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~~TOP SECRET~~

PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS

THE GULF OF TONKIN ATTACKS OF AUGUST 1964

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PRESIDENTIAL CHRONOLOGY

THE GULF OF TONKIN ATTACKS OF AUGUST 1964

AUGUST 2

A. M. The President is informed that North Vietnamese PT boats have attacked the destroyer USS Maddox in international waters of the Gulf of Tonkin.

P. M. The President consults with his advisors, and decides not to retaliate against North Vietnam. He issues instructions: (1) to prepare a protest note to be sent to the North Vietnamese regime and (2) to strengthen the Tonkin patrol force and to counter attack and destroy any force attempting to repeat the attacks.

AUGUST 3

The President makes public his instructions issued the previous day to U. S. Navy units in the Gulf of Tonkin.

The Department of State publicizes the U. S. protest note to North Vietnam.

McNamara gives private briefing to Senate Foreign Relations Committee members.

The President consults with Rusk, McNamara and Wheeler.

AUGUST 4

A. M. 9:12 The President is informed that North Vietnamese PT boats have launched a second attack in the Gulf of Tonkin against the USS Maddox and the USS Turner Joy.

Noon The President meets with the National Security Council

P. M. 1:00 The President has a luncheon meeting with Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Bundy and Vance. The decision is made to retaliate.

6:15 The President reviews his decision with the National Security Council. All agree.

6:45 The President reviews his decision with the Congressional leadership at a White House meeting. All agree. The President indicated that he will ask the Congress for a Joint Resolution on Southeast Asia.

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10:06 The President discusses his decision by telephone with Republican Presidential candidate Goldwater. Goldwater agrees.

11:36 The President addresses the Nation via Radio/TV. He reviews the circumstances of the attack and his decision to retaliate.

P. M. The President approves personal messages sent by him to several Heads of State and Heads of Government.

P. M. The President reviews drafts of speech he will deliver on Radio/TV that evening and at Syracuse the next morning.

AUGUST 5

A. M. The President, in his speech at Syracuse University reviews the Gulf of Tonkin events and his decision.

P. M. The President sends a message to Congress reporting on the Tonkin attacks and on his response and requests a Joint Resolution.

In New York Ambassador Stevenson addresses a Security Council Meeting to present U. S. charges against North Vietnam.

In Bangkok the SEATO Council meets to review the Tonkin events.

In Paris a special meeting of the North Atlantic Council reviews the Tonkin events.

AUGUST 6

Congressional hearings and debate take place on the proposed Gulf of Tonkin resolution. McNamara, Rusk and Wheeler testify.

AUGUST 7

The President issues a statement hailing passage by the Senate and House of the Joint Resolution on Southeast Asia.

AUGUST 8

A high level stock-taking conference is held on the White House on developments in Southeast Asia.

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AUGUST 10

The President signs into law the Joint Congressional Resolution on Southeast Asia.

At a White House meeting the President and his senior advisors review the situation. The President expresses his conviction that the present situation will not last long, and asks for recommendations to deal with future contingencies

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PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS

THE GULF OF TONKIN ATTACKS OF AUGUST 1964

I - INTRODUCTION

For most Americans the war in Vietnam began in earnest in August 1964 with three developments focussed on the Gulf of Tonkin. On August 2 and again on August 4, North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked U. S. naval vessels in international waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. The U. S. did not retaliate for the first attack, beyond warning North Vietnam of the grave consequences which would attend its repetition. When the attacks were repeated on August 4, the President, acting as Commander-in-Chief, responded quickly with a directive ordering retaliatory bombing against selected targets in North Vietnam. After consultations on August 4 with the Congressional leadership, the President on August 5 requested and the Congress, after three days of hearings and debates, on August 7 overwhelmingly approved, a joint resolution authorizing the President to take "all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."

The North Vietnamese attacks, the U. S. military response and the Congressional Resolution marked a significant sharpening of the confrontation in Vietnam. These developments coincided with major crises in Cyprus and the Congo involving special Presidential deliberations and the dispatch of special emissaries Under Secretary Ball (Cyprus) and Governor Harriman (Congo).

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The Tonkin developments came at a time of chronic instability in South Vietnam and of an American Presidential election campaign contested in part on the issue of U. S. involvement in Vietnam. They, perhaps for the first time, brought home to the American people the stakes, responsibilities and risks in Southeast Asia. Seen as a watershed of subsequent developments they remain to this day a major focus of the Vietnam debate and constitute a significant chapter in the history of Lyndon B. Johnson's Presidency.

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II - VIETNAM DEVELOPMENTS PRIOR TO THE TONKIN ATTACKS

In the first half of 1964 events in Southeast Asia pointed to increasing crisis and confrontation in Vietnam. The Viet Cong, trained and supplied by North Vietnam, pressed hard to exploit South Vietnamese political instability. In neighboring Laos, Hanoi's forces exacerbated existing civil and international conflicts. In the United States, debate on the best means of carrying out the U. S. commitment to South Vietnam filled the political arena, and the possible necessity of a heavier U. S. involvement was a recurrent theme of meetings at the highest levels of the U. S. Government.

1. January - March 1964

On January 30, South Vietnam's ruling junta, headed by General "Big" Minh, was overthrown by a group of generals headed by Nguyen Khanh. On April 15 the SEATO Ministerial Council meeting in Manila issued a communique (France abstaining) agreeing "that defeat of the Communist campaign is essential not only to the security of Vietnam but to that of Southeast Asia. . . (and) that members of SEATO should remain prepared. . . to take further concrete steps with their respective capabilities in fulfillment of their obligation."

2. McNamara Trip to Vietnam and NASAM 288 - March

From March 8 to 12 Secretary McNamara and General Taylor traveled

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through Vietnam. McNamara's recommendations called for South Vietnamese reforms, stepped-up U.S. assistance, preparation of a full range of Laotian and Cambodian border control operations and preparations of a contingency program to initiate "graduate overt military pressure against North Vietnam." These recommendations were adopted in National Security Action Memorandum #288 approved on March 17 (TAB 1).

3. Nixon Proposals on Vietnam - April

On April 15, upon returning from a three-week trip throughout Asia former Vice President Nixon attacked Senator Fulbright's critiques and proposed extending the Vietnam war into North Vietnam and Laos. In a speech of April 16 he called for military action against Communist bases in North Vietnam and Laos and said that the "enemy can no longer have privileged sanctuary" and that the U.S. "has gone too far in catering to neutrals." In a speech of April 18, Nixon proposed that South Vietnamese troops should go into Laos and North Vietnam "in hot pursuit" of Communist guerillas.

4. April Announcements on U.S. Reorganization in Vietnam

April also saw announcements on new U.S. military command reorganizations (April 14), Secretary McNamara's statement that the Administration had amended its plans to withdraw most U.S. military personnel from South Vietnam by the end of 1965 (April 24) and the announcement that Lt. General Westmoreland would replace General Harkins as head of the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam. U.S. advisory troops in Vietnam at this

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time numbered some 16,000.

5. McNamara Trip to Vietnam - May

On May 12 and 13 Secretary McNamara and General Taylor made another inspection trip to Vietnam and on May 13 McNamara announced in Saigon that the U. S. was sending 75 "Sky Raider" and A-1E attack planes to Vietnam to be used by U. S. and Vietnamese personnel. After another trip to Vietnam in May, McNamara reported to the President (TAB 2) on major problems in South Vietnam, including: frequent changes in leadership, incompetent leadership, poor concentration of resources, slow pacification program implementation, high RVNAF desertion rates, ineffective administration, government fragmentation and distrust, and brewing religious crises.

McNamara's report discussed Ambassador Lodge's proposals for air strikes against the North as follows:

> "Lodge wishes to carry out air strikes against the North coupled with the Canadian 'gambit' i. e., the new Canadian ICC Commissioner should be instructed to state to Hanoi that air strikes will start and continue until such time as there is evidence -- perhaps a fall-off in COMINT traffic -- that the Viet Cong have received orders to terminate the insurgency. The objective of Lodge's program would be not only to cut off the supply of men and equipment from the North, but also to destroy the morale of the North Vietnamese and to raise the morale of the South Vietnamese. *** He (Lodge) considers that since his memorandum of last October to Averell Harriman he has consistently advocated this proposal. Lodge believes he has made clear his opposition to Bill Bundy's proposal for establishing a political base and time schedule for action against the North. *** Almost certainly Lodge has discussed such a plan with Khanh, hoping to lead him to accept it."

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6. Other Developments during May

On May 13 Cambodia had forwarded a lengthy report on alleged South Vietnamese and U.S. attacks on Cambodian territory and had called for a UN Security Council session. On May 20 General de Gaulle proposed the reconvening of the 14 nation Geneva conference on Laos. In a major U.S. policy address to the UN Security Council on May 21, Ambassador Stevenson expressed U.S. opposition to the convening of a new meeting of the 14-power Geneva conference to consider the deteriorating political and military situation in IndoChina. Stevenson instead suggested the use of UN border inspectors.

On May 22 Secretary Rusk warned that if Hanoi, abetted by Communist China, persisted in its course of aggression in South Vietnam, the war there might be expanded. On May 24 Senator Goldwater commented that low yield atomic bombs could be dropped to defoliate border trips to expose infiltration lines. On April 18 Goldwater had proposed destruction of North Vietnamese rice and opium crops, and "hitting some depots" and "stopping some shipping."

At a White House meeting of May 24 attended by Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Taylor, Ball, Bell, McNaughton, Goodpaster, McGeorge and William Bundy and others the deteriorating situations in Laos and Vietnam and the possible options of military action against North Vietnam were discussed as was the project of political encadrement or "interlarding" of U.S. advisors into the South Vietnamese command structure (TAB 3).

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7. Developments During June and July

On June 7 the Department of State disclosed that two U.S. planes had been shot down while on armed reconnaissance missions over Laos. On June 9 it was announced in Washington that U.S. jets that day had bombed Pathet Lao gun positions in retaliation for the downing of the U.S. planes. On June 9 Premier Souvanna Phouma called for a halt to U.S. missions over Laos. On June 9 Communist China warned the U.S. and called for a reconvening of the 14-nation Geneva conference, and on June 15 threatened Chinese retaliation for U.S. actions. On June 11 the State Department announced a U.S.-Laotian agreement for the resumption of U.S. reconnaissance flights. U.S. determination to prevent a Communist takeover in Southeast Asia was reasserted in Under Secretary Ball's meeting with General de Gaulle and in special messages to Communist China and to Premier Khruschev on June 5 (TAB 4).

On June 18 Congressional testimony was released quoting William Bundy's May statement that in the face of further Pathet Lao advances "the only response we would have would be to put our own forces in there." On June 20 Admiral Felt, commander of U.S. Pacific forces, declared that in the face of Communist Chinese expansionism the U.S. was willing to risk war with Communist China. On June 20 major U.S. supply reinforcements were announced for Thailand and June 22 saw a report on the construction of a huge Air Force base at Danang, South Vietnam. At a June 29 press conference retiring Ambassador Lodge

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declared that it would be helpful if the Viet Cong's supply routes from North Vietnam and Laos were cut. At a June 30 closed session with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Lodge rejected a June 29 proposal by 13 Republican Congressmen urging U.S. assumption of direct operational command of the war in Vietnam (TAB 4).

In a June 10 White House meeting attended by Rusk, McNamara, Dillon, Harriman, McCone, Bell, Rostow, William and McGeorge Bundy and others, the developments in Laos proposed next steps in Vietnam and the matter of a Congressional Resolution had been discussed at considerable detail (TAB 5).

In the first week of July UN Secretary General U. Thant proposed a reconvening of the 1954 Geneva Conference and General Taylor arrived in Saigon to assume his new duties as U.S. ambassador. In mid July William Sullivan prepared a lengthy memo elaborating on specific action proposal for Vietnam (TAB 6).

On July 19 South Vietnamese Premier Khanh in a rally before 100,000 people including Ambassador Taylor called publicly for a full scale military attack on Communist North Vietnam. On July 20 the South Vietnamese Government issued a declaration reiterating Khanh's demand for an invasion of North Vietnam and decrying the Geneva Accords. On the same day the State Department stated that an attack on North Vietnam was in the realm of contingency planning and declined to comment on Premier Khanh's speech.

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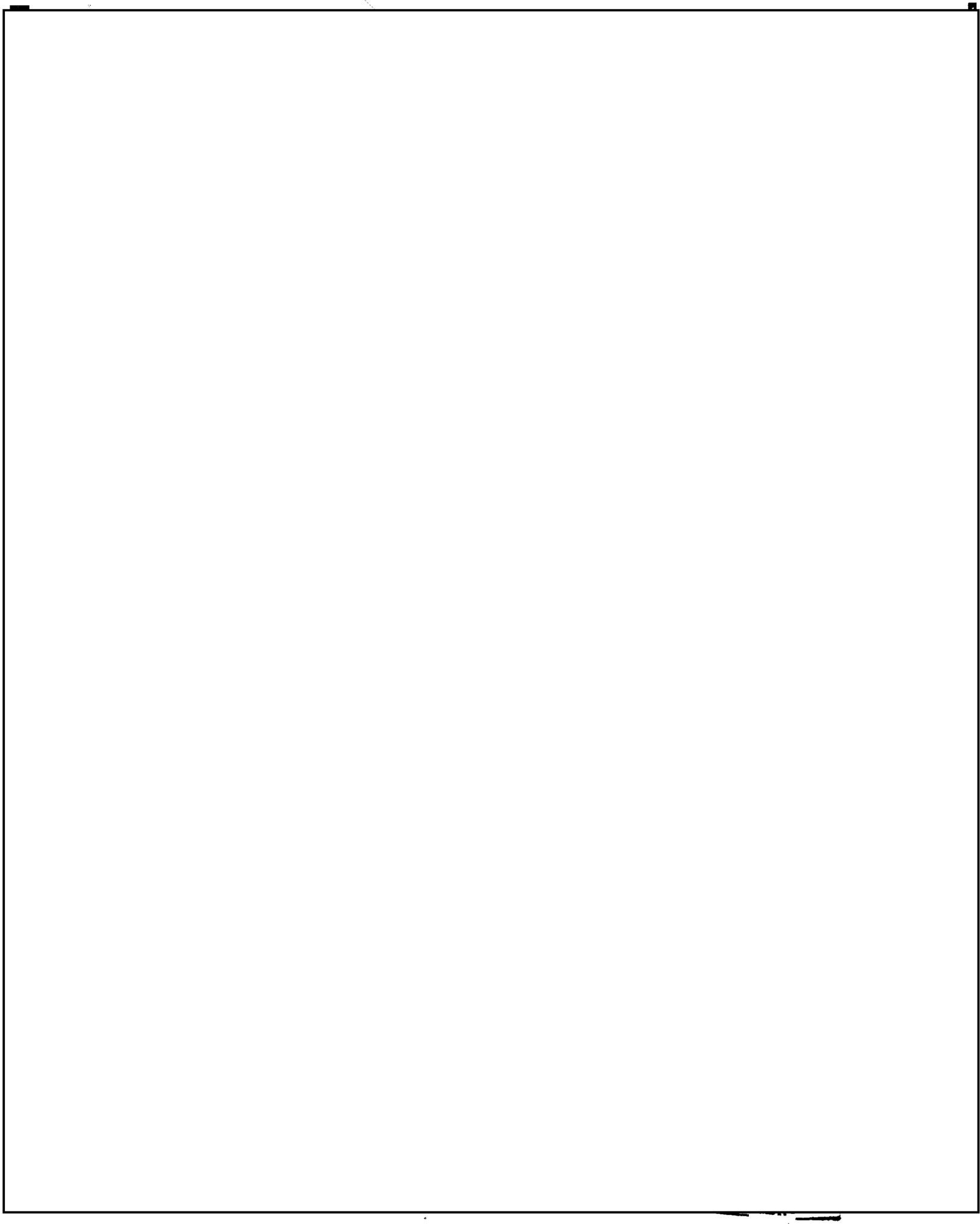

At a July 22 news conference Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky declared that the South Vietnamese air force was ready to launch bombing attacks against North Vietnam and indicated that for the past three years South Vietnamese combat teams had carried out combat raids inside North Vietnam by air, sea and land (TAB 4). At meetings between Ambassador Taylor and Premier Khanh, the Ambassador criticized the recent South Vietnamese statements. Department of State cables on South Vietnam statements are attached at TAB 7 .

At a July 24 news conference President Johnson declared that while North Vietnamese actions constituted a "danger and a provocation" and that "such provocation" could force a response, "it is also true that the U.S. seeks no wider war." The President rejected General de Gaulle's July 23 proposal for a great-power agreement on IndoChina saying "we do not believe in conferences called to ratify terror," and called instead for the Communists to live up to existing agreements.

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III - THE GULF OF TONKIN ATTACK OF AUGUST 2

A. AUGUST 2 - THE FIRST ATTACK

1. The Circumstances of the Attack

During the early hours of Sunday morning, August 2 (the afternoon of August 2, Gulf of Tonkin time) Washington learned that North Vietnamese PT boats had launched a torpedo attack against the destroyer USS Maddox in international waters of the Gulf of Tonkin some 30 miles off the North Vietnamese coast.

The mission of the Maddox was to gather electronic intelligence as part of the regular "De Soto" patrol series. The Maddox patrol had no connection with clandestine South Vietnamese 34A operations directed against North Vietnamese arms smuggling activities and the Maddox was operating under instructions to stay away from the coastal area where 34A operations were going on (TAB 8).

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North Vietnamese plans of the attack has previously been obtained from special intelligence sources. Since about noon Tonkin time, when Maddox radar had detected the approaching craft, the Maddox had sought to avoid contact. At 2:40 p.m. Tonkin time the Maddox reported that it was the apparent intent of the fast-closing PT boats to launch a torpedo attack and that she intended to open fire in self-defense if necessary. As the PT boats closed to within 9,000 yards the Maddox fired three warning shots. At 3:08 the three PT boats attacked with machine gun fire and with at least three torpedoes directed against the Maddox. The

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attacking craft were clearly seen by Maddox personnel and were photographed; the launching of the torpedoes and their wakes were observed clearly; a machine gun bullet was recovered. The Maddox responded by opening fire with her five-inch battery and four F-8E fighters from the carrier USS Ticonderoga, (which had been alerted to the impending enemy attack) arrived on the scene and strafed the enemy craft with Zuni rockets and 20mm ammunition. At 3:29 p.m. the engagement terminated. Two PT boats were damaged and one lay dead in the water. The Maddox, which was unharmed, moved southward under fighter escort on its patrol course. (TABS 9, 28, 29)

The cables received by the Defense Department relating to the Tonkin Gulf attacks are arranged chronologically under (TAB 9.).

2. The Decision Process

No reprisal against North Vietnam was undertaken by the United States in the face of this unprovoked attack on the high seas. According to the testimony of Secretary McNamara, "we believed it possible that it had resulted from a miscalculation or an impulsive act of a local commander" and did not expect that it would be repeated (TAB 28).

The nature of Presidential consultations on August 2 on the possible implications of the North Vietnamese PT boat attacks cannot be retraced from the available records. It is known, however, that sometime during the day the President issued instructions along the lines of his August 3 public announcement to strengthen the Tonkin patrol force and to counter-attack and destroy any force attempting to repeat the attack.

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B. AUGUST 3, 1964

On Monday, August 3 the President made public the instructions that he had issued the day before regarding future patrols and engagements with enemy craft. He reported to the American people that he had "instructed the Navy (1) to continue the patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of Vietnam; (2) to double the force by adding an additional destroyer to the one already on patrol; (3) to provide a combat air patrol over the destroyer and (4) to issue orders to the commanders of the combat aircraft and the two destroyers (a) to attack any force which attacks them in international waters, and (b) to attack with the objective not only of driving off the force but of destroying it." (TAB 10).

At the same time as these instructions were being broadcast throughout the world, the State Department, acting pursuant to the President's further instructions, publicized a note of protest to the North Vietnamese regime. It concluded with the words, "The United States Government expects that the authorities of the regime in North Vietnam will be under no misapprehension as to the grave consequences which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action against the United States forces." (TAB 11).

During the course of the afternoon of August 3 the President consulted privately with Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler. The precise time and nature of this meeting could not be determined from the available source materials (TAB 12).

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On this day too, Secretary McNamara gave a private briefing to the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The precise time and nature of the briefing, of issues raised therein and of its relation to Presidential consultations could not be determined from available source materials (TAB 28).

C. THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 3-4

August 3 passed uneventfully in the Tonkin area as the Maddox, now joined by the destroyer USS Turner Joy and under protection of aircraft from the carrier USS Ticonderoga, continued on its regular patrol off the North Vietnamese coast.

During the night of August 3-4 Tonkin time South Vietnamese 34A operations were carried out against North Vietnamese shipping installations just north of the 17th parallel. At the time of these attacks the Maddox and the Turner Joy were patrolling an area of the Gulf of Tonkin approximately 70 miles to the northeast of the South Vietnamese attacks. At about this time CINCPAC sent a message that the De Soto patrols be conducted in such a way as to avoid any possible interference or connection with South Vietnam's 34A operations. (TAB 8).

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IV - THE GULF OF TONKIN ATTACK OF AUGUST 4

1. SUMMARY DATA

The complex unfolding of events and decisions in the field and in Washington on August 4 is carefully summarized in the unclassified publications of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of testimony by Secretary McNamara on August 6, 1964 and February 20, 1968. (TABS 28,29) Additionally, a highly classified and almost minute by minute chronology for August 4 and 5 was undertaken at the President's direction by the Secretary of Defense. (TAB 13) This Defense memo, forwarded to the White House on August 31, 1964, contains detailed descriptions of all relevant conferences, telephone conversations and telegrams in Washington, Honolulu and in Southeast Asia.

Except where otherwise indicated, the material in the following pages is drawn from theDefense chronology. All times are Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) unless otherwise indicated. It should be noted that Saigon time is 12 hours later and that Gulf of Tonkin time is 11 hours later than EDT. The destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin kept Saigon time, while the carriers there used Gulf of Tonkin time. CINCPAC (Honolulu) time is 6 hours earlier than EDT. (TAB 13)

2. First Indications of Attacks on the U. S. Destroyers

At 7:40 AM EDT (6:40 PM on a moonless night in the Gulf of Tonkin) the Maddox, cruising with the destroyer C. Turner Joy some 65 miles from

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the nearest land, reported on the basis of actions taken by nearby unidentified vessels that an attack appeared imminent. This message was received in the Pentagon (NMCC) at about 9:30 AM.

At 8:13 AM EDT the Pentagon DIA Indications Center had been notified by the National Security Agency that special intelligence (COMINT) indicated "imminent plans of DRV naval action possibly against the De Soto mission." Copies of the message were given to Secretary McNamara and JCS Chairman Wheeler at about 9:00. According to Secretary McNamara's Congressional testimony the same source reported while the engagement was in progress that the attack was underway, and immediately after the attack ended, this source reported that the North Vietnamese had lost two ships in the engagement. (TAB 28)

At 8:36 AM (message received in Pentagon NMCC at 10:30 AM) the Maddox reported radar contact with two unidentified surface vessels and three unidentified aircraft. U. S. fighter aircraft were then launched from the USS Ticonderoga (some 100 nautical miles NE of Danang) to provide air cover in accordance with the President's previously issued directives. At 9:08 the Maddox reported the disappearance of the unidentified aircraft from the radar but confirmed the continued presence of surface vessels. (Message received in NMCC at 11:04 AM). (TAB 13)

At 9:12 AM EDT Secretary McNamara informed the President by telephone about the NSA/DIA intelligence warning. At 9:23 General Wheeler

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telephoned CINCPAC to determine available information on the impending attacks and, according to the Defense memo, was "insistent that the destroyers 'clobber' the attacks and make every effort to destroy the hostile ships. . ."

During this period, the Maddox reported the approach of at least five high speed surface radar contacts evaluated as probable torpedo boats, and that an attack appeared imminent. Other amplifying messages quickly followed and by about 10:00 AM a flash message was received in Washington reporting that the U. S. destroyers, then located some 60 to 65 miles off the coast of North Vietnam, were actually under attack. Throughout the remainder of the morning and early afternoon, flash reports of the engagement, some ambiguous and conflicting, continued to pour in.

3. Early Meetings at the Pentagon

a. 9:25 AM - 11:20 AM Meeting

Beginning at 9:25 and until approximately 11:20 Secretary McNamara met with Deputy Secretary Vance and representatives of the Joint Chiefs to examine incoming reports and to discuss the possible alternative methods of retaliation. According to the Defense memo, "during these discussions, McNamara develops four options for a sharp limited blow and one option for continuous pressure against the North Vietnamese. The four options for the sharp limited blow are: (1) Air strikes against PT boats and their bases; (2) Air strikes against petroleum installations; (3) Air strikes on bridges;

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and (4) Air strikes on prestige targets, such as a steel plant. The option for continuing pressure against the North Vietnamese is to mine important ports along their coastline." When it was pointed out that the mines would have to be brought from the Philippines, and that this would take 48 hours, McNamara ordered that the mines be obtained as soon as possible. (TAB 13)

According to the Defense memo, "McNamara made three calls to the President during this period at 9:43 AM, 10:53 AM and 11:06 AM." The specific substance of these calls could not be ascertained from the available sources. However a memo by McGeorge Bundy reported in connection with Secretary McNamara's initial call of 9:12 AM to the President that "from that point onward, the President was kept fully informed on all action reports." (TAB 12)

b. Initial Decisions on New Rules of Engagement & Recommendations on Possible Targets

Secretary McNamara was informed at 10:04 AM of a flash message indicating that the American destroyers were under attack. At 10:19 he discussed these events in a telephone call to Admiral Sharp, the Commander in Chief, Pacific in Honolulu and indicated that modified rules of engagement would be sent to him. Then, according to the Defense memo, at 10:33 AM:

> ". . . a message, personally signed, McNamara, is sent from the JCS to CINCPAC modifying the existing rules of engagement for the destroyers and their supporting aircraft. Under the old rules, in event of attack in international waters (11 miles offshore or more), U.S. forces were to destroy the attackers, but hot pursuit of attacking forces into hostile waters or airspace was not authorized (JCS Message 7681, August 2, 1964 and the destroyers were to approach

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> the North Vietnamese coastline no closer than 11 miles. Combat air patrol was restricted to daylight hours and maintained seaward of the destroyers so as to preclude any possibility of overflying North Vietnam. (JCS Message 7680, July 2, 1964). Under the new rules (JCS Message 7700), the closest approach to the North Vietnam coastline for the destroyer patrol is 11 nautical miles, and in the event of a hostile attack, aircraft only are authorized to pursue and attack the hostile forces up to the three mile limit of the North Vietnamese coastline. The message also directed that the Constellation be moved into the area off South Vietnam. . ."

In a 10:59 telephone conversation with General Burchinal, who was in Secretary McNamara's office at the time, Admiral Sharp suggested Hon Ne, Hon Me, Ben Thuy and Quang Khe as possible strike targets and in an 11:18 telephone conversation with General Burchinal he suggested that the Loc Chao estuary be added to the list.

c. 11:25 AM - 12:30 PM Meeting

According to the Defense memo, McNamara, about 11:00 AM asked Rusk, (McGeorge) Bundy and the JCS to meet with him at the Pentagon. According to a memo by McGeorge Bundy the meeting was also attended by Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance and by CIA Chief, McCone. The Defense memo indicates that General Wheeler was out of town between the hours of 10:30 AM and 4:30 PM, keeping a previously arranged appointment with the New York Times editorial board. In his absence, General LeMay was the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

The Defense memo indicates that at 11:20 McNamara and Vance met with the JCS LeMay, McDonald, Johnson, Greene, Goodpaster, Burchinal, and Mustin and Joint Staff Assistants). They were joined at 11:38 by Secretary Rusk and by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs.

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Marshall Green, General Burchinal briefed Rusk. At 11:40 McGeorge Bundy arrived and was briefed by Secretary McNamara. According to the Defense memo at this point:

> "There is a discussion of retaliatory measures. McNamara and Bundy discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a sharp limited blow such as air strikes and/or the continuing pressure of mining the North Vietnamese coast. McNamara tells LeMay that the JCS should work up recommendations for immediate action, then recommend actions for 24, 48 and 60 hours ahead, with special emphasis on reinforcements, such as the movement of B-57's into South Vietnam and fighter interceptors into the Philippines."

Then, according to the Defense memo, "At 12:04 McNamara, Rusk, Bundy, Green (State Department) and Vance move to McNamara's office, while the JCS continue meeting in McNamara's dining room. At this meeting the options are essentially refined to three: (1) Sharp limited strikes against such targets as PT boats, PT bases, oil depots, etc.; (2) Continuing pressure, i. e., mining the Vietnam coast; (3) A combination of both." At 12:20 PM McNamara, Rusk, Bundy, and Green departed for White House followed by Vance at 12:25. The JCS continued meeting until 1:49 PM and "during their meeting, at JCS direction, Burchinal calls McNamara at White House to recommend the sharp limited response option."

4. NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING - 12:04 PM to about 1:00 PM

A regularly scheduled National Security Council Meeting centering was on the Cyprus war/in progress when McNamara, Rusk and Bundy arrived at

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the White House. In addition to the President, the participants were Robert Kennedy, McCone, McDermott, Ball, Talbot, Dillon, Rowan, Reedy, Valenti, Clifton, Bromley Smith and Komer. McNamara described the attack on the destroyers, and Rusk indicated that he, McNamara and the JCS were developing a set of options, but that these were not as yet sufficiently refined for presentation.

5. The President's Decision

Upon conclusion of the National Security Council meeting, about 1:04 p.m., the President continued the discussion at lunch with Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Bundy and Vance. At the same time, the meeting of the JCS was continuing at the Pentagon.

At 1:24 p.m. General Burchinal called McNamara at the White House and informed him that the Joint Chiefs had selected the option involving air strikes against the PT boat installations (Phuc Loi, Quang Khe and Loc Chao) and the Vinh oil complex. At almost the same time the JCS received from Admiral Sharp in Honolulu a recommendation that U.S. air strikes be authorized against a similar set of targets.

The President agreed that a firm and swift retaliatory strike must be carried out. A general consensus was reached on the approach reflected in the JCS order to CINCPAC sent later that afternoon, to strike the PT bases at Port Wallut, Hon Gay, Phuc Loi, Quang Khe, and Loc Chao, and the Vinh oil depot.

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The President discussed, and rejected, the option of mining North Vietnamese ports and of an attack on Haiphong.

The President asked how long it would take to execute the strikes. McNamara estimated that a strike could be launched about 7:00 PM, Washington time which would be 7:00 AM Saigon time. The President suggested that McNamara call the JCS to confirm the time butMcNamara indicated that he preferred to work this out more carefully after his return to the Defense Department. There was discussion of a Presidential announcement of the air strikes, and the President stressed that the announcement must be timed so as to avoid any possibility of giving the enemy advance warning of these attacks.

A McGeorge Bundy memo states that "during the luncheon meeting with the President, the entire situation was reviewed and a consensus was swiftly reached on the course of action on which the President decided. This discussion lasted for about two hours and was marked by thoroughness, clarity, and an absence of significant disagreement." (TAB 12)

After the Luncheon Meeting the President ordered the scheduling of a full National Security Council meeting for 6:15 to review his decision and a meeting of the Congressional Leadership at 6:45 so that he might inform them as to his decision. The members of the Luncheon Meeting then separated for departmental discussions and for the preparation of the necessary orders.

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6. State Department Actions

State Department actions during the afternoon of August 4 included: transmission of a number of personal messages from the President to various heads of state (TAB 14); planning for a meeting of the United Nations Security Council (TAB 15), drafting the suggested text of a Congressional Resolution (TAB 26) and preparing, in conjunction with the Defense Department, for a meeting of the NAC (TAB 16) and SEATO (TAB 17), and for the Congressional hearings to be conducted the next day. At the same time research papers were prepared on such topics as Communist intentions (TAB 18) and the question of international law on the high seas (TAB 19).

7. Defense Department Actions

During the afternoon some confusion arose as to the exact circumstances of the attack. In a telephone call to General Burchinal at 1:59 Admiral Sharp reported that a flash message had been received from the Maddox stating that "a review of the action makes many reported contacts and torpedos fired 'appear doubtful'" because of freak weather effects, over-eager sonarmen and the absence of visual sightings. At 2:08 Admiral Sharp reported that there was no doubt that a torpedo attack did occur but that some reported torpedo attacks might have been in error.

At 4:08 PM Secretary McNamara telephoned Admiral Sharp, who reported receipt of a message from Destroyer Task Force Commander Moore indicating "a little doubt on just exactly what went on." McNamara asked for a further check and discussed the problem of coordinating the planned 7:00 PM launch

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time with the Presidential announcement of the retaliatory attacks. At 4:40 PM Admiral Sharp provided further details confirming the attacks and at 4:47 PM McNamara, Vance and the JCS met to evaluate the evidence that an attack on the destroyers had in fact occurred. They determined that the following five factors seemed con dusive: "(1) The Turner Joy was illuminated when fired on by automatic weapons; (2) One of the destroyers observed cockpit lights; (3) A PGM 142 shot at two U. S. aircraft (From COMINT); (4) A North Vietnamese announcement that two of its boats were 'sacrificed.' (From COMINT) and (5) Sharp's determination that there was indeed an attack."

At 5:23 Admiral Sharp called Burchinal and said that on the basis of several additional reports from the Turner Joy and an intercepted enemy message there was no doubt that an attack on the destroyers had occurred.

8. National Security Council Meeting - 6:15 PM

The 6:15 NCS Meeting was attended by the President, Rusk, McNamara, Vance, Wheeler, Speaker McCormack, McCone, Cline, McNaughton, Ball, William Bundy, Dillon, Rowan, Reedy, McGeorge Bundy, Jenkins, Moyers, Valenti, Bromley Smith and Cater.

The Defense memo indicates that McNamara outlined a four-part plan as follows: "(1) the strike against the PT boat bases and the supporting installations and armed reconnaissance along the North Vietnamese coast; (2) Sending reinforcements to the area, an expression of our will to escalate; (3) Presidential announcement of these actions; and (4) A Joint Congressional

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Resolution in support of these actions and further actions, if necessary."

The President asked the NSC members if they had any objection to the plan. There were none. (TAB 12) The President then approved the plan. There followed a discussion of the probable launch time now estimated to be 8:00 PM and of the timing of public statements estimated to be 9:00 PM. The NSC meeting broke up at 6:38 and McNamara, Rusk, and Bundy met with the President in his office, prior to the Congressional leadership meeting.

9. The President's Meeting with the Congressional Leadership - 6:45 PM

At 6:45 PM the President met with 16 Congressional leaders at the White House. Notes taken at this meeting by Walter Jenkins (TAB 21) outline a sequence of events as follows: The President impressed all persons in the room with the requirement to "be very careful" in keeping "all matters in closest confidence." Secretary McNamara gave a briefing on what was planned. Secretary Rusk gave a report on the political situation and on diplomatic steps. CIA Director McCone gave his estimate of expected enemy reactions. (NOTE: Documents relating to reactions of Communist countries including the Soviet Union and Communist China are attached at TAB 18). Questions were asked of McCone concerning Allied provocations. General Wheeler was asked by the President to report on Ambassador Maxwell Taylor's recommendations (TAB 20).

The President summarized the reasons for his decisions and read the draft of his proposed public statements on the decisions. Discussion followed the President's reading of the draft statement. The President read

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and the leadership discussed the draft of a proposed Joint Congressional Resolution requested by the President as an indication of Congressional concurrence.

The President's words to the leadership summarizing the rationale of his decisions are reported in the Jenkins memo as follows:

> "We thought there were two decisions to take. After we were attacked yesterday and today and nine torpedoes were shot at our destroyers forty miles on the high seas we had to answer that attack. There are four bases where they use these boats. There is a relatively small civilian population around them. We can tuck our tails and run, but if we do these countries will feel all they have to do to scare us is to shoot the American flag. The question is how do we retaliate. We have worked out this plan, on these four bases. There have been many discussions and recommendations by people in the country that we go into this the northern area and not allow them to murder us from bases of safety. These boats came from these bases and have been shooting the American ships.
>
> * * * * *
>
> "I think I know what the reactions would be if we tucked our tails. I thought I should get the Security Council and get the leadership and after the orders are executed I would plan to make a statement something like this. The President then read the proposed statement. Senator Saltonstall pointed out that the word 'limited' was used three times in the statement and suggested that the word 'determined' be substituted for it and let the limitations speak for themselves. The President said: 'We want them to know we are not going to take it lying down but we are not going to destroy their cities and we hope we can prepare them for the course we will follow.'"

The President then said:

> "I wanted the advice of each of you and wanted to consult with you. We felt we should move with the action recommended by the Joint Chiefs, but I wanted to get the Congressional concurrence. I think it would be very damaging to ask for it and not get it."
>
> * * * * *
>
> "We will probably make some changes in it. I don't ask you to draft the message. We have taken the resolutions you have had in the past.

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I don't think any resolution is necessary, but I think it is a lot better to have it in the light of what we did in Korea.

* * * * *

"We can pretty well work out a good resolution with a minimum of doctoring. I wanted to see if you felt it was the wise thing to do."

The President concluded by saying "I have told you what I want from you," and he "then went around the table to each person and (each) made an expression of support one way or another."

A McGeorge Bundy memo states that, as in the case of the NSC meeting where "it was clear that all members of the NSC were in accord with the President's decision, . . . in the meeting of the Leadership a similar consensus readily developed." In the light of the Congressional comments, drafting continued in the evening of Tuesday August 4. (TAB 12)

10. The President's Actions During the Early Evening of August 4

During the evening, the President was in touch with the Pentagon, and probably reviewed drafts of the statement he would give that evening and of the speech he would give the next morning at Syracuse University. After trying for several hours, he reached Senator Goldwater by telephone at 10:06 PM, and informed the Republican Presidential candidate of his decision to retaliate against North Vietnam. (TAB 13) Goldwater expressed his approval, and a few mintues later told the press: "I am sure that every American will subscribe to the actions outlined in the President's statement. I believe it is the only thing we can do under the circumstances. We cannot allow the American flag to be shot at anywhere on earth if we are to retain our respect and prestige." (TAB 4) At this point, the President had, in

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fact, as yet made no public statement.

11. The President's Radio/TV Address to the Nation August 4; 11:36 PM

The President's address to the nation, scheduled for 9:00 p.m., or one hour after the anticipated launch time, was delayed by some 2 1/2 hours. The delay was caused by the unanticipated inability of the carriers Constellation and Ticonderoga to mount the attacks as early as CINCPAC and Washington had assumed they could. The President had insisted that his announcement not be made until the planes were launched. Numerous messages and telephone calls had been made across the Pacific as the evening wore on in an attempt to confirm the launch time. Finally at 11:20 p.m. Admiral Sharp called McNamara to report that the Ticonderoga had launched the first wave of aircraft at 10:43 Washington time and that these planes were expected to arrive at the target area at 1:50 a.m. EDT. At 11:27, Secretary McNamara called the President and told him that it was now appropriate to make his public statement and at 11:36 p.m. the President went on the air. As McGeorge Bundy observed, "the timing of the President's address to the nation was complex. The address must be so timed as not to give any battle advantage to the North Vietnamese but at the same time must precede any announcement of the operation from the other side. The time which was eventually agreed to, met this requirement." (TAB 12)

The President reported on North Vietnam's renewed hostile actions against U.S. ships on the high seas and stated that "repeated acts of violence against the armed forces of the

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United States must be met not only with alert defense but with positive reply. That reply is being given as I speak to you tonight." Taking account of the overall context of the enemy's action and the U. S. response, he noted that "in the larger sense this new act of aggression, aimed directly at our own forces, again brings home to all of us in the United States the importance of the struggle for peace and security in Southeast Asia. Aggression by terror against the peaceful villagers of South Vietnam had now been joined by open aggression on the high seas against the United States of America. The determination of all Americans to carry out our full commitment to the people and to the government of South Vietnam will be redoubled by this outrage."

Having stated the requirements of a response and the obligations of the U. S. commitment to South Vietnam, the President then carefully delineated the limited nature of the retaliatory actions he had ordered. He declared that "Yet our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting. We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risks of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war." The President indicated that he had instructed Dean Rusk "to make this position totally clear to friends and to adversaries" and that he had ordered Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson to request an immediate meeting of the UN Security Council to hear U. S. charges against North Vietnam.

The President told of his telephone conversation with Senator Goldwater and reported that the Republican Presidential candidate had expressed his

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support of the President's statement. The President reported on his meeting with the Congressional leadership and stated that he had "informed them that I shall immediately request the Congress to pass a resolution making it clear that our Government is united in its determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in southeast Asia. I have been given encouraging assurance by these leaders of both parties that such a resolution will be promptly introduced, freely and expeditiously debated, and passed with overwhelming support." The President concluded by declaring that "firmness in the right is indispensable today for peace; that firmness will always be measured. Its mission is peace." (TAB 10)

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V - DEVELOPMENTS ON AUGUST 5

A. SECRETARY MCNAMARA'S REPORTS ON US RETALIATORY STRIKES AND REINFORCEMENTS

Upon conclusion of the President's Radio/Television address, Secretary McNamara at 12:02 a.m. gave the first of his four detailed reports that day to the press and public concerning specific actions undertaken by U.S. Armed Forces (TAB 22).

In his midnight press conference McNamara reported on the chronology of the attacks. He indicated that the U.S. planes had encountered heavy anti-aircraft fire, and were using only conventional weapons. In a 9:00 a.m. press conference McNamara reported that during the night 64 attack sorties had been lauched from the carriers Ticonderoga and Constellation against four North Vietnam PT bases and against the Vinh oil complex. Twenty-five enemy boats and 90% of the Vinh storage tanks had been destroyed or damaged and two U.S. aircraft had been lost. U.S. reinforcement moves in the Pacific area were listed as follows: "(1) an attack carrier group has been transferred from the First Fleet on the Pacific Coast to the Western Pacific; (2) interceptor and fighter bomber aircraft have been moved into South Viet Nam; (3) fighter bomber aircraft have been moved into Thailand; (4) intercepter and fighter bomber squadrons have been transferred from the United States into advance bases in the Pacific; (5) antisubmarine task force group has been moved into the South China Sea; and (6) selected Army and Marine forces have been alerted and readied for movement."

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In a 7:30 p.m. interview with Neil Strawser of CBS-TV, McNamara reported that the U.S. air strikes have been accomplished "very successfully" and that any "aggressive initiatives of the North Vietnamese or the Communist allies" would be met "in a fashion similar to that of the last day." McNamara again reviewed the Tonkin events in a 9:15 p.m. interview.

B. THE PRESIDENT'S SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY SPEECH

A McGeorge Bundy memo reports that the President decided on Tuesday evening that his speech at Syracuse University the following day should be related to the Tonkin Gulf crisis. The President was briefed by Bundy on Wednesday morning before departing for Syracuse and by his military Aide, General Clifton, on the plane (TAB 12).

In his Syracuse speech the President reported that the deliberate and unprovoked attacks on U.S. ships in the high seas -- part of an "aggression, deliberate, willful, and systematic aggression /which/ has unmasked its face to the entire world," -- had been answered by U.S. air strikes against "the hostile vessels and their supporting facilities." The President pointedly recalled the history of "long provocation" which had confronted three American Presidents and the American people in "threats to the peace and security of the peoples of Southeast Asia from the Communist government of North Vietnam." He cited the U.S. statements at Genervа in 1954 that the U.S. would "view any renewal of the aggression...with grave concern." The

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President cited the SEATO pact of 1954 and reviewed North Vietnam's systematic violation of the Geneva Accords of 1962 on Laos. Turning to Europe and "to our friends of the Atlantic Alliance," the President stated that "the challenge that we face in Southeast Asia today is the same challenge that we have faced with courage and that we have met with strength in Greece and Turkey, in Berlin and Korea, in Lebanon and in Cuba."

While underlining the global dimensions of the conflict reflected in the Gulf of Tonkin events the President was careful to assure the world at several points in his speech that "there is no threat to any peaceful power from the United States of America," that "peace is the only purpose of the course that America pursues," and that "the United States is now asking that this be brought immediately and urgently before the Security Council of the United Nations." (TAB 10).

The President closed his Syracuse speech with an unusually demonstrative affirmation of national unity in saying: ". . .let no friend needlessly fear -- and no foe vainly hope -- that this is a nation divided in this election year. Our free election -- our full and free debates -- are America's strength, not America's weakness. There are no parties and there is no partisanship when our peace or the peace of the world is imperiled by aggressors in any part of the world. We are one nation united and indivisible. And united and indivisible we shall remain." (TAB 10).

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C. U.S. ACTION AT THE UNITED NATIONS

At the President's request, Ambassador Stevenson called for an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council and on August 5 presented to that international forum thefacts concerning the "acts of deliberate aggression by Hanoi." (TAB 15). Stevenson called for the withdrawal of foreign troops fromLaos, and a cessation of "secret subversion," the "clandestine, illegal transit of international frontiers," and the "export of revolution and the doctrine of violence." He concluded by declaring that "when the peace agreements reached long ago are made effective, peace will return to Southeast Asia and military power can be withdrawn."

Department of State cables on U.S. and Government of Vietnam' views and views of other nations concerning United Nations actions on the Gulf of Tonkin events are attached at TAB 15 .

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VI - JOINT CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION ON U.S. ACTIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A Congressional statement of support on the American defense commitment in Southeast Asia had for some time been considered at high levels of the U.S. Government as a desirable step. Such a resolution would warn North Vietnam authorities of the possible serious consequences of their aggression. And if aggression were to continue and U.S. involvement to deepen, such a resolution would give a clear demonstration of unified national concern and action -- a step which while perhaps not legally imperative was nevertheless highly desirable.

A. McGEORGE BUNDY MEMORANDUM AND WILLIAM BUNDY DRAFT ON A CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION, JUNE 1964

A memorandum in the White House files dated June 10, 1964, on the subject "Alternative Public Positions for U.S. on Southeast Asia for the Period July 1 - November 15" reflects the consideration being given to a Congressional resolution. (TAB 23) The memo was prepared by McGeorge Bundy "for discussion June 10, 5:30 p.m." Notes of this June 10 meeting are attached at TAB 24. During the same period William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, had submitted to the White House draft texts for a possible Congressional resolution. (TAB 25).

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The McGeorge Bundy memorandum of June 10 began with the words: "It is agreed that the U.S. will wish to make its position on Southeast Asia as clear and strong as possible in the next five months. The immediate watershed decisions is whether or not the Administration should seek a Congressional resolution giving general authority for action which the President may judge necessary to defend the peace and security in the area."

Bundy foresaw that favorable passage of such a resolution "requires that the Administration be ready to give answers to a whole series of disagreeable questions" including the matter of a blank check to the President, the effect on Asian self-help projects, the kinds of force authorized, whether Southeast Asia really mattered that much, and the current rationale for requesting a resolution in answering the question "what change in the situation requires such a resolution now?" Bundy reasoned that "this answer should include a candid account of the existing situation and hazard and the growing changes both in Laos and in South Vietnam" and should also "refer to the need for international awareness that the U.S. is not immobilized by a political campaign." A resolution would "give additional freedom to the Administration in choosing courses of action," and "would give a signal of this new freedom of action and firmness of purpose in a number of important capitals, the most important of which are in Southeast Asia, on both sides of the line." Such a resolution "would require major public campaign by the Administration"

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including "a Presidential message," which should "itself be preceded by a clear indication of the increasing firmness of the Administration's position and the reasons for that firmness. Such indications could be given only by a public statement of high officials or by such devices as a White Paper." Bundy recognized that "a strong campaign in defense of this resolution will require a substantial increase in the commitment of U.S. prestige and power to success in Southeast Asia."

The Bundy memorandum suggested that in the absence of a Congressional Resolution the U.S. course of action might not be too severely limited. First there were "alternative forms of bipartisan support for action: consultation with Eisenhower and the Republican candidate, discussion with bipartisan leadership of Congress; direct Presidential appeal to the people; ample, if not always encouraging precedent for Presidential action, as in Korea." Second," a wider range of actions which are plainly permissible without a resolution" including "direct military action by South Vietnamese forces, and very substantial deployments of U.S. air, sea and ground forces. Within the framework of SEATO, and in defense of the agreements of 1962, we can plausibly move troops even into Vietnam, Thailand and Laos itself if the appropriate governments request it. Short of direct U.S. military action against North Vietnam, we could almost surely maintain adequate freedom of action even without a Congressional Resolution." Third, "the only time we can get a resolution, in the absence of acute emergency, is within the next three weeks. A strong case can be made that

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we do not now need to commit ourselves so heavily, and that if the situation changes drastically, we could readily respond by emergency session, certainly in November and conceivably in September too."

It should be noted that the matter of earlier high-level discussion and drafts of a Congressional resolution prior to the Tonkin Gulf attacks has been a matter of considerable debate among some Congressional critics of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and of the President's role in increasing the U.S. role. The issues were discussed in considerable detail in testimony by Secretaries McNamara and Rusk before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on August 6, 1964 (TAB 28) and February 20, 1968 (TAB 29) and by William Bundy on December 21, 1967 (TAB 25).

B. PRESIDENTIAL SPECIAL MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS REQUESTING A JOINT RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF U.S. POLICY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AUGUST 5, 1964

The North Vietnamese attacks brought the issue of a Congressional resolution to a focus and led the President to seek the Resolution immediately. (See the description above on the August 4 Presidential meeting with the Congressional leadership).

On the afternoon of Wednesday, August 5, the President reported to the Congress (TAB 10) that the North Vietnamese attacks had precipitated "a new and grave turn to the situation in Southeast Asia," that retaliatory

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U.S. air action had been decided on and completed, and that after earlier "consultation with the leaders of both parties in the Congress, I further announced a decision to ask the Congress for a Resolution expressing the unity and determination of the United States in supporting freedom and in protecting peace in Southeast Asia." These protective U.S. commitments in that area, he pointed out, had been first undertaken by President Eisenhower in 1954 and "are well known to the Congress." "Our policy in Southeast Asia has been consistent and unchanged since 1954. I summarized it on June 2 in four simple propositions: (1) America keeps her word...(2) The issue is the future of Southeast Asia as a whole...(3) Our purpose is peace... and (4) This is not just a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity."

The President was careful to describe North Vietnam's systematic violation of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962 as its forces had "constantly sought to take over South Vietnam and Laos." The President drew a direct link between enemy aggression and U.S. commitments in Laos and Vietnam. He reviewed with the American people recent developments in Laos where at the request of the Government of Laos the U.S. had undertaken reconnaissance flights over Laotian "territory where Communist forces were preventing inspection by the International Control Commission." And, according to the President, "when the Communistsattacked these aircraft, I responded by furnishing escort fighters with instructions to fire when fired upon. Thus these latest North Vietnamese attacks on our naval

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vessels are not the first direct attack on armed forces of the United States. As President of the United States I have concluded that I should now ask the Congress, on its part, to join in affirming the national determination that all such attacks will be met, and that the U.S. will continue in its basic policy of assisting the free nations of the area to defend their freedom." Thus, "I recommend a Resolution expressing the support of the Congress for all necessary action to protect our armed forces and to assist nations covered by the SEATO treaty." Such a Resolution "could well be based upon similar resolutions enacted by the Congress in the past" e.g. for Formosa, the Middle East and Cuba. Prompt enactment of such a resolution would "give convincing evidence to the aggressive Communist nations, and to the world as a whole, that our policy in Southeast Asia will be carried forward -- and that the peace and security of the area will be preserved."

As in his earlier statements at Syracuse, after reporting the evidence and his decisions and having pledged that he would do everything to limit the conflict and "that we shall continue readily to explore any avenues of political solution," the President ended his speech on a forceful proclamation of national unity. "The events of this week," he declared, "would in any event have made the passage of a Congressional Resolution essential. But there is an additional reason for doing so at a time when we are entering on three months of political campaigning. Hostile nations must understand that in such a period the United States will continue to protect its national interests and that in these matters there is no division among us."

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C. CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS, DEBATE AND VOTE ON THE SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOLUTION

On August 6 the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the Senate Committee on Armed Services met in joint executive session to hear Secretaries Rusk and McNamara and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Wheeler testify on the Congressional Resolution. The joint Senate Committee voted 31-1 to report the resolution favorably without amendment. Classified excerpts of the executive session are attached at TAB 27 ; the unclassified transcript is attached at TAB 28 .

Senate debate began on August 6. Most Senators confined their comments to support of the President's position and actions in the Gulf of Tonkin and cited the Formosa, Middle East and Cuba resolutions as clear precedents for Congressional action supporting the President's determination. Senators Morse and Gruening were a vocal minority of two in their opposition to the Resolution, which passed 88-2. Ten absent Senators indicated they would have voted "yea".

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs also met in executive session on August 6 and heard Secretaries Rusk and McNamara and General Wheeler. The Committee voted 29-0 to report the resolution favorably to the House. Two members voted "present". In the House, as in the Senate, the need for bipartisan unity was stressed by most speakers. The final vote was 416 to 0, with Representative Adam Clayton Powell voting "present" and with 14 members not voting.

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The Congressional Resolution characterized North Vietnam's repeated attacks on the high seas as "part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression" against neighboring nations. The Resolution declared that "the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia. Consonant with the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is therefore prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom." (TAB 26)

A summary of the Congressional debate on the Resolution is attached at TAB 30. A summary of Senator Fulbright's statement during the Senate debate is attached at TAB 31. Statements bearing on the powers of the President are attached at TAB 33. Full transcripts of the Senate and House debates are attached at TAB 32. Memoranda on the legal position of the U.S. and a comparison of the Tonkin Resolution and the three similar Congressional resolutions are attached at TAB 34. A 1967 memorandum refuting Senator Case's attack on the Administration's handling of Viet Nam,

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with special reference to the Southeast Asia Resolution, is attached at TAB 35 .

D. THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS OF AUGUST 7AND AUGUST 10

On August 7, the President issued a statement hailing the Senate and House passage of the Joint Resolution as "a demonstration to all the world of the unity of all Americans." He thanked the leaders and members of both parties in the Congress for their patriotic resolve and their rapid action. In signing the Joint Resolution into law on August 10, the President noted that as Commander in Chief the responsibility to retaliate was his alone but that as President he also had "the responsibility of submitting our course to the representatives of the people for them to verify it or veto it." The Congress had now spoken and "the unanimity of Congress reflects the unanimity of the country." Thus it should be clear to all that "to any armed attack upon our forces, we shall reply. To any in Southeast Asia who ask our help in defending their freedom we shall give it. In that region there is nothing we covet, nothing we seek--no territory, no military position, no political ambition. Our one desire--our one determination--is that the people of Southeast Asia be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way." (TAB 10).

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VII - CONCLUSION

In the weeks immediately following the Tonkin events there were a number of high-level U. S. Government reviews of the situation in Southeast Asia. They included White House conferences of August 8 (TAB 36) and August 10 (TAB 37), a State/Defense message of August 14 (TAB 38) and a new National Security Action Memorandum, NSAM 314, of September 10 (TAB 39). Related problems in Laos and Thailand were discussed in cables attached at TABS 40 and 41.

At a White House meeting with his senior advisors on August 10, the President conducted a postmortem on the Tonkin crisis. He was pleased with the nation's firm response. At the same time, however, he was convinced that the Tonkin crisis was but an episode in a longer and as yet unfinished story.

McGeorge Bundy's notes:

> "The President expressed his basic satisfaction with what had been accomplished in the last week. He said the reaction from Congress was good, and also from the people judging by the polls. He said this response was quite a tribute to the Secretaries of State and Defense. He warned, however, that if we should fail in the second challenge, or if we should do nothing further, we could find ourselves even worse off than before this last set of events. The President did not wish to escalate just because the public liked what happened last week. We would have to pick our own ground: nonetheless, instead of letting the other side have the ball, we should be prepared to take it. He asked for prompt study and recommendations as to ways this might be done with maximum results and minimum danger. He did not believe that the existing situation would last very long."

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POSTLOGUE

The President turned in mid-August from the Gulf of Tonkin crisis to other events in the world requiring intensive Presidential deliberations (Cyprus, Congo) and to the domestic preparations required for his nomination as candidate for the Presidency. The President's earnest hopes that his firm actions in the Gulf of Tonkin would deter the North Vietnamese were dashed by decisions in Hanoi. For in the fall of 1964 the North Vietnamese decided to send units of their regular army southward along the Ho Chi Minh Trail through neutral Laos. Their mission was to give decisive support to Viet-Cong forces pressing for a final military victory. These Communist steps would eventually require the U. S. to respond some six months later with regular air strikes against targets in North Vietnam and with a commitment of American combat forces to the defense of South Vietnamese freedom.

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TABS ON THE GULF OF TONKIN DECISIONS

TAB

I -- II INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1 NSAM 288 - March 17, 1964 & McNamara Trip Report of March 16, 1964
2 McNamara Trip Report - May 14, 1964
3 White House Meeting of May 24, 1964
4 Chronologies - 1964
5 White House Meeting of June 10, 1964
6 William Sullivan Memo of - July 13, 1964
7 Department of State cables on SVN July - August 1964

III - ATTACKS OF AUGUST 2

8 South Vietnamese 34A Operations
9 Defense Department Cables July - August 1964
10 Presidential Statements - August 1964 & Campaign Period 1964
11 U.S. Protest Note
12 McGeorge Bundy Memorandum - August 5, 1964

IV - ATTACKS OF AUGUST 4

13 Defense Department Special Chronologies
14 Presidential Messages to Heads of State
15 United Nations Action
16 NAC Meeting
17 SEATO Meeting
18 Communist Intentions -- NVN, Communist China, Soviet Union
19 International Law of the High Seas
20 General Taylor's Recommendations of August 3, 1964
21 Jenkins Memo on Congressional Leadership Meeting of August 4

V - DEVELOPMENTS ON AUGUST 5

22 McNamara Reports of August 5, 1964

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