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1992) 284-285 gives details on discussions by GEN Westmoreland with PACOM, the Chairman, JCS and the Chief of the South Vietnamese General Staff on attempts to gain unity of command. Westmoreland discovered the "political sensitivity" of the South Vietnamese to a combined staff, and he quickly dropped any attempt to achieve unity of command among the coalition forces in South Vietnam. Westmoreland "told his subordinates to get used to an environment where responsibility was 'shared and cooperatively discharged without . . . traditional command arrangements.'" The clearest discussion of the MACV command apparatus and its effect on the conduct of the war is in Bruce Palmer, Jr., The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984) 29-33. Palmer criticizes the MACV structure for overloading the commander with too many day-to-day responsibilities, therefore "precluding" effective control of the political-military conduct of the war. Even the volume in the initial US Army History Series on Vietnam concludes the command arrangement was unsatisfactory and made daily decision making difficult: George S. Eckhardt, Command and Control, 1950 - 1969; Vietnam Studies, (Department of the Army, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1974), 61-63. CINCPAC retained overall command from a JCS desire to have unity of command over the larger war, if the struggle escalated by intervention of China. Internal to the MACV structure, there was

also disunity over command of the pacification effort, since there was no inter-agency command authority until one was established under Robert W. Komer in 1966. Momyer, 68; Guenther Lewy, America in Vietnam, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 459 shows an organization chart of MACV in 1965. The counterinsurgency command disaster is chronicled in Robert H. Miller, "Vietnam: Folly, Quagmire or Inevitability?" Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 15 no 2 (April - June 1992) 115-117. See Douglas S. Blaufarb, The Counterinsurgency Era: US Doctrine and Performance -- 1950 to the Present, (New York: The Free Press, 1977) 233-239 for role of Komer in 1966 reorganization. Evans, 104, discusses the problems of disunity of command in Vietnam.

⁴⁷The linkage of Vietnam to larger issues of containment, credibility and the Cold War is very clear and acknowledged by nearly all critics of the war. See George C. Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950 - 1975, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979) 115; Barrett, Uncertain Warriors, 14; Bernard B. Fall, Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis, (New York: Praeger, 1967) 407; Momyer, 9 and Betts, "Misadventure," 8.

⁴⁸Betts, "Misadventure," 6, lists three reasons for Johnson's involvement in Vietnam, two of them are concerns of domestic politics; also Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1979) 96-97.

⁴⁹LBJ concern for domestic stability to develop Great Society is expressed in Gelb and Betts, 96-97.

⁵⁰Evans, 57, 59 and 62 on role of Khrushchev speech on "wars of national liberation" and role of China; Bassett and Felz, 225 on Kennedy and containment. Herring, America's Longest War, 113-114 discusses the Sino-Soviet split and advice to Johnson by 1964.

⁵¹Larry Berman, Planning a Tragedy, (New York: Norton, 1982) 8-9 for domino theory in Indochina and Miller, "Folly" for strategic situation in SE Asia. McNamara referred also to Vietnam as a "laboratory for the development of organizations and procedures for the conduct of sublimated war" in Momyer, 10.

⁵²Berman, Planning a Tragedy, 63.

⁵³Some commentators state Johnson believed himself committed to South Vietnam, at least in part, due to the US government's involvement in the assassination of President Diem. See Miller, "Folly," 113 and Berman, Planning a Tragedy, 29.

⁵⁴This policy confirmed strong US support for South Vietnamese resistance of communist aggression. Herring, America's Longest War, 110. Johnson also called for the study of alternative options for Vietnam in Davidson, Vietnam at War, 335.

⁵⁵Herring, America's Longest War, 111-112.

⁵⁶Although the number of US advisors rose rapidly from some 16,000 in January 1964 to over 26,000 by December. The advisor numbers are from Deborah Shapley, Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara, (Boston: Little Brown, 1993) 289. NSAM 288, approved March 17, 1964, Davidson, Vietnam at War, 34. This was not the first counterinsurgency effort to fail in South Vietnam. Jeffrey Clarke, "On Strategy and the Vietnam War," Parameters 16 (Winter 1986) 40 describes the failure of the effort under Kennedy from 1961 to late 1963; Bassett and Pelz, 239-251 discuss the Strategic Hamlet program collapse in 1961-1962. Part of the reason for these failures was the very poor quality of training of the American advisors, see Timmes for a discussion of the lack of language and cultural awareness training in 1961 to 1964.

⁵⁷Raymond Aron, "On Dubious Battles," Translated by John J. Madigan, III, Parameters 10 (December 1980) 7, correctly points out that North Vietnam was, indeed aggressively attacking a separate nation in its attacks on South Vietnam. See also the booklets issued by the US Department of State: A Threat To Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam, Part I, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 1961) and Aggression from the North: The Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign to Conquer South Viet-Nam, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, February 1965) for evidence on North Vietnamese involvement.

⁵⁸Davidson, Vietnam at War, 34 cites memorandum from Secretary McNamara to Johnson, March 16, 1964.

⁵⁹Momyer, 13-14 analyzes the late 1963 and early 1964 JCS plans to bring the war to North Vietnam. Vietcong attacks in February 1964 resulted in three Americans killed in action, but despite appeals from the JCS, no action was taken. Davidson, Vietnam at War, 313.

⁶⁰Herring, America's Longest War, 119. The attacks in South Vietnam included the sinking of an American ship at dockside in Saigon on May 2, 1964 and the death of two US advisors, and fifty South Vietnamese, in an attack on a base camp on July 4, 1964. There was no US response to either provocation. Davidson, Vietnam at War, 313-316.

⁶¹Momyer, 15-16; Herring, America's Longest War, 123; Berman, Planning a Tragedy, 33-34. Davidson, Vietnam at War, 317-322 has a detailed discussion of the military events of the Tonkin Gulf incident. For the May 1965 funding request, see Gallucci, 112; Karnow, 420; Momyer, 18-19; Gelb and Betts, 372-374; Phillip B. Davidson, Secrets of the Vietnam War, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1990) 149; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 345-347; Westmoreland, Soldier Reports, 159.

⁶²Davidson, Vietnam at War, 323. There were also practical military constraints on action from August through November 1964.

Insufficient aircraft were available in South East Asia until the end of November, since there were three distinct air battles under consideration -- close air support for Republic of Vietnam (RVN) troops against the Vietcong, interdiction against North Vietnamese infiltration, and the strategic campaign against the North itself. Limited close air support for the RVN was already underway in the summer of 1964, the other two air wars were under daily discussion in the Pentagon and the White House. Momyer, 17, discusses the constraints on aircraft availability.

⁶³The proposals for an air campaign against the North from the JCS were generated by GEN Curtis E. LeMay, the Air Force Chief of Staff, who advocated a strategic air campaign against the North to destroy both the capacity of the North Vietnamese war effort, including their ability to import weapons and material, and break their national will to continue the struggle. LeMay had been pushing for this option at least since September, but by the end of November he was joined by the rest of the Chiefs. Their plan, which was endorsed by the November study group appointed by Johnson, called for a two phase attack on North Vietnam. The first phase, about one month in duration, would be directed against the infiltration routes into South Vietnam, with reprisal strikes on the North and a general effort to push the RVN to reform pacification efforts. Phase two, between two and six months long, would be the "large scale air offensive" including, if necessary, naval blockade of North Vietnam. Herring, America's Longest War, 126; Perry on the discussions internal to the JCS, 140-142; Gelb and Betts, 108-109.

⁶⁴Ambassador Taylor proposed reprisal bombings, but warned that general aerial attacks on North Vietnam would trigger a direct invasion of the South by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). He proposed a medium course as the best alternative, some bombing, but not too much. The CINCPAC commander, ADM U. S. Grant Sharp, agreed with Taylor. Perry, 141-142. Another dissenting voice was that of George Ball who that bombing of the North would not compel Hanoi to halt aggression, improve RVN morale or defeat the Vietcong. He did warn, however, that China would be likely to intervene if an unlimited air campaign was launched against the North. See Herring, America's Longest War, 125 and Gelb and Betts, 111. The JCS were also not dissuaded from their proposal by a wargame (Sigma II), in which the bombing had achieved very little. Gelb and Betts, 110.

⁶⁵The advocates of a gradual response, primarily civilian strategists from the Pentagon lead by John T. McNaughton, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, with the backing of Secretary McNamara, proposed an escalatory set of bombings, designed specifically in keeping with the tenets of gradualism, to bring the North Vietnamese into agreement. Herring, America's Longest War, 124-125; Clark, "Gradualism," 7; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 339 briefly discusses McNaughton's role.

⁶⁶Gelb and Betts, 105-106. President Johnson called for a complete policy review on Vietnam immediately after the November election, Gelb and Betts, 108-109. This group was headed by Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, Perry, 143-144. The belief that airpower by itself could bring the North Vietnamese to a peace settlement was part of the creed of Air Force doctrine that developed from the Korean War experience, and the decade since then. See Clodfelter, 25, for the statements of General William W. Momyer, the officer soon to be in command of Air Force assets in South Vietnam.

⁶⁷Davidson, Vietnam at War, 324; Momyer, 18; Gelb and Bets, 116. Krepinevich, 135, discusses the options considered in December 1964 and January 1965 for the use of ground troops in response to these provocations. Ambassador Taylor was adamantly opposed to any additional ground force deployment into South Vietnam. Taylor had written to President Johnson that air attacks on North Vietnam should only be initiated after the South Vietnamese government was strong enough to resist the additional pressure Taylor believed the bombing would stimulate from the North. In August 1964, Taylor saw this target date as January 1, 1965. See Clodfelter, 48-49.

⁶⁸Shapley, 320-321 and Clodfelter, 58 for Pleiku response.

⁶⁹Ibid.; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 335-336 and Momyer, 18 for details on these operations.

⁷⁰The McConnell plan, although not the flawed timing, is discussed in Momyer, 18-20. McConnell proposed a four phase plan to the JCS, which was then briefed to the President by Secretary McNamara. This plan, which encompassed some thirteen weeks of strategic bombing of unlimited targets in North Vietnam, including targets on the very border with China, mining the port of Haiphong, and direct attacks on populated areas near important industrial targets, violated the principles of limited war, and was not approved by either McNamara or Johnson. Barrett, 17, discusses the role of National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy in proposing limited reaction to the attacks on Pleiku and Qui Nhon. A more complete analysis of the decision to initiate Rolling Thunder is found in Shapley, 320-326.

⁷¹Momyer, 18-20 for restrictions; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 341 discusses the appeal Rolling Thunder had for President Johnson. Coats, 22, gives the basic assumptions of Rolling Thunder. Clodfelter's analysis, which he titles "The Genesis of Graduated Thunder," 39-64, is the most complete available in print.

⁷²Evans, 134-135, states "It is basically impossible to formulate a coherent military strategy if the political leadership does not have a clear set of political goals that it wishes to achieve in the war." He is correct, but this was not the problem in Vietnam in 1965. The problem in 1965 was that the political leadership had a "clear set of goals" but the military never understood the

limits these goals would, and did, place on their strategy (or operational level of war).

⁷³Gallucci, Robert L, Neither Peace Nor Honor: The Politics of American Military Policy in Viet-Nam, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 110, posits Westmoreland had an offensive strategy in mind "weeks" before March 1965.

⁷⁴Krepinevich, 139.

⁷⁵Taylor had supported the use of American construction engineer units in Vietnam as early as 1961, but he had never supported the use of ground troops in South Vietnam. Krepinevich, 138-139, discusses Taylor's anxieties about the use of American ground troops.

⁷⁶Gallucci, 108, Taylor's cable to the State Department February 22, 1965, stated that "once this policy (the provision against American ground troops in South Vietnam) is breached, it will be very difficult to hold the line." Four days later, Taylor was informed that two USMC battalions were on the way to Da Nang. Also see Gelb and Betts, 120-122 for Taylor's proposals.

⁷⁷Gallucci, 108-110. One request, dated March 5, 1965, from CINCPAC to the JCS requested an entire USMC brigade for Da Nang. Another requested two divisions, one at Da Nang, the second in the Central Highlands. Victor H. Krulak, First To Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984) 182, describes the calls for additional troops and wider mission as "the first steps in a massive expansion responding to the siren calls of seeking more favorable terrain and engaging the enemy."

⁷⁸William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 151 gives this anecdote. Halberstam, 684, gives a somewhat different view, but still one of an aggressive and irritated President accosting the Chief of Staff of the Army saying, "I want some solutions, I want some answers." One example of the type of relationship that existed between President Johnson and his military subordinates.

⁷⁹Davidson, Vietnam at War, 344; Gelb and Betts, 122; Gallucci, 108-110. Johnson's recommendation to the President included a division to the Central Highlands and four divisions along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to stop infiltration and prevent a cross-border conventional invasion. See Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, July 24, 1965 reproduced in Gelb and Betts, 372-374.

⁸⁰The NVA 325th Division, consisting of three regiments, the 32d, 95th and 101st, was identified deploying into South Vietnam as early as December 1964, and "positive evidence developed" in mid March 1965. Westmoreland, Soldier Reports, 151-152; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 324-325. Robert W. Komer, Bureaucracy at War: US

Performance in the Vietnam Conflict, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), 49-50 posits the increasing reports on NVA forces infiltrating into South Vietnam "Tended to become an end in itself, drawing attention. . . further away from support of pacification as an essential corollary."

⁸¹Troops defending the air bases were now permitted local offensive security actions, as deemed necessary by the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. Multiple, nearly simultaneous meetings occurred at the very end of March in Washington. On March 29, Taylor met with McNamara and the Joint Chiefs. McNamara was impressed by Taylor's arguments, but the JCS were skeptical of this Chairman turned Ambassador. Westmoreland also sent his operations officer, BG William Depuy, to the Pentagon to present the MACV plan for offensive operations. Halberstam, 687-689. NSAM 328 authorized a 20,000 increase in forces, two additional USMC battalions and the change of mission. Included in the force structure change was 18,000 support troops, an increase that the JCS interpreted as forecasting additional troop deployments in the near future. See Gallucci, 111; also Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History, (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 417-418. Westmoreland in Soldier Reports, 158, relates the "President's approval at long last of engineer and logistical troops seemed to presage additional combat troops later."

⁸²The incremental nature of the troop authorizations had continued. Westmoreland requested an Army brigade for security of the Bien Hoa and another brigade for Qui Nhon on April 10. The request for the Bien Hoa brigade was tentatively approved by McNamara on April 13. Taylor heard of the additional brigade two days later and was "shocked" with the ease with which these additional forces were approved. Taylor cabled Rusk that the line would now be harder and harder to hold. Halberstam, 692. On April 11, Westmoreland cabled CINCPAC requesting again the division for the central highlands, despite the outcome of the April 1 meeting and NSAM 328, Gallucci, 111.

⁸³Gallucci, 112; Karnow, 420; Momyer, 18-19; Gelb and Betts, 372-374; Phillip B. Davidson, Secrets of the Vietnam War, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1990) 149; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 345-347; Westmoreland, Soldier Reports, 159.

⁸⁴Lyndon Baines Johnson, The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 142-143; Barrett, Uncertain Warriors, 48-49.

⁸⁵John J. Tolson, Airmobility, 1961 - 1971; Vietnam Studies. Department of the Army, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973), 63.

⁸⁶The American ambassador to Moscow delivered a message offering negotiations to the North Vietnamese embassy. The note was returned unopened and on May 15 Radio Hanoi rejected the bombing pause as a "trick." Karnow, 421.

⁸⁷Davidson, Vietnam at War, 348-349; Gallucci, 113; Gelb and Betts, 372-374 reproduction of memorandum of McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, July 24, 1965.

⁸⁸In addition to the possibly decisive NVA force entering South Vietnam, a deployment never seen before, the Viet Cong attacks throughout South Vietnam resulted in the destruction of a South Vietnamese army battalion every week, and the loss of a district headquarters about as often. This loss rate could not be sustained, according to MACV and the government of South Vietnam. Dave Richard Palmer, Summons of the Trumpet, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), 105; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 347-348; Gelb and Betts, 123-124, Jack Shulimson and Charles M. Johnson. US Marines in Vietnam, 1965, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 50-51 specifies that the VC main force units were attacking very effectively the ARVN battalions dispersed in the countryside on pacification efforts. This may have had a negative impact on Westmoreland's desire to continue US support for the pacification effort in South Vietnam.

⁸⁹Davidson, Vietnam at War, 348; Gelb and Betts, 123-124; Westmoreland, Soldier Reports, 162 discusses his concept of operations, submitted to Washington on May 8, 1965, in anticipation of the start of the Viet Cong attacks. This concept of operations is discussed in detail below.

⁹⁰This period is extremely confusing for the analyst to decipher. Numerous cables crossed in transmission, and several key participants, ADM Sharp for one, changed his mind on substantive issues during this period. See Gallucci, 113-114; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 348-349; Johnson, Vantage Point, 142-143; and the McGeorge Bundy to Johnson memorandum of July 24, 1965 reproduced in Gelb and Betts, 372-374. June 7, 1965 cable from MACV to CINCPAC proposed that "no course of action" was open except commitment of US ground combat forces "as rapidly as possible." CINCPAC disagreed with Westmoreland over the Central Highlands location of the Army division, but primarily for logistic reasons. On June 11, Sharp forwarded Westmoreland's request to the JCS, who in turn forwarded the request to McNamara. McNamara approved the request, but only for planning. On June 13, Westmoreland cabled the JCS directly, imploring action due to the urgency of the situation. He specifically requested the airmobile division for the central highlands and "freedom of action." This June 13 request became known as the "44 battalion request." On June 22, Chairman Wheeler cabled Westmoreland that the 44 battalions were coming as soon as possible. On June 26, Westmoreland was given permission to commit his forces as he saw fit. Johnson admits in his memoir that this was a critical decision, but he made it because of the requirements of the commander on the ground.

⁹¹Johnson, Vantage Point, 143-144; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 349.

⁹²Shulimson and Johnson, US Marines, 51-52 discusses the June 24 message from Westmoreland to the JCS in response to questions posed by the President the previous day. The message from the JCS to MACV asked if the 44 battalions were "enough to convince the DRV/VC they could not win." The precise language used in the June 22 message is critical to my analysis of the misunderstanding between MACV and the White House, as discussed below.

⁹³Berman, Planning a Tragedy, 34-35 states that President Johnson had lost faith in an airpower only solution to the war as early as December 1964; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 344 discusses Westmoreland's dissatisfaction with the Rolling Thunder outcome; Herring, America's Longest War, 130 discusses President Johnson's dissatisfaction by April. Also see Pierre, 171. Although diplomatic overtures were made in May by the US ambassador to Moscow and in June through the Canadian government, and the North Vietnamese clearly felt a threat to targets they valued, since they increased the air defense system in North Vietnam in the spring and early summer of 1965, the North Vietnamese failed to react to the coercive pressure. Robert A. Pape, Jr., "Coercive Air Power in the Vietnam War," International Security 15 (Fall 1990) 103-146 calls the Rolling Thunder campaign a combination of "Lenient Schelling, Genteel Douhet and Interdiction" and states the campaign up to the summer of 1965 was executed in accordance with "Lenient Schelling" rules, striking mostly military targets and some industrial sites. The initial campaign failed when the North Vietnamese failed to react to any overtures from the American diplomats, although the bombing progressively moved further and further north from March to July. In August 1965, the strategy of Rolling Thunder was changed to interdiction, an admission that "Lenient Schelling" had failed. Pape believes Rolling Thunder failed because the threatened losses were not sufficient to coerce the abandonment of the national goal of unification.

⁹⁴A fascinating study by itself, the meetings in July, and McNamara's abortive trip to Saigon, have been the focus of study by most historians and political scientists interested in the decision to go to war in 1965. For the best analysis, which is beyond the scope of this monograph, see Gelb and Betts, 121-132; Karnow, 420-426; Barrett, 34-42. Raymond G. Davis, "Politics and War: Twelve Fatal Decisions that Rendered Defeat in Vietnam." Marine Corps Gazette 73 (August 1989) 75-78 also offers some interesting speculation on the role the reserve mobilization decision would play in the conduct of the war.

⁹⁵United States, Department of State, Why Vietnam, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), 6.

⁹⁶This misunderstanding was caused, in part, by the energy consumed in the emotional fight between President Johnson, Secretary McNamara and Army Chief of Staff Johnson over Reserve and National Guard call-up at the meetings in July. These meetings are perhaps the most studied meetings in American

history, but also meetings for which we do not have written evidence of the thoughts of McNamara or General Johnson. Shapley's recent biography of McNamara sheds some light, but McNamara, although interviewed extensively for the biography, still refuses to answer direct questions about these meetings. Apparently, when President Johnson made the final decision on the Reserve call up issue on July 23, he asked an aide if his decision to not call Reserves would get McNamara to resign in protest. See Shapley 345-346. GEN Johnson's role is even more shrouded in myth and rumor. Perry, Four Stars, 156, relates the story, but without citation, that GEN Johnson, after conducting emotional debate with the President during the July meetings over the Reserve issue, heard the President's decision first when he saw the televised speech. GEN Johnson then drove to the White House, took off his four stars of general's rank, and was about to resign in protest, when he changed his mind. Perry relates Johnson calling this change of mind, "the worst, the most immoral decision I've ever made." Of course, the assertion that GEN Johnson did not know about the reserve call-up decision until five days after it was made is also an indicator of the amount of communication occurring that July between the Secretary of Defense and the Chief of Staff of the Army. Also see Raymond G. Davis, "Politics and War: Twelve Fatal Decisions that Rendered Defeat in Vietnam." Marine Corps Gazette 73 (August 1989) 75-78, on the impact the reserve call-up decision had on force deployment.

⁹⁷Davidson, Vietnam at War, 326-328, discusses the warnings on this subject submitted both by ADM Sharp and GEN Westmoreland.

⁹⁸Johnson, Vantage Point, 148-150; Karnow, 420-426; Gelb and Betts 128.

⁹⁹Gelb and Betts, 124, is the only source I consulted which mentioned this possibility. However, a study of the Dominican intervention, Lawrence A. Yates, Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966, Leavenworth Papers, Number 15, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988), offers several insights into the influence Johnson's decisions over the Dominican Republic in April 1965 may have had on his decisions for military ground force in Vietnam. See especially 91, where Johnson decides on a middle course of several options, exactly his same decision in July; 174, which points out Johnson's irritation when the JCS cannot keep track of friendly force deployments, adding to his distrust of the military; 142, where Harold K. Johnson is quoted in a letter to a subordinate "one thing that must be remembered, is that the command of squads has now been transferred to Washington." A "might-have-been" from the DOMREP intervention is a warning by LTG Palmer, the commander of forces, about becoming involved in similar situations only at the very start. "If the situation has been allowed to deteriorate we had better think twice before we commit our force to a large country -- it may be a bottomless pit," 176. Krepinevich, 157, comments on the military's inability to specify forces required for success to

President Johnson as "disconcerting," similar to the DOMREP experience.

¹⁰⁰Krepinevich, 140, quotes GEN Johnson's "blank check" from the President statement to Westmoreland in March 1965. Barrett, 23; "We moved to the mission of active combat in whatever way seems wise to General Westmoreland," describing earlier decision to authorize offensive combat in memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to President Johnson, July 24, 1965, reproduced in Gelb and Betts, 372-374; Karnow, 425-426; Ernest Furgurson, Westmoreland: The Inevitable General, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), 310.

¹⁰¹The first phase was to deploy to defend coastal enclaves, then conduct local offensive operations to secure the coastal enclaves, then secure inland enclaves, and then conduct the decisive offensive operations into the inland areas from these inland enclaves. Gallucci, 112-113; The Pentagon Papers, Senator Mike Gravel Edition, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), III: 411-412; Krepinevich, 151.

¹⁰²Logistical requirements also presented Westmoreland with unresolved issues in the spring of 1965. D. R. Palmer, 114-115; Frances Fitzgerald, Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972) 266; Edward N. Luttwak, "Notes on Low-intensity Warfare," Parameters 13 (December 1983) 11-18.

¹⁰³For discussions of Westmoreland's attrition strategy, see Frances Fitzgerald, Fire in the Lake, 271; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 339, 353 and 359; and Furgurson, 323-324. D. R. Palmer, 114 gives a good overview. For critical discussions, see Komer, Bureaucracy at War, 49; Edward Lansdale, "Contradictions in Military Culture," in Willard Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell, The Lessons of Vietnam, (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, 1977) 42; and F. P. Henderson, "Vietnam: A War Lost Before it Started." Marine Corps Gazette 74 no 9 (Spring 1990) 85-86.

¹⁰⁴Harry G. Summers, Jr., On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1982), 1.

¹⁰⁵U. S. Grant Sharp, Strategic Direction of the Armed Forces. (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1977), 19.

¹⁰⁶Doughty, 30; Davidson, Vietnam at War, 346, 358; Shulimson and Johnson, Marines in Vietnam, 52; Jack Shulimson and Edward F. Wells, "First In, First Out: The Marine Experience in Vietnam, 1965-1971," Marine Corps Gazette 68 (January 1984) 36-46; Komer, 48; Gallucci, 114-115. Krepinevich, 140, gives a critique of Westmoreland's strategy of big battles never accounting for the flexible nature of North Vietnam's theory of warfare.

107 Westmoreland used these OPLANS for his planning until the July decision not to call up Reserves. This decision forced MACV to rewrite all plans, since the Reserve call-up was essential to the logistical apparatus for the OPLANS. Starting from scratch in August 1965, Westmoreland pursued a planning strategy of determining what force structure limits were attainable from Washington, deploying those forces into theater as rapidly as logistics allowed, and then aggressively conduct conventional, offensive operations against NVA and VC main force units, primarily in the hinterlands of South Vietnam. Komer, 106; Momyer, 21-22; United States Department of Defense, The Joint Staff, Unified Action Armed Forces, Joint Pub 2, November 1959, (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1959) 55-56 gives doctrinal requirements for CONPLANS and OPLANS. Also see Krepinevich, 93, 96, 132, 133-134, 137.

108 Davidson, "Senior," 60; Furgurson, 310; Komer 57-60 for an incisive critique by a contemporary opponent of Westmoreland's strategy; Doughty 31-32; Luttwak, 13; James R. Ward, "Vietnam: Insurgency or War?" Military Review 69 (January 1989) 23; Guenter Lewy, "Some Political-military Lessons of the Vietnam War," Parameters 14 (Spring 1984) 6. A valuable critique of attrition in Vietnam is in Krepinevich, 165-168 and 259-260.

109 Harry G. Summers, Jr. misses the point of the failure of strategy during the Vietnam War. In his seminal work, On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context, 53-58, he states that the war was a conventional war, not a civil war or a revolutionary war. He is wrong. The war was not conventional, or civil, or revolutionary, it was, for the United States, a limited war fought under the precepts of limited war theory from the late 1950s. Summers' analysis is flawed, he does not sufficiently criticize Westmoreland for his failure to appreciate the strategic goals and the acceptable means and ways to achieve these goals in military action. Also see Gelb and Betts, 126; Shulimson and Johnson, Marines in Vietnam, 84-91; Davidson, Secrets, 150-151; Lewy, "Some," 7.

110 Shulimson and Johnson, Marines in Vietnam, 69-82.

111 Lewy, 52-53, discusses this "Cam Ne episode" in detail. The Marines in Vietnam maintained a running disagreement with Westmoreland over the proper strategy. The Marines, with their experience in the 1920s and 1930s with "Small Wars" were convinced that pacification was the key to success in Vietnam. They were consistently overruled by Westmoreland. See Krulak, First to Fight, 189-198; Shulimson and Wells, 37-38. Bernard Fall, Last Reflections on a War, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) 215 comments on body counts and the failure of attrition in the Marine area of South Vietnam.

112 The best discussion of the Ia Drang Campaign is Herring, "1st Cavalry." The problem with the journalists was over MACV attempts to claim victory and only moderate losses at Albany. The press

was "quizzical," in Herring's words, and New York Times reporter Charles Mohr "warned that the Army was feeding the American public a 'steady stream of misinformation.'" Herring, 304, states the airmobile division had been "designed explicitly" for counterinsurgency warfare and Vietnam. This is conventional wisdom, but it is inaccurate. Krepinevich, 122 and 126, discusses the reality of the airmobility concept, designed for use in conventional wars in Europe against the Soviet Union. Tolson, 73-83, does not mention the Albany fight, and the casualties in this official history do not include the casualties from Albany. It is a story of success, not a story of reality.

¹¹³Shapley, 357. Also see Gelb and Betts, 133; D. R. Palmer, 136-137.

¹¹⁴Shapley, 356-358, Pentagon Papers, IV, Document 262, page 622-623.

¹¹⁵Pentagon Papers, IV, Document 262, page 623.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 624. According to Shapley, McNamara "looked into the abyss and saw three years of war leading only to stalemate, and he warned the President," on December 6, 1965.

¹¹⁷Shapley, 359.

¹¹⁸Shapley, 359-362, discusses McNamara's disillusionment with the war after Ia Drang, and criticism he has received for his failure to "go public" with his change of attitude. She believes McNamara felt it was his duty to continue to support the President in a righteous cause, and do his best to search for "fresh" ideas to reach an acceptable solution in Vietnam. His search for "fresh" solutions began immediately after the post-Ia Drang trip with a phone call to Arthur Schlesinger, and a series of meetings searching for a non-military solution to the conflict, as well as meetings aimed at military innovations, such as the "McNamara line" across the DMZ. He also endorsed a December 1965 bombing halt in another effort to make gradualism, and limited war theory, work in Vietnam.

¹¹⁹Shapley, 356 and Krepinevich, 169.

¹²⁰Perry, 156-157, discusses in detail Johnson's trip to Vietnam in December 1965. Also see Halberstam, 594-595 for Johnson's apprehensions about the ground war. Quote is from Shapley, note number 16, 652-653.

¹²¹Gelb and Betts, 271; Krepinevich, 179-180..

¹²²Herring, "1st Cavalry," 325-326. Herring does not identify the Washington repercussions of the Ia Drang campaign. Krepinevich, 169, quotes Westmoreland.

123 Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 190-192. Westmoreland actually skips in his memoir from mid-November 1965 to mid-February 1966 with no mention of the difficulties his additional troop request of late November 1965 caused in Washington.

124 Krepinevich, 169.

125 Johnson, Vantage Point, 145-146.

126 Perry, 152; Halberstam, 593.

127 This attitude was revealed in nearly unanimous opinion expressed by guest speakers at AMSP during Academic Year 1993-1994. Only one general officer, of the numerous officers who spoke to the AMSP class, stated that conventional forces, trained conventionally, could not effectively do peace operations. Every other speaker perceived peace operations as a task for normal units, normally trained, with at most two or three additional weeks of training prior to commitment to peace operations.

128 FM 100-5, 1993, 13-8.

129 Herring, America's Longest War, ix, perhaps has the most cogent analysis of Vietnam. The war could not have been won "in any meaningful sense at a moral or material cost most Americans deemed acceptable." Fall, Two Vietnams, 413-414, believed that an effective strategy in Vietnam was "simply a matter of adjusting means and ends, and justifying the latter." Petraeus, 46, correctly points out the errors of the conventional lessons from Vietnam. We cannot simply avoid another Vietnam, we must be aggressive in searching out our errors, and then ensure we do not repeat them. This includes the error of failing to understand the political objectives "before putting soldiers at risk."

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