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COUNTERINSURGENCY
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Chapter 7: Counterinsurgency
January, 1962 - May, 1963

1/1/62 People's Revolutionary Party established in South.

1/18/62 NSAM 124. President establishes Special Group (Counter-Insurgency).

1/27/62 McNamara forwards JCSM 33-62 to JFK. Memo recommends bolstering the Diem regime and discouraging internal factions which may seek to overthrow him. If VC are not brought under control, JCS see no alternative to the introduction of US combat forces. McNamara is "not prepared to endorse the views of the Chiefs until we have had more experience with our present program in SVN."

2/2/62 Roger Hilsman submits A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam.

2/3/62 Diem approves R.G.K. Thompson's "Delta Plan."

2/8/62 MAAG replaced by MACV -- Harkins takes over from McGarr.

2/21/62 SNIE 10-62 "Communist Objectives, Capabilities and Intentions in SEA." Assesses Soviet, Chinese and North Vietnamese intentions in Southeast Asia. Concludes "Communist powers do not wish to become deeply involved militarily in Laos.... They prefer to keep their military involvement clandestine.... For the short run, however, we believe that there will be no significant change in the current pattern of Viet Cong activity in South Vietnam, although the scope and tempo of the military and political campaigns will probably be increased. The Viet Cong will probably again resort to large-scale attacks, seeking to dramatize the weakness of the Diem forces and to reduce both civilian and military morale, in an effort to bring about Diem's downfall under circumstances which could be exploited to Communist advantage."

2/27/62 Two South Vietnamese planes bomb Presidential Palace.

3/62 McNamara testifies before Congress that he is "optimistic" about US prospects for success in aiding SVN. US strategy of avoiding direct military participation "is probably the most effective way to combat the Communist subversion and covert aggression. To introduce white forces -- U.S. forces -- in large numbers there today, while it might have an initial favorable military impact, would almost certainly lead to adverse political and, in the long run, adverse military operations."

3/17/62 Tass Soviet news agency charges the United States with creating "a serious danger to peace" and demands immediate withdrawal of US Troops.

3/22/62 Operation SUNRISE in Binh Duong Province -- Strategic Hamlet Program off to a bad start. In a heavily VC infiltrated province, GVN persuades 70 families to resettle; 135 other families forcibly resettled.

4/7/62 JFK forwards Galbraith memo on Vietnam (4/4/62) to DoD for comment. Galbraith warns about our growing military commitment to a weak, ineffectual government. Urges keeping door open for political solution and resisting the introduction of US combat forces.

4/13/62 JCS reply to Galbraith memo. Cite JFK letter to Diem (12/14/61) as public affirmation of US government's intent to support Diem and SVN. Reaffirms JCS view expressed in JCSM 33-62 and urges that present US policy be vigorously pursued.

4/62 US forces escalate to 5,400.

5/62 Robert McNamara: "Every quantitative measurement we have shows we're winning the war."

5/15/62 JFK sends US forces to Thailand because of deteriorating conditions in Laos.

6/18/62 INR Research Memorandum RFE-27: Reports some progress in first three months of systematic counterinsurgency. Acknowledges there is much still to be done, but is modestly optimistic.

7/13/62 CIA Memo from Saigon Station Chief to McNamara: "As of 30 June, 2,000 strategic hamlets already completed.... We believe strategic hamlet program definitely moving forward both as an organizing principle around which the whole GVN counterinsurgency program has a fair chance of being sold to the people and as a specific tactic in preventing spread Viet Cong influence among the people. But strategic hamlets in themselves not sufficient to carry day against still strong and determined enemy. Until they are supplemented by broader pacification programs involving wide variety of counterinsurgency measures, they remain vulnerable to Viet Cong countermeasures.... No question RVNAF's capabilities fight at least conventional warfare have increased measurably as result long period training by MAAG. Still not convinced, however, that regular forces properly geared fight kind of war needed defeat Viet Cong.... One of major weaknesses to date has in our view been RVNAF tendency organize too large-scale operations which serve to tip off enemy giving him opportunity to melt into countryside.... We feel RVNAF capabilities could be used with much more telling effect if smaller-scale operations conducted."

7/23/62 Sixth Secretary of Defense Conference, Honolulu. Citing "tremendous progress" in SVN, McNamara initiates planning for phaseout of US military involvement in Vietnam by 1965.

7/23/62 Geneva Accords on Laos signed.

7/24/62 Hanoi Radio hails Geneva agreement on Laos and suggests using it as a model for resolving "many other problems" (i.e., Vietnam). Implicitly answers Soviet assertion that armed struggle against U.S. supported regimes will likely lead to nuclear conflagration.

7/62 U.S. (Harriman and Sullivan) explore negotiated settlement of Vietnam at Geneva.

7/62 Major guerrilla attacks in Central Highlands.

8/8/62 GVN National Strategic Hamlet Construction Plan.

8/20/62 Sihanouk asks JFK for guarantee of Cambodia's neutrality. If U.S. refuses, threatens to ask Chinese.

8/24/62 NSAM 182: JFK approves a national counterinsurgency doctrine for US departments and agencies concerned with internal defense.

10/62 Senate Majority Leader Mansfield's trip to Vietnam

10/62 Taylor replaces Lemnitzer as CJCS.

10/62 Cuban missile crisis.

10/20/62 Operation Morning Star. Week long offensive by 5,000 GVN troops against VC stronghold in Tayninh Province ends. Americans see it as an example of ineffectiveness of mass operations.

11/7/62 Speech by General Earle Wheeler at Fordham University: "Despite the fact that the conflict [in Vietnam] is conducted as guerrilla warfare, it is nonetheless a military action...It is fashionable in some quarters to say that the problems in Southeast Asia are primarily political and economic rather than military. I do not agree. The essence of the problem in Vietnam is military." //

12/3/62 INR Research Memorandum: A year end appraisal of the counterinsurgency effort in SVN. "At best, it appears that the rate of deterioration has decelerated." Estimates VC strength at 23,000, plus an additional 100,000 irregulars and sympathizers.

12/18/62 Senator Mansfield's report to JFK on Southeast Asia - Vietnam: Expresses doubts about Diem and notes Nhu's expanded power. Warns of the possibility of a "truly massive commitment of military personnel."

1/2 - 1/3/63 Ap Bac debacle: Five hundred Vietcong soldiers badly defeat two thousand ARVN troops. Three Americans killed.

3/63 Sir Robert Thompson (Chief of British Advisory Mission): "Now, in March 1963, I can say, and in this I am supported by all members of the mission, that the government is beginning to win the shooting war against the Viet Cong." //

4/63 GVN Ministry of the Interior informs U.S. that 1,300 strategic hamlets have been completed.

4/63 COMUSMACV "Summary of Highlights." Cites increasing scale, frequency and effectiveness of RVNAF operations. Casualty ratios and the balance of weapons captured and weapons lost are favorable. States that significant progress has been made in the Strategic Hamlet Program. "...Barring greatly increased resupply and reinforcement of the Viet Cong by infiltration, the military phase of the war can be virtually won in 1963."

4/17/63 NIE 53-63: "We believe that Communist progress has been blunted and that the situation is improving.... We believe it unlikely...that the North Vietnamese regime will either resort to overt military attack or introduce acknowledged North Vietnamese military units into the south in order to gain a quick victory.... We do not believe it is possible at this time to project the future course of the war with any confidence."

5/6/63 May Honolulu Conference. More good news on the progress of the military situation.

McNamara: "The ~~total~~ over-all situation in Vietnam is improving. In the military sector of the Counterinsurgency, we are winning. Indications of improvement are clearly visible, as the combined impact of the programs which involve a long lead time begin to have effect on the Viet Cong.