

The Series So Far: From Co

Covert Warfare Sponsored by U.S. in '64

President Lyndon B. Johnson's Administration, amid his hesitation and reluctance to take final decisions, was sponsoring covert South Vietnamese warfare against North Vietnam starting in February, 1964, and drawing up plans that spring for overt war.

These activities—long before the Aug. 4, 1964, Tonkin Gulf destroyer incident that led to a Congressional vote authorizing "all necessary steps" to aid Southeast Asian countries—were described in the first installment.

The series was based on a Defense Department study, commissioned in 1967 by Secretary Robert S. McNamara to learn how American involvement in Southeast Asia developed. The study ranged from World War II until the start of peace talks in Paris in May, 1968.

There are gaps in the Pentagon study — the researchers lacked access to Presidential files—and in that part of it obtained by The Times—it lacks the chapter on diplomatic initiatives, some of which are continuing.

A Report by McNamara

The first of 13 documents published in the initial installment was a report on Dec. 21, 1963, by Secretary McNamara to President Johnson. This said "plans for covert action into North Vietnam were prepared as we had requested."

"They present," he went on, "a variety of sabotage and psychological operations against North Vietnam from which I believe we should aim to select those that provide maximum pressure with minimum risk."

The "covert military operations," drawn up by the Central Intelligence Agency station and the military command in Saigon, were begun Feb. 1, 1964, as Operation Plan 34A. President Johnson's hope was that they might eventually induce North Vietnam to halt the Vietcong and Pathet Lao insurrections.

Through 1964, they included flights over North Vietnam by U-2 spy planes, the kidnapping of North Vietnamese citizens for intelligence information, commando raids from the sea to blow up rail and highway bridges and the bombardment of coastal installations by PT boats.

Covert War to Bombing of North

Before The New York Times was restrained by Federal court order from continuing with its series on the Pentagon study of the Vietnam war, it had published the first three parts. They dealt with the first years of the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson. Here is a summary of those three articles and a recapitulation of some of the key documents published with them on June 13, 14 and 15:

'Hired Personnel' Used

They differed from relatively low-level and unsuccessful intelligence and sabotage efforts the C.I.A. had carried out earlier in North Vietnam. The 34A attacks were under the control of Gen. Paul D. Harkins, chief of the United States Military Assistance Command in Saigon, with raids performed by the South Vietnamese or their "hired personnel."

The covert war had a second major segment—air operations in Laos by 40 propeller-

driven T-28 fighter-bombers. These bore Laotian Air Force markings, but were manned in part by pilots of Air America, a C.I.A.-controlled line and in part by Thai pilots under the control of Ambassador Leonard Unger.

Regular United States Air Force and Navy jet planes, code-named Yankee Team, gathered photographic intelligence for the T-28 bombing raids. The reconnaissance moved from high-altitude flights at the start of 1964 to low-altitude sorties in May; in June armed escort jets were added, bombing and strafing when the reconnaissance planes were fired on.

A third element in the covert military pressure was the patrolling by American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. Code-named De Soto patrols, the ships collected intelligence on warning radars and coastal defenses.

In a memorandum on Jan. 22, 1964, Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, contended that "the United States must be prepared to put aside many of the self-imposed restrictions" and to "undertake bolder actions," even to "commit U.S. forces as necessary in direct actions against North Vietnam."

to Ground Troops

Difference of Opinion

The Johnson Administration was convinced from radio interceptions that North Vietnam was directing the Vietcong despite intelligence analyses that argued "the primary sources of Communist strength in South Vietnam are indigenously arising from social and nationalist aims.

On March 16, 1964, describing a worsening situation, Secretary McNamara urged new plans up to "graduated overt military pressure," ready on 30 days' notice for strikes against North Vietnam by the South Vietnamese Air Force and an American air commando squadron, code-named Farmgate, that operated with South Vietnamese markings.

President Johnson approved the McNamara recommendations at a National Security Council meeting March 17, 1964. On March 20, President Johnson cabled Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge in Saigon:

"...our planning for action against the North is on a contingency basis at present, and immediate problem in this area is to develop the strongest military and political base for possible later action."

On April 17, the Joint Chiefs approved a so-called scenario, Operation Plan 37-64, including escalation steps against North Vietnam up to air attacks and mining of ports, initially by South Vietnamese but possibly using United States aircraft.

Military action was not to begin until after a joint Congressional resolution.

On May 4, South Vietnam's

head of government, Gen. Nguyen Khan, told Ambassador Lodge he wanted the United States to start bombing and to send in 10,000 troops.

The Pentagon study reported that at a Honolulu meeting on June 1 and 2, 1964, Secretary McNamara said "it might be necessary as the action unfolded . . . to deploy as many as seven divisions" of American troops.

One effort to apportion American aims in South Vietnam was attributed to a memorandum by John T. McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense, as follows:

"70 pct.—To avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor).

"20 pct.—To keep SVN (and then adjacent) territory from Chinese hands.

"10 pct.—To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life."

One move at United States request had J. Blair Seaborn, Canadian member of the Interna-

tional Control Commission, pass on a warning June 18 to North Vietnam's Premier, Pham Van Dong, that escalating the warfare could bring "the greatest devastation" to North Vietnam.

Separate from the Defense Department study, which was prepared in 1967 and 1968, was a 1965 Defense Department command and control study of the Tonkin Gulf incident.

In a 34A operation, South Vietnamese naval commandos raided two North Vietnamese islands in the gulf at midnight July 30. On Aug. 2, a De Soto intelligence-gathering patrol by the destroyer Maddox wound up in a clash with North Vietnamese PT boats, which the study said apparently mistook the Maddox for a South Vietnamese escort vessel.

On Aug. 3, President Johnson ordered the destroyer C. Turner Joy to reinforce the Maddox in the gulf. That night, two clandestine 34A bombardments were staged by South Vietnamese PT boats.

On the night of Aug. 4, Tonkin Gulf time, the two American destroyers were attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats, according to the Pentagon account.

At a national Security Council meeting on the afternoon of Aug. 4, Washington time, President Johnson ordered American reprisal air strikes, chosen by the Joint Chiefs from a 94-target list drawn up at the end of May. He also decided to seek the Congressional resolution of full military support for South Vietnam.