

~~(S)~~ Concerned over this interservice debate and confusion about respective requirements, Secretary Zuckert wrote to Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance and expressed the view that the basic issue should be whether the plans were feasible logistically, politically acceptable, and credible to the Communists. Vance, in turn, asked the JCS to review all of CINCPAC's contingency plans and U.S. ability to reinforce NATO and meet its other military commitments.⁵

~~(S)~~ On 11 March Wheeler informed the JCS that neither Plan 32-64 nor Plan 39-65 was feasible. The first could not be carried out within a stipulated time and had been overtaken by events (the dispatch of Marine forces to Da Nang). The second was impractical because it was unlikely that the United States would make a quick political decision to use it. He directed the Joint Staff to prepare new recommendations for air, ground, and naval deployments to the Pacific to insure holding Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and Korea and to permit, if necessary, air and naval operations against China.⁶

~~(S)~~ McConnell did not oppose further study of U.S. strategic requirements, but he disagreed with the concept inherent in Wheeler's request to the Joint Staff. In view of U.S. world-wide commitments, he warned of excessive logistic requirements and possible imbalance of the military force structure. He reaffirmed his confidence that the air and naval 39-65 plan could check intervention by Hanoi and Peking.⁷

New Assessments and the Army's 21-Point Program

~~(S)~~ Meanwhile, reports from South Vietnam pointed to a larger U.S. involvement. On 25 February a MAC/V analysis of the military situation

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in all four Vietnamese corps areas agreed with a grave CIA appraisal issued the same day. Observing that the pacification effort had virtually halted, Westmoreland foresaw in six months a Saigon government holding only islands of strength around provincial and district capitals that were clogged with refugees and beset with "end the war" groups asking for a negotiated settlement. The current trend presaged a Viet Cong take-over in 12 months, although major towns and bases, with U.S. help, could hold out for years. To "buy time," permit pressure on North Vietnam to take effect, and reverse the decline, he proposed adding three Army helicopter companies, flying more close support and reconnaissance missions, opening a "land line" from Pleiku in the highlands to the coast, and changing U.S. policy on the use of combat troops.⁸

~~SECRET~~ Sharp generally concurred with these recommendations but advised the JCS that the full use of air power in North and South Vietnam was the most important measure that could be taken to improve the military situation quickly. He also advocated obtaining better intelligence and naval bombardment of the North's coastal installations. And he warned that a coup by Lt. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi, the Vietnamese I Corps commander was possible, and this would be an "undesirable" change.⁹ There was now fear at the highest administration level that the entire Vietnamese military effort might collapse. This led to another visit to South Vietnam from 5 to 12 March of a high-ranking military and civilian mission headed by General Johnson, the Army's Chief of Staff.¹⁰

~~SECRET~~ In Saigon, the mission was briefed by Ambassador Taylor who stressed the historical, racial, and religious factors that prevented establishment of a unified country. He said these were the chief causes of the

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