

# Highlights of the Period

The Pentagon study reaches no conclusion as to how the course of the Vietnam war might have changed if John F. Kennedy had lived—but it sums up the Kennedy years as a time of significantly deepening United States involvement.

Here, arranged chronologically, are highlights of those two and a half years:

## 1961

National intelligence estimate reports "extremely critical period" for South Vietnam and Saigon regime is "immediately ahead." Says President Ngo Dinh Diem's "reliance on virtual one-man rule" and a toleration of corruption" lead many in military and government to "question Diem's ability to lead in this period."

President orders 400 Special Forces soldiers and 100 other military advisers to South Vietnam, study says. Also orders clandestine campaign of "sabotage and light harassment" in North by South Vietnamese agents trained by United States.

Task force headed by Roswell W. Gilpatric proposes discussion with President Diem on "possibility of a defensive security Alliance" despite violation of Geneva accords. President approves.

Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, in report on mission to Saigon, says United States must decide "whether to help these countries" or to "throw in the towel" and "pull back our defenses to San Francisco."

President Diem, in letter to President Kennedy, asks "considerable" build-up United States forces and 100,000-man increase in South Vietnamese Army. Uses "inflated infiltration figures" to support threat of Communism, study says.

White House agrees to finance 30,000-man increase in South Vietnam's Army.

U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Under Secretary of State, in draft paper, urges President Kennedy to accept "defeat of the Vietcong" as "real and ultimate" objective.

Joint Chiefs of Staff estimate 40,000 United States servicemen will be needed to "clean up the Vietcong threat."

William P. Bundy note to Mr. McNamara urges "early and hard-hitting" United States intervention. Gives this 70 per cent chance of "arresting things"; estimates 30 per cent chance "we would wind up like the French in 1954; white men can't win this kind of fight."

National intelligence estimate reports "little evidence" that Vietcong rely on external supplies, Pentagon account says. Ambassador Frederick E. Nolting Jr. reports that Saigon is considering asking Nationalist China for "one division of combat troops" and wants United States "combat-trainer units."

General Taylor meets with President Diem. Recommends Mekong Delta flood

"relief task force, largely military in composition," including "combat troops" for protection. Recommends 6,000-8,000-man U.S. force, warns they "may expect to take casualties" but can be removed or phased into "other activities."

He discounts risk of "major Asian war," says North is "extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing."

Secretary of Defense McNamara says he and Joint Chiefs are "inclined to recommend" General Taylor's proposal although "struggle may be prolonged." Estimates maximum United States ground-force requirement "will not exceed six divisions."

Secretary of State Rusk cables Washington stressing importance of political reforms, reluctance for United States prestige tie with a "losing horse."

General Taylor, in message to President Kennedy, says "U.S. military task force is essential."

Mr. McNamara and Mr. Rusk, in joint memo, back General Taylor's recommendations. Say losing South Vietnam "would make pointless any further discussion about the importance of Southeast Asia to the Free World." Recommend initially "U.S. units of modest size" for "direct support" "as speedily as possible"; insist on government reform as precondition.

National Security Council meeting. Notes say President asks importance of South Vietnam and Laos. Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of Joint Chiefs: "We would lose Asia all the way Singapore."

President approves major recommendations. President Diem said to be upset by United States response. Demands for reforms softened, insistence on American participation in decision-making withdrawn.

## 1962

Military briefing paper for President reports 948 United States servicemen were in South Vietnam by end of November; 2,646 by Jan. 9. Also helicopter combat-support missions, Navy minesweepers sailing along coast, United States aircraft in surveillance, reconnaissance missions.

Mr. McNamara orders planning for United States withdrawal, partly on basis of what he calls "tremendous progress," also difficulty in holding public support for American operations "indefinitely."

## 1963

Michael V. Forrestal, White House aide, reports to Kennedy, that long, costly conflict should be expected. Says Vietcong recruiting is so effective that guerrillas could do without infiltration.

United States by October, has 16,732 men in Vietnam. Planning for withdrawal continues, study says, on "the most Micawberesque predictions" of progress.