

'61 Memo From the Joint Chiefs On Commitment of U.S. Forces

Memorandum on "U.S. Forces in South Vietnam" from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, May 10, 1961.

1. In considering the possible commitment of US forces to South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the over-all critical situation in Southeast Asia with particular emphasis upon the present highly flammable situation in South Vietnam. In this connection the question, however, of South Vietnam should not be considered in isolation but rather in conjunction with Thailand and their over-all relationship to the security of Southeast Asia. The views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the question regarding the deployment of US forces into Thailand were provided to you by JCSM-311-61, dated 9 May 1961. The current potentially dangerous military and political situation in Laos, of course, is the focal point in this area. Assuming that the political decision is to hold Southeast Asia outside the Communist sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that US forces should be deployed immediately to South Vietnam; such action should be taken primarily to prevent the Vietnamese from being subjected to the same situation as presently exists in Laos, which would then require deployment of US forces into an already existing combat situation.

2. In view of the foregoing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the decision be made now to deploy suitable US forces to South Vietnam. Sufficient forces should be deployed to accomplish the following purposes:

a. Provide a visible deterrent to po-

tential North Vietnam and/or Chinese Communist action;

b. Release Vietnamese forces from advanced and static defense positions to permit their fuller commitment to counter-insurgency actions;

c. Assist in training the Vietnamese forces to the maximum extent possible consistent with their mission;

d. Provide a nucleus for the support of any additional US or SEATO military operation in Southeast Asia; and

e. Indicate the firmness of our intent to all Asian nations.

3. In order to maintain US flexibility in the Pacific, it is envisioned that some or all of the forces deployed to South Vietnam would come from the United States. The movement of these troops could be accomplished in an administrative manner and thus not tax the limited lift capabilities of CINCPAC.

4. In order to accomplish the foregoing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that:

a. President Diem be encouraged to request that the United States fulfill its SEATO obligation, in view of the new threat now posed by the Laotian situation, by the immediate deployment of appropriate US forces to South Vietnam;

b. Upon receipt of this request, suitable forces could be immediately deployed to South Vietnam in order to accomplish the above-mentioned purposes. Details of size and composition of these forces must include the views of both CINCPAC and CHMAAG which are not yet available.