

7. On another subject. I concur completely with DIA's assessment of how Barrel Roll is influencing the DRV given in his memo to you of 31 Dec.⁵ which was passed to us. We will have to make a good sized strike on a reasonably important target before the DRV will know that we are doing anything different.

⁵ Not further identified.

9. **Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹**

Saigon, January 6, 1965, 11 a.m.

2052. For the President—Section I of V Sections.² Ref A. CAP-64375.³ B. Position paper on Southeast Asia originally dated December 2, later December 7.⁴ C. Instructions from the President to Ambassador Taylor as approved by the President December 3, 1964.⁵ C [D]. Embtel 2010.⁶

1. In replying to your CAP-64375, rather than to compose a single cable which would be overly cumbersome by its length, it has appeared preferable to prepare a basic cable presenting a coherent report of our views on the overriding issues in CAP-64375 and to supplement it additionally by four supporting sections each addressed to one of the four specific suggestions contained in para 7, reference A. This is the basic cable which undertakes to evaluate the present situation in SVN, to analyze the causes of our troubles and to indicate what we can and cannot do to eliminate or attenuate these causes and closes with our recommendations. We have not repeated herein our views contained in the related cable, Embtel 2010.

2. A description of the present situation needs little amplification beyond the content of Emb cables filed since the military coup de force

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S. Top Secret; Priority; Nodis. Received in the Department of State at 1:03 a.m.

² Sections II-IV are Documents 10-13.

³ For text, see vol. I, pp. 1057-1059.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 969-974.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 974-978.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 1060-1063.

(the current phrase here) of December 20, read against the background of the report which I made to you and senior officials in Washington in early December. We are faced here with a seriously deteriorating situation characterized by continued political turmoil, irresponsibility and division within the armed forces, lethargy in the pacification program, some anti-US feeling which could grow, signs of mounting terrorism by VC directly at US personnel and deepening discouragement and loss of morale throughout SVN. Unless these conditions are somehow changed and trends reversed, we are likely soon to face a number of unpleasant developments ranging from anti-American demonstrations, further civil disorders, and even political assassinations to the ultimate installation of a hostile govt which will ask us to leave while it seeks accommodation with the National Liberation Front and Hanoi. How soon these developments may occur is hard to estimate. Some might take place tomorrow—anything like a coalition govt is unlikely for several months. In all, however, there is a comparatively short time fuse on this situation.

3. When one looks for the causes of this unhappy state of affairs, they fall generally under three heads: lack of a stable govt, inadequate security against the VC and nation-wide war-weariness. All three are interdependent and react upon one another.

4. Until the fall of Diem and the experience gained from the events of the following months, I doubt that anyone appreciated the magnitude of the centrifugal political forces which had been kept under control by his iron rule. The successive political upheavals and the accompanying turmoil which have followed Diem's demise upset all prior US calculations as to the duration and outcome of the counterinsurgency in SVN and the future remains uncertain today. There is no adequate replacement for Diem in sight.

5. At least we know now what are the basic factors responsible for this turmoil—chronic factionalism, civilian-military suspicion and distrust, absence of national spirit and motivation, lack of cohesion in the social structure, lack of experience in the conduct of govt. These are historical factors growing out of national characteristics and traditions, susceptible to change only over the long run. Perhaps other Americans might marginally influence them more effectively but generally speaking we Americans are not going to change them in any fundamental way in any measurable time. We can only recognize their existence and adjust our plans and expectations accordingly.

6. The lack of security for the population is the result of the continued success of the VC subversive insurgency for which the foundation was laid in 1954-55 and which has since grown to present proportions of an estimated 34,000 main guerrilla force supported by some 60-80,000 local guerrillas. Not only is this a large and well-trained force but it

in Laos. I do not recall in history a successful anti-guerrilla campaign with less than a 10 to 1 numerical superiority over the guerrillas and without the elimination of assistance from outside the country.

7. Obviously neither condition obtains in SVN. With regard to relative manpower, the GVN military-paramilitary-police forces during the last two years have enjoyed only a little over a 5 to 1 advantage in spite of gaining in strength some 165,000 in the same period. Thus, if there is any validity in the 10-1 superiority requirement, in spite of high losses VC strength and a maximum effort to increase GVN forces, there is no likelihood of reaching a satisfactory strength relationship now or at any time we can foresee under current procedures. Nor does it seem reasonable or feasible to look to US or third country sources to fill the manpower gap. (See Section V.)

8. The ability of the VC to regenerate their strength and to maintain their morale is to an important degree the result of infiltration from the logistical sanctuaries outside the country and from the sense of support and confidence this gives them. You have doubtless seen the recent study of infiltration⁷ which estimates a total infiltration of 34,000 since February, 1960, and points to the possibility of 10,000 infiltrators in 1964. While there is much chance for error in such figures, infiltration is an important source of VC recuperative powers.

9. Apart from inadequate forces and frontiers open to infiltration, the inability to give SVN adequate security is a by-product of the weakness of govt already discussed. Effective pacification calls for an intricate blending of military, economic, social and psychological resources which, thus far, has exceeded the capability of the changing Saigon govts. The Hop Tac experiment⁸ is producing some encouraging results but the country-wide pacification program as a whole has a long time to go—years in fact—before we can hope to bring security to SVN by present methods and at current rates of progress.

10. The third cause of the present situation, war-weariness, is easy to understand. It grows out of 20 years of uninterrupted conflict with the Japanese, the French, the religious sects and the VC. It has increased as the result of disappointed hopes following the overthrow of Diem and the failure of the heralded new revolution. It exists more in the cities and among the intellectuals than in the provinces among the peasants and soldiers. The only cause for surprise is that morale is not worse than it is.

⁷ For text of the study of infiltration dated October 31, 1964, see *ibid.*, pp. 864-872; regarding a report on *Aggression From the North*, released on February 27, 1965, see Document 171.

⁸ Hop Tac (Working Together) was a campaign begun in mid-1964 by the South Vietnamese Government, at the urging of MACV, to pacify the area around Saigon.

nomenon. One cannot escape the feeling that there is nothing in the psychological situation here which a few victories, military or political, could not turn around.

11. If these are the causes—unstable govt, lack of security and war-weariness—the next question is what we can do to eliminate or modify these factors and thus change the situation for the better, bearing in mind that we have limited time. Some things we clearly cannot do—change national characteristics, create leadership where it does not exist, raise large additional GVN forces or seal porous frontiers to infiltration. If one accepts such limitations, then it is equally clear that in the time available we cannot expect anything better than marginal govt and marginal pacification progress with continued decline of national morale—unless something new is added to make up for those things we cannot control.

12. Thus, we are faced with considering what we can do. We can probably compromise the current governmental crisis in a way which will salvage Huong but will leave him pretty much under military domination. If Huong goes, he will probably be followed by some kind of military government. If it is controlled by Khanh, we will have to do hard soul-searching to decide whether to try to get along with him again after previous failures or to refuse to support him and take the consequences—which might entail ultimate withdrawal. If we can mislay Khanh and get a military chief of state like Co or Dong, we have a fresh option worth trying. But whether a jerry-built civilian government under military domination or a brand new military government, it will not get far unless a new factor is added which will contribute to coalescing the political factions around and within the government and thus bolster its position.

13. To speed pacification, we could consider increasing the U.S. support by increasing the advisory effort or by adding combat units. With regard to the first possibility, during the last year we have already increased our advisory effort by 42 percent. The increase has taken place at several echelons and has involved not only the military but USOM and USIS representation as well. In the military sphere, the positioning of advisory teams at district (county) level and the augmentation of battalion teams account for most of the increase. Americans are now advising all elements of the regular forces down to battalion and a very large part of the paramilitary forces. Americans are also flying all manner of fixed and rotary wing aircraft, and are operating an extensive communications system. By February 1 there will be 23,700 officers and men in country; and, in addition, approximately 750 civilian advisors. We believe that our capability to stiffen further, by advisory means, is very limited; indeed, we have probably reached about the saturation point.

QUESTION. TO TAKE THIS decision would in effect change the basis of our conduct of the war. This is in itself no argument against such a change, but for the reasons discussed in Section V, we are still of the opinion that we should not get into this guerrilla conflict with our ground units.

15. In the search for some course of action which will help pull the government together, stimulate pacification and raise the morale, I can find only one which offers any chance of the needed success in the available time. This is the program of graduated air attacks directed against the will of the DRV, referred to in reference B as Phase II.⁹ The purpose of such attacks would be fourfold: (1) convey to Hanoi the message that it will become increasingly costly to support the VC; (2) eventually create a situation favorable to talking with Hanoi; (3) turn SVN attention from internal feuding to attacking the external source of their troubles; (4) restore U.S./GVN camaraderie through a joint military effort.

16. I know that this is an old recipe with little attractiveness but no matter how we reexamine the facts, or what appear to be the facts, we can find no other answer which offers any chance of success. The other choices are to continue as we are, making marginal improvements and hoping for the best, to open negotiations with enemy, or to withdraw. Nobody on the spot here believes that any one of these will result in ought but loss of SVN and eventually of SEA. It is true that our recommended course of action offers no certainty of success and carries some risks. We are presently on a losing track and must risk a change. How long it will take to arrive at a denouement if we do not change I cannot say but to take no positive action now is to accept defeat in the fairly near future. Furthermore, the action required goes beyond any mere improvement, necessarily limited, in what we have been doing up to now. The game needs to be opened up and new opportunities offered for new breaks which hopefully may be in our favor. The new breaks may also be unfavorable but scarcely more so than those we have been getting thus far.

17. I have shared your feeling that a stable government in Saigon should be a prerequisite to our undertaking offensive action against DRV. As stated in reference C, the minimum criteria of performance which should be met include the ability of the government to speak for and to its people, to maintain law and order in its principal cities, to make plans for the conduct of operations and assure their effective execution by military and police forces completely responsive to its authority. The present Huong government does not reach this standard primarily

⁹ Phase II operations referred generally to graduated military actions against infiltration routes in Laos and eventually North Vietnam.

mands. We will make every effort in adjusting the present governmental crisis to encourage legitimate participation by the armed forces in the government and an acceptance of a degree of responsibility for it. We have some leverage on the generals in the form of the increased aid which I was authorized to discuss with the government upon my return from Washington last month. The most important single item in the package is the matter of joint planning in contemplation of Phase II operations. My present authority permits me now to initiate planning for Phase II with GVN with the understanding that the USG does not commit itself to any form of execution of such plans. Actually, because of the recent climate of our relations, we have not initiated this planning and should not until we are surer of our future course of action. It would be of great assistance in reaching a compromise of the present crisis if I were authorized to state explicitly to GVN leaders that we are prepared to initiate Phase II operations in case the new government meets or shows reasonable promise of meeting your criteria. What I am suggesting is undertaking a conditional commitment that if, in the U.S. judgement, the GVN reaches a certain level of performance, the USG will join in an escalating campaign against the DRV. Hopefully, by such action, we could improve the government, unify the armed forces to some degree, and thereupon move into the Phase II program without which we see little chance of breaking out of the present downward spiral.

18. With regard to your feeling that this guerrilla war cannot be won from the air, I am in entire agreement, if we are thinking in terms of the physical destruction of the enemy. As I conceive it, the Phase II program is not a resort to use bombing to win on the Douhet theory¹⁰ (which I have spent considerable past effort in exposing) but is the use of the most flexible weapon in our arsenal of military superiority to bring pressure on the will of the chiefs of the DRV. As practical men, they cannot wish to see the fruits of ten years of labor destroyed by slowly escalating air attacks (which they cannot prevent) without trying to find some accommodation which will exorcise the threat. It would be to our interest to regulate our attacks not for the purpose of doing maximum physical destruction but for producing maximum stresses in Hanoi minds.

19. Thus far I have not specifically discussed reprisal bombing in response to some major VC atrocity such as the Bien Hoa attack or the Brink bombing.¹¹ I gather that the decision not to react to the Brink affair

¹⁰ Giulio Douhet (1869-1930) was an Italian military theorist and proponent of strategic air power and strategic bombing.

¹¹ On October 31, 1964, the Viet Cong attacked Bien Hoa airfield with mortars, killing 4 U.S. servicemen and wounding 30. On December 24, 1964, a bomb exploded at the Brink Hotel in Saigon, killing 2 and injuring 50 people.