

FOREIGN OFFICE FILES: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Series Two: Vietnam, 1959-1975

Part 1: Vietnam, 1959-1963

Part 2: Laos, 1959-1963

Part 3: Cambodia, 1959-1963

Part 4: SEATO, South East Asia General and Thailand, 1959-1963

Part 5: Vietnam, 1964-1966

Part 6: Vietnam, 1967-1968



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Part 1: Vietnam, 1959-1963

PUBLISHER'S NOTES - PART 1

"Few wars in recent times have demanded such close attention as the Vietnam war. This collection covers a period when Britain risked being drawn into conflicts developing throughout Indo-China, and will be of enormous value to all those researching this period."

Professor Lawrence Freedman

Department of War Studies
King's College, London

Although Britain was not directly involved in the Vietnam War she did have substantial interests in South East Asia, and was anxious to monitor the situation closely. And whilst Britain regarded the United States as her principal ally, she was not uncritical of American diplomacy and military initiatives. The finely honed reporting skills of the Foreign Office were brought to bear on the situation and their testimony forms a useful complement to the evidence given in US State Department Files.

We may not agree with the comment of H A F Hohler (the British Ambassador to Vietnam) that "we who are much less closely engaged in the day-to-day conduct of the war, are able to see things more clearly", but Britain's experience in Malaya in the 1940s and 1950s and her involvement in India, Burma, Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong gave her an important, alternative perspective.

Scholars interested in the implications of the war from a Pacific Rim viewpoint will also find important evidence in these files concerning the attitudes of Australia, New Zealand and other Commonwealth nations towards the war.

The first four parts of this project cover all of the relevant FO 371 Files for the period 1959-1963, taken from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, SEA TO, and South East Asia General sections.

Part 1 covers the complete run of FO 371 Files for Vietnam for 1959-1963, the period that witnessed the start of the armed struggle in the South by the communists to unite the country under their control; and the United States' efforts to secure the survival of an independent non-communist South Vietnam. The period ends with the overthrow and execution of President Diem, and a considerable and growing American presence in South Vietnam. By the late 1950s the nature of the Vietnam conflict had changed from a nationalist struggle against colonialism, to a war of world wide significance. The Americans in particular, during this period became increasingly drawn into

o the conflict as the prospect of a unified communist Vietnam loomed ever larger and the weaknesses of the regime in the South was exposed. Investing massive amounts of military and civil resources in the South to bolster the regime, the United States laid the foundations for their later role in the war when American forces would take on active combat duties and the full weight of the United States' military might would be brought to bear against the Viet Cong and their Northern patrons.

The documents in Part 1 of the Series contains material covering the momentous developments of this crucial early period of the Vietnam conflict, with specific files giving the British view on:

The internal political situation in North and South Vietnam

The leading personalities involved

Vietnam's political and commercial relations with other countries

The International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam

The economic and financial situation in Vietnam

Vietnamese labour and trade unions,

US military assistance to South Vietnam

Repatriation of Vietnamese refugees

The Geneva Conference

The coups against Diem and his final overthrow and murder

The British Advisory Mission in Saigon and the Strategic Hamlet Programme

Buddhism and the conflict with the Diem Government

There is also a great deal of material covering Anglo-American discussions, dispatches from the British Embassy and reports on visits to the area by British politicians and diplomats. Much interest is also shown in military affairs with weekly reports on the operations against the Viet Cong, giving detailed analysis of the situation and statistics.

The following extracts, taken from documents in the collection, give an idea of the kind of material to be found in Part 1. The first extract, from the Annual Report for 1958 on North and South Vietnam [FO 371/144387], highlights British concerns about the increasingly repressive nature of the South Vietnamese government and fears that it could alienate important sections of the population:

"...If M. Diem's régime has thus done fairly well over providing bread it has been less successful with its circuses. A policy of concentrating on a few limited if massive objectives and postponing everything else, including progress towards greater political freedom, as luxuries which the country cannot afford at present, has obvious drawbacks. Those sections of the population not directly involved in the tasks in hand, and this includes a large proportion of the educated, professional and business classes in the larger towns, be

come increasingly frustrated. It may be unfair, though certainly not surprising, but the impression has grown during the year that M. Diem's régime is moving toward greater intolerance and increasing despotism. The constant problem of internal security obviously postulates a strong executive, and armed communist subversion has to be countered by strong arm methods. Again M. Diem's agrarian reform, which involves a major redistribution and re-settlement of population, cannot be carried through without a measure of arbitrary authority. The Government are thus largely the prisoners of circumstances and could hardly, even if they wished, move very far towards genuine democracy. Nor, during the year, has there been any sign of an effectively organised opposition emerging to urge them in this direction. But their critics increased both in number and in outspokenness..."

The next extract, part of a secret telegram from Washington to the Foreign Office dated March 1961 and taken from a file on the Internal Political Situation of Vietnam [FO 371/160110], illustrates how Britain's experiences in Malaya were regarded as valuable in relation to advising on the Vietnamese situation, and how those same experiences made British diplomats far less sanguine about developments than their American counterparts. Concerns about the poor reputation that Diem's government enjoyed, this time in the West, are again expressed:

"...the American side, in reviewing the situation in Vietnam said that they were conscious of the need for liberalization of the Diem regime. The American Ambassador had made repeated suggestions to the Vietnamese on this point. There was some indication of responsiveness on President Diem's part. It was felt, however, that certain Western observers, especially newspapermen, tend to overemphasise the shortcomings of the regime.

The Americans believe the main problem continues to be that of the communist threat. A plan had recently been put forward to the Vietnamese Government, intended through certain changes in the government and an increase in the armed forces by 20,000 men, to increase efficiency in dealing with communists. This plan is under study by President Diem.

The Americans believe that, in terms of Diem's security an improvement in relations with Prince Sihanouk is essential. Both sides agree that British, American and French Ambassadors in Saigon and possibly Phnom Penh might help in this regard. The British expressed an interest in the counter-insurgency plan and suggested that, with benefit of their Malayan experience, they might be of help. It was agreed that more information on the plan would be made available to the British. The British appreciation of the overall situation in Vietnam, is in general, more pessimistic than that of the Departme

nt of State. They are inclined to agree, however, that President Diem does not seem to be taking realistic steps to meet his problem.”

The final extract, from FO 371/ 170092, gives an indication of how Britain, though not ostensibly involved in events, did have an important behind the scenes role in shaping political events in Vietnam:

“Visit of the Vietnamese Ambassador August 22, 1963

Monsieur Luyen’s object is doubtless to justify the declaration of martial law by his brother, President Diem, yesterday morning, and the government raids of the previous night on all the main Buddhist pagodas....

We think the President and his family have been suicidally foolish in their harsh handling of the Buddhists and are largely responsible for growing Buddhist intransigence.

We have suggested to the State Department that Mr Etherington-Smith might be instructed to give Diem a jolt, by telling him that, unless he mends his ways, we shall no longer be able to defend him vis-à-vis the Soviet Co-Chairman. We have not yet received a reply from Washington and are meanwhile withholding comment, despite the fact that the State Department have issued a forthright condemnation. In view of the United States involvement in South Vietnam, they have to speak more openly about Vietnamese internal affairs than we should.”

Parts 2-4 of this Series will complete the project for the period 1959-1963 by taking a broader geographical and political view. Parts 2 and 3 will bring together all the FO 371 South East Asia Department files for Laos and Cambodia; with Part 4 covering Thailand, SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organisation), and all relevant South East Asia General files. Together all four parts provide a comprehensive British overview of the Vietnam war and its repercussions during this period, not only in Vietnam itself, but throughout South East Asia and beyond.

Further sets will continue the theme up to 1975.

“Publication of these documents promises to facilitate research in records crucial to understanding British foreign policy, US diplomacy, and international relations in the Cold War era.”

Peter Hahn

Associate Professor of History,
Ohio State University

TECHNICAL NOTE - PART 1

Our microfilm publications have been prepared and produced in accordance with recommended and established guide-lines for the production of microfilm of superior quality. These conform to the recommendations of the standard guides to good microforming and micropublishing practice.

Attention should be drawn to the nature of the original material. A few manuscript documents consist of faintly legible correspondence and records written with a variety of inks, pens or pencils and on paper of many different types and thicknesses. A few items are stained or discoloured at the edges, or comprise material on very thin paper, which is so thin that there is show through that renders the original document difficult to read. Some items consist of carbon copies of documents and these again pose problems where the original is very faint or blurred.

These original characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and camera alterations cannot entirely overcome. Every effort has been made to minimise these difficulties. Subject headings and item numbers are clearly marked. Each frame is filmed with a vertical strip target which identifies the relevant Public Record Office piece number in Class FO 371.

The Public Record Office at Kew, England, has exercised the most responsible care in the filming of this unique collection and this microfilm publication meets the standards established by the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

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BRIEF CHRONOLOGY, 1945-1963 - PART 1

1945

Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnam an independent nation

1946

French cruiser shells the city of Haiphong causing much loss of life. Vietminh begin military campaign against reintroduction of French rule

1949

French ask for American aid in defeating the Vietminh insurgency

1950

Soviet Union official recognises Vietminh

US officially recognises Bao Dai government

Chinese military advisors arrive in North Vietnam

Vietminh defeat large French force at Cao Bang

Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) despatched by the US to Vietnam

1952

US grants \$150 million of military aid to the French cause in Vietnam

French forces suffer heavy losses in the Red River Delta during "Operation Lorraine"

1953 September

US agrees \$385 million military aid to the French

Laos becomes independent member of the French Union

1954

French surrender at Dienbienphu

Geneva Peace Conference on Indochina opens

Vietnam gains independence

Ngo Dinh Diem becomes prime minister of Vietnam

Geneva Conference divides Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel prior to nationwide election

South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) established

1955

Diem, with US support, refuses to participate in national elections

Ho Chi Minh negotiates aid from the Soviet Union

Diem declares South Vietnam a Republic

1956

Diem crackdown on suspected Vietminh sympathisers

1957

Communists begin insurgency in the South

1959

The North Vietnamese step up infiltration of men and supplies into the South

The first American casualties of the war are reported following a Vietminh attack on Bienhoa Airbase

The "Agroville" program is introduced by the government in South Vietnam

1960

Conference of non-communist South Vietnamese politicians denounce Diem's regime

The shooting down of an American U-2 spy-plane over the USSR causes a deterioration of Soviet-American relations

The Vietnamese Communist Party announces its approval of resuming the armed struggle in the South

John F Kennedy elected president of the USA

Coup against government in Laos

North Vietnam introduces military conscription

Failed army coup against President Diem

The National Liberation Front (NLF) is formed; it is referred to as the Vietcong by the Southern Government

1961

Kennedy is inaugurated as US President

Macmillan meets President Kennedy to discuss Laotian crisis

Kennedy announces resumption of US atmospheric nuclear testing, 18 months after Soviets

Bay of Pigs invasion. Failure of the venture leads to CIA Director Allen Dulles' resignation

Vice president Johnson tours South Vietnam

Geneva Conference on Laos opens

Kennedy and Khrushchev meet in Vienna and reaffirm their support for the neutrality of Laos

Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow discuss possibility of putting US troops in Vietnam under the pretence of helping with problems caused by widespread flooding

1962

Diem's presidential palace bombed by disaffected Pilots from the South Vietnamese Air Force

Kennedy announces plans for the resumption of US atmospheric nuclear tests

The 'Strategic Hamlet' programme is initiated in South Vietnam with Sir Robert Thompson as special advisor to president Diem
Kennedy sends American forces to help combat communist gains in Laos
The Geneva Accords on Laos are signed
Cuban missile crisis
Kennedy and Macmillan meet in the Bahamas

1963

South Vietnamese army defeated at Ap Bac by Vietcong forces
Diem publicly questions American policies on Vietnam
Beginning of Buddhist Crisis
A Buddhist monk sets himself on fire in Saigon in protest against Diem's policies
South Vietnam Special Forces launch operation against Buddhists - 1,400 monks are arrested despite Diem's earlier promises to the contrary
Henry Cabot Lodge, US Ambassador, arrives in Vietnam
President Kennedy denounces Diem on television
Maxwell Taylor and Robert McNamara visit Vietnam
South Vietnamese generals seize power, President Diem killed
Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas; Lyndon Johnson is sworn in as President
By the end of the year, the number of US 'advisors' in Vietnam has grown to 9,000

KEY PERSONALITIES - PART 1

Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (North Vietnam)

Ho Chi Minh Founder of the Vietminh. First president of the DRV (North Vietnam), until his death in 1969.

Vo Nguyen Giap Commander of the DRV military strategy against the French, and then the Americans.

Xuan Thuy Foreign Minister of DRV, 1963-1965.

Le Duan General Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party.

Republic of Viet Nam (South Vietnam)

Bao Dai Head of state from 1949-1955 and the last emperor of Vietnam. He was removed by Diem in 1955 and went into exile.

Ngo Dinh Diem Became prime minister in Bao Dai's government in 1954 after a number of years in exile in the USA. He ousted the emperor in the 1955 referendum and declared South Vietnam a republic. He was president of South Vietnam from 1955 until his murder in the 1963 military coup.

Duong Van Minh Known as 'Big Minh'. He headed the military coup against Diem in 1963, but was himself soon replaced by General Khanh as leader, but returned to power in 1975.

Ngo Dinh Nhu The younger brother of Diem. Nhu was a trusted advisor to the president and member of the government. He was killed with Diem after the 1963 coup.

Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu Diem's sister and First Lady of South Vietnam. She escaped to Italy after the 1963 coup.

Ngo Dinh Thuc Diem's eldest brother, Thuc became archbishop of Hué and was instrumental in provoking the Buddhist Crisis of 1963.

Nguyen Huu Tho Leader of the NLF (Vietcong) in South Vietnam.

USA - Kennedy Administration:

John F Kennedy United States President (1960-1963)

Lyndon Baines Johnson Vice-President (1960-1963)

McGeorge Bundy Special Assistant for National Security (1961-1966)

Robert S McNamara US Secretary of Defence (1961-1968)

Roswell Gilpatric US Deputy-Secretary of Defence

Dean Rusk US Secretary of State (1961-1969)

George Ball Under Secretary of State (1961-1966)

US Under-Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (1961)

General Paul Harkins Head of Military Advisory Mission to Vietnam (MACV)

General Maxwell Taylor Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff (1962-1964) and Military Advisor to the President

Walt Rostow Director of the Policy Planning Staff, US Department of State (1961-1966); Chairman of the Planning Subcommittee, Executive Committee of the National Security Council (1962-1963)

Dean Acheson Presidential Advisor (1961-1963)

Allen Dulles Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1953-1961)

John A McCone Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1961-1965)

Elbridge Durbrow US Ambassador to South Vietnam (1957-1961)

Frederick Nolting US Ambassador to South Vietnam (1961-1963)

Henry Cabot Lodge US Ambassador to South Vietnam (1963-1964)

British Government:

Harold Macmillan British Prime Minister (1957-1963)

Sir Harold Caccia British Ambassador to the US (1956-1961)

David Ormsby-Gore British Ambassador to the US (1961-1965)

Sir Alec Douglas Home British Foreign Secretary (1960-1963), then Prime Minister (1963-1964)

H A F Hohler British Ambassador to Vietnam

Robert Thompson British military officer with successful experience of countering communist insurgents in Malaya. Became a military advisor to Diem

C Stewart British Embassy, Saigon

J W Hutson British Embassy, Saigon

Burrows British Embassy, Saigon

M T Walker British Ambassador to DRV

Frederick Warner Head of South East Asian Department of the Foreign Office

Soviet Government:

Nikita Khrushchev Soviet Premier (1958-1964)

Andrei Gromyko Soviet Foreign Minister (1957-1986)

Anatoly Dobrynin Soviet Ambassador to the US (1962-1986)

PUBLISHER'S NOTES - PART 2

The basic sequence of events of the Vietnam war are well known, and the United States' gradual move from moral and financial supporter of the Southern Government, to a position where American troops took on the major role in combating the NLF is well documented. But, what often tends to get forgotten is the regional nature of the conflict and how interlocked the countries of South East Asia were in each others political and military situations.

This series aims to remedy that situation by providing British Foreign Office files, not only for Vietnam, but also for the neighbouring South East Asian countries that became caught up in the conflict, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand; as well as all relevant SEATO and South East Asia general files for the period 1959-1975.

In the first years of John F Kennedy's Presidency, few people saw Vietnam as the source of any major international crisis. Instead, it was Laos that seemed the mostly likely scene of superpower conflict and regional unrest. Since the French had relinquished control of the country in 1954 an uneasy peace had settled on Laos. The Royal Laotian Government, headed by King Sisavang Vong and his Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, was in control of most of the country, but left wing forces, the Pathet Lao, who had withdrawn to two northern provinces under the Geneva Agreement, were still armed and always a potential threat.

By the beginning of 1958 an agreement had been reached between Souvanna Phouma and his half brother Souphanouvong, the Pathet Lao leader, to bring the communists into a coalition government and to integrate their soldiers into the regular Royal Laotian Army. Elections held in May 1958 confirmed the popularity of this decision, with parties allied to the Pathet Lao doing particularly well. Right wing elements within the National Assembly, however, who opposed this compromise sought to destabilise the delicate balance that had been achieved. When the USA, worried by the inclusion of Pathet Lao in the government, cut all aid to Laos in June, the rightists took the opportunity of forcing a confidence vote in the administration, engineering a cabinet crisis which prompted Phouma's resignation in August 1958 and plunging the country into turmoil. A new right wing administration was formed by Phoumi Sananikone which granted itself special executive powers, excluded the Pathet Lao from government and arrested its leaders.

By the summer of 1959 full scale conflict had resumed in the northern territories between the Pathet Lao forces who had rejected integration in the Royal Laotian Army and government troops. Reports were also coming in of Vi

etminh forces making incursions over the border from Vietnam into Sam Neua province. Political events came to a head in December, when the king accepted the resignation of the Phoui administration, following the withdrawal of many of his ministers and an attempted coup by the Army. In January 1960 a provisional government was formed under Kou Abhay to hold power until the situation could be stabilised.

Elections in April 1960, which were widely believed to be rigged, brought Ti ami Somsanith to power with General Phoumi Nosavan in the Post of Minister of Defence. The new administration took an equally hard line approach to the Pathet Lao as its predecessor, and armed conflict continued to plague the country. Alarmed by this escalating state of civil war, a 26 year old army officer, Captain Kong Le, staged a successful coup against the government in August 1960. Having gained control of the capital Vientiane, in an operation described by the British military Attaché as "militarily most impressive", the coup leaders persuaded the King to nominate Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister.

General Phoumi and many members of the Somsanith administration who had not been in Vientiane at the time of the coup, condemned Kong Le's actions and with US backing, announced the establishment of a Counter Coup Committee, branding Kong Le and Phouma 'communists'. These accusations of communist tendencies were strongly denied by Phouma, who reiterated his neutralist credentials arguing that it would not be possible to defeat the Pathet Lao by military means, making it "necessary to bring civil war to an end and fight subversion by political and other means" [FO 371/152346].

However, notwithstanding Phouma's appeal for political dialogue, Kong Le's coup, rather than stabilising the situation, merely prompted further armed conflict. Despite a brief period of reconciliation in which a coalition government was formed between Phouma and Phoumi, mutual suspicions soon rent the new administration, prompting the withdrawal of Phoumi to Savannakhet. From there in September Phoumi and Prince Boun Oum announced the establishment of a Revolutionary Committee which would be assuming power. Within weeks armed conflict had broken out between forces loyal to the Phouma Government and those under the command of General Phoumi. The situation was further complicated by the support of the Pathet Lao, and their Vietnamese and Chinese backers, for Phouma and Kong Le. During October, Phouma held direct talks with the Pathet Lao, in an attempt to bring them into the mainstream of government.

By November, Phoumi, with assurances of American backing, had secured the support of enough Royal Laotian Army commanders to launch an attack against the Phouma government. He also managed to persuade the King, o

On 14 December, to announce the dismissal of the Phouma administration, and the establishment of a new government headed by Boun Oum. Within days of the King's proclamation, Phoumi managed to recapture Vientiane, forcing Kong Le to retreat into the mountainous countryside to the North of the city, and prompting Phouma to flee to Cambodia. Following the downturn in the military fortunes of the neutralists Phouma turned in desperation to the Soviet Union for aid. In return for Soviet military assistance to Kong Le, he agreed to form a common front with the Pathet Lao in fighting Phoumi. Accordingly, Kong Le launched an offensive late in December 1960, driving forces loyal to Phoumi out of the Plain of Jars, and linking up with the Pathet Lao fighters. By the beginning of January 1961 Kong Le had also managed to capture the town of Xieng Khouang, strategically located between the administrative capital Vientiane, and the seat of royal power at Louangphrabang. Over the next few weeks the Soviets airlifted large quantities of military supplies to the anti-Phoumi forces who, aided by units from North Vietnam, took over control of much of northern Laos. By February, Phouma felt confident enough to set up a provisional government at Xieng Khouang in anticipation of quickly overrunning the rest of the country.

This successful co-operation between the Neutralist and Communist forces naturally caused much concern in the United States government. The new President, John F Kennedy, had been elected on a ticket that had stressed the need to halt communist expansion and this combined with an instinctive mistrust of Phouma, prompted US action. In April 1961, following an appeal by the Boun Oum government, the United States established a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Laos with the aim of providing help to General Phoumi in his faltering battle against his Neutralist and Communist opponents.

By March 1961, Kong Le and his Pathet Lao allies forces were making such gains, that General Phoumi was persuaded to arrange a meeting with Souvanna Phouma in Phnom Penh to discuss peace proposals. On 3rd May, following an appeal by the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference and after drawn-out negotiations, General Phoumi and his Prime Minister, Prince Boun Oum, agreed to implement a cease-fire with Souvanna Phouma and the Pathet Lao. This truce was underlined by an agreement between Kennedy and Khrushchev that a neutral coalition government would be the best solution in Laos, a country of little strategic interest to either superpower.

During the second half of 1961 and the beginning of 1962 protracted negotiations were undertaken by the various factions to work out the details of the cease fire and the intricacies of power sharing. A formal cease fire was declared in May 1961 to be overseen by an International Control Commission (ICC), and the following month, Phouma, Boun Oum and Souphannouvong

met at Zurich where they agreed in principle to the formation of a coalition government of 'National Union'.

Once a cease-fire had been put into effect, a year's worth of torturous negotiations ensued. The US put increasing pressure on Phoumi and Boun Oum to compromise with Souvanna Phouma, threatening to suspend all American aid unless they participated in the Geneva Conference. Finally a provisional Government of National Union was established in June 1962 under the premiership of Souvanna Phouma. Souphanouvong, the Pathet Lao leader, and the former Prime Minister Boun Oum were both made deputy prime ministers. On July 23, representatives of all the major parties met at the Geneva Conference and signed the Geneva Protocol, guaranteeing the neutrality of Laos. Recognising its obligations under this agreement, the US began the withdrawal from Laos of its military advisors, who had been assisting Phoumi.

By the summer of 1962, the future of Laos seemed to have been secured, with all the main factions now incorporated into the government. In the words of the British Ambassador, although "progress in applying the Agreements in Laos" were "disappointingly slow", a general peace had been "more or less maintained" [FO 371/169802]. Inevitably though, suspicions still lingered and many of the factions turned to more covert ways of continuing the struggle for dominance. US sources claimed that large numbers of North Vietnamese troops were still positioned in the northern provinces, whilst leftists countered with accusations that the CIA was arming and training Hmong tribesmen. Trouble was also brewing amongst former allies, as Colonel Deuane Sunnalath an army commander loyal to the Neutralist cause, defected with his troops to the Pathet Lao following a quarrel with Kong Le. This argument came to a head in the spring of 1963 as fighting broke out between forces who had followed the dissident Colonel Deuane (who now styled themselves "Left Wing Neutralists") and those who remained loyal to Kong Le. Seeing his military position deteriorate, Kong Le decided that his best option was to come to terms with his former enemy Phoumi, and by association, his US backers. Simultaneously, a terror campaign waged against the Pathet Lao and its sympathisers in Vientiane, culminating in the assassination of Foreign Minister Quinim in April 1963, prompted the evacuation of that city by Souphannouvong and his allies, who returned to their northern stronghold, effectively ending the coalition Provisional Government of National Union.

By the beginning of 1964, the situation in Laos had returned to one of armed conflict. The US began supplying military aid to Kong Le in his fight against his former allies, whilst the North Vietnamese increased their assistance to the Pathet Lao. The scene was now set for a resumption of full civil war with a high potential for outside interference and regional destabilisation.

This microfilm collection provides all the British Foreign Office files from its 'backbone' class (FO 371) for Laos for the years 1959 to 1963. Charting in great detail events in Laos, the documents in this publication will prove invaluable to anyone wishing to fully come to terms with political and military affairs during this turbulent and chaotic period of the country's history. Compiled by highly trained members of the Foreign Office and associated bodies, key files included cover:

- Annual reviews for Laos for the years 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961 and 1962
- The internal political situation in Laos
- The political relations between Laos and other countries including China, USSR, France, Vietnam, UK and USA.
- The International Control Commission (ICC) in Laos
- Training of the Laotian military
- SEATO's contingency planning for Laos
- The Geneva Conference on Laos (of which Britain was Co-Chairman) and negotiations for a cease fire
- The status of foreign troops in Laos
- Aid to Laos from the United Kingdom, United States and France

The following extract of a letter from the British Embassy in Vientiane to the Foreign Office in London (FO 371/159871) gives a good flavour of the candid type of documents to be found within this collection:

September 1961

"In paragraph five of your letter of August 24 you said you would like to know if the Americans seem to be embarking on policies in Laos which run counter to the sense of the Paris meetings...

In discussion on the armed forces question the American Military Attaché has admitted more than once that he does not believe that integration will work and that an object of his recommendations is to give General Phoumi and the US the strongest possible position.

I am informed that MAAG officers constantly encourage General Phoumi to push his troops forward now wherever he can. The spirit of the Paris Peace talks has been slow to filter down to the working level of MAAG. For example the MAAG colonel in charge of training summed up his attitude to my Third Secretary as follows: "There is no need to prove we are good; we know we are good. What we have to do is prove to every villager in Laos that he can have confidence and security under the Vientiane government." MAAG are trying to implement a civil programme of community development in every centre where there is a MAAG team on the lines of their efforts in

n Khen Thao, which were described in my Third Secretary's report... This programme is carried out in close co-operation with USIS (within whose organisation a group of MAAG personnel works) in order to ensure that the maximum impact propaganda is derived.

USOM also co-operates but concerns itself very much less with politics than MAAG or USIS. Indeed USOM, of which members of the two other agencies have in the past been critical and even contemptuous, almost invariably judges projects of their value as effective aid and thus exerts a stabilising influence.

Some of USIS propaganda is astute but it is sometimes stupid and counterproductive. For example in most of the larger Buddhist temples of Vientiane the authorities have ordered the showing of propaganda films, sometimes as often as three times a week. One of the most frequently shown has been a film entitled "The Liberation of Vientiane" which, ignoring the fact that the Pathet Lao did not commit themselves, proclaims the battle as a simple and decisive victory against communism. To show this film at all in a centre where Konglae had enjoyed great popularity is in itself an error of judgement, especially as almost everyone who sees the film knows that it is not true. This is particularly offensive to public opinion when the film is shown in a Buddhist Temple."

TECHNICAL NOTE - PART 2

Our microfilm publications have been prepared and produced in accordance with recommended and established guide-lines for the production of microfilm of superior quality. These conform to the recommendations of the standard guides to good microforming and micropublishing practice.

Attention should be drawn to the nature of the original material. A few manuscript documents consist of faintly legible correspondence and records written with a variety of inks, pens or pencils and on paper of many different types and thicknesses. A few items are stained or discoloured at the edges, or comprise material on very thin paper, which is so thin that there is show through that renders the original document difficult to read. Some items consist of carbon copies of documents and these again pose problems where the original is very faint or blurred.

These original characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and camera alterations cannot entirely overcome. Every effort has been made to minimise these difficulties. Each folder is preceded by an A4 identification target giving the title of the folder as taken from the PRO class lists; and every individual frame is filmed with a vertical strip target which identifies the relevant Public Record Office piece number in Class FO 371.

The Public Record Office at Kew, England, has exercised the most responsible care in the filming of this unique collection and this microfilm publication meets the standards established by the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

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POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS - PART 2

Committee for the Defense of the National Interests anti-communist front formed in June 1958

Democratic Party (Praxathipatay) formed by Kou Voravong and Phoumi Nosavan

Independent Party (Phak Seli) formed by Phoui Sananikone

Lao Issara Free Laos Movement formed in 1945 to resist any attempt to return to French colonial status.

Lao Patriotic Front (LPF) (Neo Lao Hak Xat) Successor to Neo Lao Issara, the political arm of the Pathet Lao during the Indochina Wars (1946- 75). The Lao People's Liberation Army formerly known as the Pathet Lao is its military arm.

Lao People's Liberation Army (LPLA) Official title of Pathet Lao armed forces. The LPLA originated with the Latsavong detachment, formed in January 1949 by Kayson Phomvihane, and steadily increased in number to an estimated 8,000 guerrillas in 1960 and an estimated 48,000 troops between 1962 and 1970.

Lao People Party (LPP) (Phak Pasason Lao) Founded secretly in 1955. Changed name to Lao People's Revolutionary Party (Phak Pasason Pativat Lao) in 1972; seized full power and became the ruling (communist) party of Laos in 1975.

National Lao Union (Lao Rouam Samphan) of Bong Souvannavong

National Progressive Party (Phak Xat Kao Na) formed by former Lao Issara ministers Xieng Mao, Souvanna Phouma, and Katay Don Sasorith

Neo Lao Issara Free Laos Front-organization established by former Lao Issara to continue anti-French resistance movement with the Viet Minh; succeeded by Neo Lao Hak Xat (Lao Patriotic Front-LPF) in 1956.

Neutralist Party (Lao Pen Kang) Nonaligned Movement formed by Souvanna Phouma in September 1961 with policy of promoting political and military cooperation apart from the traditional East and West blocs.

Pathet Lao (Lao Nation) Literally, land of the Lao. Until October 1965, th

e name for the Lao People's Liberation Army, the military arm of the Lao Patriotic Front.

Patriotic Neutralists Anti-US splinter group within the Neutralist Party, led by Deuane Sunnalath

Royal Lao Government (RLG) The ruling authority in Laos from 1947 until the communist seizure of power in December 1975 and the proclamation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

ABBREVIATIONS - PART 2

ARVN - Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese army)
BRIAM - British Advisory Mission (UK military advisors)
CIA - Central Intelligence Agency
DMZ - Demilitarized Zone
DRV - Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
FRG - Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
GDR - German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
HMG - Her Majesty's Government (British government)
IBRD - International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICC - International Control Commission
MACV - Military Advisory Mission to Vietnam
NLF - National Liberation Front (aka Vietcong)
NVA - North Vietnamese Army
RAF - Royal Air Force (British air force)
RVN - Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
SEATO - South East Asia Treaty Organisation
UK - United Kingdom
UN - United Nations
US - United States
CDNI - Committee for the Defense of the National Interests
ICP - Indochinese Communist Party
LPF - Lao Patrocitic Front
LPLA - Lao People's Liberation Army
LPP - Lao People's Party (Phak Pasason Lao)
LPRP - Lao People's Revolutionary Party
OSS - Office of Strategic Services
PEO - Programs Evaluation Office
RLA - Royal Lao Army
RLG - Royal Lao Government

KEY PERSONALITIES - PART 2

Laos:

Sisavang Vong King 1945-1946, & 1953-1959
Savang Vattahana King 1959-1975
Souvanna Phouma Prime Minister 1951-1954
Katay Don Sasorith Prime Minister 1954-1955
Souvanna Phouma Prime Minister 1955-1958
Phoui Sananikone Prime Minister 1958-1959 ?
Sunthone Patthamavong Prime Minister 1959-1960 ?
Kou Abhay Prime Minister 1960 ?
Prince Tiarni Somsanith Prime Minister 1960 ?
Souvanna Phouma Prime Minister 1960
Quinim Pholsena Prime Minister 1960
Boun Oum Na Champassak Prime Minister 1960-1962
Souvanna Phouma Prime Minister 1962-1975
Kaysone Phomvihane Chairman of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party 1955-1992
General Phoumi Nosavan
Phoumi Minister of National Defense
Captain Kong Le Captain, Laotian 2nd Parachute Battalion and leader of August 1960 coup
Deuane Sunnalath Founder of Patriotic Neutralists

Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (North Vietnam):

Ho Chi Minh Founder of the Vietminh. First president of the DRV (North Vietnam), until his death in 1969.
Vo Nguyen Giap Commander of the DRV military strategy against the French, and then the Americans.
Xuan Thuy Foreign Minister of DRV, 1963-1965.
Le Duan General Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party.

Republic of Viet Nam (South Vietnam):

Bao Dai Head of state from 1949-1955 and the last emperor of Vietnam. He was removed by Diem in 1955 and went into exile.
Ngo Dinh Diem Became prime minister in Bao Dai's government in 1954 after a number of years in exile in the USA. He ousted the emperor in the 1955 referendum and declared South Vietnam a republic. He was president of South Vietnam from 1955 until his murder in the 1963 military coup.
Duong Van Minh Known as 'Big Minh'. He headed the military coup against Diem in 1963, but was himself soon replaced by General Khanh as leader,

but returned to power in 1975.

Ngo Dinh Nhu The younger brother of Diem. Nhu was a trusted advisor to the president and member of the government. He was killed with Diem after the 1963 coup.

Nguyen Huu Tho Leader of the NLF (Vietcong) in South Vietnam.

USA - Kennedy Administration:

John F Kennedy United States President (1960-1963)

Lyndon Baines Johnson Vice-President (1960-1963)

McGeorge Bundy Special Assistant for National Security (1961-1966)

Robert S McNamara US Secretary of Defence (1961-1968)

Roswell Gilpatric US Deputy-Secretary of Defence

Dean Rusk US Secretary of State (1961-1969)

George Ball Under Secretary of State (1961-1966)

US Under-Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (1961)

General Paul Harkins Head of Military Advisory Mission to Vietnam (MACV)

General Maxwell Taylor Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff (1962-1964) and Military Advisor to the President

Walt Rostow Director of the Policy Planning Staff, US Department of State (1961-1966); Chairman of the Planning Subcommittee, Executive Committee of the National Security Council (1962-1963)

Dean Acheson Presidential Advisor (1961-1963)

Allen Dulles Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1953-1961)

John A McCone Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1961-1965)

Elbridge Durbrow US Ambassador to South Vietnam (1957-1961)

Frederick Nolting US Ambassador to South Vietnam (1961-1963)

Henry Cabot Lodge US Ambassador to South Vietnam (1963-1964)

J Graham Parsons US Ambassador to Laos (1956-1958)

Winthrop Brown US Ambassador to Laos (1958-19??)

Horace H Smith US Ambassador to Laos (c1958-19??)

British Government:

Harold Macmillan British Prime Minister (1957-1963)

Sir Harold Caccia British Ambassador to the US (1956-1961)

David Ormsby-Gore British Ambassador to the US (1961-1965)

Sir Alec Douglas Home British Foreign Secretary (1960-1963), then Prime Minister (1963-1964)

H A F Hohler British Ambassador to Vietnam

Robert Thompson British military officer with successful experience of countering communist insurgents in Malaya. Became a military advisor to Diem

M T Walker British Ambassador to DRV

Frederick Warner Head of South East Asian Department of the Foreign Office

Soviet Government:

Nikita Khrushchev Soviet Premier (1958-1964)

Andrei Gromyko Soviet Foreign Minister (1957-1986)

Anatoly Dobrynin Soviet Ambassador to the US (1962-1986)

BRIEF CHRONOLOGY, 1940-1963 - PART 2

1940

AUGUST 30

Matsuoka-Henry Pact ends the Franco-Thai War giving all Laotian territories west of the Mekong River to Thailand

SEPTEMBER

Japanese forces invade Indo-China, but leave French administrative structure intact

1941

MAY 9

Peace Convention signed between France and Thailand

AUGUST 29

Treaty of Protectorate between France and the Kingdom of Louangphrabang

1945

MARCH

Japanese take over direct control of Laos from French administrators

APRIL

Under pressure from the Japanese King Sisavang Vong declares Laos' independence

Following the defeat of Japan, the King repudiates earlier declaration of independence and reaffirms the continuation of Laos as a French protectorate

MARCH 9

Khana Lao Issara (Committee for Independent Laos) establish a nationalist government under Sisavang Vong in Vientiane and declare an independent Laos.

Activists seize power in , Savannakhét, and other Laotian towns, establish provisional government.

September Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnam an independent nation

1946

? Sisavang Vong deposed by Lao Issara government

? French begin reoccupation of Laos

MARCH

Sisavang Vong reinstated as king by Lao Issara government

MARCH

French retake Vientiane

MARCH

Lao Issara government flees to Thailand and sets up a government in exile

? France and Laotian royal family establishes unity of Kingdom of Laos as a single country

? Thailand returns former Laotian territories of Xaignabouri and Champasak lost to Laos in 1940

1947

MAY 11

Constitution introduced, making Laos a constitutional monarchy; elections held for National Assembly; Prince Souvannarath forms government of Kingdom of Laos.

1949

Kaysone Phomvihane forms Latsavong detachment, armed forces of Pathet Lao, the later to become the Lao People's Liberation Army (LPLA);

JULY 19

French-Lao General Convention grants Laos limited self-government within French Union

? Lao Issara government-in-exile splits, some members return to Laos others follow Souphanouvong to North Vietnam.

1950

FEBRUARY

United States and Britain recognize Laos as an Associated State within the French Union.

AUGUST

Souphanouvong forms Pathet Lao "resistance government."

1951

FEBRUARY

Indochinese Communist Party dissolves; separate parties established in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

AUGUST

National Progressive Party wins 15 of the 39 seats in elections to the Lao National Assembly 1953

APRIL 19

Pathet Lao forces under Souphanouvong establish a government in Houaphan Province

OCTOBER 22

Franco-Lao Treaty of Amity and Association signed, transferring remaining French powers (except control of military affairs) to Royal Lao Government (RLG) establishing Laos as an independent member of the French Union

NOVEMBER

French parachute sixteen thousand troops into Dien Bien Phu, to control the traditional invasion route from Vietnam into Laos.

Geneva Peace Conference on Indochina opens

Vietnam gains independence

Ngo Dinh Diem becomes prime minister of Vietnam

Geneva Conference divides Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel prior to nationwide election

1954

MAY 7

French surrender at Dienbienphu, Vietnam

MAY

Laos participates in Geneva Conference on Indochina

JULY 20

Agreement signed by French and Viet Minh, whereby Viet Minh troops return to Vietnam, and Pathet Lao forces are to withdraw to the northern provinces of Phongsali and Houaphan; Pathet Lao are to be integrated into the Royal Lao Army

JULY

International Control Commission established to implement agreements.

AUGUST 6

Ceasefire comes into effect between Viet Minh and French forces

SEPTEMBER 8

South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) established

1955

MARCH

Phak Pasason Lao (Lao People's Party-LPP) is established and holds its first congress

DECEMBER

US Programs Evaluation Office opened in Vientiane to provide covert military assistance to the RLG

DECEMBER 14

Laos admitted to the United Nations.

DECEMBER

Elections held by RLG won by the Progressive Party

1956

JANUARY

Pathet Lao congress establishes Lao Patriotic Front (LPF).

AUGUST

Negotiations begin between RLG and Pathet Lao result in renewed cease-fire agreement and political integration of the Pathet Lao.

AUGUST

Souvanna Phouma visits Beijing and Hanoi

SEPTEMBER

Constitution amended to allow formation of coalition government.

1957

FEBRUARY

Negotiations resumed between RLG and Pathet Lao

MAY

Souvanna Phouma resigns, ending RLG/Pathet Lao negotiations

AUGUST

Souvanna Phouma is re-appointed Prime Minister

OCTOBER

Communists begin insurgency in South Vietnam

OCTOBER 22

Final agreement reached between RLG and Pathet Lao

NOVEMBER 18

Pathet Lao relinquish civil and military control of their two northern provinces to the RLG

NOVEMBER

First Laotian coalition government formed under the premiership of Souvanna Phouma.

1958

JANUARY

Souvanna Phouma visits Washington

MAY 4

Pathet Lao and allies win partial elections for National Assembly.

JUNE

US cuts aid to Laotian coalition government on grounds of 'corruption'

JULY

Souvanna Phouma government resigns following loss of a confidence vote over withdrawal of American aid.

AUGUST

An anti-communist government under Phoui Sananikone comes to power and excludes the LPF/Pathet Lao from the government.

DECEMBER

North Vietnamese forces occupy a number of Laotian villages, claiming them to historically belong to Vietnam

1959

MAY

Phoui Sananikone demands the immediate integration of two remaining Pathet Lao battalions into the Royal Lao Army; non-compliance leads to a resumption of hostilities

MAY

Souphanouvong and other Pathet Lao leaders are arrested and sent to prison on treason charges

JULY

Heavy fighting breaks out in northern Laos between Pathet Lao and RLA units; UN subcommittee investigates charges of North Vietnam's involvement

SEPTEMBER

North Vietnamese create Group 959 to supply Pathet Lao with military equipment

OCTOBER

King Sisavang Vong dies; succeeded by Savang Vatthana

DECEMBER

General Phoumi Nosavan, occupies key government buildings in Vientiane, but fails to gain total control of the government

1960

JANUARY

Kou Abhay forms provisional government following coup attempt by army.

APRIL 24

Elections, believed to be rigged by Phoumi, gives power to rightist parties

MAY

Souvanna Phouma becomes President of the National Assembly

MAY 23

Souphanouvong and three other Pathet Lao leaders escape from prison

JUNE 3

Prince Somsanith made Prime Minister whilst Phoumi becomes Minister of National Defense

AUGUST 9

Captain Kong Le stages a successful Neutralist coup d'état against government of Prince Somsanith and requests Phouma become Prime Minister

AUGUST 14

Somsanith resigns and the King agrees to nomination of Phouma as new Prime Minister

AUGUST 15

General Phoumi Nosavan forms counter coup committee in Savannakhét and declares martial law

AUGUST 16

Kong Le hands over power to a government headed by Souvanna Phouma

AUGUST 29

At a convocation of the National Assembly, Souvanna Phouma and Phoumi agree to form a coalition government

AUGUST 31

The new coalition government is invested, Phoumi dissolves his Counter Coup Committee

SEPTEMBER 10

Prince Boun Oum announces the abolition of the Constitution and the assumption of power by himself and Phoumi

NOVEMBER 8

John F Kennedy elected president of the USA

NOVEMBER 11

Failed army coup against South Vietnamese President Diem

NOVEMBER 21

General Phoumi begins military offensive

DECEMBER

The National Liberation Front (NLF) is formed; it is referred to as the Vietcong by the South Vietnamese Government

DECEMBER 9

Phoumi and leading members of his administration flee to Phnom Penh, leaving the military in control

DECEMBER 11

National Assembly passes vote of no confidence in Phoumi's government

DECEMBER 12

The King dismisses Phoumi's administration and hands power to Phoumi's Revolutionary Committee

DECEMBER 13

General Phoumi Nosavan attacks Vientiane; prompting a Soviet airlift to aid Souvanna Phouma.

DECEMBER 14

Prince Boun Oum appointed Prime Minister of the new government

DECEMBER 16

Phoumi's troops take Vientiane

1961

JANUARY 1

Troops loyal to Phouma's government, led by Kong Le, take control of the Plain of Jars

JANUARY 4

National Assembly passes vote of confidence in Boun Oum's government

JANUARY 7

North Vietnamese troops enter the conflict in support of Phouma

JANUARY

John F Kennedy is inaugurated as US President

JANUARY

Pathet Lao forces, supported by North Vietnamese troops, force Phoumi to retreat

JANUARY

Souvanna Phouma government recognized by communist bloc

JANUARY

Prince Boun Oum's Vientiane government recognized by West

MARCH

Kennedy announces US support for Laotian sovereignty; Britain and the Soviet Union propose an international conference on Laos

MARCH

Peace talks held between General Phoumi and Souvanna Phouma

APRIL 19

US establishes a Military Advisory Group (MAAG) in Laos

? British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan meets President Kennedy to discuss the Laotian crisis

MAY

US Vice President Lyndon B Johnson tours South Vietnam

MAY 3

A cease-fire, organised by the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference, comes into effect

MAY 16

Geneva Conference reconvened

? Pathet Lao forces down CIA chartered Air America aircraft, proving US violation of the ceasefire

JUNE 3-4

Kennedy and Khrushchev meet in Vienna and reaffirm their support for the neutrality of Laos

SEPTEMBER

Formation of the Nonaligned Movement

1962

JUNE

Agreement among Neutralists, Pathet Lao, and Rightist factions at the Geneva Conference to set up a coalition 'Provisional Government of National Union' under Souvanna Phouma.

JUNE 23

Phouma's new administration takes office

JULY 23

Geneva Protocol signed, guaranteeing the neutrality of Laos.

JULY

Phouma visits Washington

OCTOBER

US withdraws its MAAG personnel from Laos

? Kennedy and Macmillan meet in the Bahamas

1963

FEBRUARY

Elements within Kong Le's neutralist troops join Pathet Lao igniting conflict between the former allies.

Kong Le switches sides and joins forces with General Phoumi Nosavan

APRIL 1

Assassination of Laotian Foreign Minister in Vientiane; Souphanouvong and other Pathet Lao officials flee Vientiane for the Pathet Lao head quarters at Khang Khay, effectively ending the second coalition government

? Pathet Lao offensive against Neutralists on Plain of Jars succeeds; International Control Commission proves ineffective

? Bombing of Laos by United States begins.

OCTOBER

The USSR ceases its airlift operation to the Pathet Lao

NOVEMBER

South Vietnamese generals seize power, President Diem killed

NOVEMBER

Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas; Lyndon Johnson is sworn in as President

DECEMBER

By the end of the year, the number of US 'advisors' in Vietnam has grown to 9,000

PUBLISHER'S NOTES - PART 3

Compared to her neighbours to the north and east, Laos and Vietnam, Cambodia's post war years were, if not untroubled, then at least somewhat less traumatic. Granted independence in 1953, the former French Protectorate was one of the nations whose future was to be decided at the Geneva Conference which opened in May 1954. Along with Laos, Cambodia embarked on a policy of neutrality in an effort to halt the conflict between communist and non-communist forces that was threatening to tear South East Asia apart. Accordingly, it was agreed that in common with Vietnam and Laos, an International Control Commission would be established in Cambodia in an effort to monitor events and enforce the policy of neutrality. By October 1954, under the auspices of the ICC, the majority of French military forces and their Viet Minh opponents had withdrawn from Cambodian soil and preparations were being made for elections to be held in the following year.

The elections in September 1955 marked a watershed in Cambodian politics. The King, Norodom Sihanouk, abdicated the throne in order to more fully participate in the political arena, founding his own political party, Sangkum Reastr Niyum which handsomely won the vast majority of seats in the National Assembly. Over the course of the next 15 years (and arguably longer than that) Sihanouk and his Sangkum Party would dominate Cambodian politics.

By 1959, Cambodia appeared to be one of the more stable of the South East Asian nations. Sihanouk as Prime Minister carried a genuine popularity amongst the majority of Cambodians, and what dissent there was he easily contained. Even a coup attempt by one of the country's most powerful military governors, Dap Chhoun, backed by anti-Sihanouk forces based in South Vietnam, was quickly crushed, further enhancing the Government's reputation. By the beginning of 1960 Sihanouk's position seemed unassailable, the British Ambassador reporting how the year had shown "clearly what a firm grip Prince Sihanouk has on the country and how indispensable his presence is to it." [FO 371/152684]. However, whilst the British Ambassador could be cautiously optimistic about Cambodia's internal situation and economic prospects, the volatile nature of the regions geo-political situation and cold war rivalries were already planting the seeds of future troubles.

By embarking on a course of neutralism, Cambodia was treading a tight line. As well as the global power struggle being waged between the forces of communism and capitalism, there were numerous regional suspicions and antagonisms which further muddied the water of South East Asian politics.

In particular, Cambodia, in common with Laos, had a long standing suspicion of Vietnamese motives, which prompted Sihanouk to find creative methods of curbing the ambitions of Vietnam to be the dominant regional power. As a result Sihanouk looked to the People's Republic of China to provide a restraining influence, and the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression in 1960. In spite of this intimacy with China, Cambodia still relied on the US to supply the bulk of its civil and military aid requirements. The US, by now herself becoming enmeshed in efforts to secure the independence of South Vietnam, was prepared to overlook this friendship with communist China in order to ensure the survival of a non-communist Cambodia. As with Laos, the Americans had little direct interest in Cambodia beyond denying it to the friends of the Vietnamese communists, for whom Cambodia provided an essential supply route and hiding place. As the British Ambassador succinctly put it "The Americans frankly regard Cambodia as a 'piece of real estate' which is of negative value in so far as they don't want it to fall into communist hands" [FO 371/144345].

This policy of so-called neutrality, became the hallmark of Sihanouk's policy, as he played one power off against another, constantly trimming his sails to take best advantage of the prevailing political winds. Whilst it is fair to say that he was not entirely unsuccessful in following this policy, it was one that was perhaps doomed to failure in the long run. For as the United States' involvement in the Vietnam conflict steadily increased, their need to deny the NLF its supply routes through Laos and Cambodia correspondingly increased. Initially the US was prepared to overlook Sihanouk's flirtations with the People's Republic and his constant sniping at Washington, but soon a momentum had built up, fuelled by American officials on the ground in Cambodia, that he was unsound and should if possible be replaced.

The following extract from the Annual Report for Cambodia, 1962, (see FO 371/170057) prepared by Mr Murray at the British Embassy, Phnom Penh, and despatched to the Foreign Office on 15 January 1963, provides an example of typical "tit for tat" actions:

"... the Thais in March found a new way to irritate the Cambodians by forbidding them to land at Bangkok Airport (the Cambodians promptly retaliated). In June the International Court awarded the disputed frontier temple of Preah Vihear to Cambodia, which provoked a quite disproportionate outburst of national rejoicing..."

When in 1963, Cambodia severed diplomatic links with Saigon and announced her intention to open an embassy in Hanoi, relations hit an all time low. By the end of the year the Cambodians refused American aid and requested the withdrawal of all non-consular US officials. To make up the shortfall in

n foreign aid, Cambodia began increasingly to look to China and the Soviet Union, for civil and military assistance.

The first months of 1964 found Cambodia in an increasingly precarious position. The war in Vietnam showed no signs of slowing, and if anything, was threatening to spill over into neighbouring countries. The generous levels of aid formerly provided by the US had been turned down, but had not been replaced by equivalent Soviet or Chinese donations. And whilst internally, Sihanouk retained a firm grip on the reigns of power, the first signs of serious opposition to his regime were appearing.

Back in 1959, Sieu Heng, a leading official of the communist Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), had defected to the Government, providing Sihanouk's forces with detailed information on the Party's membership and organisation. Armed with this data the Government was able to effectively destroy the KPRP at its root-and-branch level across the country. Thus, unlike Laos and Vietnam where the communist opposition was well organised and deeply entrenched, Cambodia was relatively free from any such effective communist insurgency. It would take the communists several years to re-build the party structure that the Sieu Heng betrayal had brought down. In February 1963 the Cambodian communists, who had restyled their party as the Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK) held their second conference. Following the 'disappearance' of their former General-Secretary, the relatively moderate Tou Samouth, a group of hard line pro-Chinese activists took control of the Party. Under the guidance of their newly elected General-Secretary Pol Pot, the decision was taken to begin an armed struggle against the Sihanouk Government. The WPK accordingly moved its centre of operations from Phnom Penh and established a military headquarters in the northern province of Rotanakiri. Over the following years the WPK established close links with North Vietnam and China and began the recruitment and training of a revolutionary guerrilla force that would eventually sweep to power in the spring of 1975.

The interlocking geographical and political nature of the Vietnam War is again highlighted by the third part of this microfilm series. Bringing together all FO 371/ South East Asia Department files for Cambodia for the period 1959-1963, Part 3 provides the British Foreign Office's perspective on events in Cambodia, the personalities involved and the motives of the various parties who had a stake in the future of Cambodia.

These files include: Annual Reviews; notes on the internal political situation in Cambodia; files on political relations with China, France, Thailand, Laos, the United States, the Soviet Union, India, Vietnam and other countries; files on the commercial relations with other nations; Papers of the International

I Supervisory Commission in Cambodia; UN policy in the region; French views on the region; reports on new developments; border incidents; Papers on the London talks; reports on the status of foreign troops in the area; and notes on Anglo-US discussions. Taken on their own they provide a first hand insight into the history of Cambodia; when studied in conjunction with the other parts of this series they give an unparalleled perspective on the complex and interrelated story of the early phases of the Vietnam Conflict.

TECHNICAL NOTE - PART 3

Our microfilm publications have been prepared and produced in accordance with recommended and established guide-lines for the production of microfilm of superior quality. These conform to the recommendations of the standard guides to good microforming and micropublishing practice.

Attention should be drawn to the nature of the original material. A few manuscript documents consist of faintly legible correspondence and records written with a variety of inks, pens or pencils and on paper of many different types and thicknesses. A few items are stained or discoloured at the edges, or comprise material on very thin paper, which is so thin that there is show through that renders the original document difficult to read. Some items consist of carbon copies of documents and these again pose problems where the original is very faint or blurred.

These original characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and camera alterations cannot entirely overcome. Every effort has been made to minimise these difficulties. Subject headings and item numbers are clearly marked. Each frame is filmed with a vertical strip target which identifies the relevant Public Record Office piece number in Class FO 371.

The Public Record Office at Kew, England, has exercised the most responsible care in the filming of this unique collection and this microfilm publication meets the standards established by the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

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Part 4: SEATO, South East Asia General and Thailand, 1959-1963

PUBLISHER'S NOTES - PART 4

Part 4 provides complete coverage of the SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organisation) files for 1959-1963 and all relevant files on the Vietnam Conflict from FO 371 South East Asia General files and Thailand files.

The South East Asia Treaty Organisation was formed on 8 September 1954 following the conclusion of the Geneva Conference on Indo China. Having agreed in principle to the withdrawal of the French from the region, the Western powers were keen to put in place mechanisms to help prevent communist expansion and to uphold the agreements reached at Geneva. SEATO was created as a defensive alliance to oppose further communist gains in South East Asia. It was supplemented by a Pacific Charter, affirming the rights of Asian and Pacific peoples to equality and self-determination, and setting forth goals of economic, social and cultural co-operation between the member countries. As a result, a compromise of sorts was reached, resulting in an organisation that was not a binding military alliance, yet was more than just a political treaty.

Lacking a clearly defined role, it instead propounded broad principles, declaring the signatories' aim of upholding "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and declaring that they will earnestly strive by every peaceful means to promote self-government and to secure the independence of all countries whose people desire it..."

If such peaceful means failed, however, the treaty made provision for military assistance:

"Each party recognises that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the Parties or against any state or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes..."

Another serious flaw with the treaty was the exclusion of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, the three countries most at risk from subversion and outside interference. The agreements reached at Geneva, aiming to keep Indo China neutral, forbade these countries from joining in any military alliances. Nevertheless, an ambiguous protocol to the SEATO agreement did "designate for the purpose of Article IV of the Treaty the States of Cambodia and Laos and ...Vietnam" as special areas that if threatened, would endanger the "peac

and security” of the signatories, thus justifying SEATO intervention in certain circumstances.

Such open ended sanctions were regarded by many countries as little more than a *carte blanche* for Western intervention in South East Asia. The Chinese and North Vietnamese were particularly opposed to SEATO, believing, not entirely without justification, that it was little more than an American instrument to thwart the neutrality imposed by the Geneva Accords and to legitimise the establishment of an independent, pro-western, southern Vietnamese republic.

Despite these problems, SEATO was still an important development in the affairs of South East Asia, as the British Foreign Office files in this collection illustrate. As well as providing a framework for regional security within a Cold War scenario, SEATO was concerned with creating a sense of political and military co-operation amongst the nations of the region. The involvement of British Commonwealth countries such as Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand was of particular interest and importance to the United Kingdom, who was at that time scaling down her military commitments ‘east of Suez’ and trying to encourage former colonies and dominions to take on regional security roles.

The documents provide good source material to form an overview of British, American and French policy in terms of the perceived communist threat to different regions throughout Asia, from Pakistan and Ceylon, to Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand, and also the Philippines and Indonesia.

There is much material on communist infiltration and insurgency, the training of forces for jungle warfare, the conflict in Vietnam and Laos, briefs and discussion papers for the UK delegation, tripartite discussions with the French, Anglo-American policy differences, as well as the perspectives of Australian and New Zealand representatives.

A significant section of the documents cover SEATO forces in Thailand, military planning and SEATO amphibious exercises. The member countries: Australia, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and the United States were supposed to provide military forces. However, France and Pakistan withheld support for the US presence in Vietnam. Of the eight original signatories to the Manila Treaty, only three, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, actually ever put combat troops into the field in South East Asia.

This project allows researchers to look at the successes and failures of SEATO during these complex and tumultuous years. How useful was SEATO as an instrument of American and British policy? How frequently did difference

s between the British and the Americans surface and threaten to complicate deliberations with SEATO allies? How useful were the tripartite discussions with the French? What impact did meetings with Australian and New Zealand representatives have on policy in South East Asia? What role did SEATO play as the Vietnam conflict intensified?

Files for 1959-1963 focus on:

- Political situation in South East Asia
- Communism in South East Asia
- Political relations between SEATO countries and the Soviet Union
- SEATO military exercises and military planning
- The Vietnam Conflict
- Training US and Commonwealth forces for jungle warfare and sabotage
- Future of the International Control Commissions in Indo China
- Co-operation between countries of South East Asia under South East Asian Friendship and Economic Treaty
- SEATO Council Meetings and Conferences
- Anglo-American policies in South East Asia
- The situation in South Vietnam
- Threat of communist subversion in SEATO area
- Vietnamese refugees fleeing to Thailand
- Sarrano's attitude over Laos
- Thanat-Rusk communiqué of March 1962

The few extracts below give a flavour of the material: The first of these concerns Soviet attitudes towards SEATO (see FO 371/143721) and comes from the Briefs on South East Asia, dated 12 February 1959, prepared for the British Prime Minister's visit to Moscow:

"The Russians appear to pay no special attention to SEATO although it is included in frequent denunciations of the Western military blocs. However, at the time of the last meeting of the Council in Manila in March 1958, which the Foreign Secretary attended, there was a considerable increase in Communist publicity about SEATO. It is a matter of conjecture whether this was a Chinese or Soviet instigation. But the increase in volume may indicate that the Soviet Union recognises SEATO as being something more than the "paper tiger" which they represent it to be..."

The following extract concerning SEATO (see FO 371/170042) comes from the start of the summary section of the SEATO Annual Review for 1962 sent by D MacDermot of the British Embassy, Bangkok, to Lord Home at the Foreign Office in London, dated 14 January 1963:

"In 1962 SEATO took a turn for the better. The early months were something of a hangover from 1961 with the Thais making difficulties over the Geneva Agreements and the holding of a Council Meeting. Thanat's visit to Washington and the Thanat/Rusk communiqué issued in March, followed by the willingness of most members to send forces to Thailand which was demonstrated in May, improved relations... During the year Laos ceased to be a cause of friction. With the change of Foreign Minister in the Philippines SEATO was spared the harmful comments of Mr Sarrano: but balancing this Pakistan became troublesome and obstructive. Morale within the organisation was not high with the postponement of the Council Meeting and the by-passing of the Headquarters with bilateral arrangements for bringing forces to Thailand...."

The next text comes from a document headed Exchange of views on recent developments in the Far East, a Memorandum to the Committee of Political Advisers from the Chairman, R W J Hooper, 21 June 1963 (NATO Confidential). This is from FO 371/169678 - Files of the South East Asia Department: General:

"It is suggested that an exchange of views concerning the Far East be held on 2nd July 1963. The Committee may wish to discuss, inter alia, the following Far Eastern topics:

- (i) Recent developments in Laos and prospects for the future.
- (ii) The situation in South Vietnam with particular regard to Mr Diem's government and their problems.
- (iii) Indonesia's foreign policy and its alleged evolution with regard to Malaysia.
- (iv) The recent shift towards the Chinese side by the Communist parties of various Communist and non-Communist countries of the Far East."

There is significant information in these documents on Indonesia during this period. The Draft Brief on Indonesia prepared for the SEATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting, 28 September 1959, (see FO 371/143745) states:

"Indonesia is determined to avoid being drawn into either the Eastern or Western camp politically, or into military alliances eg: SEATO. She deliberately accepts aid and buys arms from both sides and in her international alignment takes the stock Afro-Asian attitude. The campaign against the Dutch and the claim to West New Guinea are likely to be maintained, but a resort to force seems improbable. In Indonesia President Sukarno's authority is still unchallenged after ten years of independence. He embodies the spirit of the Nationalist struggle and, despite his failings, there is little likelihood of his

s being replaced as a political leader for the time being. He has recently introduced sweeping constitutional changes and a currency reform... The other main focal points of power are the Army and the Communists. The Army's prestige has grown since the military action started last year against the dissidents and they have a say in every aspect of civilian life; General Nasution, the Army Commander-in-Chief, is now in practice the second most - although he does not enjoy the undivided support of all the senior officers - powerful man in the land. But it has not been thought so far that he would seek to supersede Sukarno; both appear inter-dependent. Sukarno...uses the Communists - despite his left wing tendencies, he does not regard himself as a Communist, and evidently thinks he can avoid becoming their tool - and he leans on the support of the Army, maintaining an uneasy balance between the two..."

Leslie Fry, at the British Embassy in Djakarta, reports on Indonesian views on SEATO (see FO 371/143746) in a despatch to DF MacDermott in the South East Asia Department in the Foreign Office, dated 28 September 1959. He remarks on the Indonesian desire "that SEATO if possible demonstrate that its aim is not 'to perpetuate colonialism'."

British Foreign Office telegram No. 2015 about the SEATO Ministerial Meeting on 28 September 1959 highlights British anxieties about Laos:

"I hope that it will be possible to avoid going very deeply into the Laos question at the SEATO meeting on September 28. Until we have reached agreement with the Americans about what is to be done, there is a danger that discussions of this kind will reveal our differences and give the appearance to our SEATO allies that we are less solidly determined to honour our obligations than are the Americans. In the circumstances I must leave you to decide how much of our thinking it is necessary to reveal. I hope that it may be sufficient for you to say something on the lines of the following.

If Laos goes Communist all will be lost. We must have plans ready to deal with the possibility that the North Vietnamese will step up their covert support for the rebels to the point where this might become an immediate danger to the survival of the Laotian Government or that they might even intervene openly; but we should be against military intervention by SEATO except as a last resort and as a purely defensive measure. We do not consider that at the point where outside military help to the Laotian Government is necessary has nearly been reached. It is certain that the reports of the Laotian Government have to some extent exaggerated the size of the threat..."

FO 371/166355 documents fears about the intensification of the conflict. There is a map showing the expansion of US Military Aggression in South East Asia and an address by Senator Mike Mansfield at MSU on interests and p

olicies in South East Asia. He argues that the US should review and reappraise its policies. Dick Ledward reports from South Vietnam on Anglo-American relations: "...In Saigon there are special problems arising out of the massive American aid to Vietnam and the peculiar British position as an ally of the United States while retaining responsibilities as co-chairman of the Geneva Conference. So far as the local Americans are concerned, I would judge that the good sense and experience of the British Advisory Mission has helped to keep our stock high. Our two ambassadors are clearly deep in each other's confidence, and it is largely the danger of precipitate action by the US military, without adequate advance consultation, that we have to look out for. The establishment of a separate US command in Vietnam without advance warning earlier this year, is generally accepted to have been a mistake. Nevertheless it is not going to be easy to guarantee, when so much American military and political capital has been sunk in support of President Diem, that there will not be similar American moves without adequate warning in the future..."

FO 371/143771 includes material on investment in Cambodia as well as draft briefs for the UK Delegation on the Philippines and on Singapore.

FO 371/159737 features good material with illustrations on the SEATO amphibious exercise. Two files, FO 371/166353-4, provide excellent documents on UK policy in South East Asia, with good coverage on Laos, Indonesia, Vietnam, Burma, Malaysia and Cambodia.

FO 371/166359 covers the Eden Hall Conference. There is much material on Vietnam and the activities of the Viet Cong. There is also the debate on SEATO voting procedures. The Thai insistence on a two-thirds majority for SEATO decisions was aimed at dropping the reluctant trio (France, UK and New Zealand) and with US support to pursue a much more "forward policy". Britain had strong reservations about this "dangerous possibility".

The Brief for the Eighth Meeting of the SEATO Council in Paris, 8-10 April 1963 (see FO 371/170046) reviews the attitudes of different member nations towards the organisation. For instance:

"Australia is a staunch supporter and generous contributor. In her eyes the chief merits of the Organisation are that it provides a framework for collective military arrangements in an area vital to Australia's interests, and that it commits the United States to the defence of the mainland of South East Asia. In their desire to confirm the Americans in this commitment the Australians have identified their line in SEATO with that of the United States, sometimes to the extent of showing themselves ostentatiously independent of the United Kingdom. Moreover, the Australian military regard us as far too c

autious and have doubted whether we would honour our obligations to SEATO if they were to involve actual fighting.”

“The United States is a strong supporter of SEATO, which is important to her in relation to Congress and the United Nations as a cover under which she could take military action in South East Asia if she thought the situation demanded. The Americans, however, probably have little real confidence in the Organisation as such and attach more importance to their own national and bilateral planning than to the likelihood of collective action. There is however slight but increasing evidence that they may now wish to identify SEATO more closely with their policy in South Vietnam...”

FO 371/170634 contains the papers on the Expert Working Group on the Far East (April 1963) with the UK draft submissions on South Vietnam and Indonesia.

The Thailand files cover the government of Sarit Thanarat, essentially a military regime, and its foreign policy in the region. The anti-communist policy continued and steps were taken militarily to deal with the growing threat of insurgency posed by communist-inspired activities in neighbouring countries. Sarit sought closer ties with Thailand's anti-communist neighbours and with the United States. In 1961 Thailand and another SEATO member, the Philippines, joined with newly independent Malaya to form the Association of Southeast Asia.

When the Pathet Lao moved into northwestern Laos in March 1962, Dean Rusk (US Secretary of State) and Thanat Khoman (Thai Foreign Minister) agreed that their countries would interpret the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty of 1954 as a bilateral as well as multilateral pact binding the United States to come to the aid of Thailand in time of need, with or without the agreement of the other signatories to the pact. Two months later, US troops were stationed in Thailand in response to the deteriorating situation in Laos. The arrival of these forces in May 1962 was seen by the Thai government as confirmation of the United States commitment to preserve Thailand's independence and integrity against communist expansion. On the other hand, despite continual pressure from the Americans, Sarit refused to entertain ideas of democratic reform.

Sarit gave ministers in his cabinet considerable independence in the affairs of their own ministries, but he made all major decisions himself. Work continued on a new draft constitution, but in the meantime Sarit took extensive powers for his own office of prime minister under the interim constitution. Military officers were frequently appointed as directors of state or quasi-governmental economic enterprises. Despite the regime's political shortcomings, some economic progress was made from 1961 onwards with a series of ec

conomic development schemes. Sarit welcomed foreign investment. Major electrification and irrigation projects were started with aid from the United States and international agencies. A major clean-up campaign tackled sanitation in the cities.

Sarit revived the motto "Nation-Religion-King" as a slogan for his regime. He aimed to combine the paternalism of the ancient Thai state with the benevolent ideals of Buddhism. He spoke of his intention to "restore" the king to active participation in national life - some royal tours were scheduled for the king and queen to represent Thailand abroad. The administration of monastic institutions was centralised under a superior patriarchate friendly to the regime. Monks were mobilised to support government programs. Critics protested that Sarit had demeaned religion by using it for political ends and that he had compromised the monarchy by using it to legitimise a military dictatorship. They asserted that the regime's policies had contributed to the growth of materialism and secularism and to the erosion of religious belief in Thailand.

When Sarit died in office in December 1963, his deputy, Thanom, took over. He decided to shorten the timetable for the country's transition from a military dominated leadership structure to a popularly elected government. The process still took another five years.

Thailand allied itself closely to the United States in the Vietnam conflict. It permitted bases in Thailand to be used for raids on both North Vietnam and Cambodia. These missions were not officially acknowledged for fear of possible communist retaliation against Thailand. Sarit also committed a division of Thai army troops to the war in South Vietnam.

This microfilm edition provides a thorough overview of the complex problems of the region. The next two parts will cover material on Vietnam for the period 1964-1968.

TECHNICAL NOTE - PART 4

Our microfilm publications have been prepared and produced in accordance with recommended and established guide-lines for the production of microfilm of superior quality. These conform to the recommendations of the standard guides to good microforming and micropublishing practice.

Attention should be drawn to the nature of the original material. A few manuscript documents consist of faintly legible correspondence and records written with a variety of inks, pens or pencils and on paper of many different types and thicknesses. A few items are stained or discoloured at the edges, or comprise material on very thin paper, which is so thin that there is show through that renders the original document difficult to read. Some items consist of carbon copies of documents and these again pose problems where the original is very faint or blurred.

These original characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and camera alterations cannot entirely overcome. Every effort has been made to minimise these difficulties. Subject headings and item numbers are clearly marked. Each frame is filmed with a vertical strip target which identifies the relevant Public Record Office piece number in Class FO 371.

The Public Record Office at Kew, England, has exercised the most responsible care in the filming of this unique collection and this microfilm publication meets the standards established by the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

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FO 371/143771 Tripartite talks between UK, US and France on political situation in South East Asia
FO 371/143772 Future of International Commissions in Indo China (Folder 1)
FO 371/143773 Future of International Commissions in Indo China (Folder 2)
FO 371/143774 Future of International Commissions in Indo China (Folder 3)

FO 371/143782 Meetings of Australia, New Zealand and the United States on the defence of South East Asia

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Thailand - 1959

FO 371/144293 Thailand: annual review for 1958
FO 371/144296 Communism in Thailand
FO 371/144297 Foreign policy of Thailand

Far Eastern Department - 1960

FO 371/150381 Internal political situation in countries of Far East

South East Asia General - 1960

FO 371/152136 Political situation in South East Asia and Far East (Folder 1)
FO 371/152137 Political situation in South East Asia and Far East (Folder 2)
FO 371/152138 Internal situation in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam (Folder 1)
FO 371/152139 Internal situation in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam (Folder 2)
FO 371/152140 Co-operation under South East Asian Friendship and Economic Treaty (Folder 1)
FO 371/152141 Co-operation under South East Asian Friendship and Economic Treaty (Folder 2)

FO 371/152142 Views of Singapore on the political situation in South East Asia

FO 371/152143 Annual Conference of HM Representatives in South East Asia (Eden Hall Conference), Singapore, January 1960 (Folder 1) [File missing at the time of filming]

FO 371/152144 Annual Conference of HM Representatives in South East Asia (Eden Hall Conference), Singapore, January 1960 (Folder 2)

FO 371/152145 Political relations between UK and Commonwealth countries in Far East and South East Asia

REEL 111

SEATO - 1960

FO 371/152146 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 1): including papers on Council Meeting in Washington DC, May 1960; Annual questionnaire; South Vietnamese attendance at SEATO meetings; distribution of documents to London; publicity for military meetings.

FO 371/152147 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 2): including White House press release designating SEATO as an international organisation: privileges and immunities; "Talking books" reprint of "SEATO and the uncommitted", article by Mr Sarasin, SEATO Secretary General; papers for UK delegation; review of development in treaty area; papers for Council Meeting 31 May - 3 June 1960.

FO 371/152148 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 3): including national attitude of various countries towards SEATO; annual classified report; restricted session of Council representatives on 28 April 1960 to discuss Laotian elections; papers for Council Meeting 31 May - 3 June 1960.

FO 371/152149 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 4): including papers for Council Meeting 31 May - 3 June 1960; publicity for military meetings; consultations by Jack Conroy, member of permanent working group, in Dakka, Ankara, Paris and London; Committee of Security Experts, interim meeting 19 May 1960; visit of Pote Sarasin, Secretary-General of SEATO, to London from 7-9 June 1960; account of recent NATO meeting in Istanbul.

FO 371/152150 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 5): including papers on visit of Deputy Secretary-General of SEATO to Foreign Office.

FO 371/152151 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 6): including points for inclusion in Secretary of State's comments on work of SEATO at Council Meeting in Washington DC; request from UK schoolmaster for information about SEATO; suggestion by UK about clearance of deficit on expenses of SEATO graduate school of engineering for 1960-1961; speeches for Sixth Council Meeting in Washington DC.

FO 371/152152 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 7): including record of closed session of Council Meeting made by Lord Selkirk, UK delegate to SEATO Council; Fourth SEATO Communications Committee Meeting, 21-30 June 1960; Military advisers twelfth conference; papers for Secretary-General's visit to London; papers for Council Meeting 31 May - 3 June 1960.

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FO 371/152153 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 8): including copies of SEATO economic studies; parliamentary question by Mr Donnelly MP on Meeting of SEATO powers; Sixth anniversary of SEATO; SEATO day reception on 8 September 1960; Council representatives' meeting: proposal for discussion on Cambodia on 26 August 1960; plans for Bangkok meeting; topics discussed during the visit of the UK Commissioner General for South East Asia to Bangkok.

FO 371/152154 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 9): including request from SEATO Research Services Office for UK material on South East Asia; preparation of official report and communiqué for Council meeting of 31 May - 3 June 1960; annual questionnaire and Council representatives' August meeting.

FO 371/152155 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 10): including personal message from Secretary of State to Secretary General of SEATO on sixth anniversary of signature of Manila Treaty; Privileges and immunities within SEATO; Colombo Plan aid to member countries of SEATO; activities of SEATO Civil Organisation; distribution of documents to London; Council representatives' meeting on 5 October 1960; Annual Questionnaire; eleventh regular session of Council representatives on 28 October 1960.

FO 371/152156 South East Asia Treaty Organisation (Folder 11): including Thai proposal for abolition of permanent working group; Privileges and immu

nities within SEATO; setting up of a committee to review the negotiating of the SEATO Civil Organisation; arrangements for Council Meeting in Bangkok in 1961; Council representatives' meetings in November and December; discussions on Burma and Indonesia; draft of political review of events in the treaty area.

FO 371/152157 Closed. Retained by Department under Section 3 (4)

FO 371/152158 Closed. Retained by Department under Section 3 (4)

FO 371/152159 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Accommodation and staffing (Folder 1)

FO 371/152160 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Accommodation and staffing (Folder 2)

FO 371/152161 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military exercises (Folder 1)

FO 371/152162 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military exercises (Folder 2)

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FO 371/152163 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military exercises (Folder 3)

FO 371/152164 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budgets (Folder 1)

FO 371/152165 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budgets (Folder 2)

FO 371/152166 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budgets (Folder 3)

FO 371/152167 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budgets (Folder 4)

FO 371/152168 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: SEATO Military Planning Committee: meetings

FO 371/152169 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military planning (Folder 1)

FO 371/152170 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military planning (Folder 2)

FO 371/152171 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military planning (Folder 3)

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FO 371/152172 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military planning (Folder 4)

FO 371/152173 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military planning (Folder 5)

FO 371/152174 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military planning (Folder 6)

FO 371/152175 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Economic aid for member countries (Folder 1)

FO 371/152176 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Economic aid for member countries (Folder 2)

South East Asia General - 1960

FO 371/152177 International commissions in Indo China (Folder 1)

FO 371/152178 International commissions in Indo China (Folder 2)

FO 371/152179 International commissions in Indo China (Folder 3)

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FO 371/152180 International commissions in Indo China (Folder 4)

FO 371/152181 International commissions in Indo China (Folder 5)

Thailand - 1960

FO 371/152639 Annual review for 1959

FO 371/152640 Internal political situation

FO 371/152641 Communism

FO 371/152642 Political relations with China

FO 371/152644 Political relations with the United States

FO 371/152646 Political relations with the United Kingdom

FO 371/152647 Political relations with Commonwealth countries

FO 371/152671 Vietnamese refugees

Far Eastern Department - 1961

FO 371/158379 Political situation in the Far East (Folder 1)

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FO 371/158380 Political situation in the Far East (Folder 2)

South East Asia General - 1961

FO 371/159701 UK policy on South East Asia (Folder 1)

FO 371/159702 UK policy on South East Asia (Folder 2)

FO 371/159712 Anglo-American policies in South East Asia (Folder 1)

FO 371/159713 Anglo-American policies in South East Asia (Folder 2)

FO 371/159715 UK policy towards South East Asia

FO 371/159722 UK policy on Indo China

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SEATO - 1961

FO 371/159728 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 1)

FO 371/159729 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 2)

FO 371/159730 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 3)

FO 371/159731 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 4)

FO 371/159732 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 5)

FO 371/159733 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 6)

FO 371/159734 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 7)

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FO 371/159735 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 8)

FO 371/159736 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 9)

FO 371/159737 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 10)

FO 371/159738 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 11)

FO 371/159739 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of SEATO Council in Bangkok and Paris (Folder 12)

FO 371/159740 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Military exercises

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FO 371/159741 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budget (Folder 1)

FO 371/159742 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budget (Folder 2)
FO 371/159743 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budget (Folder 3)
FO 371/159744 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budget (Folder 4)
FO 371/159745 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budget (Folder 5)

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FO 371/159746 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Budget (Folder 6)
FO 371/159747 South East Asia Treaty Organisation: Meetings of military advisers
FO 371/159756 Voting procedures for Council Meetings

South East Asia General - 1961

FO 371/159757 International Commission for Supervision and Control (Folder 1)
FO 371/159758 International Commission for Supervision and Control (Folder 2)

Thailand - 1961

FO 371/160069 Annual review for 1960
FO 371/160070 Internal political situation
FO 371/160071 Foreign policy
FO 371/160072 Political relations with the Soviet Union
FO 371/160073 Political relations with the United States

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FO 371/160074 Political relations with Burma
FO 371/160075 Political relations with the United Kingdom
FO 371/160076 Political relations with Commonwealth countries
FO 371/160079 Commercial relations with the Soviet Union
FO 371/160080 Commercial relations with the United States
FO 371/160083 Repatriation of refugees from Thailand to North Vietnam

Far East General - 1962

FO 371/164871 Political situation in the Far East

SE Asia General - 1962

FO 371/166353 UK policy on South East Asia (Folder 1)
FO 371/166354 UK policy on South East Asia (Folder 2)
FO 371/166355 Anglo-American policies in South East Asia

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FO 371/166359 Eden Hall Conference on South East Asia
FO 371/166360 UK policy towards South East Asia
FO 371/166363 Discussion of unified command in the Far East

Thailand - 1962

FO 371/166616 Annual review for 1961
FO 371/166617 Internal political situation
FO 371/166618 Foreign policy
FO 371/166619 Political relations with the United States
FO 371/166622 Political relations with the United Kingdom
FO 371/166629 SEATO forces in Thailand (Folder 1)
FO 371/166630 SEATO forces in Thailand (Folder 2)

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FO 371/166631 SEATO forces in Thailand (Folder 3)
FO 371/166632 SEATO forces in Thailand (Folder 4)
FO 371/166633 SEATO forces in Thailand (Folder 5)
FO 371/166634 SEATO forces in Thailand (Folder 6)

SEATO - 1962

FO 371/166644 Annual review for 1961
FO 371/166645 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 1)
FO 371/166646 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 2)

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FO 371/166647 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 3)
FO 371/166648 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 4)
FO 371/166649 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 5)
FO 371/166650 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 6)
FO 371/166651 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 7)
FO 371/166652 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 8)
FO 371/166653 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 9)
FO 371/166654 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 10)

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FO 371/166655 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 11)
FO 371/166656 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 12)
FO 371/166657 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 13)

FO 371/166658 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 14)
FO 371/166659 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 15)
FO 371/166660 Military planning for intervention in South East Asia (Folder 1)
FO 371/166661 Military planning for intervention in South East Asia (Folder 2)

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FO 371/166662 Military planning for intervention in South East Asia (Folder 3)
FO 371/166663 Visit of Secretary General to the United Kingdom

South East Asia General - 1963

FO 371/169678 UK policy on South East Asia (Folder 1)
FO 371/169679 UK policy on South East Asia (Folder 2)
FO 371/169681 UK-France-US tripartite discussions on Cambodia in Paris, December 1963

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FO 371/169684 Political relations between the Peoples Republic of China and Indonesia, Burma and Cambodia

FO 371/169686 US policy on South East Asia
FO 371/169689 Eden Hall Conference on South East Asia

FO 371/169728 International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam and Cambodia: financial situation (Folder 1)

FO 371/169729 International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam and Cambodia: financial situation (Folder 2)

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Thailand - 1963

FO 371/170016 Annual review for 1962
FO 371/170017 Internal political situation
FO 371/170018 Foreign policy
FO 371/170019 Political relations with Peoples Republic of China
FO 371/170020 Political relations with the United States
FO 371/170022 Political relations with the United Kingdom

FO 371/170031 UK military assistance
FO 371/170032 SEATO forces in Thailand
FO 371/170038 Vietnamese refugees in Northern Thailand SEATO - 1963
FO 371/170042 Annual review for 1962
FO 371/170043 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 1)

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FO 371/170044 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 2)
FO 371/170045 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 3)
FO 371/170046 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 4)
FO 371/170047 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 5)
FO 371/170048 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 6)
FO 371/170049 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 7)
FO 371/170050 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 8)
FO 371/170051 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 9)

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FO 371/170052 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 10)
FO 371/170053 Meetings of SEATO Council (Folder 11)
FO 371/170054 Military forces and strategy
FO 371/170055 Threat of communist subversion in SEATO area (Folder 1)
FO 371/170056 Threat of communist subversion in SEATO area (Folder 2)

Far East General - 1963

FO 371/170634 Political situation in the Far East

Part 5: Vietnam, 1964-1966 (PRO Class FO 371/175464-175545, 180510-180643 and 186279-186419)

PUBLISHER'S NOTES - PART 5

Parts 5 and 6 focus on the build up of American forces in Vietnam following the attack on the USS Maddox and the passage by US Congress of the Tonkin Gulf resolution which gave President Johnson extraordinary powers to act in South-East Asia. Weekly reports, intelligence assessments and critical analyses bring together news from Saigon, Hanoi, Haiphong and Dien Bien Phu, offering a British and Commonwealth perspective on US policy, the motives and debates influencing decision making, the scale of the human tragedy, the efforts at mediation and peace talks to end hostilities.

The Vietnam War had wide-reaching implications; it was destined not to confine itself to Vietnamese borders, with the interlocking geographical and political nature of the region ensuring that more nations would become immersed in the increasingly complex conflict. Whilst Britain was not directly involved in Vietnam she had substantial interests throughout South-East Asia and was anxious to monitor the situation closely. The Foreign Office files included in this collection reflect this, documenting the events which led to an intensification of the conflict and the involvement of far greater numbers of American combat troops.

Part 5 provides all the files for 1964-1966. These include material on:

- the internal political situation in South Vietnam
- the British Advisory Mission
- Robert McNamara's visit to Vietnam, March 1964
- US policy in Vietnam
- US bombing of North Vietnam
- McGeorge Bundy's visit to Saigon, February 1965
- North Vietnam's use of Laotian territory for supplying the Viet Cong
- the internal political situation in North Vietnam
- Viet Cong offensives
- US military strategy - attrition, search and destroy operations, massive bombing campaigns
- Reports on political asylum, prisoners of war, refugees, Red Cross activities and medical aid
- UN, US and Commonwealth initiatives on Vietnam
- Foreign military assistance to South Vietnam
- the economic situation in North and South Vietnam
- Peace moves, conferences and negotiations

The British and Commonwealth viewpoint offers scholars different perspectives and insights on the formulation of US policy and strategy, the day to day situation on the ground, the refugee crisis, the impact of the conflict on the whole region, and its bearing on east-west tensions and international politics.

The files offer up lots of material to look at questions such as:

- What were the weaknesses of Johnson's concept of a "limited conflict" to stop communist "aggression"?
- What were the main reasons for the escalation of the conflict?
- How important was the role of McNamara?
- What was the response to the huge refugee crisis?
- How significant was the impact in America of domestic public opinion?
- How damaging was American intervention for the political and social infrastructure of South Vietnam?
- What role did China and the Soviet Union play in terms of indirect support, military aid and diplomatic intervention?
- Why were various peace initiatives frustrated?

The following extracts give a flavour of the material.

At the start of November 1963, the Diem regime was overthrown by military coup d'état. Following the death of President Diem and his brother, Mr Ngo Dinh Nhu, the Military Revolutionary Council, under the presidency of General Duong van Minh, assumed control and declared martial law. Gordon Etherington-Smith, from the British Embassy, Saigon, reports:

"On assuming power the military leaders declared two principal aims: to defeat Communism and establish democracy in the country. The measures they have taken since have been in keeping with these objectives. Their prime concern has been to eliminate the abuses of the old regime and to prosecute the war against the Viet Cong. It has been made clear that they intend to allow as much political freedom in the country as present circumstances permit.

The question of immediate importance, however, is whether the war can be won under their leadership. For them to succeed in this it is necessary that they should remain united, that they should command the active support of the bulk of the population. My impression is that, for the present at least, the Minh-Don-Kim trio have matters under control. It is also clear that the junta are generally popular. Their liberal outlook and the restoration of many liberties denied under the old regime have seen to this.

The United States Government sympathise with the Vietnamese standpoint and for the rest have made it clear that they fully support the new regime and will give them all aid to win the war. Support by the United Kingdom (whose relations with the new regime are otherwise excellent) for the Cambodian conference proposal and for policies aimed at the neutralisation of free Indo-China could cause trouble for us with the Vietnamese in the coming year..." (see FO 371/175465).

The summary of the Annual Report for South Vietnam for 1964 emphasizes the difficult situation:

"A year of continued deterioration in all sectors. The prime cause was the failure to develop effective government which was itself the result of the army's inability to rule and the emergence of new popular pressures, some communist-influenced. Viet Cong strength increased considerably, though not as yet decisively. American assistance to Vietnam was impeded by an unsatisfactory relationship with the Vietnamese and lack of co-ordination on the American side. United States-Vietnamese relations became seriously strained at the year's end. The Viet Cong have strengthened their position in most parts of the country. Militarily they are now operating more confidently in larger units and closer to the main towns; and in many rural areas their civil administrative machinery has effectively replaced the no longer existent authority of Saigon." (see FO 371/180511).

On 8 July 1964, the British Embassy in Saigon reported on the implications of the current situation in Vietnam:

"President Diem failed in the vital task of creating a sound political foundation on which to build a stable and durable system of Government. Those who overthrew him faced the same problem: meanwhile, the Viet Cong gained much ground. By January 1964, however, the original Revolutionary Government appeared to be making progress. General Khanh's further coup caused another setback. He failed to establish himself as a popular figure; his Government, into which he unwisely admitted politicians, was not a success and he made serious mistakes in his public utterances. More effective leadership is essential if confidence is to be restored...The Viet Cong threat now makes the solution of the problem of leadership most urgent..." (see FO 371/175470).

M W Ponsonby in his Annual Report on North Vietnam states:

"The North Vietnamese made full use of their massive propaganda machine to exploit the Gulf of Tongking 'incidents' in August and the International Solidarity Conference in November 1964. Internally the regime continues to ti

ghten its grip; and its authority over the country is probably complete. The past year has seen a steady increase in the military strength and capabilities of both sides, and the published figure of 22,000 Americans, only a very small percentage of whom are actually engaged in the war, is used to full effect by the North Vietnamese propaganda machine..."

The report concludes: "The situation has reached a point where the North believe that they can count on the political, military and psychological factors working in their favour. The South must think in negative terms of containment; the North in the positive terms of its primary objectives - the ejection of the American military presence in Vietnam and the creation of a de facto Government by the National Liberation Front in Saigon." (see FO 371/180511).

There is an account of a visit made by Mr Etherington-Smith to three villages on the outskirts of Saigon on 26 July 1964:

"The second hamlet, Dan Phu, six miles from the centre of Saigon, was still subject to the attention of a Viet Cong regular platoon whose presence in the area had been known before Hop Tac got under way. Thus, although the first phase of Hop Tac included ridding the area of armed Viet Cong progressively, starting from Saigon and working outwards, here we were with Viet Cong in the vicinity only six miles from the centre. Charles Napier was told by the American district adviser that no regular and regional forces were available to clear the area and it would only be possible to take action by detaching various popular forces platoons allotted for hamlet defence; this would not only involve loss of security for the hamlets in question, but also inevitably give the show away long enough in advance for the Viet Cong to prepare their defences..." (see FO 371/180512).

Another file contains R G K Thompson's record of his visit on 5 May 1964 to Kien Hoa Province, which controls the mouth of the Mekong Delta, and his discussions with Colonel Chau:

"...We were taken straight to the operations room, which is quite the best sector operations room I have seen in the country, with maps on the wall showing all forms of activity, strengths and plans so that the situation in the Province can more or less be summed up at a glance. The radio room is next door and there is an officer on duty throughout the twenty four hours. There were even three beds in the room so that the Province Chief himself could spend the night there if necessary.

The armed Viet Cong strength in the Province is about 5,000 made up of regular regional forces 1,450, three provincial battalions 600, seven district c

companies 920 and village guerrillas 2,100. In addition to this the Viet Cong have their own hamlet self defence corps, which is estimated to number 13,000, mainly unarmed, but some of them with hand grenades. Chau estimated that their strength had increased by about 50% over the last six months and that their capability had been greatly increased by the infiltration of some particularly good military cadres from the North. Their strategy was now well thought out and their military operations well executed. Quite apart from the mangrove strips along the coast which have always been Viet Cong permanent bases, they control the whole area around Mo Cay up to the Vinh Long boundary and most of the area south of Truc Giang and east of Giong Trom and both banks of the Ba Lai down which Government craft can no longer operate in the face of recoilless rifle fire. All this accounts for about 80% of the population in the Province and particularly those in the coconut areas. The Government still holds all the district towns and, where there are open rice field areas, as in Binh Dai, Ba Tri and Thanh Phu, a few hamlets around them. However, most of the roads are cut and access is by helicopter or special operation only..."

The four page report ends: "In conclusion, and making allowances for Chau's personality, showmanship and good English, he is obviously one of the few Province Chiefs working on the right lines and trying to get things done. The situation is clearly very serious indeed, but on the whole not as discouraging as we had expected. He obviously needs a lot more boats (we discussed waterways control) and General Stilwell has also offered him bicycles for his Civil Guard to increase mobility. As Chau said: 'They still have their use in the nuclear age'. His immediate problem is to hold Mo Cay and, if possible, to consolidate the town and the hamlets immediately around it to such an extent that the battalion can be released for the Pacification Plan in the A1 area. This will go much better and faster if two battalions can be used together. The one battalion now carrying out the Plan might be badly mauled if the Viet Cong can organise a heavy attack on it." (see FO 371/175469).

Other reports on the work of Mr R G K Thompson, Head of the British Advisory Mission in Vietnam (BRIAM), provide valuable evidence. His notes compiled at the end of December 1964 are set down to give useful background material for any new British advisers in Vietnam.

On 2 August 1964 North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the American destroyers USS Maddox and USS C Turner Joy. President Johnson issued the following instructions to the US Navy:

"(a) to continue patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of Vietnam;
(b) to double the force by adding an additional destroyer to the one already

y on patrol;

(c) to provide a combat air patrol over the destroyers;

(d) to issue orders to the commanders of the combat aircraft and the two destroyers (i) to attack any force which attacks them in international waters; (ii) to attack with the object of not only driving off the force, but of destroying it." (see FO 371/175498)

Folio 68 of the same file comprises a cartoon from the daily 'Lien Minh' of July 29 which shows Ambassador Taylor and General Khanh in a rowing boat, each proposing to row in the opposite direction.

Many files give details on raids, attacks and infiltrations. FO 371/175517 contains reports on four major clashes between the Viet Cong and Government forces:

- July 4: strong night attack on a Special Forces camp at Polei Krong, some seven miles west of Kontum.
- July 6: night attack on Special Forces Camp at Nam Dong, in the hills some 35 miles west of Da Nong, in southern Thua Thien province.
- July 11: strong attack on the post at Vinh Cheo, Chuong Thien province in the south west of the Mekong Delta.
- July 13: Ambush of a motorized column in Binh Long, 45 miles north of Saigon.

R A Burrows at the British Embassy, Saigon comments on 15 July 1964:

"In each case, substantial, well equipped and experienced Viet Cong forces took the initiative, acted according to accurate information and followed plans which accurately estimated the reaction of Government forces. Senior Vietnamese and American officers are most perturbed that these weaknesses should be revealing themselves at this late stage and after so much effort in the training of Government forces. The Polei Krong incident was an unmitigated failure. It should never have been possible for the Viet Cong to surprise a strong armed camp in this way (there appear to have been no outposts or effective patrolling); moreover the treachery within the camp was most disquieting..."

(see FO 371/175517).

Typical of Chinese press comment is the following extract from the People's Daily which reproduced an article by a Red Flag commentator entitled "Drive the United States aggressors out of Vietnam" on 5 May 1965. The argument in the article is developed along the following lines:

"(a) Vietnamese war has become focus of great struggle between people of the world and United States imperialism. Vietnamese resistance to United

States aggression is important component of common struggle of world's people and Vietnamese are champions of proletarian internationalism in forefront of struggle.

(b) Situation is excellent (article recounts successes both in South and North Vietnam). War in South Vietnam has entered a new phase, in which tempo of United States aggressors approach to complete defeat is being accelerated. People are invincible and people's war will surely emerge victorious.

(c) What is way out for United States imperialism? Its gangster nature prevents it getting out of Vietnam. (president Johnson's remark that if Vietnam were lost, it would be one down and ninety-nine to go is quoted). Further United States expansion of the war will lead to stronger political opposition from world and United States Allied opinion and fail militarily because

- (i) Its troop strength is inadequate;
- (ii) Its battle line too long;
- (iii) Its rear too far away;
- (iv) Morale of troops is low, and
- (v) Terrain is unfavourable.

Reckless extension of war will only further expose United States weaknesses.

In this dilemma dual tactics of war blackmail and peace talks swindle is vain attempt to coerce Vietnamese people so that United States imperialism can gain by peaceful means what it has failed to gain on the battlefield. But Vietnamese are united and will fight to the end as long as United States aggressors remain..."

The summary of the Annual Review for South Vietnam for 1965 compiled by the British Embassy in Saigon focuses on the American build up:

"The Americans decided to intervene directly and massively in the war, thus averting the collapse of South Vietnam. Hostilities were intensified and the conflict became to an increasing extent a source of international tension. Despite American affirmations of willingness to negotiate, Hanoi and Peking remained intransigent and Communist armed forces in South Vietnam were substantially strengthened. Air strikes against North Vietnam started in February. US ground forces began to arrive in March. Korean, Australian and New Zealand units followed. The Viet Cong have been harassed and hurt but it remains to be seen whether American might and skill can eliminate the Communist regular forces, as the Americans believe. Military escalation has brought a refugee problem."

"The tempo, scale and range of the fighting continued to increase throughout the year. At the end of the year there were some 180,000 American troops in the country. The American strategy was to establish strongholds in o

r near the coast from which sorties could be made to engage and destroy the enemy. At the same time in-country air strikes were steadily increased (B52s from Guam made their first attack in June)..."

Gordon Etherington-Smith concludes: "Assuming the war continues, the Americans as well as the South Vietnamese must expect a difficult time while the United States military establishment is built up to the level necessary to take on the increased Communist forces. When this has been done, it will still remain to be seen how far the Communist threat can be dealt with by conventional means. However successful future operations may prove to be, the problem of Communist subversion and terrorism, will remain and for this only effective pacification can provide the answer." (see FO 371/186279).

Ponsonby, the HM Consul-General in Hanoi, provides the following view on events in his Annual Review for North Vietnam for 1965:

"...while it may be claimed that the bombing has had a slowing down effect on the North Vietnamese capacity to support the Viet Cong, it is becoming ever-increasingly clear that the basic objective - to stop North Vietnamese infiltration of the South - has not been fulfilled. The outlook for 1966 is most sombre. The North Vietnamese, in my view, have no intention of showing weakness and are prepared to continue the struggle..." (see FO 371/186279).

There are lots more documents on morale and the attitude to the war in North Vietnam in FO 371/186289. A report from the British Consulate General in Hanoi, dated 23 June 1966, notes: "In Hanoi the semi-disappearance of meat, the shortage of firewood, and the very high prices of chicken and fish typify an economy that is on the downward slope and suggest that the people could in a longer term become dangerously discontent."

Two files (FO 371/186418 and FO 371/186419) cover meetings in the United Nations on the Vietnam conflict. The extract below is taken from a document, dated 31 January 1966, addressed to the UK mission in New York, setting out suggested points to be made in a speech to the UN meeting on Vietnam:

"We suggest you make the following points in your speech:

- (a) HMG have always been conscious of their special responsibility (because of their position as Co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference of 1954) for promoting a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. For over a year they have made repeated efforts to this end.
- (b) The obvious method was to reconvene the Geneva Conference, but our repeated proposals for this have met with no response from the Soviet Gov

ernment. The latest was made during the Foreign Secretary's visit to Moscow last November.

(c) We have always been willing to consider other methods of negotiation and a notable instance was the proposal for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Mission.

(d) We intensified our efforts in the favourable atmosphere we hoped had been created by the recent prolonged pause in American bombing of North Vietnam.

(e) But all our initiatives have foundered on the same obstacle: the constantly reiterated refusal of the North Vietnamese to consider negotiations on any basis other than prior acceptance of their Four Points.

(f) The first of these Points is a demand for complete American withdrawal from South Vietnam: ie: unconditional military surrender. The third requires the future of South Vietnam to be settled in accordance with the programme of the National Liberation Front: unconditional political surrender.

(g) Whatever view other members of the Council may take of the rights and wrongs of the conflict in Vietnam, nobody who wanted negotiations (and without negotiations there cannot be peace) could ever have made such obviously unacceptable demands..."

(see FO 371/186418).

Many files provide observations on the internal political situation in South Vietnam. The British Embassy in Saigon reported on 24 February 1966 that:

"There has been a recent spate of speeches by Vietnamese leaders as a follow up to the Honolulu Declaration. On 16 February, addressing two hundred members of the Anti-Fraud Youth Group in Saigon, Ky announced the Government's decision as part of its social revolutionary policy to set up a special tribunal to try dishonest businessmen and corrupt officials. Enjoying the same status as the Military Field Courts, this special tribunal will pronounce sentences ranging from hard labour to a maximum penalty of death..."

"Thieu made an intransigent statement on the South Vietnamese attitude on 'our most important problem of War and Peace'. He soundly condemned the National Liberation Front as an organisation of Communists who were betraying the fatherland. There was no room for Communists in the national political life...South Vietnam was the victim of unprovoked aggression, and peace could only come when the Communist aggressors agreed to put an end to aggression and subversion in all its forms..."

(see FO 371/186281).

Viet Cong strength during 1964 doubled to a total of 170,000 men, most of them recruited in the south. About 30,000 were incorporated into fifty hard-core battalions, elite units equipped with new modern weapons and stiffened

by northern veterans. They hoped to shatter the Saigon regime and force its leaders to concede to the creation of a neutral state that could eventually come under Communist domination.

By mid 1965 the Americans had eighteen combat battalions in Vietnam. At the end of July, President Johnson approved Westmoreland's request for forty-four additional combat battalions. In October, in the Ia Drang valley the American forces defeated North Vietnamese units in the first major conventional clash of the war.

The President suspended bombing of North Vietnam on December 25 in an attempt to induce the Communists to negotiate. This met with no progress so the bombing campaign resumed on 31 January 1966. Visiting Cambodia in September, President de Gaulle of France called for the Americans to withdraw from Vietnam. American and South Vietnamese leaders met in Manila the next month to discuss the situation. By the end of 1966 American troop strength in Vietnam reached nearly 400,000.

Starting in the summer of 1965, as more and more American troops landed, South Vietnam underwent a convulsive transformation. These files give researchers a vast array of material to assess the impact and reasons for the massive American intervention.

Scholars can examine General Westmoreland's strategy. The basic plan was to deploy American troops to protect US air and supply bases along the South Vietnamese coast and around Saigon. At the same time, units would be sent into the central highlands to block any attempt by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to cut across to the sea and slice the country in two. Having gained the initiative, the Americans planned to launch a series of "search and destroy" operations in which the American forces, with their vastly superior mobility and firepower, would relentlessly grind down the enemy. Finally, Westmoreland proposed to "mop up" the remaining Communists to achieve "victory". He counted on two further efforts to help bring success: (a) the intensive bombing of North Vietnam (b) the American program of "pacification" to gain control of South Vietnam's rural population - "winning the hearts and minds" of the people, an approach predicated more on military muscle than on social and economic policy.

To what extent did American strategy succeed? What were its failings?

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Part 6: Vietnam, 1967-1968 (PRO Class FCO 15/481-782)

PUBLISHER'S NOTES - PART 6

Part 6 focuses on the continued build up of American forces in Vietnam and the growing number of peace initiatives to try to resolve the conflict. Weekly reports, intelligence assessments and critical analyses bring together news from Saigon, Hanoi, Haiphong and Dien Bien Phu, offering a British and Commonwealth perspective on US policy, the motives and debates influencing decision making, the scale of the human tragedy, the efforts at mediation and peace talks to end hostilities.

The Vietnam War had wide-reaching implications; it was destined not to confine itself to Vietnamese borders, with the interlocking geographical and political nature of the region ensuring that more nations would become immersed in the increasingly complex conflict. Whilst Britain was not directly involved in Vietnam she had substantial interests throughout South-East Asia and was anxious to monitor the situation closely. The Foreign Office files included in this collection reflect this and the growing concerns of the Wilson Government, documenting the events which led to an intensification of the conflict and the involvement of far greater numbers of American combat troops.

Part 6 focuses on 1967-1968 including:

- the impact of US bombing of North Vietnam
- the exchange of letters between President Johnson and Ho Chi Minh
- the continued build up of American forces in Vietnam
- the Tet offensive
- the capture of Hué
- the partial bombing halt, de-escalation and changes in American policy
- the Paris peace talks

The British and Commonwealth viewpoint offers scholars different perspectives and insights on the formulation of US policy and strategy, the day to day situation on the ground, the refugee crisis, the impact of the conflict on the whole region, and its bearing on east-west tensions and international politics.

The files offer up lots of material to look at questions such as:

- What were the weaknesses of Johnson's concept of a "limited conflict" to stop communist "aggression"?
- How isolated did President Johnson become?

- What were the main reasons for the escalation of the conflict?
- What was the response to the huge refugee crisis?
- How significant was the impact in America of domestic public opinion?
- How damaging was American intervention for the political and social infrastructure of South Vietnam?
- What role did China and the Soviet Union play in terms of indirect support, military aid and diplomatic intervention?
- Who was winning the propaganda war?
- Why were various peace initiatives frustrated?
- What progress was made at the Paris peace talks?
- The following extracts give a flavour of the material.

At the start of 1967 the US administration was divided over strategy; President Johnson had been escalating the war steadily for eighteen months, with little impact. The air campaign of the previous year had destroyed hundreds of bridges, but virtually all of them had been rebuilt or quickly bypassed. Against a background of the intensified US bombing of North Vietnam, the British Government renewed its diplomatic initiatives to try to find a way to end the war:

Revised draft statement by the Prime Minister in response to escalation of US bombing of targets in North Vietnam, 18 June 1966

"We are convinced that the United States forces are taking, as always, every precaution to avoid civilian casualties. Nevertheless, we have made it clear on many occasions that we could not support an extension of the bombing to the areas of Hanoi and Haiphong. Our concern throughout the Vietnam conflict has been over the twin dangers that the war will spread, and that suffering and distress are placed upon innocent people. We believe that the value of each application of military strength must be judged not only in terms of military needs but also in terms of the risk of injury to those not directly involved in the conflict.

For these reasons, when President Johnson informed me that it might become necessary to attack targets in or on the outskirts of the populated areas of Hanoi or Haiphong, while he assured me that these attacks would be directed specifically to the oil installations, I notified him that Her Majesty's Government must formally dissociate themselves from such action.

Nevertheless, Her Majesty's Government believe that the United States is right to continue helping the millions of South Vietnamese who have no wish to live under Communist domination, until such time as the North Vietnamese Government abandon their attempt to gain control of South Vietnam by force and accept the proposals for unconditional negotiations repeatedly put forward by the United States as well as by Britain and the Commonwealth

h. Her Majesty's Government are convinced that the North Vietnamese refusal alone prevents these negotiations and deplore Hanoi's constant rejection of the path of peace... " (See FCO 15/590)

Parliamentary Labour Party: Discussions on Vietnam

Draft Statement for the Secretary of State's use at the PLP meeting on 2 February 1967

This draft begins: "We have discussed Vietnam many times before and many of you will know very well what I have to say. Nevertheless, if there is still any doubt about the Government's attitude to the war and our efforts to get it stopped, then I am glad to set out once again, as clearly as I can, where the Government stands....

The overriding aim of our policy is to get the war stopped and to promote a settlement which will allow the people of Vietnam - and indeed all South East Asia—to develop in peace, in their own way and without any outside interference.

I suggested a way in which this might be done in the Plan I put forward at Brighton on 6 October last year and again at the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 11 October. However, I recognise that, although this seems to me to be the best way forward, it is not the only way and we are ready to support and promote other proposals if they should seem to offer any chance of achieving peace.

But meanwhile, day by day new reports come in about incidents in this wretched war. Some of you have said that the Government should dissociate themselves from, and condemn American policy and American use of modern weapons. But the sufferings of this war are not confined to North Vietnam alone nor are they caused only by the Americans.

I detest, as I am sure we all do, the bombing and the use of such weapons as napalm. But I detest also the Vietcong terrorist mine, which kills indiscriminately both soldiers and civilians, both adults and children. I detest the weapons of assassination and terror. I detest all war and if I were to condemn, I would want to condemn not one side or the other, but all those who bring suffering to the Vietnamese people.

I respect the honestly-held feelings about the distress and suffering caused in North Vietnam. But I ask those who hold these views to be careful lest their honesty is put to ignoble account by the Communists. I believe that a carefully planned campaign has been launched by Hanoi to present their case in the whitest possible way.

This is getting us into a moral imbalance which is just as dangerous as a military or political imbalance. As I said at Brighton, this would nurture the seeds of a new conflict. We need a balanced settlement—with balanced de-escalation and a balanced cease fire as part of it..." (See FCO 15/615)

Top Secret, UK Eyes Only Telegram No. 49 of 11 January 1967, from Mr Colvin in Hanoi, to the Foreign Office

"I learn from Canadian Permanent Representative that Commissioner is (repeat is) engaged in clandestine discussions over negotiations. Moore's contact is with Foreign Minister and is "partly" on behalf of U Thant. Talks are not connected with Salisbury. He gave me impression that some of the initiative was coming from North Vietnamese whose conciliatory attitude had surprised him. I could learn nothing more and apologised for incomplete report... Canadians emphasised secrecy as essential to success and I must ask you to maintain United Kingdom eyes proviso if only to preserve him as my continuing source." (See FCO 15/582)

On a visit to Guam, 20-21 March 1967, President Johnson meets with Thieu and Ky and visits injured US soldiers in hospital.

Note by P H Gore-Booth, 21 April 1967, to Sir D Allen re: Secretary of State's Visit to Washington DC for discussions on Vietnam

"...Mr Rusk was afraid of further escalation but felt that it was very difficult to persuade the President to keep a foot on the brake if absolutely nothing was happening in the way of peace efforts. The President was only too prone to argue that Mr Rusk's advice had been "wrong so far". This meant that, increasingly, the President was getting advice from Walt Rostow who was in these matters a hard liner and, in Mr Brown's judgement, not adequate to the great responsibility which fell on him... Mr Johnson himself was feeling an increasing isolation and that this, combined with what he had seen of the impact of the war, both on service people and on Senate and Congress, were making him more emotional and less objective about the situation. (He had been enormously affected by some of the cases he had seen in hospital in Guam)... " (See FCO 15/663)

John McNaughton, an advisor to US Secretary of Defense McNamara, and a certified hard-liner in the Pentagon a year earlier, by Spring 1967 was noting sadly to McNamara that people think that "we are trying to impose some US image on distant peoples we cannot understand, and that we are carrying the thing to absurd lengths". He feared what lay ahead, possibly "the worst split in our people in more than a century..." – some possible 21st century echoes here. The looming split over Vietnam was to be compounded by the US Government's increasing isolation from its public. McNaughton comm

ented wryly that McGeorge Bundy, George Ball and Bill Moyers, all of whom had at least had the guts to voice misgivings about the war, had resigned. And, McNaughton asked ominously, "Who next?" McNamara, increasingly disillusioned with the progress of the war, was to be replaced in Spring 1968.

These divisions and potential splits in the US Administrative are closely scrutinised by the British Embassy in Washington DC and by the Foreign Office officials in London. Their minutes frequently refer to an "increasingly isolated President Johnson..."

FCO 15/735 covers discussions with US Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge during his European Tour. Ellsworth Bunker took over from Henry Cabot Lodge as US Ambassador in Saigon at the start of May 1967.

FCO 15/701 looks at the concept of an electronic barrier in Vietnam, the so-called "McNamara Line".

Towards the end of June 1967 there were talks between Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin and President Johnson in New Jersey. The British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, believed that his Soviet counterpart could be persuaded to pressure the North Vietnamese into seeking some kind of compromise. With some misgivings President Johnson accepted the British proposal to try to get Kosygin to co-operate. Chester Cooper acted as a liaison man in London, but the British felt that several good opportunities were wasted in 1966 and in 1967.

There are lots of files on Soviet policy - see FCO 15/558, FCO 15/621, FCO 15/633-634 covering Kosygin's visit to the UK, FCO 15/666-667 on the British Foreign Secretary's visit to Moscow, FCO 15/668 with details on Soviet weapons and military supplies in Vietnam, FCO 15/709 on Harold Wilson's visit to Moscow and FCO 15/732 on exchanges between the UK and the Soviet Union regarding possible peace moves. UK proposals for Three Power talks on ending hostilities are covered in FCO 15/580-582.

National Vietnam Week in 1967

It actually aroused little media interest in the UK and the expectations of Lord Brockway "for the biggest national demonstrations of his lifetime" were not fulfilled. This file includes lots of data on public opinion in the UK with briefing notes for MPs. The file includes a copy of the newspaper "Vietnam, Our Neighbour", June 1967, published by the International Committee of Conscience on Vietnam (ICCV), with a poignant and graphic illustration on its front cover. (See FCO 15/565).

Large clusters of files such as FCO 15/598-602 focus on US policy. These are full of reports from the British Embassy in Washington DC.

Telegram from Sir Patrick Dean, Washington DC, to Foreign Office, 16 August 1967

"Following Personal for Prime Minister. Repeated for Information to Mr George Thomson, Minister of State, Foreign Office. Personal. Vietnam.

The President summoned me this afternoon and asked me to convey the following information to you. The President said that he was distressed that recent speeches and Newspaper Articles here were causing you concern and possible embarrassment. He wanted you to be informed about the present bombing policy. The US Government had recent firm information that the Soviet Government was at present powerless to bring about a negotiation or a Conference. If the Russians had the power they would probably wish to use it but they had not. The US Government also had very good information that Hanoi was not in the least interested at present in trying to reach a settlement. On the contrary, they wanted to go on. At the same time, the US Government calculated that up to 700,000 North Vietnamese were tied down in trying to repair the damage done by the US bombing. The President did not want to see these men set free to reinforce the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong. The President said that there were about 350 industrial targets which were of prime importance to the North Vietnamese war effort and which the US Air Force would like to attack. In practice, about six out of seven of these plants had been and would be kept under attack. The remaining 50 or so would not be attacked because they were so situated that the risks of killing substantial numbers of civilians were too great. For instance, there was no intention to bomb or to attempt to close Haiphong Harbour as such or to attack the shipping in it. The only targets on the list in or close to Hanoi were the power plants and oil installations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff would like to bomb the remaining 50 Plants, but the President was not going to agree for the reasons stated." (see FCO 15/602, Telegram No. 2674)

Telegram from Sir Patrick Dean, Washington DC, to Foreign Office, 17 August 1967

"I asked Mr Rusk today whether he foresaw the possibility of a renewed diplomatic attempt to begin negotiations after the present phase of the bombing had come to an end. Mr Rusk said that this might be so but that a great deal depended on the reaction both inside and outside Vietnam after the forthcoming elections there. This was very difficult to foretell. He wished to make it clear moreover that hardly a week passed without the US Government testing out the reactions from Hanoi in one way or another. The public

position of the Hanoi Government was on record in the correspondence between President Johnson and Ho Chi Minh..." (see FCO 15/602, Telegram No. 2689)

McNamara, testifying before a Senate sub-committee in August 1967, described "American bombing of North Vietnam as ...ineffective". By Spring the following year, Clark Clifford had succeeded McNamara. Clifford was soon embroiled in studies of troop requests. He quickly came out against the idea of a further build-up.

On 3 September 1967 in South Vietnam, Thieu, despite a very poor performance, was elected President with Ky as Vice-President. It was plain that the elections would do nothing to alter the course of the war. However, President Johnson was able to portray the newly elected regime to the American public as a legal government. In return, his South Vietnamese allies could continue to count on considerable US military and economic aid. Many observers were left dissatisfied as the South Vietnamese generals continued their internal squabbles.

Various files, such as FCO 15/622, look at NLF strategy.

The new program of the National Liberation Front

Max J T McCann (British Embassy, Phnom Penh) writing to R A Fyjis-Walker (SE Asia Department, Foreign Office), 5 September 1967

"The Representative of the South Vietnam National Liberation Front in Cambodia, M. Nguyen Van Hieu, held a press conference in Phnom Penh on 2 September dealing with a recently held Extraordinary Conference of the NLF and the promulgation of the Front's new political programme. Most of what was said was the usual propaganda, though references to bogus proposals put forward by the Americans for peace and negotiation; to the farce of presidential and parliamentary elections in South Vietnam; and an appeal by the Congress to patriotic Vietnamese to eliminate their political differences, may give some clue to the apprehensions which inspired the calling of the Congress and the decision to issue what is called a new political programme..."

There follows a detailed summary of all the key points of the new program. (see FCO 15/622)

President Johnson speaking in San Antonio on 29 September 1967 declared that the US would halt its bombing campaign in exchange for "productive discussions". This gave renewed hope for a fresh wave of diplomatic initiatives.

American troop strength in Vietnam was close to half a million by the end of 1967.

31 January 1968 saw start of the Tet Offensive as nearly 70,000 Communist soldiers launched surprise attacks on more than a hundred cities and towns, including Saigon. This moved the war into a new setting - South Vietnam's supposedly impregnable urban areas. In many places the Communists were swiftly crushed by overwhelming American and South Vietnamese military power. Viet Cong commandos attacked the US Embassy in Saigon. Some of the fiercest fighting and worst atrocities took place in Hué, which was recaptured by US forces on 25 February 1968, after a prolonged battle of twenty-six days.

In 1968 Westmoreland requested 206,000 additional American troops. Clark Clifford, succeeding McNamara as Secretary of Defense, rejected the idea of a further build-up of forces. Consequently, Westmoreland was appointed Army Chief of Staff and replaced in Vietnam by General Creighton Abrams.

On 25 March 1968, the so-called "wise men" met in Washington DC to advise the President against further escalation; on 31 March President Johnson announced a partial bombing halt, offered peace talks and declared that he would not run for re-election. North Vietnamese diplomats arrived in Paris in mid-May for talks with the American delegation headed by Averell Harriman.

The British continued to pin great hopes on Soviet pressure brought to bear on the North Vietnamese. The Foreign Office hoped such pressure might yield results in Paris.

Soviet Policy on Vietnam

Gerald Clark (British Embassy in Moscow) in his letter to R B Dormann (SE Asia Department at the Foreign Office), 24 July 1968

"...In view of the pessimistic tone which now pervades the reporting here about the Paris talks, it is perhaps worth repeating that the communiqué issued at the end of the President of India's visit on 18 July said "In the opinion of both sides (ie Soviet Union and India) the talks going on in Paris and direct contacts can lay the foundation for the cessation of war in Vietnam and for the peaceful solution of the Vietnam question..."
(see FCO 15/621)

Soviet External Policy

Analysis of Mr Gromyko's Speech on 27 June 1968

"...The decision to discuss missiles, the emphasis on the Soviet Union's great power status and the expressed interest in taking part - by implication with the United States - in the solution of major international questions suggest that the Russians are more ready to assert publicly that on certain issues at least the concurrence of the super powers is essential and that co-operation between them is necessary..."
(see FCO 15/621)

The file draws a contrast between the style and approach of Kosygin and Brezhnev and their different speeches:

"We know well enough that the two men are very different in their approach. On the rare occasions when Mr Kosygin has tried to use Brezhnev-type language he has been transparently uncomfortable. This is not because he is indifferent to ideology or because his devotion to the Communist cause is less than complete. It is because by temperament and training he is a man who is able to look at a problem fairly objectively and who seeks a victory for his side by practical means, unclouded by dogmatic extravagance. Mr Brezhnev reacts more violently and is less intelligent..."
(Analysis by H F T Smith, Northern Department, Foreign Office, see FCO 15/621).

FCO 15/698 is one of a number of interesting and detailed files on UK policy on South Vietnam. It includes a White Paper published by the Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saigon 1968, on "The War in Vietnam: Liberation or Aggression?"

The same kind of issues and questions are mirrored in a discussion paper written in 1967 by Alain Enthoven, a senior assistant to McNamara, an expert on European defence issues at the Pentagon.

Stanley Karnow in *Vietnam: A History* (Pimlico revised and updated edition, 1994) describes Enthoven as "an inside observer, with no professional ax to grind" as he "dealt only tangentially with Vietnam". Karnow argues that Enthoven's perceptive analysis focussed around the key point: "The real force confronting the United States in Vietnam was less Communism than the strongest political current in the world today - nationalism. That force had welded the North Vietnamese together through more than twenty years of almost uninterrupted fighting." It would, he argued, "inspire them to continue to endure great hardship." Thus, the American bombing would not "hurt them so badly as to destroy their society or, more to the point, their hope of conquering all Vietnam." The basic challenge for America was to promote an "equally strong" sense of nationalism in the South. Without that, "we will have lost everything we have invested...no matter what military success we may achieve." He cautioned that a big US build up would ultimately weaken

South Vietnam. "If we continue to add forces and to Americanize the war, we will only erode whatever incentives the South Vietnamese people may now have to help themselves in this fight. Similarly, it would be a further sign to the South Vietnamese leaders that we will carry any load, regardless of their actions."

In many files, there is evidence that the British kept information back from the Americans - often to protect the anonymity of their sources.

**D F Murray Top Secret Minute to Mr Samuel, 27 March 1968
re: Weekly Survey of Intelligence**

"...The phrase "administrative and political void" is a quote from Dr Do who also referred to fear in the towns. Dr Do is purposely not identified as a source since this report is read by the Americans who may not know the extent to which Dr Do lets down his hair with us: he may be saying very different things to Mr Bunker, but to Mr Macle hose he is sober, realist and almost always gloomy. " (See FCO 15/490)

American proposals leading to the Paris peace talks are the subject of FCO 15/736-739.

Sir Patrick Dean (Washington DC) to Sir Paul Gore-Booth (Foreign Office), in a letter headed "Vietnam", dated 30 April 1968

"Dear Paul,

Further to my letter to the Secretary of State of 27 April, I asked Walt Rostow today whether he could give me an insight into the President's personal thinking about Vietnam, bearing in mind that the President himself had told me with great vehemence at the Diplomatic Reception last week that he was quite determined to bring about peace if he possibly could.

Rostow said that he thought that an agreement on a site for the talks would be found. The President, however, did not think that the posture to adopt before a negotiation was "to get down on his belly". He was convinced that Warsaw had been chosen in order to humiliate the United States and her Allies, and the President was personally very displeased with the Poles. They had proved to be unreliable intermediaries..."

(see FCO 15/738)

Finally, President Johnson stopped the US bombing campaign in North Vietnam. A whole series of files are devoted to the Paris Peace Talks. As well as FCO 15/736-739, see also FCO 15/743-746. UN debates are covered in FCO 15/687.

Foreign Office Background Note on Vietnam headed:
"Secretary of State's talks with Mr Katzenbach"

"...To our Ambassador in Washington Mr Rusk has made it clear that the Americans have no intention of being hustled into the wrong place. Mr Rusk seems prepared for the bargaining process on a meeting place to go on for some time and to recognise that the North Vietnamese are not more likely to accept the second list of proposed places than the first; they are represented in none of the new capitals suggested and Paris, which opinion in general would expect Hanoi to accept, has been omitted by the Americans..." (see FCO 15/738)

Vietnam: The Paris Talks

D F Murray to Mr Wilkinson, Foreign Office note of 9 May 1968

"On the eve of the United States/North Vietnamese bilateral talks in Paris, I submit a memorandum to which I have rather euphemistically given the title of "Prospects." [this was a 9 page document]. The purpose of this memorandum is to set out as simply as possible what I would estimate to be the objectives of both sides in these discussions, and also to highlight the major problems – all of them depressingly complex – which are likely to arise as soon as the talks get beyond the opening courtesies..." (see FCO 15/738)

There is lots of material on the propaganda of both sides. See FCO 15/756-759 for assessments of captured North Vietnamese and Viet Cong documents. FCO 15/758 includes a 60page Top Secret booklet compiled by the North Vietnamese entitled "Resolution of the Central Office for South Vietnam".

However, the British Foreign Office prided itself in the need for balanced analysis. Plenty of information was kept back from the Americans and there was no sense in which pro-American propaganda would be seen as anything other than what it was. Information was gathered from all sources. There are numerous files which document the views of various countries – European nations such as Germany, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium, Norway and Sweden - the attitudes on Vietnam of Commonwealth countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, as well as feedback from those closer to the field of conflict - Thailand, Pakistan and Indonesia.

The activities of Cuban military missions were carefully monitored - see FCO 15/562 and 568. The Foreign Office also took careful note of Chinese attitudes, the Sino-Soviet situation and the impact of Chinese policy on the war.

Walt Rostow's visit to the UK is described in FCO 15/779; included are the briefing notes for the Prime Minister for discussions on Vietnam.

Relief activities, care for war orphans and refugees are also important topics – see files such as FCO 15/722-726 and FCO 15/768.

As 1968 drew to a close, many of the files contain comments on the prospects for 1969, the new American President and his team, the progress of covert negotiations as well as faltering events in Paris. Richard Nixon had been elected President of the United States on 5 November, choosing Henry Kissinger as his National Security Adviser. Kissinger, like Nixon, believed that the war had to be ended "honorably" for the sake of America's global prestige. No sooner was he installed in the White House than Kissinger directed his staff to canvass American officials in Washington DC and in Saigon for their appraisals of the prospects for Vietnam. American troop strength in Vietnam at 31 December 1968 stood at a total of 540,000 front-line soldiers. The following year would see the start of some significant withdrawals as part of the US policy of "Vietnamization" as Kissinger sought an agreement that would give the Saigon Government a reasonable chance of survival - a "decent interval" as Kissinger later described it - allowing the Americans to complete troop withdrawals and pass full control to a viable South Vietnamese Government.

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