

- (c) Our own reputation for steadfastness and our unwillingness to stultify ourselves.
- (d) If proposed action is suspended, I believe a body blow will be dealt to respect for us by VNese Generals. Also, all those who expect U.S. to straighten out this situation will feel let down. Our help to the regime in past years inescapably gives a responsibility which we cannot avoid.

I realize that this course involves a very substantial risk of losing VN. It also involves some additional risk to American lives. I would never propose it if I felt there was a reasonable chance of holding VN with Diem.

THE TONKIN GULF RESOLUTION

In the summer of 1964, President Lyndon Johnson reported to the American people that North Vietnamese gunboats in the Gulf of Tonkin had attacked U.S. Navy ships. In retaliation, Johnson ordered a one-time air attack on North Vietnam and proposed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The resolution had, in fact, been drafted months before the incident, the administration waiting for an opportune moment for its introduction to ensure its easy passage.

To this day, doubts remain about the extent, actual dates, and even the existence of the North Vietnamese attacks. What is not in doubt is that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution became the only congressional authorization for the war in Vietnam. No war declaration was ever passed. When questioned as to why they never sought such a declaration, both Presidents Johnson and Nixon pointed to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as sufficient authorization for their actions.

To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia.

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it *Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled*, 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.

Sec. 2. 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 Constitution of the United States and the Charter of 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.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

MCGEORGE BUNDY AND "SUSTAINED REPRISAL"

In 1964 the Johnson administration began planning to expand American involvement in the war, a series of steps that would introduce American ground troops in 1965. As part of this planning, McGeorge Bundy, assistant to the president for national security affairs, sketched out the aims and the costs of the expanded war in a memo to Johnson in February 1965. Years later, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara would relate how American military planners had no coherent notion of how to fight the war. Some of that lack of clarity is evident in Bundy's assessment, as he continually speaks of potential failure. Despite that possibility, he notes that one aim of this expanded American involvement was to dampen criticism that nothing was being undertaken, even if the plans failed.

We believe that the best available way of increasing our chance of success in Vietnam is the development and execution of a policy of *sustained reprisal* against North Vietnam—a policy in which air and naval action against the North is justified by and related to the whole Viet Cong campaign of violence and terror in the South.

While we believe that the risks of such a policy are acceptable, we emphasize that its costs are real. It implies significant U.S. air losses even if no full air war is joined, and it seems likely that it would eventually require an extensive and costly effort against the whole air defense system of North Vietnam.

Yet measured against the costs of defeat in Vietnam, this program seems cheap. And even if it fails to turn the tide—as it may—the value of the effort seems to us to exceed its cost. . . .

This reprisal policy should begin at a low level. Its level of force and pressure should be increased only gradually—and as indicated above should be decreased if VC terror visibly decreased. The object would not be to "win" an air war against Hanoi, but rather to influence the course of the struggle in the South. . . .

We are convinced that the political values of reprisal require a *continuous* operation. Episodic responses geared on a one-for-one basis to "spectacular" outrages would lack the persuasive force of sustained pressure. More important still, they would leave it open to the Communists to avoid reprisal entirely by giving up only a small element of their own program. The Gulf of Tonkin affair produced a sharp upturn in morale in South Vietnam. When it remained an isolated episode, however, there was a severe relapse. It is the great merit of the proposed scheme that to stop it the Communists would have to stop enough of their activity in the South to permit the probable success of a determined pacification effort. . . .

We emphasize that our primary target in advocating a reprisal policy is the improvement of the situation in *South Vietnam*. Action against the North is usually urged as a means of affecting the will of Hanoi to direct and support the VC. We consider this an important but longer-range purpose. The immediate and critical targets are in the South—in the minds of the South Vietnamese and in the minds of the Viet Cong cadres. . . .

We cannot assert that a policy of sustained reprisal will succeed in changing the course of the contest in Vietnam. It may fail, and we cannot estimate the odds of success with any accuracy—they may be somewhere between 25% and 75%. What we can say is that even if it fails, the policy will be worth it. At a minimum it will damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done, and this charge will be important in many countries, including our own. Beyond that, a reprisal policy—to the extent that it demonstrates U.S. willingness to employ this new norm in counter-insurgency—will set a higher price for the future upon all adventures of guerrilla warfare, and it should therefore somewhat increase our ability to deter such adventures. We must recognize, however, that that ability will be gravely weakened if there is failure for any reason in Vietnam.

JOHN T. MCNAUGHTON'S "PLAN FOR ACTION FOR SOUTH VIETNAM"

In March 1964, assistant secretary of defense John McNaughton outlined his view of U.S. aims in Vietnam in a memo to Robert McNamara. It is noteworthy that McNaughton saw only 10 percent of the aim as providing the people of South Vietnam with "a better, freer way of life," when this was the stated public rationale for American involvement.

U.S. aims:

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

20%—To keep SVN (and the adjacent) territory from Chinese hands.

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

ALSO—To emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from methods used.

NOT—to "help a friend," although it would be hard to stay in if asked out.

The situation: The situation in general is bad and deteriorating. The VC have the initiative. Defeatism is gaining among the rural population, somewhat in the cities, and even among the soldiers—especially those with relatives in rural areas. The Hop Tac [pacification] area around Saigon is making little progress; the Delta stays bad; the country has been severed in the north. GVN control is shrinking to the enclaves, some burdened with refugees. In Saigon we have a remission: Quat is giving hope on the civilian side, the Buddhists have calmed, and the split generals are in uneasy equilibrium. . . .

Evaluation: It is essential—however badly SEA may go over the next 1–3 years—that U.S. emerge as a "good doctor." We must have kept promises, been tough, taken risks, gotten bloodied, and hurt the enemy very badly. We must avoid harmful appearances which will affect judgments by, and provide pretexts to, other nations regarding how the U.S. will behave in future cases of particular interest to those nations—regarding U.S. policy, power, resolve and competence to deal with their problems. In this connection, the relevant audiences are the Communists (who must feel strong pressures), the South Vietnamese (whose morale must be buoyed), our allies (who must trust us as "underwriters") and the U.S. public (which must support our risk-taking with U.S. lives and prestige).

GEORGE BALL AND THE INTERNAL OPPOSITION

Undersecretary of State George W. Ball was the one high-ranking member of the Johnson administration who opposed the escalation of the war, as this July 1965 memo to the president illustrates. Many scholars believe that had another member of the administration joined Ball in opposition, some restraint might have been exercised.

(1) A Losing War: The South Vietnamese are losing the war to the Viet Cong. No one can assure you that we can beat the Viet Cong or even force them to the conference table on our terms, no matter how many hundred thousand *white*, foreign (U.S.) troops we deploy.

No one has demonstrated that a white ground force of whatever size can win a guerrilla war—which is at the same time a civil war between

Asians—in jungle terrain in the midst of a population that refuses cooperation to the white forces (and the South Vietnamese) and thus provides a great intelligence advantage to the other side. . . .

(2) The Question to Decide: Should we limit our liabilities in South Vietnam and try to find a way out with minimal long-term costs?

The alternative—no matter what we may wish it to be—is almost certainly a protracted war involving an open-ended commitment of U.S. forces, mounting U.S. casualties, no assurance of a satisfactory solution, and a serious danger of escalation at the end of the road.

(3) Need for a Decision Now: So long as our forces are restricted to advising and assisting the South Vietnamese, the struggle will remain a civil war between Asian peoples. Once we deploy substantial numbers of troops in combat it will become a war between the U.S. and a large part of the population of South Vietnam, organized and directed from North Vietnam and backed by the resources of both Moscow and Peiping.

The decision you face now, therefore, is crucial. Once large numbers of U.S. troops are committed to direct combat, they will begin to take heavy casualties in a war they are ill-equipped to fight in a non-cooperative if not downright hostile countryside.

Once we suffer large casualties, we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot—without national humiliation—stop short of achieving our complete objectives. *Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives—even after we have paid terrible costs. . . .*

LYNDON JOHNSON ON WHY FIGHT IN VIETNAM

In an effort to explain to the American people why soldiers would now actively enter the fray in Vietnam, in 1965 Lyndon Johnson sketched out his vision of the future of South Vietnam and his resolve for American involvement. Ten years later, his final words would possess a hollow ring as the United States did grow tired and had withdrawn with what many would see as a meaningless agreement.

Why must this nation hazard its ease, its interest, and its power for the sake of a people so far away?

We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny, and only in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure.

This kind of world will never be built by bombs or bullets. Yet the infirm-

ties of man are such that force must often precede reason and the waste of war, the works of peace.

We wish that this were not so. But we must deal with the world as it is, if it is ever to be as we wish.

The world as it is in Asia is not a serene or peaceful place.

The first reality is that North Viet-Nam has attacked the independent nation of South Viet-Nam. Its object is total conquest.

Of course, some of the people of South Viet-Nam are participating in attack on their own government. But trained men and supplies, orders and arms, flow in a constant stream from North to South.

This support is the heartbeat of the war.

And it is a war of unparalleled brutality. Simple farmers are the targets of assassination and kidnaping. Women and children are strangled in the night because their men are loyal to their government. And helpless villages are ravaged by sneak attacks. Large-scale raids are conducted on towns, and terror strikes in the heart of cities.

The confused nature of this conflict cannot mask the fact that it is the new face of an old enemy.

Over this war—and all Asia—is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China. The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peking. This is a regime which has destroyed freedom in Tibet, which has attacked India and has been condemned by the United Nations for aggression in Korea. It is a nation which is helping the forces of violence in almost every continent. The contest in Viet-Nam is part of a wider pattern of aggressive purposes.

Why are these realities our concern? Why are we in South Viet-Nam?

We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Viet-Nam. We have helped to build, and we have helped to defend. Thus, over many years, we have made a national pledge to help South Viet-Nam defend its independence.

And I intend to keep that promise.

To dishonor that pledge, to abandon this small and brave nation to its enemies, and to the terror that must follow, would be an unforgivable wrong.

We are also there to strengthen world order. Around the globe from Berlin to Thailand are people whose well being rests in part on the belief that they can count on us if they are attacked. To leave Viet-Nam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of an American commitment and in the value of America's word. The result would be increased unrest and instability, and even wider war. . . .

Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves—only that the people of South Viet-Nam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way.

We will do everything necessary to reach that objective and we will do only what is absolutely necessary.

In recent months attacks on South Viet-Nam were stepped up. Thus, it became necessary for us to increase our response and to make attacks by air. This is not a change of purpose. It is a change in what we believe that purpose requires.

We do this in order to slow down aggression.

We do this to increase the confidence of the brave people of South Viet-Nam who have bravely borne this brutal battle for so many years with so many casualties.

And we do this to convince the leaders of North Viet-Nam—and all who seek to share their conquest—of a simple fact:

We will not be defeated.

We will not grow tired.

We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement. . . .

ONE SOLDIER'S VIEW: VIETNAM LETTERS

George Skakel

In the fall of 1967, the student newspaper at the University of California, Santa Cruz, *The City on a Hill Press*, began to run a series of letters from a former student stationed in Vietnam. Using the pseudonym "Cpl. Callibernus," George Skakel wrote back to the UCSC campus community from the ground in Vietnam. The *Press* was one of the few, perhaps the only, newspapers in the country—student or otherwise—to have an American soldier writing a regular column directly from the jungle. Skakel's letters, excerpted here, appear for the first time since their initial publication. [The dates given are of the issue of the newspaper, not when the letters were written.]

October 13, 1967

The life here is miserable. It is very hot and humid. We live wretchedly, unwashed, dirty clothes for weeks on end—sleeping on the ground in our clothes every night, eating C rations. For me there is no one to talk to, no responsive intellect; and of course the moral torment. At times I could damn near cry for the loneliness, the being cut off. The dishonor and the vicious future. The unabashed waste of life.

I have been scared a couple times over here. My second day in the jungle some sniper opened up on the motor pit while I was in it. I just kept low and manipulated the gun.

The VC scare us. At night they may crawl up to the perimeter and chuck us

by traps and knives around the perimeter every night. A couple of weeks was on a perimeter with a few other guys. . . . One of our own GIs got I the dark and tried to sneak up on our foxhole, no doubt scared as hell—guy. My friend in the foxhole opened up on him. I heard a sharp cry and 10 minutes of being dead scared, I found his body, blown to bits, in our fox . . . The horror of the perimeter at night! For this I hate America, LBJ ar ever lovin' Bourgeoisie.

I have no confidence in my fellow soldiers. They survive because they're lucky. . . . At night we go on patrols in the village—upsetting the dogs, I on mats crying, old men smoking pot, women trying to hush the dogs.

Most of the GIs subscribe to a kind of fatalism. If you get zapped, you get zapped.

Back at UCSC I had a grip on history and now I feel I am losing touch. . . . times I feel forlorn, as though I've blown my chance.

If I survive this mess I will go back to UCSC and try to pick up where I left off a year ago. . . . To be sure, I will agitate against the war, vehemently. . . . I find a sense of service in giving UCSC guys the straight dope from one who knows.

Someday I'll get my revenge—someday I'll live the way I want to live.

October 20,

I would like to begin these dispatches with a description of a typical day in the field, the field being our combat zones. By 5:30 AM everybody is roused for the last watch out of their hootches or impromptu shelters constructed of bamboo poles and ponchos. The soldiers then groggily set about fixing breakfast, each man trying to get B-3 C ration because it contains cocoa. We make little stoves out of tin cans using heat tablets as a heat source. Occasionally if the company is near a good LZ (landing zone) we get hot supplements by helicopter. They are always the same—scrambled eggs, army bread (it has its own character), bacon and coffee.

By 7:30 AM we are off humping—scouring terrain on search and destroy missions. . . . The VC live in the hills and come down into the valleys at night and search for food. The company breaks up into platoon size, which patrol designated areas during the day. It is mainly a matter of quietly hiking around following paths and checking out suspicious areas in an attempt to surprise and kill and run him down. On a typical day we never run into Charlie.

At noon we eat C rations on some jungle trail. Then more humping. The weather is hot and we frequently have heat casualties. . . . We set up foxholes at night in a perimeter. First we dig foxholes and build our hootches.

Nearly every night we get hot chow in merimite cans—always pot roast, meat of some kind, and a vegetable and more army bread. Also Kool-Aid. In the morning we get a briefing for the next day's activities. At nightfall we creep