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Statement by General Maxwell D. Taylor (Ret.) Before the
Fulbright Committee, February 17, 1966

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Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen:

I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of the committee for your willingness to hear my views on the situation in South Viet-Nam. I am afraid that they will not be new to many of you since you have often heard me express them in the days when I was an official of the Government. I agree thoroughly with the motivating purpose of these hearings, namely, to analyze the reasons why we are involved in South Viet-Nam, the importance of this involvement and the effectiveness with which we are dealing with the resultant problems. If my personal views can assist in clarifying these points, I am most happy to present them.

For the purpose of providing a basis for our subsequent discussion, with your permission I would like to make a continuous statement which will undertake to answer three basic questions. First, what are we doing in South Viet-Nam? Secondly, how are we doing it? Finally, can we improve upon what we are doing?

A simple statement of what we are doing in South Viet-Nam is to say that we are engaged in a clash of purpose and interest with the militant wing of the Communist movement represented by Hanoi, the Viet Cong and Peking. Opposing these Communist forces, in the front rank stand the government and people of South Viet-Nam supported primarily by the United States but assisted in varying degree by some 30 other nations.

The purpose of the Hanoi camp is perfectly clear and has been since 1954. It is to absorb the 15,000,000 people of South Viet-Nam into a single

Communist state under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh and his associates in Hanoi. In the course of accomplishing this basic purpose, the Communist leaders expect to undermine the position of the United States in Asia and to demonstrate the efficacy of the so-called "War of Liberation" as a cheap, safe and disavowable technique for the future expansion of militant Communism.

Our purpose is equally clear and easily defined. In his Baltimore speech of April 7, 1965, President Johnson did so in the following terms: "Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves -- only that the people of South Viet-Nam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way." This has been our basic objective since 1954. It has been pursued by three successive administrations and remains our basic objective today.

Like the Communists, we have secondary objectives derived from the basic one. We intend to show that the "War of Liberation", far from being cheap, safe and disavowable is costly, dangerous and doomed to failure. We must destroy the myth of its invincibility in order to protect the independence of many weak nations which are vulnerable targets for subversive aggression -- to use the proper term for the "War of Liberation". We can not leave while force and violence threaten them.

The question has been raised as to whether this clash of interests is really important to us. An easy and incomplete answer would be that it must be important to us since it is considered so important by the other side. Their leadership has made it quite clear that they regard South Viet-Nam as the testing ground for the "War of Liberation" and that after its anticipated

success there, it will be used widely about the world. Kosygin told Mr. Reston in his interview of last December: "We believe that national liberation wars are just wars and they will continue as long as there is national oppression by imperialist powers." Before him, Khrushchev in January, 1961, had the following to say: "Now a word about national liberation wars. The armed struggle by the Vietnamese people or the war of the Algerian people serve as the latest example of such wars. These are revolutionary wars. Such wars are not only admissible but inevitable. Can such wars flare up in the future? They can. The Communists fully support such just wars and march in the front rank with peoples waging liberation struggles." General Giap, the Commander-in-Chief of the North Vietnamese forces, has made the following comment: "South Viet-Nam is the model of the national liberation movement of our time. If the special warfare that the United States imperialists are testing in South Viet-Nam is overcome, then it can be defeated anywhere in the world." The Minister of Defense of Communist China, Marshal Lin Piao, in a long statement of policy in September, 1965, described in detail how Mao Tse-tung expects to utilize the "War of Liberation" to expand Communism in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

These testimonials show that, apart from the goal of imposing Communism on 15,000,000 South Vietnamese, the success of the "War of Liberation" is in itself an important objective of the Communist leadership. On our side, we can understand the grave consequences of such a success for us. President Eisenhower in 1959 stressed the military importance of defending Southeast

Asia in the following terms. He said: "Strategically, South Viet-Nam's capture by the Communists would bring their power several hundred miles into a hitherto free region. The remaining countries of Southeast Asia would be menaced by a great flanking movement. The loss of South Viet-Nam would set in motion a crumbling process which could as it progresses have grave consequences for the forces of freedom." This view has often been referred to as the "domino theory." I personally do not believe in such a theory if it means belief in a law of nature which requires the collapse of each neighboring state in an inevitable sequence, following a Communist victory in South Viet-Nam. However, I am deeply impressed with the probable effects world-wide, not necessarily in areas contiguous to South Viet-Nam, if the "War of Liberation" scores a significant victory there. President Kennedy commented on this danger with moving eloquence: "The great battleground for the defense and expansion of freedom today is the southern half of the globe -- Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East -- the lands of the people who harbor the greatest hopes. The enemies of freedom think they can destroy the hopes of the newer nations and they aim to do it before the end of this decade. This is a struggle of will and determination as much as one of force and violence. It is a battle for the conquest of the minds and souls as much as for the conquest of lives and territory. In such a struggle, we can not fail to take sides". Gentlemen, I think a simple answer to the question, what are we doing in South Viet-Nam, is to say that for more than a decade we have been taking sides in a cause in which we have a vital stake.

My second question was, how are we doing in the pursuit of our objectives in South Viet-Nam? Both sides in the struggle have over the years developed the current strategies which are now in confrontation. During 1964 and 1965, the Hanoi leadership attempted to exploit the political turbulence which followed the fall of President Diem in November, 1963. Greatly encouraged by the disorder which marked the political scene in Saigon, the Communist leadership made a massive effort to press on to victory. To meet the growing needs in military manpower, they began the infiltration of personnel of the North Vietnamese Army, first as individual replacements, later as formed tactical units. Utilizing this new strength, they intended to make the monsoon offensive of 1965 a major drive for significant military victories. Concurrently, they increased the sabotage directed at the land communication system in South Viet-Nam for the purpose of hampering the distribution of commodities and thus adding to the economic stresses in the South. Terrorism was stepped up and directed with added frequency at United States personnel and installations. They apparently hoped to be able to seize and hold politically important localities such as district and provincial capitals, to demoralize the Vietnamese people and government and to demonstrate to the United States that we were backing a cause which must inevitably fail.

Faced with this growing threat, the Vietnamese Government and our American officials were obliged to develop a counter strategy to blunt and

defeat the intensified efforts of our adversaries. It evolved out of the experience of the preceding months and years and assumed its full form with the critical decisions in 1965 to introduce United States ground forces and to initiate the bombing campaign against military targets in the North. Both of these courses of action had been under consideration at least since November, 1961, when I presented my report to President Kennedy following a visit to Saigon to appraise the growing criticality of the situation there. We did not take either action at that time but my report contained the following comment with regard to the possible necessity of using air power against the source of the Viet Cong support in North Viet-Nam: "While we feel that the program recommended represents those measures which should be taken now, I would not suggest that it is the final word. If the Hanoi decision is to continue the irregular war declared on South Viet-Nam in 1959 with continued infiltration and covert support of guerrilla bands in the territory of our ally, we will then have to decide whether to accept as legitimate the continued guidance, training and support of a guerrilla war across an international boundary. Can we admit the establishment of the common law that the party attacked and his friends are denied the right to strike the source of the aggression after the fact that external aggression is clearly established?" By February, 1965, it became clear that we could no longer tolerate this clandestine support from the immune sanctuary in North Viet-Nam which served as the external base for the Viet Cong insurgency.

In brief, the strategy which we have been and are pursuing consists of four components. The first includes the many activities directed at increasing

the effectiveness of our ground combat against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units in South Viet-Nam. For this purpose, we have made the utmost efforts to increase the indigenous forces of South Viet-Nam, always mindful that this is a Vietnamese war in which we should do only those things which the Vietnamese can not do for themselves or can not do in time to avert defeat. From July 1954 to July 1955 the armed forces and police of South Viet-Nam were increased by some 140,000 trained men, a very creditable effort on the part of this small country where military leadership and administrative experience are inevitably in short supply. As of today, the overall military strength in South Viet-Nam is approaching 700,000, the largest military force in being among all of our allies.

Encouraging though the results have been in increasing the Vietnamese strength, during the year cited, our intelligence authorities believed that the Viet Cong increased their total strength by some 60,000. In other words, we were advancing at a rate only a little better than 2 to 1 in our favor. Since history has shown that the government forces successfully opposing a guerrilla insurgency in the past have required a much greater preponderance of strength, 10 to 1 or 12 to 1 for example, it was quite clear that the Vietnamese could not raise forces fast enough to keep pace with the growing threat of the Viet Cong in time. It was ~~this sobering~~ conclusion that led to the decision to introduce American ground forces with their unique mobility and massive fire power to compensate for the deficiency in Vietnamese strength. With such forces available, it was felt that the ratios of required strength cited above would lose much of their validity.

I am thoroughly aware of the concern of this committee over the growing requirement for American troops in South Viet-Nam. Is this an endless requirement in an open-ended war? I do not believe that anyone can give a completely satisfactory reply to this question but I can suggest the consideration of certain limiting factors which have a bearing on the matter.

First, on our side, we are not setting as an objective for our ground forces the occupation of all South Viet-Nam or the hunting down of the last armed guerrilla. We are in Viet-Nam to safeguard the people who are the real target of the enemy. Terrain has little meaning except insofar as it supports people. Thus the extent of control and protection of population is the true measure of progress rather than control of territory. By the former indicator we are not doing too badly. Senator Mansfield estimates in his recent report that the government controls about 60 percent of the population, the Viet Cong about 22 percent, leaving 18 percent contested. When I left Saigon last July, those figures were 53 percent, 25 percent, 22 percent.

The point I wish to make is that when one expresses our military objective in terms of securing a high proportion of the population, the troop requirement loses some of its impression of open-endedness. Under this concept, the prime target of our United States forces becomes the main line enemy units which constitute the greatest threat to population -- not the entire guerrilla force wherever found.

Another limiting factor is the logistic difficulty of the Viet Cong in supporting increased numbers of troops in combat. The combination of

air attacks on their lines of supply and of increasing ground attacks on their units which must then consume supplies at an increased rate places some kind of ceiling on the forces they can maintain in South Viet-Nam.

I wish I knew exactly where that ceiling is but our basic data on Viet Cong logistics are too uncertain to permit precision. But the point is that there are factors which tend to keep our troop requirement finite and limit the capability of Hanoi to support large numbers of additional forces in the South.

The second component of our strategy relates to the use of air power against military targets in North Viet Nam. It is well to remind ourselves the reasons which impelled us to this decision. There were three which we recognized perfectly at the time of the decision and which remain valid today. The first was to give the people of South Viet-Nam the assurance for the first time of imposing a direct penalty on the source of the aggression. For eleven years they had suffered the depredations of the Viet Cong without exacting any price from the country which provided the direction and support. The morale of the people and that of the armed forces in Viet-Nam received an unestimable lift from the decision to use the air forces of both our countries against military targets in the homeland of the enemy -- a lift which has certainly contributed to sustaining their will to continue the fight.

The second reason for the decision was to use air power, insofar as it could be effective, to limit and render more difficult the infiltration of men and supplies from North Viet-Nam to South Viet-Nam. It was perfectly clear

from the start as it is clear today that air power would not be able to stop infiltration. We were quite sure, however, that it could impose a ceiling on the forces which could be sustained in combat in South Viet-Nam. I do not believe that anyone who has reflected on the effect of the destruction of bridges, ports, railyards and similar facilities, and on the effect of the limitation of daylight movement on the roads throughout a large part of North Viet-Nam can avoid the conclusion that the air campaign has had an important effect in slowing down infiltration and in raising its price. A testimonial to its effectiveness was the feverish activity in North Viet-Nam during the bombing pause to repair bomb damage and to move transport in daylight.

The third reason for the decision to use our airpower was to provide a sobering reminder to the leaders in Hanoi that progressively they must pay a mounting price for the continuation of their support of the Viet Cong insurgency. In spite of their defiant statements of determination to endure these attacks forever, I for one know from experience that no one derives any enjoyment from receiving incoming shells and bombs day after day and I have no doubt that the warning message is getting through to the leadership of Hanoi. In a very real sense, the objective of our air campaign is to change the will of the enemy leadership. We hope that, in due course, the combination of the Viet Cong failure to win victory on the ground in South Viet-Nam and the effect of continued air attacks will present to the Hanoi leadership a situation so disadvantageous that they will decide that it is in their interest to halt their aggression, redefine their aims, and join with us in discussing ways and means of improving the lot of all Viet-Nam.

The third component of our current strategy includes all of those non-military activities which are so important but which receive too little public attention. It is not that our leaders have been unaware of the importance of better government, better living conditions and the promise of a better future for the people of this country. Unfortunately, lack of security and governmental instability were for a long time factors limiting the effectiveness of the many programs for development and reconstruction. But now, with the growing military effectiveness of our forces on the ground and the slowly developing maturity of the civil leadership in Saigon and in the provinces, I hope that conditions will permit much greater progress than in the past in bringing the benefits of a comparatively normal life to this war-weary people. As you know, the recent Honolulu Conference devoted most of its time to a consideration of these non-military activities. If we are to leave a viable country after the end of the Viet Cong insurgency, it is essential that we make progress even under the conditions of war in stabilizing the government, the society and the economy.

The fourth component of our strategy is that which relates to our political and diplomatic efforts to initiate the discussion of a peaceful settlement of this conflict. The so-called "peace offensive" is so well known as to require no discussion at this time, as is also the discouraging lack of response from the other side. I am obliged to feel that the Hanoi leadership is not yet convinced that it must mend its ways. Perhaps they still hope for some kind of military victory in the South. Certainly, they are not convinced that in some way the United States can not be detached

from the support of South Viet-Nam. They hope against hope that through international or domestic pressures our government can be forced off course. They have not forgotten that the Viet Minh won more in Paris than in Dien Bien Phu and believe that the Viet Cong may be as fortunate in Washington. They doubt the will of the American public to continue the conflict indefinitely. In a contest of patience, they expect to win even though North Viet-Nam like the South has been constantly at war for over twenty years. Until it becomes perfectly clear to them that we are going to stay on course regardless of anything they can do, I am afraid we are not likely to see them at a conference table. Or if they come unconvinced of the inevitability of the failure of their present course, we can expect them to stall, delay and maneuver just as they did at Panmunjom in Korea for over two years.

In summary then, our four point strategy consists of a complex but coherent package of measures designed to improve the effectiveness of our forces on the ground in South Viet-Nam, to exploit our air superiority by attacking military targets in North Viet-Nam, to stabilize the political, social and economic systems in South Viet-Nam and to seek an honorable negotiated settlement of the conflict. It is limited as to objective, as to geographical scope, as to weapons and forces employed, and as to targets attacked. All parts of it are inter-related; all parts are indispensable; we must be successful on all fronts. The key, I believe, is inexorable pressure at all points, directed at the will, the ability and the means of the Communist aggressors.

It is a fair question to ask, whether this is the best strategy to attain our basic objective. I am the first to concede that we can and must do better in all four categories of our efforts but, unhappily, progress toward peaceful negotiations is a bilateral affair which can progress only with some cooperation from Hanoi. As you know, thus far that cooperation has been withheld.

Having conceded the need and possibility for improvement within the components of our current strategy, I must add in honesty that I know of no new strategic proposal which would serve as a better alternative to the one which I have described--that is, provided we do not sacrifice our basic objective. There are, of course, the two old alternatives which we have always rejected and I hope will continue to reject--to withdraw and give up our basic objective or to widen the war with massive air attacks on the North Vietnamese or even on Chinese targets. These two courses of action appear so to contravene our national and international interests that I shall not take the time of the committee to discuss them here.

The only new proposal of which I am aware is the so-called "Holding Strategy" which, in its least extreme form, calls for a cessation of United States reinforcements and a limitation of military operations to those necessary for the security of our forces and for the maintenance of our military presence. On several occasions, I have expressed myself in opposition to such a course of action. To button up our troops in defensive positions and thus to the sacrifice of their unique attributes of mobility and fire power would constitute the abandonment of our allies

on the battlefield and would assign a most inglorious mission to our troops who, for the present, have high morale and complete confidence in their ability to cope with the Viet Cong in the field. The effect of such behavior on our Vietnamese allies could be disastrous. At a minimum, it would destroy all confidence in Viet-Nam in ultimate success and would encourage the timid and the wavering to turn to the Viet Cong for protection and to the Liberation Front for political accommodation. Another serious result of such passivity would be the impossibility of obtaining honorable terms at any peace table. The Communists are tough enough to deal with when one has the upper hand. They would never give us acceptable terms if the military situation reflected weakness on our part and a readiness to withdraw. Our only alternative would be to accept dishonorable terms or to continue to sit out the war indefinitely on a supine defensive. I can hardly see the American public or this Congress long supporting such a course of action. Thus, I am obliged to conclude that the so-called "Holding Strategy" is really not an alternative way of reaching our objective of an independent South Viet-Nam free from attack. We could never reach it on such a course. Rather than being a true alternative, it amounts to the modification and erosion of our basic objective and hence appears to me to be unacceptable.

In conclusion, I feel that our present strategy is the best that has been suggested and that it is important that we adhere to it, always striving to improve our performance within the confines of its general concept. Certainly, it is not without risks--but little of value in this world is

accomplished without risk. It seems to me that the risks entailed are warranted by the importance of our stake in Southeast Asia. Congress recognized this importance in the wording of the Joint Resolution of August, 1964: "The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia." I subscribe to those words and believe that we should live by them and by the words of President Johnson when he said in regard to our commitment in South Viet-Nam: "We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement." Thank you gentlemen.