

# AIR FORCE



VIETNAM FIFTIETH  
COMMEMORATION

# LEMAY ON VIETNAM

EDITED BY KENNETH H. WILLIAMS

AIR  
FORCE  
*History  
and  
Museums*  
PROGRAM

## COVER

Gen. Curtis E. LeMay (*right*) and President Lyndon B. Johnson (*center*) listen to the secretary of defense, Robert S. McNamara (*left*), during a meeting at Johnson's Texas ranch on December 22, 1964. For the full image with all of the Joint Chiefs, see page 12 below. Photo by Yoichi Okamoto. *Johnson Library*.



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Washington, D.C.  
2017

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**Gen. Curtis E. LeMay with President John F. Kennedy in the White House Rose Garden during a 1962 event for foreign air force officers. *USAF.***

# Introduction

With his memoir comment that the United States should threaten to bomb North Vietnam “back into the Stone Age,” Gen. Curtis E. LeMay became forever linked with the Vietnam War.<sup>1</sup> His observation has resonated so long across the decades that few remember that LeMay stepped down as Air Force chief of staff on February 1, 1965, a month before the first sorties of the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign. The general continued to argue his aggressive position after retirement in books, articles, interviews, and as the vice-presidential running mate with third-party candidate George C. Wallace in the 1968 presidential election.

Large-scale “strategic” bombing had no greater champion than Curtis Emerson LeMay (1906–90), opinions that made him a lightning rod in both the defense establishment and the general population.<sup>2</sup> The Ohio native emerged from World War II as a well-known figure, the young general, only thirty-eight when the conflict ended, who had been the architect of the devastating aerial campaign that brought Japan to the brink of surrender. Whether the bombing, including the use of incendiary and nuclear devices,<sup>3</sup> actually forced Japanese capitulation and whether the toll, particularly in civilian casualties, was justifiable are issues that scholars and military strategists have continued to debate since that time.<sup>4</sup> In LeMay’s mind there was no equivocation, however; as he related in the interviews below and elsewhere, he firmly believed that air power had won the war, saved Allied and Axis lives that would have been lost in subsequent ground campaigns, and could prevail in future conflicts.

In the postwar period, General LeMay remained a public figure, first as the organizer of the Berlin Airlift, and subsequently as he built Strategic Air Command (SAC) into America’s Cold War bulwark. At SAC, LeMay demanded discipline and honed the precision of his force.<sup>5</sup> The massive response capabilities that SAC and LeMay provided fit well with the “new look” defense policies of the Dwight D. Eisenhower presidential administration and the muscular anticommunist foreign policy pursued by Eisenhower’s secretary of state, John Foster Dulles.<sup>6</sup>



Gen. Thomas D. White, the Air Force chief of staff (1957–61), brought LeMay to the Pentagon as his vice chief in 1957 in large part because LeMay's bomber command experience complemented the "massive retaliation" thinking of the Eisenhower administration. Although White later noted that he "never had occasion to regret the choice" of LeMay, he found that the general had "almost no social graces" and was "not a good conversationalist." White, who had several attaché postings in his background, was one of the Air Force's most polished officers, while LeMay was a brusque, hard-driving field commander. As Gen. David C. Jones later put it, LeMay had been a "superb military commander" but was a "lousy politician." LeMay saw weakness in White's willingness to strike deals, telling his biographer that White "thought politics was the art of compromise. He would go into battle ready to compromise." LeMay stated that "I never believed in that. I thought if you believed in something, God damn it, you got in there and fought for it." White, who was more experienced in the halls of power from his time as vice chief and as a congressional liaison, left LeMay in charge of overseeing much of the general operation of the Air Force as a military service, which by most accounts he did well, albeit with a heavy emphasis on strategic assets over tactical. As vice chief and subsequently as chief of staff, LeMay began moving his SAC-developed leaders into senior positions, to the point that three-fourths of the high-ranking Air Force officers at the Pentagon were SAC products by the time LeMay retired in 1965.<sup>7</sup>

The major direct confrontations with the Soviets or Chinese for which LeMay prepared and drilled SAC, and subsequently the entire Air Force, never materialized, however. Cold War engagement in the 1950s and into the 1960s devolved into insurgent confrontations in such out-of-the-way places as Laos and Vietnam. The U.S. military, including the Air Force with its LeMay-built fleet of heavy bombers, found itself ill-suited for counterinsurgency warfare. As military historian Earl H. Tilford Jr. put it, "The Air Force was prepared to fly into Vietnam against guerrilla forces on the wings of the same conventional strategy used in bombing Nazi Germany in 1944."<sup>8</sup>

Into this evolving geopolitical situation stepped John F. Kennedy in 1961. The young president brought with him a business-experienced technocrat as the new secretary of defense in Robert S. McNamara; university-based scholars as his senior national security advisors in McGeorge Bundy and Walt W. Rostow; and a retired Army general as his personal military advisor in Maxwell D. Taylor. As LeMay noted in some of the interviews below, Taylor's opinions had not been particularly popular with the military establishment when he had served as chief of staff of the Army (1955–59), and many at the Pentagon were concerned by Taylor's close relationship with the incoming president.<sup>9</sup>



**General LeMay with Gen. Thomas D. White, his predecessor as Air Force chief of staff, at a function at Fort Myer after White had retired. White found when he brought LeMay to the Pentagon as vice chief in 1957 that the former SAC commander had “almost no social graces.” *USAF*.**

Kennedy’s first senior military appointment was for the position of Air Force chief of staff, as White retired in mid-1961. LeMay’s biographers have tried to sort through the conflicting accounts of why Kennedy decided on LeMay. Eugene M. Zuckert, Kennedy’s secretary of the Air Force, told biographer Thomas M. Coffey that of the available candidates, “I didn’t think there was anybody who could get the Air Force behind him the way LeMay could.” He believed the choice was “very simple” and made the recommendation to the secretary of defense. McNamara told biographer Warren Kozak that he and the president believed LeMay was a “fine commander” and that “we thought we could reason with him.” After the Senate confirmed LeMay, Kennedy brought the general to the

White House for his swearing in as the new chief of staff on June 30, 1961. McNamara was conspicuous by his absence from the ceremony.<sup>10</sup>

It was a momentous time for General LeMay to be joining the Joint Chiefs Staff (JCS). The United States had spent the spring considering intervention in Laos before the warring parties there reached a tenuous cease-fire on May 3. The ill-conceived Bay of Pigs operation in April had publicly embarrassed the new administration and increased Kennedy's skepticism of military and intelligence experts, leading him to tighten his inner circle and move away from the established National Security Council model (as LeMay discusses below).<sup>11</sup> Kennedy had sent Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to Vietnam in May to investigate the worsening situation there, and he dispatched Taylor and Rostow in October 1961 to consider troop deployment after Viet Cong activity increased. By that time, the communist government in East Germany was constructing the Berlin Wall, with Moscow's backing.<sup>12</sup>

As chief of staff, the blunt, cigar-chomping LeMay clashed almost immediately with Secretary McNamara, most publicly over the B-70 bomber platform, a program the Kennedy administration threatened and subsequently killed. LeMay suffered a heart attack in December 1961 during the midst of the B-70 debate and spent a month and a half hospitalized at Andrews Air Force Base. LeMay described McNamara as a "very impressive man" with a "tremendous memory" who would "overwhelm the audience"—including Kennedy, Johnson, and Congress—"with what he called facts and figures." However, LeMay believed that McNamara had "absolutely no respect for the military at all," had "little respect for anybody," and was "completely ruthless and unprincipled." LeMay did not think McNamara trusted Taylor "any more than the rest of us because he had the military background."<sup>13</sup>

Taylor was already anathema to the Air Force before he resurfaced as a Kennedy advisor, having written in his post-retirement national security polemic, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, in 1959 that "the Army considers that the Air Force is depending too much and too long on manned aircraft, both bombers and interceptors." He advocated that "this force needs to be modernized through a more rapid replacement of bombers by missiles." Taylor convinced Kennedy and McNamara that the "flexible response" capabilities he championed were the way of the future for the military.<sup>14</sup>

Kennedy had told confidants that he liked having proven field commanders like LeMay on the Joint Chiefs in the uncertain times early in his administration,<sup>15</sup> but the president increasingly listened more to McNamara and Taylor and less to the Joint Chiefs. Kennedy eventually



**President Kennedy presided at the installation of General LeMay as Air Force chief of staff at the White House on June 30, 1961. Eugene M. Zuckert, the secretary of the Air Force, administered the oath. Photo by Abbie Rowe. Kennedy Library.**

formalized the advisory chain when he brought Taylor out of military retirement and appointed him chairman of the Joint Chiefs, with Taylor assuming that duty on October 1, 1962. In that position, Taylor saw his role more as a supporter of the president's foreign policy than as an advocate of the opinions of the Joint Chiefs.<sup>16</sup>

“LeMay, your airplanes are no good,” LeMay recalled Taylor telling him many times. According to LeMay, Taylor “thought ground defense would make the airplane obsolete.” LeMay conceded that Taylor’s opinions “would drive me practically crazy” and later stated that “it took a lot of will power to keep from letting him have one.” LeMay said that he “seldom agreed with Taylor on most of the basic questions.” Protocol seated LeMay to the right of Taylor at the Joint Chiefs’ meetings, and LeMay made sure to keep his lit cigar to his left side, trailing smoke into Taylor’s face.<sup>17</sup>



**President Kennedy talking with General LeMay outside the West Wing on October 1, 1962. Kennedy respected LeMay as a military commander, but an administration official said conversations with LeMay left Kennedy “frantic” and in “sort of a fit.” Photo by Cecil Stoughton. *Kennedy Library*.**

In a recent work on Gen. Wallace M. Greene Jr. of the Marines, who became LeMay’s closest ally among the Joint Chiefs, historian Nicholas J. Schlosser observed that Taylor “regularly discouraged dissent, presented his own views as if they were shared by the entire Joint Chiefs, and often failed to provide the Chiefs with adequate information as they deliberated on military issues.” LeMay was far from the only service chief who was increasingly frustrated with their chairman.<sup>18</sup>

Of course LeMay did not go out of his way to foster better understanding with Pentagon colleagues like Taylor and McNamara, either. As LeMay explained in the June 1984 interview excerpted below, “The



**President Kennedy meeting in the Oval Office on October 2, 1963, with Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, whom Kennedy had brought out of retirement to appoint as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. Photo by Abbie Rowe. Kennedy Library.**

administration spouted new phrases and things of that sort, but as far as the Air Force was concerned, we had no radical change in thinking at all.” With little interest in different approaches, LeMay had a habit of turning up his hearing aid only when he was discussing his own ideas. As Roswell L. Gilpatric, the deputy secretary of defense, recalled, with LeMay literally tuned out, “you couldn’t conduct a dialogue” with him. “He just had one position. He knew what it was going to be.” Gilpatric added that LeMay advocated his stances “very forcefully and effectively, and he had a big following in Congress and elsewhere.”<sup>19</sup>

LeMay’s relationships with McNamara, Taylor, and Presidents Kennedy and Johnson are important context for LeMay’s comments in this book. Taylor thought LeMay was politically naïve and believed that his appointment as Air Force chief of staff was a “big mistake.”<sup>20</sup> Kennedy became equally frustrated, with Gilpatric remembering that when Kennedy met with the Air Force leader, “he ended up in a sort of fit.” The president would “just be frantic at the end of a session with LeMay.” The general wouldn’t listen and would make what Kennedy thought were “outrageous proposals that bore no relation to the state of affairs in the 1960s.”<sup>21</sup> Kennedy’s successor

had a similar reaction. After a meeting with LeMay in mid-1964, Johnson confided to an aide that “I get anxious and look for the fire exits when a general wants to get tough. LeMay scares the hell out of me.”<sup>22</sup>

Many in the overlapping Kennedy and Johnson administrations viewed LeMay as an anachronism, a belief reinforced in the public mind during LeMay’s Joint Chiefs tenure with the release in January 1964 of Stanley Kubrick’s dark comedy *Dr. Strangelove, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. A number of observers likened LeMay to both Air Force generals featured in the film, the paranoid Jack D. Ripper and the war-giddy Buck Turgidson.<sup>23</sup> These images continued to hound LeMay, particularly during the 1968 political campaign. At his introductory press conference with Wallace, LeMay joined the ticket with a rambling discourse on unrestrained warfare, including the potential use of nuclear weapons.<sup>24</sup>

\* \* \*

Readers of the interviews and excerpts that follow may come away with the impression that the civilian higher-ups in the Department of Defense and the White House never gave a full hearing to General LeMay’s plans for a massive strategic bombing campaign against North Vietnam, and that few shared his frustrations with the national security apparatus in the first half of the 1960s. Neither was the case. LeMay got his hearings, even with presidents, although he later said that the service chiefs risked retribution from McNamara and Taylor if they went directly to Kennedy or Johnson. Kennedy began moving away from interaction with the Joint Chiefs, but Johnson engaged their proposals after he became president, particularly in 1964 as the United States considered various levels of escalation. In fact, Johnson apparently heard more than he wanted to hear. “Ken, have you any idea what Curtis LeMay would be doing if I weren’t here to stop him?” Johnson said to John Kenneth Galbraith during this period.<sup>25</sup>

These points stated, the Joints Chiefs clearly felt that their unvarnished views were not making it through the chain of command to Johnson. Maj. Gen. Chester V. “Ted” Clifton Jr., U.S. Army, who was Johnson’s senior military aide, noted in March 1964 that the service chiefs had begun referring to the McNamara-Taylor planning on Vietnam as the “Asian Bay of Pigs.” He observed that this time, “they are sure” that they “cannot be blamed, because each of the members is keeping careful record of what he has advocated to General Taylor and the Secretary of Defense.” Clifton added that the Joint Chiefs “feel that the things they are advocating have not been presented *strongly* to the President.”<sup>26</sup>



**General LeMay with President Lyndon B. Johnson at Johnson's ranch in Texas in December 1963. "I get anxious and look for fire exits when a general wants to get tough," Johnson told an aide in mid-1964. "LeMay scares the hell out of me." *National Archives.***

In the same memo, Clifton commented on another pending issue, the approaching end of LeMay's term as chief of staff, which was to be up in June 1964. "His feelings run so deeply," Clifton wrote, that "he will be tempted to speak out on this matter, especially when he feels that so much more should be done against the North Viet Nam sanctuary, and especially when he feels that this proposition hasn't been reviewed thoroughly and that all the Chiefs haven't had a chance to speak on the matter before the 'inadequate' courses of action were announced."<sup>27</sup>

Despite the president's concerns about LeMay's ideas, Johnson re-appointed LeMay for another seven months as chief of staff, surprising most of his advisors. At the same time, the president named Gen. John P. McConnell as the vice chief, with widespread assumption that he would be LeMay's successor as chief of staff. Johnson had spent a couple of weeks considering other options for LeMay, including an ambassadorship, but he decided to keep LeMay's criticism in-house, at least through the 1964 presidential election. LeMay reminded the president that "I don't agree with what your secretary of defense is trying to do." LeMay recounted that Johnson replied, "Yes, I understand that. Just go back over there [to the





Secretary McNamara at a press conference on April 26, 1965, giving a briefing about interdiction efforts along routes into South Vietnam from the Ho Chi Minh trail. General LeMay described McNamara as “a very impressive man,” but one who was also “completely ruthless and unprincipled.” Photo by Marion Trikosko. *Library of Congress*.

Pentagon] and do what you think is best for the country.”” The president let LeMay break the news of his reappointment to McNamara. The extension meant that LeMay was still a member of the Joint Chiefs in the summer and fall of 1964 as the situation in Vietnam worsened.<sup>28</sup>

LeMay had support on the Joint Chiefs for aggressive action during this time from General Greene, the commandant of the Marine Corps as of January 1964, whose recently published notes from this period echo LeMay’s frustration with McNamara, Taylor, and the civilian national security apparatus.<sup>29</sup> Greene had responded to a McNamara proposal in March 1964 by declaring that “half-measures won’t win in South Vietnam.”<sup>30</sup> For his part, McNamara was not only reluctant to move beyond a more limited response, but also skeptical about whether more drastic measures would have the desired effect. When LeMay sent forward a list of prospective targets in North Vietnam in August 1964—the plan that LeMay references often in the text that follows—McNamara wrote back: “If the destruction of the 94 targets were not to succeed in its objective of destroying the DRV [North Vietnamese] will and capability, what courses of action would you recommend?”<sup>31</sup>

LeMay had little use for even considering more limited measures. During the 1964 discussions, he declared that “we are swatting at flies when we should be going after the manure pile.”<sup>32</sup> As the following

interviews and writings show, LeMay remained convinced that a large-scale bombing campaign that directly attacked Hanoi, the port at Haiphong, and other major targets deep in North Vietnam would have significantly altered the war, particularly if the strikes had taken place early in the U.S. involvement in the conflict. As the war progressed, the North Vietnamese improved their anti-aircraft capabilities, especially with surface-to-air missiles, and imported their MiG fleet. LeMay discusses his advocacy for the mining of Haiphong harbor, a step that President Richard M. Nixon finally approved just weeks before the June 1972 interview with LeMay included here. The general did not mention the proposed bombing of the dikes in the Red River Delta near Hanoi, a long-debated step that was becoming a political issue at the time of this interview. The North Vietnamese alleged that some dikes had been hit in the spring 1972 bombing campaign that evolved into Linebacker I. Nixon and his advisors continued to contemplate dike targeting as part of the Linebacker II missions in December 1972.<sup>33</sup>

The Linebacker II operation, with B-52 strikes against military and industrial targets in and around Hanoi, approximated the type of campaign that LeMay had wanted to see in Vietnam from the beginning, as he and other general officers discussed in the June 1984 interview below that concludes the book. The perceived success of Linebacker II, according to military historian Mark Clodfelter, led post-Vietnam air commanders to LeMay-like conclusions and to advocate “no sweeping doctrinal changes. They parade[d] Linebacker II as proof that bombing will work in limited war.” Clodfelter also noted that the Air Force leaders “dismiss[ed] the notion that too much force could trigger nuclear devastation,” much as LeMay does in the following passages. He showed little concern about potential Chinese or Soviet intervention and a wider war.<sup>34</sup>

Air Force historian Brian D. Laslie has observed that “preconceived notions of how air warfare should be conducted and the way in which the U.S. Air Force prepared its pilots in the 1950s and 1960s were proven wrong during the war in Vietnam.”<sup>35</sup> But, as Clodfelter noted, it took the Air Force time to acknowledge what he called the “limits of air power”—the title of his book—that Vietnam exposed, as well as the deficiencies in tactics and training that Laslie examined in his work.

The significance of the LeMay observations that follow is that they explain in good detail the thinking behind why and how the Air Force had been developed the way it was, and why its leaders continued to believe what they did, even in light of Vietnam. There is more context and nuance beyond bombing “back into the Stone Age,” and also explanation from LeMay on how he thought the service could be flexible in counter-guerrilla



**President Johnson meeting with the Joint Chiefs at his ranch on December 22, 1964. Clockwise from the president are Secretary McNamara, Maj. Gen. Chester V. Clifton Jr. (Johnson's military aide), General LeMay, Gen. Earle G. Wheeler (chairman of the Joint Chiefs), Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus R. Vance, Gen. Harold Johnson, Adm. David L. McDonald, and General Wallace M. Greene Jr. Photo by Yoichi Okamoto. *Johnson Library*.**

responses. Several times he mentioned the need for coordinated air and naval operations, but he was vague on the roles he envisioned for the Navy, other than blockading North Vietnamese ports.

It is important to note that the Air Force was not the only service ill-prepared for irregular warfare. Just as the Air Force had focused its training and weapons-system development on large-scale Cold War confrontations, so too had the Army and the Navy, despite Army leaders who had been early adherents to “flexible response.” The Marine Corps claimed more flexibility but struggled to adapt to jungle warfare nearly as much as the rest of the U.S. military did.

The LeMay statements that follow also add firsthand commentary to the literature on the disintegration of the national security apparatus during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Whether one believes that the United States should or should not have directly intervened on a large scale in Vietnam, there can be little disagreement on the point that distrust in the halls of the Pentagon between the uniformed and civilian personnel did not help improve the decision-making process.

Readers hoping for more detail on the debates in 1963–65 that led to the expanded U.S. military role in Vietnam will be disappointed by the following interviews, however.<sup>36</sup> LeMay gave no specifics and told an inconsistent and evolving story on timing. In the July 1965 excerpt below, he accurately stated that not until “two or three months” before he retired did

all of the service chiefs recommend more aggressive action (late October 1964), but even then, LeMay and Greene wanted more drastic measures than the others, and disagreement continued on whether to focus the resources on North or South Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> By the 1969 and 1972 interviews, LeMay was insisting that the Joint Chiefs were more or less on the same page about striking the north by late 1963. This assertion ignores the acrimony among the chiefs during much of the 1964 debate. LeMay clashed in particular with Gen. Harold K. Johnson, the Army chief of staff, who insisted that the war had to be fought primarily in South Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> In the interviews, LeMay also stated that Gen. David M. Shoup, commandant of the Marine Corps until the end of 1963, was his primary backer among the chiefs. LeMay did gain Shoup's support in late 1963 for more aggressive action than the small-scale counterinsurgent missions outlined in Operation Plan (OPLAN) 34A, which LeMay labeled "pinprick" efforts. But Shoup had been skeptical of expanded involvement in Vietnam since he had visited there in 1962, particularly of the introduction of U.S. ground forces, and after retirement, he became a critic of the war—a point of consternation for LeMay in the 1969 interview.<sup>39</sup>

LeMay was right, however, in his observations that neither Johnson nor McNamara offered an overarching strategy to guide U.S. involvement in the spiraling conflict, a point on which historians have agreed. George C. Herring wrote in *LBJ and Vietnam* that "the most glaring deficiency is that in an extraordinarily complex war there was no real strategy." Johnson and McNamara "provided no firm strategic guidance to those military and civilian advisors who were running programs in the field. They set no clearcut limits on what could be done, what resources might be employed, and what funds expended."<sup>40</sup>

LeMay took his criticism public in 1968 in his book *America is in Danger*, writing that "I question whether an organization as unwieldy and amateurish as has been created by the Secretary of Defense could ever propagate a successful war. The dismal results in Vietnam attest to this doubt." Much of the book was an attack on the civilian leadership in general and McNamara in particular, although he was rarely mentioned by name.<sup>41</sup> Surprisingly, considering their disdain for each other, McNamara only referenced LeMay and his "stubbornness" a couple of times in passing when he finally wrote about Vietnam in his 1995 memoir.<sup>42</sup>

As for Johnson, according to Herring, "The president retained to the end a southern populist's suspicion of the military, and especially on the bombing of North Vietnam." Johnson "feared that acceptance of the Joint Chiefs' proposals might lead to World War III."<sup>43</sup> As noted, no one advocated more for massive bombing of North Vietnam than Gen. Curtis LeMay—and no one scared Johnson more with his scenarios.

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This project is built around an extensive interview with LeMay about Vietnam conducted by Air Force historians in June 1972, which is nearly half the material in the book. For context, however, it is instructive to see what LeMay had said over time. This collection is by no means exhaustive; it combines snapshots from a few published accounts with material from several previously unpublished oral histories, dating back to LeMay's exit interview with an unnamed Air Force historian in January 1965 as he prepared to retire. The first section begins with excerpts from this dialogue. It is interesting to note that the only questions about Vietnam came at the very end of the conversation.

LeMay was such a prominent figure that a number of reporters sought him out for interviews during this same January 1965 time frame. He was more circumspect with the media than he was in the career interview excerpts published here. When asked by a United Press International reporter if there was a way out of Vietnam, LeMay replied that "the direction of the war comes from Hanoi, supplies come down from the north, and so forth." He observed that "we try to fight all our battles in South Vietnam. It doesn't appear that we can win this way. The only way to stop it is to make it too expensive for North Vietnam to conduct the war."<sup>44</sup>

At the time LeMay left the Air Force in February 1965, he and co-author MacKinlay Kantor (author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Andersonville*) were already well underway with work on LeMay's autobiography, for publication in November of that year. They added a short viewpoint on Vietnam, written in July 1965, that is included here. This passage contains LeMay's most famous statement, that the United States should threaten to bomb North Vietnam "back into the Stone Age." Although he never did so publicly, LeMay later privately denied actually referencing prehistory, writing a friend that the Stone Age comment had come from Kantor. LeMay protested that "I was just so damned bored going through the transcripts that I just let it get by."<sup>45</sup> However, the full passage below, and the information in it, ring true to LeMay's thinking and clearly came from interviews with him.<sup>46</sup> He made some statements very close to these in his 1969 and 1972 interviews. The memoir excerpt is included here as an example of the progression of his thinking, and of his public statements, with the strong caveat that these may not have been his exact words.

The same cautioning applies to the next two passages, from a 1966 article in *U.S. News & World Report* published under LeMay's byline, and from LeMay's 1968 book *America is in Danger*, coauthored with Maj. Gen. Dale O. Smith, USAF (Ret.). Some sections in the book are almost verbatim from the article, possibly indicating a common, uncredited ghostwriter. Included

here are short excerpts from each publication. The flavor and thinking are clearly LeMay's, perhaps with his prose polished a bit. *America is in Danger* appears to have been written for the most part in 1967, as it focuses heavily on McNamara, who left the Department of Defense in February 1968, and it does not include mention of the Tet Offensive, which started at the end of January 1968. Although LeMay's biographers have not documented the connection, the book brought renewed attention to LeMay's calls for a more aggressive U.S. military and foreign policy and may have contributed to his selection as Wallace's running mate.

The combative and at times defensive LeMay is on display in the interview of June 7, 1969, perhaps as a result of his experiences on the campaign trail the previous fall. The conversation was part of the oral history collection effort by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. In a curious twist of provenance, LeMay insisted that the interview not be on file at the Kennedy Library and instead had the tape and transcript transferred to the Air Force.<sup>47</sup> While the interviewer asked LeMay his opinions of several people, including McNamara and Taylor, he did not ask about Kennedy, or about key interactions LeMay had with him, such as during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Most of the discussion of Vietnam came about because of LeMay's interjection of the subject.

The fuller interview material published here is from two conversations with General LeMay in 1972, in a later time frame of the war. They came about as the Air Force History program moved toward publication of its first official history of Air Force involvement in Southeast Asia, even while the war was still proceeding. The history program asked LeMay to read a draft manuscript for the book, written by Robert F. Futrell. Since the material was still classified at the time, LeMay had to commute from his home in Bel Air, California, out to March Air Force Base for several reading sessions, more than a hundred miles roundtrip.

After LeMay had reviewed most of the manuscript, which he found "comparatively dull reading," Thomas G. Belden of the history program interviewed him on March 29, 1972, at March Air Force Base. Belden asked general questions about material covered in the book, but after a few minutes of conversation, LeMay suggested that it might be better for him to meet with the author the next time he was in Washington so Futrell could ask about more specific details. Excerpts of the March 1972 interview are included below, mostly with LeMay discussing material that he did not address in the follow-up session. Points he covered in more detail in the later conversation have been omitted.

As promised, LeMay alerted the history program of his next visit to Washington and sat for a conversation at the Pentagon on June 8, 1972. The

interviewers were Belden, Futrell, and Jacob Van Staaveren. The Air Force later published a revised and expanded version of the Futrell manuscript LeMay had reviewed as *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965*, while Van Staaveren wrote *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam, 1965–1966*.<sup>48</sup>

The knowledge that Futrell, Van Staaveren, and Belden brought to the discussion, both from their long association with the Air Force and from research in the documents, informed and shaped the interview. The primary point of it was to fill in holes in Futrell's research, so the discussion did cover some minor points and some smaller deployments. One of these was the Farm Gate operation, which was a largely LeMay-generated effort for the Air Force to develop counterinsurgency capability within the constraints that the Kennedy administration recognized. The trio of historians asked some broader questions, leading to a wider discussion of the Air Force role in Vietnam. LeMay responded with candor, as he usually did, but the discussion was more focused than it was in his public interviews or in his books. This interview was LeMay's fullest statement on Vietnam.

This collection of LeMay's Vietnam observations concludes with excerpts of his comments from a panel discussion at the Air Force's Senior Statesmen Conference on June 15, 1984. Richard H. Kohn of the Air Force History office led a session on strategic air warfare with LeMay and fellow retired generals Leon W. Johnson, David A. Burchinal, and Jack J. Catton. This section is particularly instructive because it includes LeMay's thoughts on how much the Linebacker II campaign resembled the type of operation he had wanted to see against North Vietnam in 1964–65. His belief that strategic bombing could have won the war never wavered.

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As one reads the following material, one is struck by an irony that completely eluded General LeMay: he won the argument for the massive use of manned air power in Vietnam. Even McNamara and Taylor became proponents.<sup>49</sup> While LeMay believed that Rolling Thunder was a bastardization of strategic bombing, it was still air power, a large-scale employment of it, that became the first hammer of U.S. escalation to fall. A Viet Cong attack on the U.S. Marine barracks at Pleiku on the night of February 6–7, 1965—just days after LeMay had left the Pentagon—killed eight Americans and wounded 126.<sup>50</sup> As the Joint Chiefs and Secretary McNamara huddled to formulate a response to what they and the South Vietnamese saw as an intensified level of provocation, the specter of LeMay's forceful arguments over the previous two years permeated the

atmosphere like the cloud of blue smoke that usually trailed him. General Greene recorded in his notes that as the Joint Chiefs put the finishing touches on the planning for the early rounds of the sustained bombing campaign a few weeks later, the chairman, Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, turned to his service-chief colleagues and said, “in a half-joking fashion, ‘The secretary of defense is sounding like General LeMay. All he needs is a cigar.’”<sup>51</sup>

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*Editorial methodology:* Four of the pieces that follow have been previously published, while the other four have not. The excerpts from published works record the text verbatim, with ellipses and breaks indicating omitted material.

Text from the four unpublished LeMay interviews has been transcribed from typescripts. All have some very light editing for readability, such as the silent omission of a few transitional words at the beginnings of sentences like “but,” “and,” and “well,” as well as a handful of false-start statements and repeated phrases. Punctuation and paragraphing have been added when needed. Only one of the interviews, from June 1972, is presented at close to full length. For that one, references in the discussion to the change of tapes have been omitted, as have introductory and concluding chatter.

Some redundancy across the LeMay statements is unavoidable. In some cases duplicated discussion has been left in intentionally to show consistency in LeMay’s thinking, or changes in his arguments. The focus is on Vietnam, and on the broader national security apparatus of the period. Several digressions about World War II, Korea, and SAC have been truncated or omitted.

Full names, the spelling out of acronyms, and dates have been added in brackets where necessary. Annotation is included in a few places for clarification or elaboration. For more details on many of the issues discussed, readers are encouraged to consult works cited in the introduction and its endnotes, particularly Futrell’s book.





General LeMay piloting his last flight as an Air Force officer, flying a C-135 out of Andrews Air Force Base in February 1965. *USAF.*

# Part I

## January 1965–March 1972

CAREER INTERVIEW, AIR FORCE HISTORY, JANUARY 1965:<sup>52</sup>

**Question [unidentified interviewer]:** What are your views on the role of the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff]?

**Gen. Curtis E. LeMay:** I don't know its future. None of us is happy about its present role. Too many decisions are made without a military input by the JCS. We used to have the National Security Council and its staff. Decisions were made slowly, but they were made deliberately. Everyone was heard. We had a national security policy, but now we do not. Some think this is good because policy can be a handicap. I'm not so sure this is so. For some people it is a handicap, but men with drive will change regulations.

We don't have a National Security Council per se, but a group of committees. The chairman [Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, U.S. Army] says military advice gets through. I'm not sure full consideration is given to it. Maybe the reason I think so is because all our resolutions are ruled against. All the chiefs feel that they don't have much influence on policy. Perhaps the military view should be ruled against, but when we are fighting, the military should have its say, I think. And we are fighting in Vietnam.<sup>53</sup>

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**Question:** Did the JCS default by not making decisions?

**LeMay:** I admit that there were arguments and differences of opinion. This is all right, provided that we have a boss who makes a decision. But he doesn't appear to take our advice. In many cases, I think he has his mind made up prior to getting our advice, and he will not change his preconceived decision as a result of receiving that advice.<sup>54</sup>

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**Question:** What are the proper Army and Air Force roles in counter-insurgency?

**LeMay:** We develop tactics and techniques to help our friends fight

communism. This is the proper role for the military. If we concentrate too much on this, however, that is the wrong way.

One trouble is that we set up rules that favor the enemy, not us. According to the rules of international law, we can take actions against an open aggression. But they send in guerrillas, and we can't take action against covert infiltration. Cuba did this in Venezuela. There should be changes in the law.

Both the Army and the Air Force have roles in counterinsurgency. They should cooperate in a team play. The experience in Vietnam bears this out.<sup>55</sup>

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**Question:** What can we do to improve the Vietnam situation?

**LeMay:** We can't get out of Southeast Asia. I don't believe we should get out of South Vietnam. The political problems don't permit us to get out. The Vietnamese are unhappy and dissatisfied. I'd be discontented, too, if I lived there, through war, for a long, long time and saw no end of it. If any government in South Vietnam showed the people that it had some chance of winning the war, the people would get behind it.

To me, winning the war means going north and stopping the aggression coming out of there. It's so late now that even this may not do it. But it should be done. There is a good chance that if we did this, we could stop the aggression.

I don't understand how we can go on as we have been going on. If it goes on, we will jeopardize the lives of our people in Vietnam. We received a message from CINCPAC [Adm. Ulysses S. G. Sharp Jr., commander in chief, Pacific Command] recommending taking out U.S. dependents because CINCPAC believes they are in danger. MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] doesn't agree because he [Gen. William C. Westmoreland, MACV commander] thinks this would have serious defeatist implications.

For a long time, I've said we should go north. Our present strategies aren't working. The coups are getting worse. Dissatisfaction with the government in South Vietnam is growing. The military is the only viable and cohesive force. It offers the only stability in the country. It is possible to do things with them. But these things smolder. Who knows when rioting will spread to the army. Everything else would then go up. We would lose our people who are dispersed and not able to get to an airfield.

**Question:** How would you go about attacking North Vietnam?

**LeMay:** By air. I would use conventional air power to take care of North Vietnam. I would bomb more than the supply lines. I would go right up to the source of the aggression.



President Johnson hosted the farewell ceremony for General LeMay at the White House on February 1, 1965. LeMay's wife, Helen, is seated next to Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, with their daughter, Jane, to the right of her. Photo by Abbie Rowe. USAF.

**Question:** Would the Chinese react?

**LeMay:** Maybe, maybe not. I don't worry particularly about that. We have to be prepared to take care of them, by air also. This would be a sizable chore with conventional tonnages. It would probably be more efficient in a big war with the Chinese communists to use a few nuclear weapons in carefully selected places to do the job.

At the end of the Korean War, we made it clear we wouldn't fight another war of that kind. We'd fight a war of our own choosing if it flared up again. I don't see any difference between a flare-up north or south.

Maybe it would be a good thing if the Chinese came to the support of North Vietnam. We could set back the Chinese nuclear program, or knock it out for good. We could then review history and see what kind of world we would have had if we had knocked out the Russian nuclear setup when they first got the atomic bomb.<sup>56</sup>

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We may be engaged in an all-out war by the time this book is published. I don't think we will be. But it could happen.

All along I have said that if we were going to get anywhere in Viet Nam, we'd have to attack in the north. I advocated that policy for about three years in the Joint Chiefs, and I was all by myself. Then the Marines came around to agreeing with me, and we were together in the opinion. Then, two or three months before I retired, the Army and the Navy began to see what we were talking about. Finally the entire JCS recommended the northern approach.<sup>58</sup>

Political and religious winds of Viet Nam blow in every direction. Those people have been fighting for a long time; they are extremely weary of fighting, but they can't see any end in sight. They don't especially wish to become Communists. Many rustics up in the backwoods probably don't know the difference between Communism and Capitalism. They just want to be left alone, in peace.

But the people who *do* know the difference are still tired of the war, and they've been looking to their government to try to do something about ending the carnage. It is essential to show them a ray of light somewhere along the line, and make them know that they have a chance of winning, and getting the war over with. If any government would show them that ray of light, assuredly they would support it.<sup>59</sup>

But voices have been saying repeatedly, "No, we must recognize a stable government, down there in the south, before we dare carry the war to the north."

I don't believe that. If you carry the war to the north, and really *carry* it there, you'll get your stable government.

The United States finally began attacking the north last February [1965]. This was assuredly a step in the right direction. I have not met anyone conversant with the true situation in Southeast Asia who is not behind the Administration's resolve to stay in Viet Nam.

The Russians now say that they will permit "volunteers" to go in there. Chinese Communists are already installing the latest defensive devices which they possess. I fear they will use them, maybe even before these words get into print. You allow the North Vietnamese to build up an adequate protection, and it becomes harder and harder to perform the military task which we need to perform. And it costs more lives.<sup>60</sup>

The military task confronting us is to make it so expensive for the North Vietnamese that they will stop their aggression against South Viet Nam and Laos. If we make it too expensive for them, they *will* stop. They don't want to lose everything they have.

There came a time when the Nazis threw the towel into the ring. Same way with the Japanese. We didn't bring that day about by sparring with sixteen-ounce gloves.

My solution to the problem would be to tell them frankly that they've got to draw in their horns and stop their aggression, or we're going to bomb them back into the Stone Age. And we would shove them back into the Stone Age with Air power or Naval power—not with ground forces.

You could *tell* them this. But they might not be convinced that you really meant business. What you must do with those characters is convince them that if they continue their aggression, they will have to pay an economic penalty which they cannot afford.

We must throw a punch that really hurts.

For example, we could knock out all their oil. They don't have oil of their own; it has to come into the country; so there are rich targets, in storage areas sprinkled around.<sup>61</sup>

Knock them all out. This immediately brings a lot of things to a halt: transportation and power particularly. It would be the simplest possible application of strategic bombardment, and you could do the job with conventional weapons. You wouldn't have to get into a nuclear fracas.

. . . Or you could bottle up the harbor at Haiphong.<sup>62</sup> That's their main port, fifty-odd miles east and a little south of Hanoi, the capital. One way to do it would be to knock out the dredges which keep the channel open. They have to keep dredging, or that particular channel will close up within a very short period of time, and ships can't get in or out. Take advantage of a local phenomenon: kill off the dredges. No dredges, no ships.

Or knock out the dock areas, the port itself. Or mine the harbor, the way we mined waters around Japan with our B-29s.<sup>63</sup>

So, choke off all supply by water routes. Or hit the few industries they have. Or knock out *all* their transportation.

Successful prosecution of this war would not necessarily require the introduction of nuclear weapons. But you won't get anywhere until you do go in there and really swat the Communists. This could be done with conventional weapons.

Maxim: Apply whatever force it is necessary to employ, to stop things quickly. The main thing is *stop it*. The quicker you stop it, the more lives you save.

Once you are in a position where you are compelled to use military force, or in a position where you decide that military force is the only solution to the problem, then you *resort to military force*. The quicker you complete that military action, the better for all concerned.

\* \* \*

“GENERAL LEMAY TELLS HOW TO WIN THE WAR IN VIETNAM,”  
OCTOBER 1966.<sup>64</sup>

Through one fateful strategic decision after another, we have backed into a nasty and confusing kind of war in Vietnam. The fact that we have become entangled in this struggle, however, is water over the dam. What we must realize is that, stated or not, we are now fully committed to halt aggressive Communism in South Vietnam.

What can be done to accomplish this mission? . . .<sup>65</sup>

First, war in any proportion is dangerous for all of us and should not be undertaken lightly or haphazardly. Now that we are fully involved in a hot war, however, we have no choice but to go through with it. To back out now would be a great defeat for the cause of freedom. But we should never pretend it to be a sort of business-as-usual sideshow.

Second, once we have taken the fateful step into war, we should wage it in such a way as to end it as quickly as possible. This means, as I have often recommended, that we should use naval and air power against the most valuable targets. Destruction of oil storage is a beginning, but the thumb screws will need much more tightening before “uncle” is called. This does not mean the bombing of populations, but rather of important industrial, transportation and agricultural objectives.

Third, we must not try to fight a benign war against an enemy who utilizes terror as a basic tactic. If we take up arms against an enemy, we should hit him hard. This means that we should destroy his economy and his will to wage war. Again, let me say, as I have often said, this does not mean mass slaughter.

Fourth, we must be prepared to risk and fight a large war if necessary. We must not let ourselves be subdued by Red China’s threats and blusters. If we are not prepared to escalate, that is, apply more power, then we are not prepared to win and we should get out. . . .<sup>66</sup>

You don’t save a dog any pain by cutting off his tail an inch at a time. I’m not satisfied that “we are no longer losing the war.” The longer we drag out the conflict, the better chance there is of the political base in South Vietnam crumbling under our feet.

Suppose we are invited to depart? What then of our 4,919 dead? To them and their families it will have been total war, and futile.

This is just one more reason why we must wage this war in such a way as to win it as quickly as possible. We have started doing this by bombing POL [petroleum, oil, lubricants], but it means much more. It means employing the weapons and strategies available to us. It means

warning the North Vietnamese of our intentions and then letting them feel the strength of our muscles. It means attacking every valuable target.

We need only go after the economic jugular vein instead of yapping at the logistical legs.<sup>67</sup>

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*AMERICA IS IN DANGER*, 1967/1968:<sup>68</sup>

Regardless of how we have backed into this war, we must now recognize, unequivocally, that we *are* in it, and our only exit with honor and world respect is to win it. How can we do this?

The first step is to reverse our objective. Instead of the negotiating table, we must aspire to decisive victory. We must make war so costly to North Vietnam that it will sue for peace. The Communists started this war. Let them wish they never had. Let the Communists end it.

Second, we must fight the war from our position of strength, not theirs. We must fight it at the lowest possible cost to ourselves and at the greatest cost to the enemy. We must change the currency in this contest, from men to materials.

America's greatest strength in this military situation is air and naval power. We must use it strategically. We must use it decisively. And we must use it now.

It is important that we tell the world about this change in objective so that the world can correctly interpret our motives and evaluate our results. And we must also tell the Communists.

We must tell them that we are going to bomb increasingly costly targets in North Vietnam. They can decide how much they want to pay for the privilege of invading their neighbor. First, we must destroy the ability of the North Vietnamese to wage war and then, if necessary, their entire productive capacity.

We can pinpoint the targets we will hit and warn the civilians in advance to evacuate. In modern warfare, with modern warning devices, there is little surprise in bombing raids. Hanoi, for example, is ringed with far more and far better anti-aircraft devices than were ever in Berlin during World War II.

You will recall that North Vietnam is a rather recent arrival to twentieth-century technology and industry. Her resources, by our standards, are meager and hard earned. They are more valuable to her, in many respects, than human life. And North Vietnam must be made to pay for this war with her dearest coins.



To do this, we must return to the strategic bombing doctrine which was tried and proved in World War II. We must attack the *sources* of supply and the *sources* of power. We must not waste our bombs, our multi-million-dollar aircraft, and our precious fighter pilots on bridges, trucks, barracks, and oil drums when major factories, supply dumps, power plants, port facilities, and merchant ships go unscathed.

We hear dissenters say today that the bombing of North Vietnam is ineffective and, in relation to the great effort we are expending, they are right. Probably the weirdest aspect of this Alice-in-Wonderland war is that we have dropped more explosives on Vietnam than we did on Germany in World War II. Our strikes against Germany devastated one of the world's most powerful and industrially advanced nations, yet an even greater destructive force seems to have hardly dented the military capacity of a backward, third-rate power. How can this be? It is not air power which is wanting. It is the wrong *employment* of air power.

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INTERVIEW BY JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY, JUNE 7, 1969:<sup>69</sup>

**Dennis J. O'Brien:** In the [1960 presidential] election, did you sense that the candidates, both President [Richard M.] Nixon and President [John F.] Kennedy, did you sense that they, from their political speeches and things like this, did you sense that they really had a grasp of national defense issues?

**Gen. Curtis E. LeMay:** No, I don't think they did. National defense is something that you don't get in a short period of time. It's a profession, it's a lifetime work. My main complaint about the Kennedy administration is you never could get the experience and judgment of a lifetime spent in defense of the country ground into the solution of any of the problems. Never. Now it's true that Mr. [Robert S.] McNamara always told the Congress that he consulted the Joint Chiefs on every military question, and this was literally true, but many times we would get papers asking our comments on some question or other when we knew that the decision had been made two days before, the order issued. That sort of stuff. No one paid too much attention to our judgment on anything. They thought that the standard Harvard Business School method of solving problems would solve any problem. In defense, it will not do it. When you're dealing with people that have had experience and judgment rather than a complete computer solution, that sometimes prevails over the computer solution.<sup>70</sup>



President Kennedy visited the Pentagon for a series of briefings on May 29, 1962. He is shown talking with Secretary McNamara. Photo by Robert Knudsen. *Kennedy Library.*

**O'Brien:** Let's talk about some of the people that you dealt with while you were chief of staff. When was the first time you met Mr. McNamara?

**LeMay:** Well, I met him before he actually took office. He was over some with briefings, and I think I met him then. If I didn't, it was early in the game.

**O'Brien:** Did you meet him during World War II?

**LeMay:** He served in my command during World War II out in India as a captain, and I think when I moved to Guam, he came over to Guam with some of the plans people that I had moved over there. . . . I don't remember meeting him during that time. . . .

**O'Brien:** What were your impressions of him at that point [at the beginning of the administration], of his appointment as secretary of defense?

**LeMay:** Well, rather neutral. [He was] a new secretary of defense, hoping that he would turn out all right, but he never did according to my opinion. As a matter of fact, I think he was a disaster for the country. Not that he didn't do some things that all the military agreed with; he did. He accomplished some things that had to be accomplished and were good.

I think one of the main shortcomings of practically all the secretaries of defense that we had before then is that there comes a time when somebody has to make a decision. It's not surprising that in a complicated matter like the defense of the country that you find different opinions and different solutions to problems. I used to find them in all of my commands.



General LeMay was seated next to Letitia Baldrige, Jacqueline Kennedy's social secretary, at a July 1961 dinner at Mount Vernon in honor of Mohammad Ayub Khan, president of Pakistan. LeMay shared the table with Senator W. Stuart Symington Jr. (*far right*), who had served as the first secretary of the Air Force, and Senator Michael J. "Mike" Mansfield (*far left*), a Kennedy confidant on Vietnam. Photo by Cecil Stoughton. *Kennedy Library*.

Sometimes you could lock up your staff and let them fight it out, and they'd finally arrive at a solution that everybody agreed on. But many times you couldn't, so you'd listen to the proponents of each solution, and their pros and cons, and their arguments, and come time you had to make a decision and say, "OK, we're going to do it this way." Make a decision. This is true in the Department of Defense that you'll find different solutions for problems amongst the Army and the Navy and the Air Force and even the Marines. So there comes a time when somebody has to make the decision. That's the secretary of defense. Most of them before [McNamara] had been a little reluctant to make a decision when it was called for because they didn't feel that they really had the adequate background to make it, I suppose. So they'd appoint a committee or something to study it a little bit more, to try to get a little more help on it since there was a diversion of opinion amongst the services.

Mr. McNamara never did this. Matter of fact, he made the decisions without even listening to the arguments in a lot of cases. There was no reluctance on his part to make decisions. Unfortunately, most of them

that he made were wrong. I think most people are beginning to realize this now.<sup>71</sup>

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**O'Brien:** How about Mr. [Roswell L.] Gilpatric [the deputy secretary of defense]? When was the first time you came into contact with Mr. Gilpatric?

**LeMay:** Well, very early in the game, too. Mr. Gilpatric, I think, was a more reasonable individual than some of them in the team that came in, but he couldn't have stayed there, of course, without playing on the team.<sup>72</sup>

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**O'Brien:** Senator [W. Stuart] Symington [Jr., D-Mo.], of course, has always been quite concerned with the Air Force. Did you ever, in your meetings with him, . . . express any apprehension about the attitudes and the policies of the Kennedy administration?

**LeMay:** No. I never had any contact with Congress except when I went over to testify before committees. I always felt that this was kind of going behind the boss's back to do something. I told my views to the secretary of defense, and in several cases I told them to the president, as was my duty to do. But also when I appeared before congressional committees, I gave them my honest opinion, which in many cases differed from what the administration was presenting. . . . I think they felt that I was honest in my opinion and was really presenting what I thought, but I never did it unless I was asked a direct question.<sup>73</sup>

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**O'Brien:** Give your impressions of the new, incoming administration in 1961 at the time of the inauguration. Were you apprehensive about what the new administration was going to do?

**LeMay:** Not initially. I think that everyone welcomes a new administration with an open mind. But it didn't take very long for most military people to feel that they were in a complete state of frustration, that you could never gain anything. About all you could accomplish was to cut your losses.<sup>74</sup>

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**LeMay:** The B-70 was to be the follow-on manned system to the B-52, and it was a pretty good airplane. However, I think Mr. McNamara was heading towards no airplanes at all. I think his first goal was to get down to about a thousand missiles, and that would be a sufficient deterrent force.

We never believed this in the Air Force, and none of the other services ever believed this, either. But I think that was his goal, so we couldn't make any headway on the B-70.<sup>75</sup>

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**O'Brien:** In regard to your relations, particularly on the B-70, would people like General [Maxwell] Taylor, was he a person that was kind of amenable to persuasion? Did you ever get him out to SAC [Strategic Air Command], or did you ever get him in a kind of situation in which you could explain the real value of the B-70?

**LeMay:** Oh, we had an opportunity to explain to Taylor many, many times. I personally have offered to explain to him many times, but he was just too wooden to understand. He just wouldn't understand.

I give him the main responsibility for getting that half a million troops we've got bogged down in Vietnam into a position that we should never have gotten them in. Every soldier has always recommended against getting embroiled in a land war in Asia because of the unlimited manpower that can be poured against you in a land war. We should have used the weapons that we're strong in and they're weak in, our air and naval power. I give Maxwell Taylor credit for that stupidity. We shouldn't have those troops in there.

**O'Brien:** Was he susceptible to civilian pressure?

**LeMay:** I think he was, yes. Now, if you ask me to prove it, I can't. But I think he was.

He was brought back by the civilians, you know. During the time that he was chief of staff of the Army, General [Nathan F.] Twining was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I think Arleigh [A.] Burke was chief of naval operations, and they used to have arguments with Maxwell Taylor. They'd just march him over to the president [Dwight D. Eisenhower] and get a decision, and the president would decide against Maxwell Taylor, during the time he was on active duty. Then the Kennedys brought him back, mainly because I think his ideas fit the Kennedys' ideas. They thought they had a soldier that would take orders.

**O'Brien:** Well, was this a part of the, what might be called the Kennedy-Robert S. McNamara strategy . . . I guess the appropriate term is "flexible response" . . .

**LeMay:** Well, I think it was part of the idealistic view that nuclear war is too horrible to contemplate; therefore, we ought to do anything to avoid it. So they wanted anything but nuclear war, and they didn't want us to look like we even threatened to use nuclear weapons, so they did everything in their power to make it look like we wouldn't use nuclear weapons. Of course this further weakened our position in the world.



**President Kennedy with Maxwell Taylor on June 28, 1961. Taylor had consulted with the Kennedy campaign and had been a part-time advisor in the early months of the administration while also continuing to serve as president of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York. In mid-1961, Kennedy brought him to Washington full time as his senior military advisor. Photo by Abbie Rowe. *Kennedy Library*.**

We're weakened to the point now that even Vietnam will not negotiate with us because they think they're beating us. They don't think that we have the will to fight and win, the courage to fight and win, and with good reason they believe that. So they're not going to negotiate with us, ever, unless we give in to what they want.<sup>76</sup> I'm afraid that this is exactly what's going to happen, that we'll sell our friends in Asia down the river. But we're not only selling the Vietnamese down the river when we sell them down the river, we sell all of Asia down the river, so it's really building up real trouble for us in the future.

Whereas very easily we could win that war over there. I think if we really convinced those people we were going to use whatever strength is necessary to win it, that very quickly we would have negotiations that were meaningful. This is the history of the past. You don't have to be very smart to figure this out. It's not a matter of reading the future or anything of that sort. Take a look at past performance and then see what the odds are.

This is the same thing that happened in Korea. We talked for two years over there without making any headway because they're willing to expend lives and they know that we're not willing to expend lives in warfare unless we really have to. But General Eisenhower finally got irritated at the delay and said, "Figure out a method of winning the war in the shortest possible



**The Joints Chiefs and the president on July 10, 1962: General LeMay, Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer (the chairman), President Kennedy, Gen. George H. Decker, Adm. George W. Anderson Jr., and Gen. David M. Shoup. Photo by Robert Knudsen. *Kennedy Library*.**

time. Use nuclear weapons if you have to.” This was done and leaked to the Indians, and the Indians, of course, told Peking. In ten days, we had an armistice over there; not a peace, but we had an armistice.<sup>77</sup>

I think we can get the same thing with the Vietnamese, but you’ve got to convince them that you mean business. We’ve been wishy-washy for so long that we’re going to have to go up there and kick them around a little bit before they’re convinced that you mean business. Now, I don’t mean bomb their cities, and kill all the civilians, and be a barbarian—as I’m credited as being—at all. I think you can close that port [at Haiphong], as a matter of first priority, and there are many ways of doing it without destroying it. Close it. Then I think you should hit the military targets, wherever they’re found. If they happen to be in Hanoi or in a village or something, as they’ve deliberately put them [in] because we’ve told them we wouldn’t hit them there, hit them there anyway, after warning the people to get away from them. This works because I did this up in Japan.

[Discussion of dropping leaflets before bombing in Japan in 1945.]

So this works. The people react to it, and you can do these things with a minimum of civilian casualties. Although I wouldn’t say so out loud, me personally, I could care less about enemy casualties. I worry about our friendly casualties, our people and the South Vietnamese. Nobody seems

to worry about them at all. I see near 265,000 casualties over in Vietnam so far, to say nothing of the South Vietnamese that have been killed off at a rapid rate—nobody even bothers to keep count of them—and by the worst kind of terrorist attacks.<sup>78</sup> Nobody says anything about this at all, and are only worried about killing more Vietnamese civilians. I say avoid doing it if you can, but there again, I'm not particularly worried about them. I'd warn them to get away; if they did, good.

I think if you hit a few military targets up there—and there are plenty of them; my last trip over Vietnam, the reconnaissance boys are doing a tremendous job over there. I looked at hundreds of pictures up there, and you could see every pier in the harbor occupied by ships unloading war supplies, [with] the surplus anchored out in the harbor, with lighters bringing stuff ashore. [They had] supplies piled all around the port there because [we] won't hit them. All the damage that we've done while we did bomb up there—the railroad yards, the bridges that were out, and so forth—have been rebuilt and bypassed around them, a couple of pontoon bridges and roads down to the pontoon bridges around each one of them. If you knock the bridge out again, they can use the pontoon bridges, so you've got three bridges to knock out instead of one. All of the choke points [have] bypasses around them, practically all the damage repaired that we had done while we were bombing up there, and stuff moves in by the thousands, into the south at an even greater rate.

The stuff that President [Lyndon B.] Johnson put out at the time of the [1968 presidential] campaign was just an out-and-out damn lie. There was no indication that they were looking for peace at all. Quite the opposite, by all of the intelligence information.<sup>79</sup>

It was, hell, the boys were even going down and taking pictures inside of a boxcar, flying along the side and taking a picture in the open door, and you see what's inside the boxcar that was going south.

**O'Brien:** They really refined the art of photo intelligence.

**LeMay:** Oh, they do a remarkable job, and they've got some remarkable cameras now, too. So they know a lot about what's going on in the logistics picture up there, and stockpiles of drums and supplies in the villages, way higher than the village shacks because we won't hit them in the village. Even while we were bombing up north, we had orders not to hit a target that was in the village. [They had] trucks lined up bumper to bumper in the villages during the daytime waiting for night to continue the journey because we wouldn't hit them in the village.

**O'Brien:** Getting back to some of the other people in the Joint Chiefs, did you find General [Lyman L.] Lemnitzer a little more easily influenced?

**LeMay:** Lem was a pretty good soldier, and while we didn't always



agree, that's perfectly normal and natural to find out we wouldn't, but I have a very high regard for Lem. I think everybody else does, too.

**O'Brien:** General [David M.] Shoup supported you on the B-70 issue, didn't he?

**LeMay:** Yes, and General Shoup supported us in our view on Vietnam. As a matter of fact, I advocated going north long before anybody else did. I think [that is] the best way to end the war over there. After a couple of months, Shoup climbed on board with me, and we fought the battle for a long time. It wasn't until the [Ngo Dinh] Diem fiasco [in November 1963] that the others climbed on board. I think that the thing it pointed out was that, look, your main argument against going north has been, look, we've got to get a stable government in the south before we can go north. My argument is that unless you can show these people a ray of light someplace over there, you're not going to have a stable government. They're going to be against anybody that's just continuing the war on and on for years. They can't remember anything else, and they're tired of it. They've got to have a ray of light that they are going to have peace eventually before they're going to support a government. They're not going to support any government that doesn't show them some chance of peace in the offing, without communism. So far, in all these overthrows, the military has remained loyal to the government in power, whoever it happened to be. They may not always. Suppose they get sick and tired of it. You can't even evacuate the ground soldiers you've got in there now. You can't get them out. [When I presented that case], that scared the hell out of them [the other service chiefs], and so they came over [to my way of thinking] then.

I don't know what's happened to Shoup lately. He's been against the Vietnamese war, and I don't know whether he's had a blood clot on the brain, or what's happened to him. I haven't seen him since he retired [at the end of 1963]. And I really don't know what he's said. I doubt if he's said everything the newspapers say he said, because I've had experience with them, too. They're pretty well leftist oriented. So I doubt if he's been properly quoted. But what I got out of the left-wing newspapers that we have out in California is that he's been against the Vietnamese war. Well, I'm against it, too. But I'm for ending it and ending it properly, and it can be ended and ended properly. And I think probably Shoup is for that, too, but they just conveniently left that out.<sup>80</sup>

**O'Brien:** Did you ever see any real disagreement between the Army and the Air Force in regard to strategy in Vietnam?

**LeMay:** As far as strategy?

**O'Brien:** Yes, in the kind of military effort.

**LeMay:** Yes, we've had plenty of disagreements on both questions, and



**President Kennedy with Gen. David M. Shoup, commandant of the Marine Corps, on July 12, 1962, in front of the Home of the Commandants at the Marine Barracks in Washington (8th & I). Photo by Abbie Rowe. Kennedy Library.**

this is perfectly normal. We argue about them, and sometimes we come up with an agreed position, where everybody agrees. Sometimes we don't. This is where you need a good civilian chief [secretary of defense]. If he just has the guts to pitch a nickel and say, "OK, this one," it'd probably be all right because in any complicated problem there are many solutions to it, and who knows beforehand which is best. Some people, based on their experience in the past, may latch onto one and fight to the death on that one. But that doesn't mean it's the right one because other people will do likewise. But all of them, coming up through the services, have the experience that the people have had in like problems in fighting, and their [solutions] all [are] bound to be pretty good. But when somebody without the experience comes up with the solution to the problem, it's likely to be bad.

**O'Brien:** Did the question of pacification efforts ever come up in regard to the discussions that you were involved in?

**LeMay:** Well, I think everybody agreed with the so-called pacification program because one of the things that bothers them over in Vietnam is that it's not only a backward country, but when you get back in the boondocks, you're *really* back in the boondocks: no roads, no communications with any place. The Viet Cong come in there, and they levy the taxes and create the terror, murder the village chief if he objects, and the government is not around to protect them. If you get the government out there, and the government starts doing something for them—gets them some medical

help, gets them some sanitation aid, gets them some farming aid, and so forth, gets them some protection—then that's something else again. This is all the pacification program was, to get the government represented out at these places. This had to be done.

Now, granted, many of these people were no damn good. I get awful frustrated at some of these left-wing columnists and left-wing congressmen and senators who object to us being there because the Vietnamese are corrupt, and they don't have a proper democratic government over there, and they don't like that. Well, I'll be the first to admit that that's so. But you've got to remember that the French, when they were there, treated these people as a colonial people, and they didn't try to train any of them except for the most menial jobs. They ran all of the government, all of the defense, and everything. When they left, there was no leadership in the country. So the people that took over had no experience, and everyone knows that there's corruption all over the place in all of the Asiatic countries. It's, I guess, a common practice, if any money goes through your hands, if you take more than 10 percent, you're a crook; if you take less than 10 percent, you're a fool. That sort of thing.

So it takes time to get these people transferred over to our standards. I think they've done remarkably well myself, particularly in the military. They've done remarkably well in the short period of time that we've had to develop leaders. Gosh, when you can change people from driving a buffalo to driving a jet airplane, and driving at night, when they formerly believed that night is full of dragons that are going to get them—quite an accomplishment. We've been able to do that. So I think that the Vietnamese people are a fine people, and that they've done remarkably well. But I don't expect perfection out of them, and I don't expect all of the corruption to be out of them. We haven't even got it out of our own government yet.

**O'Brien:** Did Vietnam come into your thinking, and Laos, too, as well, when, I understand that you were a rather enthusiastic supporter of the Air Force counterinsurgency effort, Jungle Jim [4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron], back in 1961. Were you thinking of places like Vietnam and Laos when you . . .

**LeMay:** Well, the Air Force was practically the only force that was doing anything much in Laos during that period. In fact, I had the pleasure of decorating a major and a first lieutenant for their efforts in helping out the so-called Laos air force, which didn't consist of much, some AT-6s.<sup>81</sup> They were over there advising them on how to use them, and they really used them properly and were very successful in helping defend the country. Of course the communists were in there, too, and there's some

fighting in there now, but they'll probably take Laos over by internal subversion because they had a coalition-type government, like they had a coalition-type government in Cambodia, and it's communist. A coalition government means it's communist very shortly.

**O'Brien:** In 1961, when the Laotian problem was beginning to boil up—well, it had been boiling up for a year—were there some suggestions that the Air Force supply some tactical air to certain key points in Laos to interdict some of the supplies that were coming in from the Russians?

**LeMay:** We pointed out that the Air Force could do something over there at the time. The answer was no, that they didn't want the United States embroiled.

**O'Brien:** You got some support from Mr. Rostow on that, though, didn't you?

**LeMay:** Hmm?

**O'Brien:** Mr. Rostow, Walt Rostow, in the White House, wasn't he, in a sense, in support of tactical air?

**LeMay:** I don't remember that he was in any particular sense.<sup>82</sup>

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INTERVIEW BY AIR FORCE HISTORY, MARCH 29, 1972:<sup>83</sup>

**Gen. Curtis E. LeMay:** We couldn't put first-class equipment in there [Southeast Asia] because it was violating the Geneva Accords. It didn't make any difference if the Reds were violating it right and left; we had to set up our own arbitrary rules to handicap ourselves, and it was a fight to get the tools you needed. [We had] to throw in the old stuff. This was a war in which, if [Soviet leader Nikita S.] Khrushchev had been running it, he couldn't have done any better as far as handicapping us [by] what we did to ourselves all through the thing from start to finish. We didn't miss a trick. Any handicap that could have been dreamed up, we had thrown at us. Every one. They didn't miss one. At least I don't know of any they missed. Every roadblock possible was there.

And what followed was the tools that were used in the fighting down there were dictated not by the military but by, mostly, the State Department and the executive branch of government. I think you covered very well [in the Futrell book manuscript] the interservice battle. Normally we have an interservice fight going on on budgets and all that sort of stuff all the time, but this was a little more than that. I think it was basically brought on by the fact that, back in those days, we didn't have any real clear-cut directive I ever saw from the administration as to exactly what the aims were down there, what we were going to do. We just kind of drifted along.



**Vice President Johnson, Secretary Zuckert, President Kennedy, and General LeMay watch a manned weapons firepower demonstration at the Air Proving Ground Center, Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, on May 4, 1962. Photo by Cecil Stoughton. *Kennedy Library.***

We were going to help them a little bit, but not much, so it didn't look too important. So it was more of an interservice fight about who was going to do the little bit that we did get to do. It got pretty bad before long. You covered very well the fact that it was generally thought that this was an Army mission down there—guerrilla warfare, ground warfare—and the air had no place there. This was just the same old story of the fight that air power has had to wage all through the time that I was in the service. We thought air power had a contribution it could make to the country, and they had [to fight] tooth and nail for the privilege of doing it.

This was the same story all over again. The whole staff, practically the whole [MACV] staff in Vietnam, for instance, was Army, and there was never any proper planning for the use of air, never any proper communication set up so you could use the characteristics of air power, which are mobility, and speed of getting into action, and so forth. None of this was done; never any understanding of it. And most of all, it wasn't passed on in the early days to the Vietnamese [who] were doing the fighting, and they didn't know much about fighting anyway because the French had never really trained the Vietnamese to operate a military force. They had no leadership, so it was really starting from scratch. The fact that they did as well as they did is something of a miracle.

So we find all sorts of mistakes in not using air power at all, or using it improperly, what little bit was available down there. Then, as part of

this battle, the Army came up with this Howze report, which was part of an attempt [by] the Army to build their own tactical air force.<sup>84</sup> They had these airborne units with a lot of helicopters and fixed-wing airplanes to fight from the air, move by air, and so forth. We soon found out that, even under the situation down in Vietnam—where there was no opposing air, which would have cut them to pieces in no time at all—they didn't even have automatic-weapon ground fire against them. Even so, they found out that they could either supply themselves, or they could do a little fighting, but they couldn't do both. The Air Force wound up supplying these people so that they could do what little fighting they did.

Now, I don't think it's brought out clearly enough the fact that, sure, a helicopter is a real handy tool to get around with, providing nobody shoots at you much. And they did do a lot of very good jobs down there. But as soon as they [the enemy] got automatic weapons in the hands of better-trained troops, they began to be shot down like flies, and history will never record just how bad it was. The system they used [was that] if they recovered a name plate, it wasn't "lost." In the last operation over in Laos that they went on, [there] was a real mess, and I think you ought to try to get the facts of this down in our Air Force history because it's never going to be written anyplace else.<sup>85</sup>

Some place we've got to get into writing our side of the Air Force battle. I'm talking about the battle for missions—who was going to do what. We can't afford any more Air Force this end of the country, that's for sure.

I don't think it's brought out clearly enough how the decisions were arrived at on what we were going to do in South Vietnam. What you have there shows very clearly all the people that were in the act and making decisions in areas where they weren't competent to make decisions—the committee action that took place, the vetoes, the stalling. All through, it was too little too late all the way through.

But it wasn't clear enough to show that once the decision to use military force was made, then military force wasn't used. They stood off or back in the old diplomatic exchange and things of that sort, whereas going to war is a very serious business, and once you make the decision that you're going to do that, then you ought to be prepared to do just that, and to go ahead and use the principles of war, which means using the force that's necessary. By my definition of the force that's necessary, you put in more than is actually necessary to do the job, because you can't actually determine that you need 152,506 and one-half men. You just define it like that so you put more in than is necessary in order to hit with overwhelming weight—no doubt about it—and you crush things right then. That's the only way to do it. If you don't do that, then you stretch things out over a

period of time. You lose a lot of your own people, and your own resources, and your own treasury, to say nothing of the enemy's too.

This is the big mistake that we've made down there. They didn't decide to go to war and then go to war. Supposedly, the military were in the chain of command, or in the chain of things to try to help make these decisions. But having sat up there, this just wasn't so. We argued about a lot of things; we sent papers in on certain subjects; we disagreed among ourselves on certain things, which is normal. Maybe we disagreed about more things than were normal because no one, in the early days, really believed that this was anything except some diplomats fiddling around with a little more aid program. No one ever believed that they were really going to make a stand. At least I didn't. And there was never any policy to tell us who could have done it. I don't think they had one. I don't think the administration knew.

So that's the kind of situation we were in. Then the decisions that were made were made up topside by the president or his cabinet on what was going to be done and how it was going to be done—usually too late—even to the point of saying, "All right, we're going to attack this target, but you can only use X number of airplanes, and you'll have this kind of a weapons system on the airplane, and only this number of them." That sort of thing, things that are the responsibility and business of the commander in the field, of what's necessary to destroy the target, and that sort of stuff.

I'm sure you can argue that, well, this is a delicate situation, and I don't want the stupid military getting us into any diplomatic boxes that we can't get out of. The argument against that is, all right, tell us what you don't [want to] get into, and let the commander in the field protect the lives of his men, and protect the property of the United States, in carrying out his mission. This was never done. Of course later on in the war, they relaxed them a little bit, but never did the commander in the field have the real responsibility of a military commander in the field.

**Thomas G. Belden:** You are speaking up to what date?

**LeMay:** I'm speaking up to the day I left the service, which is 6 February 1965.

It [the Futrell manuscript] wasn't very clear about how a recommendation to go north—bomb North Vietnam—came about. Once we got down the road far enough to find out that there was no doubt about North Vietnamese regular troops being in South Vietnam, and clear enough identification of chains of command through radio networks that were finally plotted and so forth, there was no doubt that the war was being run by North Vietnam as well as supplied and administered. Once that was determined, and by that time we knew what the volume of stuff coming

down there was, and things of that sort, then it became apparent that trying to get each individual guerrilla, with his little hoard of supplies that he had in the jungle in South Vietnam, wasn't the way to do it. Interdiction wasn't the way to do it, either. We'd learned this through long and bitter experience in the past, that you can interdict, yes, but in this sort of a situation, you can't stop a trickle of supplies that somebody can throw on their back, or a bicycle, and wiggle through a jungle.

**Belden:** Like Korea?

**LeMay:** Yes, and Italy; you couldn't do it in Italy. I think if we committed enough that we could defeat them eventually, but you couldn't stop it completely.

You have to go back farther than that, to the strategic bombing of the sources of supplies. I think we finally got enough information out of the Strategic Bombing Survey [after World War II] to ask if strategic bombing would have ended the war if they hadn't made the invasion by such-and-such a time. I know this is so in Japan.

But it was apparent, to me at least, that we had to go north [in Vietnam] to do the job. This was where my expression of "we're swatting flies instead of cleaning up the manure pile" arose. I couldn't get much support out of the other services because this became then [it would be] an air job, of course, and they took a damned dim view of that, although I wasn't specifying air power particularly in getting this job done. The Navy could have been in the act. I followed the principle all along that we should do our fighting with our air and sea power, where we were predominant, instead of with the dough feet, where they were predominant.

Well, the first one that climbed on the bandwagon was [General] Dave Shoup, Marines. He finally agreed with me that we had to go north if we're going to get anything done. It was the cheapest and most efficient way of doing it; I meant to close the ports and really do a job of strategic bombing to stop the importation of supplies before they even got started south by land. That's where you should stop them. Once you stopped the supplies, this dried up the line down below, and the South Vietnamese could have had the capability of cleaning out what amounted to a bunch of bandits then. Never got anywhere.

The first time we finally got some place was after the [Ngo Dinh] Diem coup, when he was overthrown [on November 1–2, 1963]. You haven't said too much about it, and I don't know where you'll ever find anything or not, but it looks to me like from what little I know about it—I didn't know about it at the time—we engineered that thing. It looks to me like we did it. I can't prove it; I can't even offer you a very good set of facts. It's just a feeling that I have. But I have a feeling that some of the idealists in



our State Department got the CIA and engineered this thing because they didn't like the way Diem was running the government.<sup>86</sup> This is another thing that's strange to me because, based on the actual facts, actually I think he was doing a pretty good job, compared to the Philippines, for instance. We told them that we were going to give them freedom in forty years, or something like that, and meanwhile, we would teach them how to govern themselves and protect themselves and so forth, and after two generations of schooling and training and letting them get into these jobs themselves so when they turned loose, they'd be a going concern. Even after all that, they had their problems. They've still got their problems. It looks like they're going to make, it but there are problems there. Compare that with the hopeless situation that the Vietnamese were in without any of that background.

**Belden:** The French never allowed it.

**LeMay:** Never allowed it, so they had nothing. So considering the start, Diem, I thought, was doing pretty well. But he went down the drain. Then after that, remember the couple or three-year flaps of sorts, and all this time, Shoup and I were saying, "Look, we gotta go north and stop this flow of supplies down there." And the answer from [Maxwell] Taylor and the rest of the people was: "Look, you can't do anything like this 'til you get a stable government in South Vietnam." I didn't see what that had to do with it. As a matter of fact, I didn't think that they'd ever get a stable government until they could point out to the people at least a ray of light way out in the future here that they might win this war.

So it was the "chicken or the egg" thing. They maintained you couldn't go [north] until you had a stable government. I didn't think we'd ever get a stable government. Finally one day I pointed out after another one of these little crises, I said, "Look, all of this governmental trouble the Vietnamese have been having, the only stable portion of it has been the military. They've been loyal to the country, or to what looked like the legal government of the country, in each and every case. Things are getting pretty bad now, and this may not happen. You may lose the war, or at least have a wholesale diversion of some sort, or at least enough bickering among themselves that you'll have chaos. You may wind up where you're going to have to fight to get your ground forces out of there, what's in there out, unless you do something to show the people a ray of light."

This finally shook them enough that we went on the record then as saying, "Look, we've got to go north and start the bombing there." It was some time before we got this sold, however.

When we finally did go, it was again too little too late. You can't really do a first-class job if you can hit this little target, this little target, and finally

got a list of ninety-four targets on our guidance that might be desirable to hit, but they hit them piecemeal. We only got the oil, for instance, after they'd been convinced that we were going to do more bombing up there and they'd got it dispersed. You never could close the port on all of these things. So here again is piecemealing your effort, too little too late, all the way through.<sup>87</sup>

The effort we put into bombs was fantastic, the tonnage of bombs that went down on to worthless targets made the cost of stopping a round of rifle ammunition getting to South Vietnam astronomical, when hitting the proper target could have done it very cheaply. We delayed it so late, gave them so much warning, while we could have done all this without any antiaircraft defense around the targets. It was delayed to the point where the defenses around the targets were stronger than ever existed during World War II. These are the things that are not brought out that I think should be brought out in such a history. . . .

**Belden:** I was going to ask one other question. Do you think he [Futrell] had enough on the fall of Diem, or too much? Do you think he went into it too much, or not enough?

**LeMay:** No, I didn't get that impression that there was too much or not enough. It just never entered my mind. It shows very clearly the problems that we had with the government of Vietnam. It probably didn't show clearly enough the reasons back of it. Somebody ten or twenty years from now, reading this thing, will be just like some of our radicals now. They're always saying it: "South Vietnam is not worth helping because they're a corrupt, no-good government."

The answer is, "Yes, they're corrupt, no doubt about it. Certainly they're inept and unskilled, because they never had any training." No one ever takes the trouble to point out what they had to start, and the progress that they've made in that regard. And the same way in the fighting ability of the troops, the South Vietnamese troops. Certainly it [the South Vietnamese military] had deficiencies in all echelons. But from what they had to start with, they did remarkably well. The Vietnamese Air Force, particularly, did remarkably well, taking the resources that they allocated to the air force. Here again, it was a battle to get anything allocated to start with because the Vietnamese didn't know [what they were doing]. Then when they got advisors, they were Army advisors, mostly, and they weren't about to allocate any resources to the air force, so you had that handicap all along. But what resources went into the Vietnamese Air Force, they did very well. When we finally got them flying at night, with fairly sophisticated equipment, and doing things; when we started with them, they didn't even go out of their huts at night because the dragons

were out there. So starting from that, what we ended with did pretty well, and did it in a pretty short length of time. . . .<sup>88</sup>

**Belden:** Another problem they had that added to their political problem was the religious problem.<sup>89</sup> This seemed to affect that early period as well. Is it possible that Diem couldn't have held out anyway, or was the threat not specific enough?

**LeMay:** I don't know. I don't feel that I got enough information or enough feel to answer that question properly. As I remember, at least I personally didn't feel that Diem was doing such a bad job that he ought to be overthrown. I only met him once.<sup>90</sup> No, I didn't have the feeling that he was doing a bad job under the circumstances.

Here again, we went into this thing supposedly to help them, with the idea of saying, "Look, this is your war. You've got to fight it. We'll help you and advise you," when they weren't really capable of doing this chore for themselves. They weren't really capable of doing a good chore. We ought to have done a little better than that, I think. We advised them. They're a proud people. I would think that they could have set up some sort of an arrangement—of course, this is Monday-morning quarterbacking—some sort of an arrangement to make sure that the advice we did give them was accepted a little more than it was. How this could come about, I don't know, but there should be some way of setting it up so there would be face-saving on the part of the people concerned that they weren't a stooge of the United States. Maybe it was impossible to do this. I don't know.

**Belden:** Of course this was one of the, we'd given them all this advice just before the fall, I guess getting pretty desperate that it wasn't being followed.<sup>91</sup>

**LeMay:** Well, a lot of it wasn't. But they were getting a lot of advice from everybody, and they weren't getting very good advice, either. So you can't blame them for not doing exactly right.

**Belden:** Of course, when we finally did go north, it did seem to bolster the government for a while.

**LeMay:** Yes, and I maintained that it would. From being in a position where you're being kicked around every place and not doing anything on the offensive side at all to going on the offensive is bound to pick up your troops. This is just ordinary common sense. I suppose you could pick out some big words about [the] psychology of being on the offensive and so forth, but this to me is just common ordinary sense of the way people act. . . .

**Belden:** If we had done more earlier—that is, in terms of bombing the north—was there a considerable amount of argument that the Chinese might escalate—like Korea—and so forth? Was this part of the argument in, say, the Joint Staff?



Senior South Vietnamese and U.S. military officials met General LeMay when he arrived at Tan Son Nhut air base near Saigon on April 19, 1962. During his inspection tour in Vietnam, LeMay had a brief meeting with President Ngo Dinh Diem. *USAF*

*LeMay:* This was part of the argument. You could always say, “Well, if we do this, then the Russians and the Chinese will come in.” Well, I point back to Cuba, Lebanon, and the things that we did. We did what we wanted, and they didn’t come in. Matter of fact, all through history, every time we stood up like a man, they backed off. It was only when we vacillated and weaseled around did they keep on pushing. I don’t think there was a chance of the Chinese coming in if we stood up and warned them not to.

But all of our action, throughout all of this thing, all of our action indicated a fear to do anything: indecision; not knowing what we were going to do; afraid to move; too little too late. What were we going to do? All through here. And as this went on, they [the communists] became firmly convinced that they were going to win the war in Washington. They couldn’t win it in the field. . . .

[Discussion turned to U.S. Army management of the war.]

The Army’s still moving at twelve miles an hour in trucks, and that’s it. You don’t need very fast communications for that. I cried right from the start, saying: “Look, the big trouble the French had over here is they

lacked mobility.” All they could do is put these outposts out, all over the place, which meant they had to supply them. They dispersed what strength they had, and they just sat there and waited until the guerrillas picked out one of them, assembled the necessary force, and then overran it and faded back into the jungle. Now, if we can give communications at these places, with mobile teams—and we’ve got the air power to do it—and just saturate it when one of them gets hot, let’s drop all the paratroopers we can get in airplanes out there and make sure none of them get away. And we could do it real quick. All you have to do is have them on the alert. [It] takes a lot of troops to do it, but we can do it that way. Let’s try it. That means you have to have a radio set at each one of these outposts—hamlets and villages and so forth—and somebody to operate it. They couldn’t even get the radio sets.

**Belden:** There’s one thing—a very remarkable thing—about this war from the technical point of view that always intrigued me, and that’s the way the B-52 turned out to be used. You know, when the B-52 was first built, nobody would ever think of dropping an iron bomb out of it.

**LeMay:** That’s not exactly the story.

**Belden:** How did that come about?

**LeMay:** We had enough bomb racks to put iron-type bombs in one wing of a B-52.

**Belden:** From the early times?

**LeMay:** From the early times. No one ever expected to use these damn things, but it just seemed to be worth the effort for insurance policy. We might want to do it some time. We had it.

No one ever expected we’d go into the type of operation that we went into, and there’s still some question in my mind whether the results warranted the effort or not. It certainly wasn’t the way I would do it. But under the ground rules that were made and decided by the president of the United States, we did it. That’s what he wanted; we did it, which meant building some more bomb racks and getting more airplanes fixed up to do this sort of a job.

**Belden:** What about the issue that later developed, that you could see the beginnings of it in this period, and that’s the close air support issue—in terms of the fast movers versus the low-and-slow types.

**LeMay:** Well, there again, you get all of the so-called experts who say they know how to do it instead of the people who’ve done it. And you find ground people standing up as an “expert” on close air support and saying, “You can’t hit that target on the ground because you’re moving too fast.” This is not the case. You find that the experience was that they discarded the slow-moving airplanes, the AT-6 and the T-28 and stuff like

that. They got rid of them. They were too slow. They got shot down. The helicopter is slow-flying. They fly so slow that they get shot down. They're too vulnerable.

**Belden:** What about the gunships?

**LeMay:** Gunships the same way. It's not a very good platform, and you can't carry the load. You don't have the range, staying capacity, or anything else. They're too vulnerable, both on the ground and in the air. . . .

**Belden:** I'd like to ask just one more question. This is the problem that comes out in the Vietnamese situation, where you are beginning to use more sophisticated weapons, and you want to turn it over to the local forces. This takes more training and more maintenance on their part, and so on. How do we overcome a problem like this? You were starting to experience it in Vietnam even in this early period, I believe.

**LeMay:** You can't overcome it. You can't overcome it in our own forces.

**Belden:** It's only magnified.

**LeMay:** It's magnified over there. For instance, we're taking some F-111s. By no stretch of the imagination is this a strategic weapons system. But it's the only thing we can get, so we take them. I would be willing to equip some strategic squadrons with C-47s to hold the skill and knowledge that we've built up in the last twenty-five years in our strategic units together until we can give them a proper weapons system. Because if you have to start from scratch, if we have to start from scratch in this country, it's quite a job to build up an outfit. I say it takes four years in this country to build a good bomb wing.

**Belden:** Even with a given aircraft.

**LeMay:** Yes, after you've got the aircraft, to get the people in there, to get them working, to know their equipment, to know their job, to learn the things they have to do. [It] takes four years. Now, maybe you can do it a little quicker in wartime, where you get out there, and you really have to do it every day, day after day, and you learn it or die, and a lot of people die, you can do it a little quicker. But in peacetime, it takes four years.

**Belden:** So it's going to have to take longer over there.

**LeMay:** And longer over there.



An official portrait of General LeMay while he was chief of staff of the Air Force. *USAF.*

## Part II

### June 1972

INTERVIEW BY AIR FORCE HISTORY, JUNE 8, 1972:<sup>92</sup>

**Robert F. Futrell:** This first question that we've got here really is an attempt to get a trend toward the recognition that we were not going to be allowed to use nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia. I think this is important concerning the planning stage of it. Could you trace through and tell us when you began to know, or to feel, that we were not going to be allowed to use nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia?

**Gen. Curtis E. LeMay:** Oh, I think that was generally known right from the start. I don't think there was ever any recommendation from the military that nuclear weapons be used, certainly not from the Air Force. Not while I was around in there was there ever any thought of using nuclear weapons in this kind of an operation. So I think it was known right from the start. . . .

**Thomas G. Belden:** Was there any feeling in SAC about the diversion of B-52s for Southeast Asia in the conventional role? That is, taking them off of their nuclear role?

**LeMay:** Not too much. This is not really the proper use of the airplane, of course, of a weapons system. But there are plenty of times when you have to use, in a military situation, weapons systems on jobs on which they're not designed. And this is all right. They will help out the situation.

But the main quarrel at the time was that the administration wouldn't do the things that were necessary to do once they got into war. They wouldn't hit the target systems that should have been hit, like closing the harbor at Haiphong. That was the main quarrel, not to be just usually diverted to help out people on the ground.

**Futrell:** Could we elaborate there just a little bit more? In your interview earlier with Dr. Belden, you said that "there's still some question in my mind whether the results of the B-52 employment warranted the effort or not, and I certainly wouldn't have done it that way." Of course, this has whetted our curiosity greatly.



**LeMay:** Well, what I meant was that we have dropped an awful lot of bombs on South Vietnam, far more than we ever dropped on Germany and Japan during World War II.<sup>93</sup> And the results that we've gotten haven't added up to winning the war, as it did in Germany and Japan—particularly in Japan, because I think the air effort in Japan was more evident for the contribution it made to ending the war when it did than it was in Germany, although the Strategic Bombing Survey definitely stated that the air effort would have ended the war in Germany without an invasion. And certainly it did in Japan, because we planned it that way.

General [Henry H. "Hap"] Arnold came over. . . . He visited every place in the Far East, and he stopped by Guam to visit us. He was asking everyone the question: "When is the war going to be over?" Well, we hadn't been giving it much thought as to when the war was going to end. We were too busy with daily operations. He said, "Well, let's see if we can figure it out here." We looked at the target list, what we had left to do, and we couldn't find any targets that were going to be in existence much after about the first of September. We would have been on purely transportation after that, so we couldn't see much of a war going on after that time.

**Belden:** But in the Southeast Asia case, there were still plenty of targets left, because of the constraints on the targets.

**LeMay:** Because we never hit the proper targets to start with. For instance, the most important target over there has always been Haiphong, and the other minor ports. In other words, if you stop the supplies from coming in, there can't be too much of a war going on. That's always been the primary target.

Then there are power plants, and transportation, and the supply dumps, and so forth. Look, there's all sorts of examples of reconnaissance photographs of supply dumps in villages, because we wouldn't hit populated areas, and they knew it. So you'd see a village with supply dumps piled in amongst the village shacks far higher than the shacks themselves. We couldn't hit them. That sort of thing. We were forbidden to hit the proper targets.

**Futrell:** Could we go back to this nuclear question just one more time? In [19]61, [Roger] Hilsman [Jr.] and [Arthur M.] Schlesinger [Jr.] have said that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were determined not to go back into Southeast Asia unless we went all-out, including the use of nuclear weapons. Would you comment on this?<sup>94</sup>

**LeMay:** I don't remember anything of this sort. I do know, or do remember, that the Joint Chiefs were always rather frustrated with the no-win policy down there. In spite of the arguments we've had in the Joint Chiefs, everyone was of the opinion that once you choose military



**As the Air Force's senior bomber commander, General LeMay had been integrally involved in the development of the B-52. He is shown here piloting a YB-52 on a test flight in May 1952 during a visit to Boeing's Seattle plant. *Boeing/USAF.***

action as a solution to your problem, then you ought to get in with both feet and get the chore over with, and do the things that are necessary to be done. We never did that. As a matter of fact, every principle of war was violated down there, doing everything wrong. So this was rather frustrating.

We always wanted to go back in, full strength, to get it over with. But I don't think anybody ever thought that nuclear weapons would be necessary. Maybe what they're talking about is that I think everybody objected to the government making statements [like], "Oh, we won't use nuclear weapons, ever." We all thought this was bad. Here we've taken a large segment of the resources of the country to put into the nuclear program for weapons systems. If we tell our enemies that we have a policy of never using them, we've wasted the taxpayers' resources.

Whether you intend to use them or not, you should never say what your intentions are. But these idealistic people in the government at the time threw up their hands in horror at the thought of using nuclear weapons and would want to say, "We would never do anything so nasty as to drop a nuclear weapon." Once you convince the enemy that that's not going to

happen, this relieves his mind and allows him to do a lot of things that he wouldn't otherwise do.

What you're talking about is that they [the Joint Chiefs] wanted to say they might use them, whether they intended to use them or not. But the situation never got to the point where we thought it was necessary out in Southeast Asia.

**Futrell:** That is one of the items of information that I have not fully understood, and I will cover in this fashion. In fact, you realize the things that I'm trying to do are to fill in chinks that I've got. Sometimes things didn't happen, and they're thus really not coverable in documents because they never happened, but they are more significant than the things that did happen.

**LeMay:** Well, no one ever planned on using the nuclear weapons there, although funny things get out. I definitely remember one thing that I got awfully mad about. We were talking about some problem in Southeast Asia at the Joint Chiefs, and after the meeting was over, [Adm. Arleigh A.] Burke said to me, in a joking manner, "LeMay, don't you think maybe we ought to drop an atomic bomb on Hanoi just to solve the problem?"

I said, "Yes, it might be a good idea."

This came out in the newspaper the next day. Where it came from, I don't know. "LeMay advocates dropping a nuclear weapon on Hanoi." No one, including LeMay, ever advocated using atomic weapons.

**Futrell:** In 1958, though, Gen. Frederic [H.] Smith [Jr.] did send you this study about the use of nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia for what he called "situation control." He told me sometime ago that that study, he thought, went up like a lead balloon, that the only person that ever asked him about it was an Iron Curtain military attaché that asked him was he really serious.<sup>95</sup>

**LeMay:** I don't remember. I'm not surprised. Everybody was making plans all the time, encouraged to, as a matter of fact—new ideas coming up, old ideas coming up again, using everything, which was very well. Once, somebody suggested using nuclear weapons to defoliate the jungle over there, that sort of stuff; using nuclear weapons to contaminate the Ho Chi Minh Trail, all of this sort of stuff coming up all the time. But I'm talking about a serious plan that the Joint Chiefs [had] that we might use nuclear weapons over there. It never was found.<sup>96</sup>

**Futrell:** How did the Army sell the doctrine that counterinsurgency was an Army mission? This I simply can't understand.

**LeMay:** Well, there was certainly a big battle down there in the Joint Chiefs on this. We never thought it was fully an Army mission. We thought air power should play a big role in this sort of thing. As a matter of fact, mobility is one of the most important factors, looking at the history of



This image shows General LeMay meeting with the Joints Chiefs on May 27, 1961, after he had been selected as Air Force chief of staff but before he had been confirmed. Left from LeMay are Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer (chairman), Gen. George Decker, President Kennedy, Adm. Arleigh A. Burke, and Gen. David Shoup. Photo by Robert Knudsen. *Kennedy Library*.

the campaign down on the Malay Peninsula that the British were on, and learning lessons from that, and learning the lesson of the French in Vietnam. It took at least ten to twenty times as many people on the defensive side against the guerrillas as the guerrillas had to try to just defend against [them] because the guerrillas could pick the place of attack, and they'd always pick a place where they'd have temporary superiority.

You can't be strong every place, so it's a matter of transportation, mobility, and getting to where they attack. Air power can play a tremendous role in this, and it still never has been exploited properly. I tried for several years to get a mobile parachute force so that when an attack came, they could really dump large segments of paratroopers in the area there and cut off these people, and cut them up before they could withdraw. We never got around to doing this.

**Jacob Van Staaveren:** Was this because the Army opposed it?

**LeMay:** Yes, not directly, but we just never got it done. They always wanted to use the air power for something else. We talked about poor communications and all around the big problems that we had, but it could have been done. It still can be done.

I think this is one of the tools that air power will give you to fight counterinsurgency action. The main thing is to find these people. Where are they? When they get a group together big enough to attack an outpost



**General LeMay and President Kennedy watch a manned weapons firepower demonstration at the Air Proving Ground Center, Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, on May 4, 1962. Photo by Cecil Stoughton. Kennedy Library.**

or something of that sort, and when you find them, within a very short period of time, you can dump a bunch of people in there. If you tried to get them over a road or through the jungle, they might stay ahead of you and get away. But if you dumped them in there by air right quick, then that's something else again.

**Belden:** This requires a good deal of tactical intelligence to let you know where they are.

**LeMay:** Well, no. You know when the attack starts. If you have a lot of these people on alert—just standing on the alert, ready to go, full packs ready to go right then—you could certainly get off in fifteen minutes. Then you've got the flying time to this place, so within an hour, you're going to be there. The attack's probably not going to be over by that time, and you could dump a bunch of people in there, so you've got a lot of people in the area. In other words, instead of the enemy then having superior numbers, you can dump superior numbers on top of them.

**Futrell:** Would you comment on air firepower? This is air mobility that you've just mentioned.

**LeMay:** Well, our air firepower has always been handicapped, until the later years of the war, by the type of equipment we could put in there. Remember, at the start of the fracas, they didn't want it known that we were even over there helping them. They didn't even want it known that

we were giving them any supplies. Anything we sent over there had to be capable of being pulled off the junk heap of World War II equipment that was supposedly lying around the world, readily available. So we had to use all that stuff. For instance, the first gunship was a C-47 with a Gatling gun in the door that we came up with because there wasn't anything else to use. You had to use all of this old stuff, B-26s and things of that sort.

**Futrell:** You did mention, though, in your interview with Dr. Belden, that you still had some reservations about gunships.

**LeMay:** I don't know what I was thinking about. They've done a remarkably good job over there. All of them, even the C-47s, did some good work. I think probably what I meant was that once we got into a shooting war, we should have gone in there with the best equipment we had to get it over with as soon as possible, rather than dragging along with junk equipment and a halfhearted effort.

**Belden:** I think this gunship thing came up when we were talking about fast-movers versus slow-movers, in the tactical situation, and you were a little bit on the side of using fast-moving aircraft, you know, as close air support rather than . . .

**LeMay:** Well, yes. Once you get into an area that is defended, then these gunships are pretty vulnerable, and I think finally we did lose a couple of them over there when we ran into some antiaircraft stuff. Whereas a fast-moving tactical airplane, F-111 for instance, has got the capability of hitting moving targets on the road at night, or in bad weather, the same as the gunship. And that airplane is more likely to survive in a defended area than the unarmed, slow-moving gunship.

**Van Staaveren:** General LeMay, when did you first recommend bombing North Vietnam? What stage of the war? Aside from any formal memo that may have gone up.

**LeMay:** Oh, very early in the game, when it became apparent that this was not a group of guerrillas, insurgents inside of South Vietnam operating; that it was being controlled from Hanoi, and it was an attack from out-country.

**Van Staaveren:** Before the overthrow of President Diem on 1 November 1963?

**LeMay:** Oh yes, definitely.<sup>97</sup>

**Van Staaveren:** You mentioned in your interview with Dr. Belden that General [David] Shoup joined you initially as another member of the Joint Chiefs in recommending bombing the North. Do you recall when General Shoup took that position? Was he with you almost from the beginning?

**LeMay:** He was with me almost from the beginning. But it wasn't, I think, until the overthrow of Diem that the other chiefs came along full

scale on it. The argument that I used that I think brought them over was one of, look, in all of the political instability that we've had in the country down there, the military has always remained loyal to the government in power. This may not always be the case, and we may wind up with a situation where we're hard put to get our people out of the country; in other words, complete chaos. This is a possibility. This was seen for the first time, I think, after the overthrow of Diem.

The argument [before that time] was, look, we can't go north until we get some stability in the south. I never understood this argument, but that was the one that was advanced. My point was that we're never going to have any stability in the south unless you went north and tried to sell the people in South Vietnam, who were just as tired of the war—they were more tired, as a matter of fact—and they couldn't see the end in sight, any place. You had to give them a ray of light to get some stability down there. Once they had a government, it looked like they were going to have a chance of winning and cleaning up the war, there had been more cohesion in the south. The overthrow of Diem, I think, finally brought the rest of the Chiefs on board, and then we were all together from then on about going north.

*Van Staaveren*: I was going to ask how you would characterize the Navy position. Just looking at the formal documents, it seems that the Marine Corps was with you at an earlier date than the Navy.

*LeMay*: That's correct.

*Van Staaveren*: What was the Navy position? How would you characterize the Navy position at this time?

*LeMay*: The Navy was against anything over there in which they felt they couldn't really participate and take the leadership in. (Same way with the Army.) That was their main drawback. To me, they never did have any real valid arguments for not closing the ports and stopping the supplies that were coming in there. It was very apparent back in the early days where their supplies were coming from. The bulk of the stuff was coming from outside the country because it couldn't be manufactured in North Vietnam. That's the first principle that should have been taken care of, stopping that.

*Van Staaveren*: The statement has also been made, and I've seen this from several sources, that the Joint Chiefs never really got together rather solidly until the attack on Bien Hoa on 1 November 1964; that up until that time, the Joint Chiefs differed on the timing and the severity of an air strike on the North.<sup>98</sup>

*LeMay*: No, I don't think that's so. That's pretty late in the game. We were together much before that. When did Diem go down?

*Van Staaveren*: Diem went down on 1 November 1963, and Bien Hoa was attacked on 1 November 1964.



Secretary McNamara, General Taylor, and President Kennedy talk in the Cabinet Room of the White House after a meeting of the executive committee of the National Security Council on January 25, 1963. Photo by Robert Knudsen. *Kennedy Library*.

*LeMay*: They were together a year before that, or more. It was about the time that Diem went under that they really got together.

*Van Staaveren*: The first memo that I've seen where the Joint Chiefs do get together is dated 22 January 1964. But they seem to be talking a great deal about smaller-scale action, [with OPLAN] 34A.

*LeMay*: Well, starting at the time that President Kennedy came in, shortly after that, General [Maxwell] Taylor became chairman of the Joint Chiefs.<sup>99</sup> He had this idea of “flexible response,” of not going in with a full, all-out effort, but just still enough strength out there to say, “Look boys, you can't do anything against us, be sensible and negotiate.”

I never was for that solution to the problem. I could foresee many things happening that could have happened, but we'd get tired of that stuff and pull out like the French did. I never could condone spending lives, particularly the lives of our people, on such an operation over a long period of time without a policy of winning because I never could foresee a defensive action—and this is defensive action—winning anything. Never in history has a defensive action been the solution to military operations to settle your problems. You have to go on the offense if you're going to win. This was essentially a defensive operation, an idealistic approach, that never has worked throughout history. So I never was for it.

This came in with Taylor. Now he controlled, of course, the chief of staff of the Army, and the Navy to some extent went along with them. In



other words, they wouldn't stand up on their hind legs as I did to start with, and as Shoup did later on when he saw what was going on. Later on, when some of these things came to pass, the other chiefs got together that we should be following the principles of war and not some of these ivory tower principles in this sort of an operation.

**Futrell:** Do you feel that the chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in this period reflected the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

**LeMay:** I don't think so, no.

**Van Staaveren:** I would like to follow up on this. How would you characterize the role of Taylor throughout your association in this period? Would you consider him one of the principle architects of the strategy, or one among many?

**LeMay:** I think he had a great deal of influence on President Kennedy, yes.

I know from talking to General [Nathan] Twining, who was chairman of the Joint Chiefs when Taylor was chief of staff in the Army,<sup>100</sup> that Taylor was advocating some of these same principles at that time, and the remainder of the Joint Chiefs did not agree with him. As a matter of fact, I've heard General Twining several times say that they'd have to button up and take Taylor over to see General Eisenhower and get him back on the track. Taylor then retired. And I think after retirement, he presented some of his ideas to Kennedy, who was a presidential candidate, and sold him on them. [Taylor] came back first as a military advisor in the executive department of the government when Kennedy was elected president, and a little later on [October 1962] was . . . brought from retirement and made chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I think he had a great deal of influence on the president.

During this time, the administration didn't seem to have much confidence in the military. It was sort of a waste of time to try to present any arguments, although we all tried from time to time, individually as well as collectively. But remember, President Kennedy practically abolished the National Security Council. We met with him as a group hardly ever. Most of the time, we were represented by Taylor, and we gave him our views. But I have my doubts as to whether they were fully presented before the president or not.

I do know that in many cases we would get papers from the secretary [of defense, Robert McNamara] requesting our views on certain problems when we would know that the decision had been made and the order issued a couple of days before we ever got the paper asking our advice on the question. So I don't think that Secretary McNamara ever paid much attention to the Joint Chiefs. He used to come down and meet with us, and he was always saying over before the Congress that he always consulted the Joint Chiefs on basic military questions. But I have the feeling that he never paid any attention to anything we said.<sup>101</sup>



General Taylor and General LeMay led the Joint Chiefs and other senior military personnel from the White House as part of the Kennedy funeral procession to St. Matthew's Cathedral on November 25, 1963. Photo by Abbie Rowe. *Kennedy Library*.

**Futrell:** I am leading into a summarization of the diffusion of the decision-making process from the beginning of the Kennedy administration, and I'm leading in with this downgrading of the National Security Council, and the use of these task forces that President Kennedy seemed to favor. Do you think these task forces and task groups that were established downgraded the province of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

**LeMay:** Yes, I do. The proper military thinking never got in to him. Let me give you an example of this Bay of Pigs operation.<sup>102</sup> I don't know myself the full story of the Bay of Pigs. All I can tell you is what I know of personally. I went down to a Joint Chiefs meeting once while I was vice chief when General [Thomas] White was gone on a trip. He was in Europe, I think, on an inspection trip, or at least out of the country and gone, so I represented the Air Force at the regular Joint Chiefs meeting. I went in there, and there was a flap on because there was an item on the agenda that I wasn't cleared to receive. They finally got me cleared to listen to this, and it was the CIA man who gave a briefing about a choice between a couple or three beaches for a landing in Cuba.

I only said, "Well, I'm fresh on this, and I can't render any sort of judgment on this without knowing a little bit more. How many people



**The national security principals in Palm Beach, Florida, with the president on January 3, 1962: Vice President Johnson, President Kennedy, Secretary McNamara, Maxwell Taylor, and Roswell L. Gilpatric, the deputy secretary of defense. Photo by Cecil Stoughton. *Kennedy Library*.**

are involved here, who are they?” It turned out that there were about 700 Cubans that were going to do this job. So I said, “Well, I know that way back in history, Henry Morgan took Panama [in 1671] with 700 people, but that was a little different situation. I see no chance of 700 being successful here unless there’s a general uprising in the country at the same time, and I presume you have this arranged so it’s going to happen.”

The CIA man was very blunt about it. He said, “This doesn’t concern you. Just answer our question as to which beach is best.” Then I found out that the Joint Chiefs had been asked before to pick out the best beach for landing among the choice of about three, which they had done. Later on, [the CIA] decided maybe that they ought to have an airstrip at the beach. Well, they picked out a couple more that had an airstrip in the vicinity, or a place where they could land their airplanes without preparing one. Which one of those was the best? I think we came up with an answer on that. But that was all the Joint Chiefs were asked.

So that happened. Then the day the actual invasion took place, General White was gone again, and I was down at the [Joint Chiefs] meeting, and we found out that the invasion was going to take place tomorrow morning [April 17, 1961]. We were going to have a meeting at eight o’clock in the morning to look at the progress with the secretary of defense. I went down there at a quarter ’til eight, got there a little ahead of time, and I found out

when I got down there that the air cover had been canceled over the beach. I remember the plan was to use some B-26s, I guess, of which Cuba had some, with Cuban markings on them, to land at Key West to indicate there had been an uprising amongst the Cubans, and the Cuban air forces had taken off and bombed their own airfields and then defected to Florida. Meantime, the rest of the air force that they'd assembled from Guatemala had come up and hit.

Well, they didn't do a good job of knocking out the Cuban air force. They didn't do it properly; they didn't knock it out. But they were going ahead with the invasion anyway, but they were supposed to have air cover from Guatemala over the beaches at daylight when the landings occurred. They had to take off about midnight to be up there by daylight, and about ten or eleven o'clock, it was scrubbed. I didn't find this out until the next morning, and to me, this marked the end of the invasion effort right then with the Cuban air force not knocked out and no air cover over the beach.<sup>103</sup>

McNamara didn't come to the briefing. Mr. [Roswell] Gilpatric [the deputy secretary] came down. I met him at the door and said, "Look, you've just cut the throat of everybody on the beach down there by canceling the air cover last night." We went on and got the briefing, and sure enough, [Fidel] Castro's air force sank the supply ships before they could get them unloaded. When they ran out of ammunition, that was all there was. There wasn't any uprising, either, in the country.

Well, here's an operation that was planned outside the military, operated outside of the military, but the military got blamed for it being a bad operation—that is, from where I saw it. Now, there might have been more information that I didn't know anything about and never was cleared for, but from where I sat, it was an operation planned outside of the military, operated outside the military, that actually failed where with full military participation, it might have succeeded.

**Belden:** Was this a pattern that was repeated in the Vietnam planning?

**LeMay:** Yes, generally speaking, the war was run from outside the military in the early days, to the extent of the targets being picked by the civilian element of the administration. We sent in target lists, but they would pick the target. They'd pick the time of attack, the number of airplanes that could hit it, and the munitions that would be carried by the airplanes, right down to that extent.

**Futrell:** I want to go into this business of Air Force expertise on the MACV staff.<sup>104</sup> I simply cannot understand why we didn't have a properly balanced joint staff in MACV.

**LeMay:** We tried and tried and tried to get air representation down there, without success. And even gone right to McNamara on it.<sup>105</sup>

**Futrell:** What were his reasons?

**LeMay:** He never gave any.

**Futrell:** Just turned it off?

**LeMay:** Never gave any. He accepted Taylor's recommendation, and [Gen. William C.] Westmoreland's recommendation, and we never could get the proper representation for air power.

**Futrell:** Another thing that we would like to know, it's not really essential, is how Gen. [Paul D.] Harkins got selected for the job as COMUSMACV [commander, U.S. MACV].

**LeMay:** Well, the recommendation is beyond me, and McNamara made the decision. The Joint Chiefs never did any more than give tacit approval for those sorts of things. . . .<sup>106</sup>

**Futrell:** Could we continue with this Air Force expertise matter on the MACV staff for just a minute, looking at the potentiality of what might have been the case had there been Air Force expertise on the MACV staff? We know that there was an insufficient amount there.

**LeMay:** Ever since I've been in the Air Force, there has been a constant battle on the part of the Air Force people who thought they had a capability of rendering service to the country to render that service. We've never been able to do it properly. Up-to-date air power has not been used properly by this country. This is just a continuation of the battle down in South Vietnam. This is part of the interservice battle carried to the extreme. The Army had been trying to build back a tactical air force of their own—as you well know, having seen the documents—over the past several years. This is part of the battle.

**Futrell:** Why does the Air Force have to sell itself in every war?

**LeMay:** I don't know. It's always been that way since I've been in the Air Force. We've never been able to use air power properly.

During the period of the Eisenhower administration—well, starting from about the time of the Berlin Airlift, where this shook the country up, pretty much—we started to build our defenses back from the dismantling that had happened, in a very disastrous fashion, at the end of World War II. We started to build back again. For the next decade or so, I think the proper planning was done in air power, and we built up the Strategic Air Command, and did a pretty good job of it I think. Most people give it credit for keeping the peace in the world, and Winston Churchill did so openly. There was a lot of opposition to this, but we got it done anyway.

But there have always been battles against the airplane and the Air Force. Always.

**Futrell:** We get the counterargument that it wouldn't have made much difference had there been more Air Force expertise on the MACV staff



**Gen. William C. Westmoreland, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), greeted President Johnson upon Johnson's arrival in South Vietnam on December 22, 1967. According to General LeMay, Westmoreland showed "no signs of really understanding what air power was doing." Photo by Yoichi Okamoto. *National Archives.***

because of the rather prevailing belief that counterinsurgency was an Army mission, and air power couldn't contribute substantially. Could you respond to this?

*LeMay:* Well, maybe they wouldn't have been able to help much, but I'm sure if we'd had more people there that we could have gotten air power into the picture more. Maybe not enough, but we probably could have gotten it in a little better.

I think now that if you talk to [MACV commander] General [Creighton W.] Abrams [Jr.], he's been over there long enough and been fighting long enough that he fully understands air power. As a matter of fact, he told me personally the last time I was over there about air power. Air power was his reserve. He no longer maintained a reserve. It was air power. And he personally was assigning the targets for the B-52s. There are so many sorties a day, and so many requests for them, that he personally did it.

So he understands the use of air power, but he's got the Army to battle for the proper use of it. Certainly he understands it now, and understands very well that without air power, Vietnam would have gone under in this last offensive [the Easter Offensive]. It would have gone under in the Tet Offensive of a couple of years ago [1968]. He understands that.<sup>107</sup>



President Johnson and Secretary McNamara are shown agonizing over Vietnam on February 7, 1968, in the midst of the Tet Offensive. McNamara left the administration at the end of the month and became president of the World Bank. Photo by Yoichi Okamoto. *National Archives.*

**Belden:** Was Khe Sanh a turning point in General Westmoreland's assessment of air power, where he really praised it?<sup>108</sup>

**LeMay:** I doubt if General Westmoreland was ever convinced of anything. He showed no signs of it. In my opinion, he showed no signs of really understanding what air power was doing.

**Van Staaveren:** General Westmoreland insisted on controlling all of the B-52 strikes, did he not?

**LeMay:** Well, the Army insisted on controlling everything over there, and we had a great deal of difficulty in keeping air power under [the Air Force] so it would be properly used.

But this battle has been going on all along. For instance, General Arnold worked a miracle, I think, in getting the B-29s under a separate command outside the theaters in the Pacific during the war [World War II]. They had always been assigned to the theater commander. . . .

[More discussion of the command structure during World War II for the Army Air Force.]

**Belden:** Could similar command arrangements have been made in the Vietnam case as were made in the B-29 case?

**LeMay:** Yes. I don't think we had any objection to the air power coming under the theater commander out there in this case. It was a tactical situation rather than a strategic one. But we wanted it all together. We wanted to operate

it properly, like it was operated under [Gen. Douglas] MacArthur in the campaign there, where the air power was under one head, all of the air power under one head, instead of being piecemealed out to the units in the field.

**Belden:** Did that include the Navy and Marine air, too?

**LeMay:** It would have been better if we could have gotten it that way, but we never got it that way until late, late in the game. We finally just got the Army [air] transports, for instance, put under one head, so all the transports in the theater could be operated as one and get some efficiency out of them. Finally got the Marine combat units operating along with the Air Force combat units. Never got the Navy into the act.

**Futrell:** But General LeMay, it seems to me the Defense Unification Act, this thing in 1958, fractionated air power more than it unified any air power. Is this a valid judgment?

**LeMay:** Well, it turned out that way. Of course, we made a mistake of not getting the Navy air power into the Air Force at that time—Navy and Marines. And the Army then, of course, tried to build back its own air force in spite of the fact that we had a separate Air Force in the country, and they've continued to do that. They've done pretty well at it, too. They've got more airplanes than the Air Force has.

**Futrell:** But it seems to me that this results in little penny packages of aviation being employed rather than air power being employed. In other words, we've got Army RDF [rapid deployment force], Air Force RDF.

**LeMay:** That's right.

**Futrell:** What's the solution for that?

**LeMay:** I can't explain the reason for it. It doesn't make any sense to me, and I don't think it should make any sense to anybody. They ought to have air power under one head. But it's the same old human trait, I guess, coming to the front, that everybody wants everything they can get their hands on to do their job well. And certainly, the airplane is a handy tool for anyone to have if they're going to have to fight and get around.

**Futrell:** I've got another problem on interservice rivalry. It seems to me that Secretary McNamara, in effecting his cost-effectiveness judgments and his program-package budgeting, invited the services to bid against each other for the accomplishment of missions.

**LeMay:** They did play the services one against the other. Many times he'd go to one service and say, "Look, if you'll give up this, we'll give you this." So you try to cooperate to get things improved a little bit and say, "All right, I'll do that." Well, then you'd give up what he asked for, but you never got what he was supposed to [give] in return. That sort of thing happened all the time.





**President Kennedy on the White House lawn with the Joint Chiefs on January 15, 1963: Gen. David Shoup, Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, General LeMay, President Kennedy, Gen. Maxwell Taylor (chairman), and Adm. George Anderson. *Kennedy Library.***

***Futrell:*** Was this the sub-central theme of the interservice rivalry that took place in Vietnam, that if one service didn't do it, the other service would pick up the role?

***LeMay:*** To some extent, yes. Not all together. Everybody wanted to make what contribution they could, of course, to solving the problem over there. If anyone had any capability, it was offered to solve the problem.

But the Army had always been trying to build back their tactical air force. They were trying to make a case that the Air Force wasn't properly carrying out the tactical role; it wasn't giving them the support that they needed, that all of our budget was going to the strategic forces.

Well, this is not exactly the case. First of all, the Air Force didn't make the final decision on where the money was going to be spent. This is a civilian prerogative, of making the final decision of where our money was going to be spent. Even during the big-spending years of building up the

Strategic Air Command, and the submarine program, missiles, the maximum of the national budget that was ever spent on the strategic forces, I think, was about 17 percent. All the rest of it went to tactical forces. But the Army was just looking for excuses as to why the Air Force couldn't support them properly with tactical air power, even though we had a pretty good team going at the end of World War II, operating properly.

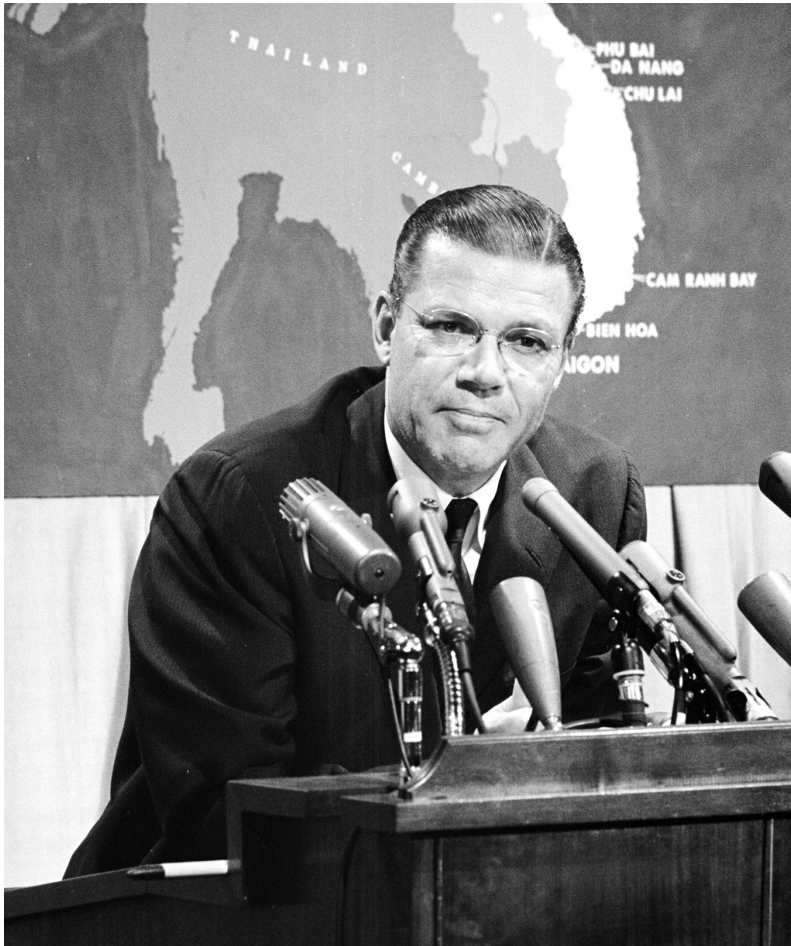
I think one of the mistakes that we made, and I blame the Air Force to some extent for this, is that when the war was over, instead of living together and working together as we did during the war, we had come home, and the Air Force goes to its airfields and air bases, and the Army goes to their posts, camps, and stations, and about the only time we get together is when we have a maneuver. Well, I've tried to change that by sending forward air controllers and air liaison officers, and so forth, back to the Army units, so they had their people that they know, and worked with daily, and had some confidence in. I think this was helpful. But here again, the Army wasn't looking for help; they were looking for reasons why they had to have their own tactical air force.

**Belden:** In the JCS discussions, how much were the international political problems discussed as a constraint on the use of air power, that is, possibly the intervention of the Chinese, etc., as happened in Korea?

**LeMay:** We used to have a meeting every once in a while with the State Department, and we'd ask them questions, and they'd tell us a few things. President Kennedy always said that he wanted political advice as well as military advice from the Joint Chiefs, but what I think he really meant was he didn't want any advice at all. At least, I always had the feeling that I was spinning my wheels, and anything that I said was not really falling on receptive ears. I think the other chiefs felt more or less like that, too.

But we did discuss some of these things, and tried to be helpful, and offer advice where we thought our experience would give us a capability of rendering advice that might be helpful. First, we discussed a lot of these things amongst ourselves, many, many times, in trying to arrive at conclusions. As I have been talking here, I might have given the impression that all we did in the Joint Chiefs was fight interservice battles and things of that sort. There were these sort of squabbles, but most of the time, I think we were pretty much in agreement on the basic military problems, of what should be done.

It's more than emphasizing our disagreements, of which there were many, of course, and I hope there always will be. I don't want to give the impression that I frown on interservice rivalry. I do not. I think it's a good thing. I used to think if maybe we all had the same uniform, and everybody



Secretary McNamara speaks at a press conference on June 16, 1965, while standing in front of a map of Southeast Asia. Photo by Warren K. Leffler. *Library of Congress*.

in the same service, it might cut out some of the disagreements, and things might run a little smoother. Well, maybe they would run a little smoother, but I don't think it would produce the type of thinking we should have in the military forces. They're bringing new weapons systems out, and new methods of fighting, and things of that sort that we get by some of this interservice rivalry. I think we need it, and I think it's helpful.

It, of course, like everything else, can be carried too far. Under the system we have now, what we need is a strong secretary of defense. When the time comes, [he] will make the decisions when there's disagreement among the Joint Chiefs. We had that under Mr. McNamara, except he made the decisions without paying any attention, much, to the Joint Chiefs, which meant that he was making military decisions without the background to do

it. I think a great number of them were basically wrong decisions, and a lot of the chickens are coming home to roost now, in later years, on some of the things that he did without the benefit of military advice.<sup>109</sup>

**Belden:** Did the Chinese intervention in Korea have much of an influence on the early decisions about Vietnam?

**LeMay:** I would say that it did. One of the reasons that the administration wouldn't allow us to hit the proper targets is that they were afraid that the war would expand by the Chinese coming in. I never thought that this would happen down there. It could have happened, yes. But this is one of the things you have to think about when you make the basic decision to use military force in solving your problem. You can't get a little bit pregnant. Once you get into this, you're into it. If you haven't the guts to see it through at the end, you shouldn't get into it to start with.

**Van Staaveren:** I would like to follow up on Dr. Belden's question. In his book, President Johnson refers to the possible intervention of the Chinese or the Soviets—one or the other—and yet when we did begin to bomb North Vietnam, the Flaming Dart strike of 7 February 1965, he states that his military analysts assured him that the Chinese now were unlikely to intervene unless we invaded North Vietnam or unless we toppled Hanoi.<sup>110</sup> Did you discern a change in the assessments of what the Chinese might do from late 1964 and early 1965, that the Chinese might intervene, or that they might not intervene? Was there any change in those?

**LeMay:** Well, I don't think the situation has changed much. You're talking about President Nixon's decision now to do some of these things?

**Belden:** No, he was speaking of the earlier decisions in 1964 and 1965 when they made the first air strikes in North Vietnam.

**LeMay:** No, I don't think the situation changed there on the thinking on the Chinese. I don't think the Chinese would have come into the Korean fracas if we hadn't had the leak that notified them that we weren't going to bomb north of the Yalu [River]. I think that information got there. I can't prove it, but there's no doubt in my mind but that it did get there. I've seen articles around about that convinced me that this was so. The leak probably occurred through the State Department. Once they were convinced that this was going to happen, they came in. If it hadn't been [for] that leak, they wouldn't have come in.

So, to answer the question, there was no such change in thinking, that I know of, in the Joint Chiefs as to the attitude of the Chinese before or after the decision was made to actually go north.<sup>111</sup>

**Van Staaveren:** I'd like ask another question, to go back to one we discussed briefly, about these special committees set up by the White House. On February 14, 1964, President Johnson appointed a Vietnam coordinating



**General LeMay spoke with Maj. Milton E. Nelson, the pilot, after an orientation flight in the new F-104B in March 1958 while LeMay was vice chief of staff of the Air Force. LeMay was frustrated that the United States would not deploy the newest technology, like the F-104, to Southeast Asia. When it “finally got through my thick skull that this is the way we’re going to have to operate,” he oversaw the development of an Air Force unit that was prepared to fly “junked airplanes,” the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron, commonly known as Jungle Jim. USAF.**

committee chaired by William Sullivan, who later became ambassador to Laos. The purpose of this committee was to manage U.S. policy and operations in South Vietnam; Maj. Gen. [Rollen H.] Anthis of SACSA [special assistant for counterinsurgency and special activities] was a member of this committee. Then later that year, 1 November 1964, as a result of the attack on Bien Hoa, the president established an NSC working group to prepare military and political options against North Vietnam, and Adm. [Lloyd M.] Mustin was the JCS representative [as J-3, director of operations].<sup>112</sup> How important were these committees? There’s quite a bit of literature on it. From the documents, one gets the impression they were really making the policy and providing the options for the White House. Were you aware of what they were doing, and do you have a recollection of how important their work was?

**LeMay:** I don’t have any recollection of much of it, or all of it, so there couldn’t have been much going on in the Joint Chiefs on the subject. They

probably had representation over there, but how influential they were in coming up with the report, I don't know. Of course, how important the report was in making up the administration's mind, I don't know, either.<sup>113</sup>

**Futrell:** Tying in with this, you are familiar both with General Eisenhower's use of the National Security Council and President Kennedy's, and President Johnson's use of the National Security Council. Which would you prefer?

**LeMay:** I would prefer the proper use of the National Security Council as it was set up by the National Security Act, which gives the president really a planning operation for the security of the country which takes into account not only the military portion of the country's planning, but the State Department and the other departments of the government that are really involved. With this sort of an operation going on, I think you get the field properly covered. And you do get proper advice into the president. Of course it's not unanimous in every case; it shouldn't be. But at least everyone had a chance to get their two cents' worth into the act.

I think all anyone can expect is to get an audience with the boss, so that the boss understands his position. And if you can't sell your position to him, why, OK, you've lost the battle, but at least you've been listened to. But when you have a feeling that the boss has no confidence in your advice or really [doesn't] want it, then it's a sorry state of affairs, and we were in that position during a portion of this time we're talking about.

**Futrell:** Could I develop the case of Farm Gate just a little bit, you know, the air commando Jungle Jim troop [4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron] that was sent to Vietnam in November 1961? I want to be sure that I correctly understood your talk with Dr. Belden. You led into the subject of Jungle Jim by saying that you would have preferred to have gone first class.<sup>114</sup>

**LeMay:** Well, [when] this operation came about, during the early days [in Southeast Asia], there were plenty of cases where a small number of airplanes, properly used, would have prevented things from happening that had long-range, detrimental effects on our policy and the things we were trying to get done.

For instance, I remember a case where an attack came on the Plaine des Jarres [the Plain of Jars in Laos], and a few airplanes would have really turned it back. They didn't have them. The Laotians didn't have them, and we didn't have them to give them because we couldn't give them anything except the old junked airplanes and so forth, but they probably couldn't operate them anyway.

If they ran into shiny airplanes with U.S. markings on them, why, we would have to face the world; and we've done this. For a little aside, I think in many cases we ought to stand up and be counted on these things

and stop worrying about it. Later on, we were able to fix up some of these junked airplanes and give them to some of these people, but it took time to do this, and there again, it was too little too late again.<sup>115</sup>

When it finally got through my thick skull that this is the way we're going to have to operate, I suggested to the Joint Chiefs that we get ready for this sort of stuff by having the Air Force form an outfit that was equipped with these junked airplanes. [They] would be pulled off of every junk heap in the world, unmarked, with Air Force crews on board that could be sent, if necessary, as Air Force people, or people who would be willing to resign from the Air Force and operate as mercenaries in case they wanted to do it that way. This was accepted by the Joint Chiefs, so they started the Jungle Jim outfit.

We got some of this old equipment overhauled so it was mechanically in operating shape.<sup>116</sup> We started a particularly oriented training program for these people to train them in the use of them in guerrilla operations, the type of warfare that they'd probably be used in, and we did this down at Eglin [Air Force Base, Florida]. They never were used in any of these undercover operations except the start of the Vietnamese program was undercover to the extent that we gave them this old equipment, and they were supposed to be flying it, and we were supposed to be advising them. Well, actually, we were flying it, or told to fly it, except they didn't want it to be known. So the cover plan was that we were training the Vietnamese.

Well, it got to the point where we didn't have the Vietnamese to train, but they still needed the firepower of these airplanes over there, so our people flew them, with a Vietnamese warm body on board; whether he was being trained or not was questionable. But that's the way it was done.

But these people [the air commandos] rendered very great service in the early days because they were the only ones that we could get in there. We couldn't, at that time, send any of our greater Air Force units in there.

**Futrell:** But, is it fair to begin by saying that you would have preferred to stand up and be counted, as opposed to the clandestine approach, such as Jungle Jim was?

**LeMay:** Oh, definitely. Here we are deciding to use military force in the solution of our problem, but not going about it in a first-class manner, asking our people to go out and risk getting killed, but they only can have junk to fight with. To me, this is a pretty tough thing to ask of our people, but they did it.

**Futrell:** There's another problem that I'd like to bring in on Farm Gate. The Farm Gate pilots, including [4400th CCTS commander] Col. Ben King, apparently believed that they were sent over for clandestine operations, where the American crews get in there and do some good. Yet as the mission [evolved], they got this training mission, which was admittedly

a cover mission, but nevertheless was one of the rather substantial limiting actions on the Farm Gate force. Were they given some sort of indication, initially, that they would go over and do this combat job?

**LeMay:** Yes, definitely.

**Futrell:** In other words, Col. Ben King says that you gave him some verbal instructions.

**LeMay:** They went over there to fight, right from the start. We knew it, [but] nobody ever said that, though.<sup>117</sup>

**Van Staaveren:** Did all the JCS members know it?

**LeMay:** Certainly. They knew it.

**Van Staaveren:** And McNamara, everyone?

**Futrell:** Then why did this 26 December [1961] JCS directive from [Joint Chiefs chairman] General [Lyman] Lemnitzer say they would operate only when VNAF [Vietnam Air Force] didn't have the capability, that they would always have a Vietnamese aboard, and these other restrictions that were put on the 26th of December come from?<sup>118</sup>

**LeMay:** Well, this was back in the days where a policy was that we would have some advisors over there and give them supplies, but we weren't participating to any great extent. They certainly didn't want to come out with the announcement that this outfit was going over to go into combat, but this is exactly what they were doing, and what they were sent over there for.

**Belden:** Is it your feeling that if they had gone in as you advocate, you know, directly, once you got involved in the pre-1964 situation, if that had been done properly, do you think American ground intervention would have been necessary in 1965?

**LeMay:** I don't believe so, no, if we'd gone in there, once we decided to use military force, we'd have gone in full blast. The shock effect would have accomplished what they wanted to do. There was a time when there was absolutely no defense in North Vietnam, for instance. We could have stopped all those supplies coming in very easily at any time and completely destroyed North Vietnam if we'd wanted to, with no cost of doing those offensives.

**Belden:** Do you think this action might have broadened the war with regard to China?

**LeMay:** I don't think so.

**Van Staaveren:** I would like to follow up on Dr. Belden's question. You may recall on the 1st of February 1964 we began our covert mission against North Vietnam. It was called 34A. The JCS was clearly on record, shortly afterward, that it would not have a decisive effect, although it continued. What was the rationale for continuing these very small-scale



or covert operations against North Vietnam during 1964 if they were not going to be [decisive]?<sup>119</sup>

*LeMay*: What was whose rationale for this?

*Van Staaveren*: Well, I'm inquiring what the rationale was for continuing them.

*Belden*: Rationale from the JCS, you mean?

*Van Staaveren*: Yes. If there was substantial agreement within the JCS that these operations were not going to have a significant or a decisive effect, why did they continue with them?

*LeMay*: We're doing what we're told. Remember, the decisions that are being made of what we will or will not do in Vietnam are not being made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They're being made by somebody else. In many cases, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not even participate. Maybe the chairman did, but the Joint Chiefs didn't. We're doing what we're told.

*Futrell*: Well, could I go back now to '61-'62, that winter? What were the objections to putting a strong—the Joint Chiefs recommended this also—a rather strong American show of force into South Vietnam rather than going into . . .<sup>120</sup>

*LeMay*: You're asking the wrong people to answer to this question. We were never given any explanation for any of the decisions.

*Futrell*: Well, we're developing a fact that's good right there, to know this. It does puzzle me, though, that we so easily intervened and sent the task force into Thailand in 1962, and that Taiwan show of force. The Lebanon show of force [in 1958] had worked extremely well, and yet all of the requirements for a show of force existed, it seems to me, in South Vietnam in 1961, and yet it was not shown.

*LeMay*: Well, show of force and things of that sort are fine. I think, for the Joint Chiefs, . . . they're suggesting a lot of things that might be helpful and so forth, and maybe some of them were actually accepted by the administration, but usually a little late, if they were [accepted], and after so many other things had been suggested that you probably forgot about wanting to suggest the fact weeks before.

Every time we stood up to the Russians, they backed off. I'm talking about communists. This is the only thing they understood. Back in this time period, where we had no doubt about strategic superiority, we never took advantage of it and used it except in the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis. If we'd really used it, we'd have accomplished a lot more. We never did.

We have always bent over backwards to try to cultivate world opinion. And, not being the aggressor, it hasn't done us any good, in my opinion. People are still talking about the United States as being an imperialistic nation and a selfish nation. Even though we've wrecked the economy of

the country, practically, by our gifts to the rest of the world, we're still an imperialistic nation seeking world domination. So it hasn't done us any good.

We might as well have gone ahead and used the power we had. I think if we had, in many cases, we'd probably brought about a better world, and a better place for all the people to live in, if we'd corrected some of these evils that had been going on. We could have corrected them, can still correct them, although we've now fallen into second place, definitely. There's no doubt about that. So we've got to be a little careful how we throw our weight around now, because we haven't got the weight to throw around. But I don't think that we've sunk to such a low point that we can't stand up to be counted. Once we fail to do that, then we really go down the drain awfully fast.

**Futrell:** When you came back from your trip to Vietnam in the middle of 1962, you made a statement for the Joint Chiefs of Staff that air power was depreciated rather than appreciated. I think this was a pretty good theme for the whole experience, but did you get any repercussion from this?

**LeMay:** No, I didn't get any repercussion. It was a fact, and I think it was generally known by the other people, and that's it. It wasn't corrected, but no repercussions. No action, either.

**Futrell:** I teach some classes at the Air War College from time to time, and somewhat with my tongue in my cheek, I suggest that air power was never used in Southeast Asia, that air vehicles were used to do things, up until now I would say.

**LeMay:** Well, you're about right. I don't know even now where it's really 100 percent properly used or not. I don't know whether they're hitting all the targets they should because I don't know what targets are left, or what have been hit, and so forth. About the only thing I get from the few conversations I've had with [Air Force chief of staff] General [John D.] Ryan is that he's happier than he has been in the past. But I don't get the information from him that every target that should be hit is being hit. I don't know whether they have any restrictions on the targets as of now. I gather that they're certainly better than they were. They have more freedom in hitting supplies wherever they're found now than they ever had before.<sup>121</sup>

**Belden:** When did the issue of mining Haiphong [harbor] first come up in the JCS? Very early, I presume.

**LeMay:** Yes. I don't think the Joint Chiefs ever advocated any particular method of closing the harbor of Haiphong. There are any number of ways that it could be closed. You could bomb the ships in the harbor. You could destroy the warehousing and the port facilities, and so forth, by bombing. You could mine the place, or you could even knock out the

dredging operations that are going on and let the harbor fill up with silt so they couldn't get ships in there and have to lighter everything in, that sort of stuff. Or you could blockade and so forth. It's just a matter of stopping the flow of supplies through there. Mining is one way of doing it, of course. That's what they chose this time, plus a blockade.<sup>122</sup> I can assure [you] that they're not going to lighter anything to shore.

*Van Staaveren*: I've got another question on the bombing of North Vietnam. You've made the point that concern about Chinese intervention was one of the factors. Did the civilian authorities ever raise the argument that bombing North Vietnam might have the opposite effect intended, that it would unite the North Vietnamese rather than weaken their morale, and weaken their will to resist? Did that argument ever surface in the period that you were there?<sup>123</sup>

*LeMay*: Oh, it probably did. Every argument against doing something always comes up. My answer to that was to warn the civilian population of North Vietnam that you're going to hit the military targets wherever they're found and advise them to get away from them.

In other words, you made your case to the people that you're not probably doing these indiscriminate attacks that you're getting credit for. Every time you go up north, you always bomb the hospital, or a school, or an orphan asylum, or someplace like this. You never hit a military target; you always hit something like this. Undoubtedly, some of them were hit by stray bombs. Some of them were hit by anti-aircraft missiles and so forth and so on that are applied by the North Vietnamese. That sort of thing.<sup>124</sup>

But there's no way of fighting the war without killing somebody, and I don't know any way of fighting the war without killing some innocent people once in a while. This is a deplorable situation, and you minimize that, I think, by going in and doing the job properly to start with. . . .

To carry on this part we had going about killing a few innocent people in warfare, as I said before, war is a mean, nasty business, and you always kill a lot of people. There's no way of getting around it. I think that any moral commander tries to minimize this to the extent possible, and to me, the best way of minimizing it is getting the war over as quick as possible.

But too many of our leaders find this pretty hard to stomach. They find it very difficult to say, "All right, we're going to do this, and we're going to kill some innocent people in doing it." If they do do it, it will shorten the war and probably save overall life in the long run, many fold. But they can't stomach going on and deliberately killing some people all at once and getting it over with. If they continue the fighting, and many more times those people are killed over a period of years, this seems to be more palatable to them. Well, it isn't to me.



**An official portrait of General LeMay from August 28, 1962. Photo by Ronald Hall. USAF.**

For instance, at the start of the Korean War, the only reason the Korean War started is that we convinced the Chinese that we weren't going to defend Korea. But remember, at this time, we've got overwhelming superiority in atomic weapons and so forth, and an all-out war against a free world is not possible on the part of the communists. So they start these wars of national liberation, little ones that we won't consider important enough to launch an atomic offensive against, and get away with it.

But we convince them that we're not going to defend Korea. And here's another leak, I think. They pretty well infiltrated our State Department during this period. All of this is forgotten about and swept under the rug, at least in these days. But there it was. So they attack in Korea. And President [Harry S.] Truman has the courage to say, "No, we'll defend."

I was out in SAC at the time and, of course, no one ever asked advice down that far from Washington. Well, we slipped a little idea under the door up there in the Pentagon that maybe if we turned SAC loose, not with atomic weapons, but with some incendiaries against four or five towns in North Korea, that this will convince them we mean business and maybe it'll stop it.

Well, the answer was, "No, you can't do this." It comes back under the rug route, too. "You'll kill too many noncombatants." Well, no one worried about noncombatants [during World War II]; I'm referring now to Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, and the rest of the places.

So we go on, and we don't do it, and [we] let the war go on over a period of three and a half or four years. We did burn down every town in North Korea and every town in South Korea, including Pusan—that was an accident, but we burned it down anyway—and what, killed off 20 percent of the Korean population, either [from] direct effects of the war or disease and exposure and so forth, from the side effects of war over a period of years.

All of those deaths were palatable. The people would say, "No, you can't stop it to start with because you might kill a few noncombatants." Well, what I'm trying to say is once you make a decision to use military force to solve your problem, then you ought to use it, and use an overwhelming military force; use too much, and deliberately use too much, so that you don't make an error on the other side and not quite have enough. You roll over everything to start with, and you close it down just like that. You save resources, you save lives, not only your own, but the enemy's too. And the recovery is quicker, and everybody's back to peaceful existence, hopefully in a shorter period of time. It's a more humane and efficient way of doing it, I think. But this is something that seems to be impossible to accomplish these days.

[More discussion of Korea.]

**Van Staaveren:** I would like to ask one quick question about the planning for the bombing [in Vietnam], especially in the latter part of 1964. It has been said that some of President Johnson's advisors, among them [National Security Advisor] McGeorge Bundy, were convinced that even a low-scale bombing program against the north would probably cause Hanoi to cease and desist within a period of about three months. Did this type of reasoning ever reach your desk?

**LeMay:** Well, this type of reasoning never seems to be successful in war. You always underestimate the resistance of the enemy. It's a natural tendency to do this. This has been particularly true of these intellectual type people who just can't understand that reasonable men can't sit down and talk out their differences. They've been doing it so long in the academic hall that they can't understand everybody not being able to do this.

The communists have always used this as a weapon against us. They want to get us talking so we'll stop fighting and stop taking the action that really hurts them. I notice the Viet Cong are down on their knees just begging to get started to talk back in Paris again. Meantime, we stop fighting. They continue on, regroup, rebuild, and get going again. This always happens.

Not that I have any objection to talking—fine, talk—but providing you realize that in talking with the communists, you're never going to get anyplace. [You're] never going to get anyplace by talking unless you follow up or precede it by military action. When you've got them on their knees, strength they pay some attention to. Then, if they have to, you've got them over a barrel, you can get an agreement from them that is a reasonable agreement. They'll never carry it out unless you force them to carry it out.

This is history in the past. Every time we got an agreement with them, it was usually because it was overwhelming and in their favor to agree. Even so, they never carried it out later on anyway. Every agreement we made with them I think has been broken, and the agreement was only made if the advantage of making the agreement was on their side.

[Discussion of interdiction in the Pacific Theater during World War II.]

**Futrell:** Let me continue with interdiction. It never seemed to work in Southeast Asia. This Barrel Roll thing, the beginning of it . . .<sup>125</sup>

**LeMay:** Well, interdiction is just simply stopping the flow of supplies to the battlefield; in other words, of isolating a battlefield. Now, how will you do it? Well, the easiest way of stopping the flow of supplies to the battlefield is to bomb the plant where they're being manufactured, and destroy the plant where they're being manufactured. You get the biggest result for the expenditure of ammunition and supplies. That's the best way of doing it.

Now, the farther forward you come to the front where they're being expended against you, the more difficult it is to stop it, and you never can stop it completely. You can slow it down, but you never can stop it completely. They never stopped it completely in Italy [in 1943], and that was an easier job than in most places. They never completely got it done because they'd always get enough off the railroads onto the trucks down south. They were fighting a retreating action anyway.

Of course, interdiction has to be used in conjunction with pressure to use up supplies. You can interdict till hell freezes over, and if they're not using any supplies, nothing happens. So you interdict, and you can bring these forward supplies to almost a complete halt. But if they're not using any down there, you still accomplish nothing.<sup>126</sup>

Take the case of Vietnam now. I think it's generally agreed that no supplies are getting into Vietnam now because none have come in over the

beaches or through the ports. The rail lines are cut, and I think they'll keep them cut if we're allowed to do it. Some will get in over the roads. It's harder to keep roads out than it is to keep railroads out. But they're going to have to keep knocking those bridges down. They'll put them up. I've seen pictures where they had repaired the bridge that had been knocked out, but in addition to that, bypassed it on the east side with pontoon bridges and so forth, so interdicting those is more difficult.<sup>127</sup>

What I'm trying to say is that it's very difficult to stop the flow of supplies completely, very difficult. But you can certainly restrict them. Now, the thing to do is to restrict the supplies where they're using more at the front than they could possibly get down there. Then you get results from your interdiction program. If you allow them to get more supplies down than they're using, then you accomplish nothing with your interdiction program.

What must be done in Vietnam now is to put enough pressure on the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam so that they'd have to use up more supplies than they can get down there. Then you can break the big units up into one-ring bands that should be taken care of fairly easily.

**Futrell:** I wonder, though, in Southeast Asia if we magnified the difficulties that interdiction operations would pose to such an extent that we didn't try to capitalize and develop the capabilities that would have made us do as good a job as we could have done. In other words, night air operations, intelligence, all of those things, at an early date.

**LeMay:** Well, I don't know that that is exactly true. Monday-morning quarterbacking is always easier than Saturday quarterbacking, much easier. Undoubtedly, we could have done a better job. But with all the restrictions that we've had, I think we've done a reasonably good job of what we were allowed to do. Of course, it hasn't been a good one when you think of the tonnage of bombs that have been dropped over there, what's been accomplished. Everybody in this country should hang their heads in shame.

**Van Staaveren:** I have a question on reconnaissance, a rather specific one, pertaining especially to Laos in 1964 when we began our limited operations there—Yankee Team and so on.<sup>128</sup> The civilian control was very tight. I fail to understand what was behind the reasoning that they even dictated whether planes should fly at low altitude or medium altitude. Do you recall what the explanation was? Why airplanes could not fly certain altitudes over Laos? This is for reconnaissance, not interdiction.

**LeMay:** I think you're talking about reconnaissance airplanes and our reconnaissance airplanes with our markings on them. I don't think they wanted it known that we had any military aircraft over there at all. If they flew at low altitude, they could be identified as belonging to the United States.

**Van Staaveren:** I wondered whether that was the explanation. I simply have not seen the one that you have just offered. Otherwise, I simply failed to understand what the purpose of this was.

**Futrell:** Could we broaden this one just a little bit into intelligence? Did the intelligence that you got from Southeast Asia meet your requirements?

**LeMay:** No, never. Your intelligence never meets your requirements, but it was particularly bad there, and it's still particularly bad. The only really good intelligence you can get is to have agents and help on the ground, and we found this particularly hard to do against the communists.

The reconnaissance people have done some phenomenal work, photographic-wise. But here again, the weather over there is not particularly good for this type of reconnaissance. It was particularly sorry as a matter of fact, because you can't get it in a timely fashion. It's usually a little late, but they have gotten some good stuff. I've seen pictures where they've gone down and taken pictures of the inside of a boxcar. You can look in and see what was in there. They've done remarkable work.

**Futrell:** We thought, though, maybe intelligence was set up more to meet Army requirements than Air Force requirements.

**LeMay:** I wouldn't say that's exactly true. I think that we've gotten a lot of stuff for our benefit.

**Van Staaveren:** To follow up on the intelligence subject, during the period 1961 to 1965, was there considerable conflicting intelligence, especially assessments, on what the internal situation was within South Vietnam and North Vietnam? I'm speaking now of the various agencies, CIA and State Department as against DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency]/MACV. Was there always a severe conflict, or not particularly severe at that time?

**LeMay:** Well, I wouldn't use the word "conflict" exactly, but it was certainly inadequate. In the first place, we're babes in the woods at intelligence collection. In fact, I'd go so far as to say we had nothing, absolutely nothing, before World War II. Absolutely nothing. We tried to build something after the war, but we really had to start from scratch, and it takes several generations to get a good intelligence system going. And it takes the will to do this. This sort of thing has always been repugnant to the American people. We haven't got a good one yet.

On top of that, we really didn't understand the Asiatic mind and what was going on. So our capability of making an assessment even of what's going on in South Vietnam has been rather limited. So we've always operated with inadequate intelligence here.

**Belden:** Would you say that the intelligence that we do get is sufficiently collated and brought together and, you know, focused so that conclusions [can be drawn], or is it too dispersed even to this time?



**LeMay:** Well, certainly we have the capability of putting it together. Things are pretty well centralized now. Whether we draw the right conclusions or not, even where we get the dissenting opinions or not, is something else again. I firmly believe that a lot of people have to look at the whole picture.

For instance, let's take a soldier who has spent all of his life with ground forces, and a sailor who has spent all of his life at sea, and an airman who has spent all of his life in airplanes, and a diplomat that spent all of his life balancing teacups, and you're shown some intelligence information. Every one of them will look at it with the eyes of the experience that he has had, and it'll mean a little something different to each one of them. All of this has to be correlated by someone who has had a little experience overall, particularly had long experience in the intelligence field, to try to come up with the proper answer to these facts that all of these different eyes have looked at. This is one drawback to consolidating everything in the DIA and the CIA. At the present time, I doubt whether everything is looked at by all the experience that could be brought to bear upon it.

**Belden:** Some of these dissenting views might be missed.

**LeMay:** Might be missed, yes.

**Belden:** In fact, they might not even get filtered up to the top.

**LeMay:** No, they might not even be brought to birth in the first place.

**Van Staaveren:** I have another question. This is about Seacoord [South-east Asia Coordinating Committee]. Do you remember about the Seacoord organization established by General Taylor in 1964 when he went to Saigon as ambassador? He established a coordinating group made up of the ambassadors of Laos, Thailand, and South Vietnam, and he and the ambassadors or their deputies met monthly. Their meetings began about August 1964 and continued on a monthly basis. Do you recall if this became a rather significant organization getting over-involved in military planning at that time?

**LeMay:** I can't quote you any instances, but the answer is yes.<sup>129</sup> The ambassadors did get too much in the military line, and still are for that matter. I had a talk with a recent commander of U-Tapao [Royal Thai Navy Airfield]. They had a couple of sappers come in a while back. They got both of them. They damaged one B-52 I think. But as a result of this, of the sappers getting in before they were discovered, so that once the attack started, there could have been a lot of damage done by poor discipline on the part of the defenders and indiscriminate shooting, and shooting up our own airplanes and our own people and so forth—there wasn't any of this, but this bothered the commander considerably. It might come about in case of a larger attack. So he wanted a proportion of his people at certain positions in the defenses to have shotguns with buckshot

so that they wouldn't have the range that the M-16 has of hitting airplanes or his own people someplace else. The ambassador, I understand, got into the act over there and objected to this, of using this inhuman weapon in defending yourself.

**Futrell:** Along these same lines, how important was Ambassador Taylor's letter from President Johnson that allowed him to take command of the military forces in Vietnam if he decided to do so? That seems to be going rather far.<sup>130</sup>

**LeMay:** Well, I think it was going pretty far, too. There again you find a special situation where you've got a soldier over there who has just retired, and he can't quite turn loose of one suit and put on another one. I don't think this would ever have come to pass, but it might have.

**Van Staaveren:** I've got another one on the background on striking North Vietnam. There seemed to be three basic reasons why the decision was finally made to bomb North Vietnam in 1965. One was the weakness of the Saigon government and the military forces. I should rephrase my question. There were three basic reasons why we were afraid to bomb North Vietnam. One was the weakness of the Saigon government and its military forces; secondly, fear of Chinese or Soviet intervention or diversionary action; and three, the domestic/political situation with President Johnson running against Senator [Barry M.] Goldwater [in the 1964 presidential race]. Which of these reasons do you think is perhaps the most important?

**LeMay:** Well, this is fairly hard for us to assess because the Joint Chiefs of Staff were never given any reasons why they shouldn't do this. There were sound military reasons right from the start why it should have been done, and the decision was made against it. But you wouldn't expect the administration to come out and say, well, we're not going to do this because we're afraid Russia might come in, or we're afraid of this or afraid of that. They never would stand up and admit what their fears were, or why they didn't make the proper decision. My guess is that they were probably afraid of having another confrontation with Russia.

**Van Staaveren:** That's perhaps the number-one reason?

**LeMay:** That's my guess, but it was never explained why.

[Discussion of forward air control and single-side band use in military communications, during World War II and later at SAC.]

**Futrell:** Could I have one last question that really troubles me? I came up with General Arnold. I know the services are supposed to function together cooperatively, each one magnifying its intrinsic capabilities in support of each other. Yet here in Vietnam, we get Secretary McNamara telling Congress that one of the services has to be dominant. What happened to this concept, this doctrine of coequality and cooperation between them?

*LeMay:* Well, I think that the farther away from Washington you get, the more cooperation you find. You get out in the field, you find the people cooperated pretty well. Up here [in Washington], they're battling for projects, mission assignments, and things of that sort. So you find more difference of opinion and battling here than anyplace else. Once you get out in the field, I think you find that they are cooperating.

Of course, the battle of the Marines being off by themselves, with their air power, to start with over there, wasn't their fault in the field. It was the orders they were getting from Washington back then. They are always maintaining that they had the best tactical support that's possible to achieve, although I don't think it was any better than what the Air Force had, for that matter. But here again is [an example of] piecemealing the resources you have instead of centralizing, where you could do more with what you had. We finally got it corrected, but it took long, hard battles to do it.

*Van Staaveren:* This is more of an Army problem than an Air Force problem. It concerns the leadership of the South Vietnamese army. There's a great deal of agonizing about this problem, from the early '60s on, about improving the leadership of the South Vietnamese army. Is there anything more that we could have done that wasn't done?<sup>131</sup>

*LeMay:* Well, I suppose you could have always done a better job. But leadership is something you can't make quickly, and you can't store it on the shelf and leave it there until you need it.

We started out with not much in the way of leadership in any capacity in Vietnam because the French governed the country with Frenchmen, and they defended the country, particularly the top echelon, with Frenchmen. I think they had some officers—native officers—in the military forces down there, but they were of low rank, and no one ever got very high in the business in any segment of the government or the armed forces or in any capacity down there. It was all French. In other words, it was a real colonial empire, with the natives held down and in the background.

I can remember, I think it was [Lt. Gen. Earle E.] "Pat" Partridge making a trip down there right after the war [in 1954] and finding that the French were there in force, and they had some Vietnamese officers that were fighting the communists at that time, but the French wouldn't even allow them in the officer's club—that sort of thing. So what I'm saying is that the French did not do anything to develop any leadership or any capability of the Vietnamese to govern themselves, or to defend themselves, so that when they left, they left a complete vacuum there. There just wasn't any leadership, and it takes time to build this.

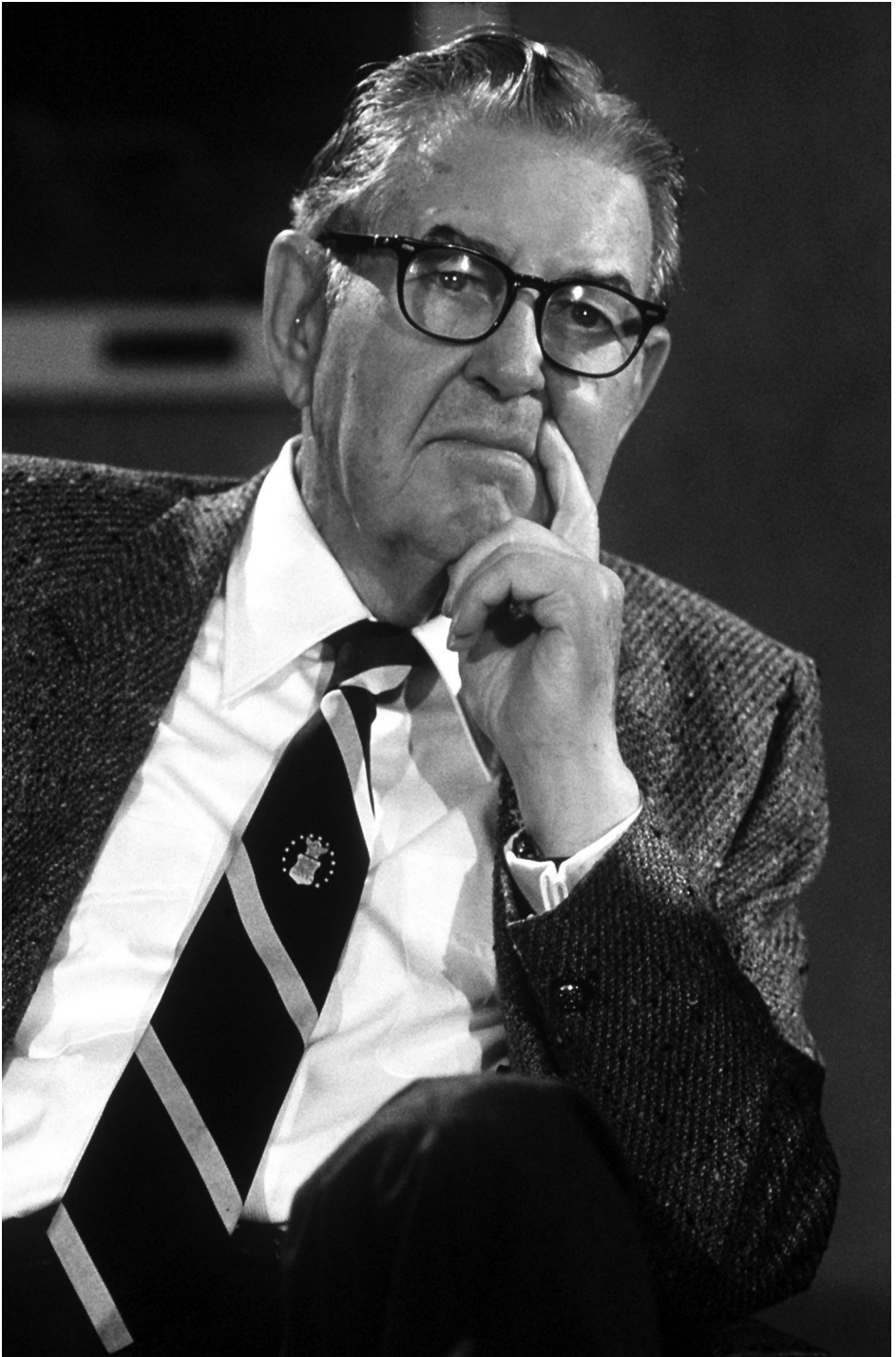
Directly the opposite extreme, when we took over the Philippines at the turn of the [twentieth] century, we told the Filipinos that we were

going to give them their freedom just as soon as they were capable of governing themselves. We took two generations to train them. It wasn't until after World War II that we got around to turning the government over to them. But we made an effort for two generations there to train the people to govern themselves, to defend themselves. They had their problems, difficult problems. They still have some, [but] it looks like they're going to make it all right.

Now compare the Philippines and the problems that they had with the Vietnamese situation starting out right from scratch. I think they've done remarkably well in both the armed services and in the government. But this is something you just can't correct overnight.

**Futrell:** I can find that no one plays this thought that you've just presented into the equation in South Vietnam back in 1961. We're going to accomplish things by three-year programs, and building up ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], and building up the Vietnamese Air Force. So my thought is, maybe from the very beginning, we just couldn't get there from where we were, here from where we were, in terms of this gradualistic approach.

**LeMay:** Well, perhaps not. But we did the best we could in training these people, like sending them to school. We brought all of their pilots, for instance, in their air force—practically all of them—back here for training, tried to give them leadership training by example. But we spend years giving our own people in the Air Force leadership training so that they are capable of taking over positions of higher responsibility as they come along. If we were forced with our type of people, who are living in a modern world, to jump from a second lieutenant to being the deputy for operations on the Air Staff, he wouldn't do a very good job. Now, take somebody from a rice paddy and throw him into that position, and he doesn't do a very good job, either. You can't cram that space of experience and education into a couple of years and do very well.



General LeMay during an interview in February 1990. *Department of Defense.*

# Epilogue

## June 1984

STRATEGIC AIR WARFARE, JUNE 15, 1984:<sup>132</sup>

**Gen. Curtis E. LeMay:** To go back to your question, “Was there any drastic change when the Kennedy administration came in?” The administration spouted new phrases and things of that sort, but as far as the Air Force was concerned, we had no radical change in thinking at all. We were all on the same track. However, the Kennedy administration thought that being as strong as we were was provocative to the Russians and likely to start a war. We in the Air Force, and I personally, believed the exact opposite. While we had all this superiority, we invaded no one; we didn’t launch any conquest for loot or territory. We just sat there with the strength. As a matter of fact, we lost because we didn’t threaten to use it when it might have brought advantages to the country.<sup>133</sup>

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**Gen. Jack J. Catton:** General LeMay, did you have to fight those guys all the time to get them to give us some authority and some capability to use air [power] over there [in Vietnam]?

**LeMay:** Constantly, constantly. To start off with on this flexible response business, I think that phrase is an outgrowth to counter the “immorality” of the massive retaliation that everybody thought meant we would dump all the atomic weapons we had automatically on a poor, helpless foe. That was immoral. Flexible response was, “No, we don’t have to do that. We are just going to use what force is necessary to do the job.” Of course, this violates the principles of war, and over the centuries we have found that it doesn’t work. But we couldn’t convince anybody in the Pentagon at the time that it wouldn’t work.<sup>134</sup>

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**LeMay:** To get back to your question, “Was there any planning for the use of air power in Vietnam?” There was some after we got fully

embroiled over there. As a matter of fact, we got ground forces involved in there before I knew anything about it, but I don't remember any discussion where we would use our ground forces in Asia until it was right there, happening. The decision was made, and there we were, involved. The Joint Chiefs finally came up with a target list of ninety [*sic*, ninety-four] targets in North Vietnam, targets that would badly reduce the North Vietnamese capability of supporting the war in the South. But it was never approved, and we were never given authority to get them.<sup>135</sup>

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**Gen. David A. Burchinal:** Curt, was there ever a time during Vietnam when the recommendation was made that we go up and burn down North Vietnam?

**LeMay:** Yes, when we finally got that target list through the Joint Chiefs.

**Burchinal:** Because that would have ended the war real quick, just like it did in Japan.

**LeMay:** We could have ended it in any ten-day period you wanted to, but they never would bomb the target list we had.

**Burchinal:** We could have dropped circulars like we did in Japan and said, "Get out because this town won't be here tomorrow."

**Richard H. Kohn:** Do you all think that what we did in the Southeast Asia war was at all a strategic air campaign, as you learned to wage strategic air war in your military careers?

**LeMay:** Definitely not. It wasn't until the last two weeks of the war [in the Linebacker II operation] that we even approached it. When we turned the B-52s loose up north—that started what would have been a strategic campaign, and it would have been completely over in a few more days if we had just continued it. A few more days' work and we would have been completely free without any casualties because all of the SAMs [surface-to-air missiles] were gone by that time. Their bases and warehouses supplying the SAM sites were gone, too. So it would have been a pretty free ride from then on, and we would have completely won the war.<sup>136</sup>

Up until that time, even when we were using the B-52s, we were bombing jungle because there was a rumor there might be some Viet Cong in that jungle. So they would give us a point in the jungle, and we would go hit it.<sup>137</sup>

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**Catton:** General LeMay, how would you characterize the similarity between Linebacker II and the plan that we took to the government, took to the secretary of defense and the White House back in 1964–65?

**LeMay:** The first plan we had was ninety strategic targets, and I don't know what the target objective was in Linebacker II.<sup>138</sup>

**Catton:** The targets, of course, would be a little bit different in detail, but the philosophy, the concept of the operation, to my mind was very similar.

**LeMay:** In that we stopped bombing jungles and started getting more important targets.

**Catton:** It has always been my thought, General LeMay, that if we had been able to go get those 90 targets—and we certainly would have succeeded—we would have saved tens of thousands of lives and many, many years, and billions of dollars in that effort. I think we could have made the point way back in 1964–65 by taking on those ninety targets and destroying them.

**LeMay:** Well, I spent a lot of time trying to bring out the point that in any two-week period or so, we could have, with the proper application of air and naval power, won the war over there.

**Catton:** That's the point I was hoping you would make.

**Burchinal:** We should have gone incendiary, like we did in Japan, warned them to get out of the way, and then destroyed their means to exist. It wouldn't have cost anything in the way of casualties, really.

**LeMay:** I want to point out that if you look at the tonnage figures, at the tonnage of bombs that we dropped in the Vietnamese affair, and compare it with what we dropped on Japan and what we dropped on Germany [during World War II], you will find that we dropped more on Vietnam than we did on Germany and Japan combined.<sup>139</sup> Look what happened to Germany, and above all, look at what happened to Japan. There was no invasion necessary there. The only conclusion you can draw is that we were bombing the wrong things in Vietnam.

**Kohn:** Perhaps you are saying that in the end, the ultimate target is the will of the enemy. It is something [Giulio] Douhet raised back in the 1920s: that you destroy enough or so much that your enemy simply ceases to make war against you.

**Burchinal:** Destroy the will *and* capability; separate the two.

**Catton:** You have got the right words, Dave.

**LeMay:** If you destroy their *capability* to win war, then the will to wage war disappears also.<sup>140</sup>



IMMEDIATE RELEASE, JUNE 30, 1961

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE SWEARING IN CEREMONIES  
OF  
GENERAL CURTIS LEMAY AS  
CHIEF OF STAFF, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
ROSE GARDEN  
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I want to express our great pleasure at the assumption of this responsibility by General Lemay. He was one of the most distinguished combat commanders in World War Two. He played a most instrumental role in developing SAC into its present high peak as the great shield of the United States in the free world.

He brings to the responsibilities of Chief of Staff long experience in the Air Force, and also a wide recognition of the challenges and responsibilities and opportunities which face the United States in meeting our commitments around the globe.

It is a source of satisfaction to me personally as President, to be able to rely on his counsel as a member of a group of distinguished Americans, the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and I think the fact that so many Members of the Congress are here from both parties indicates the wide respect which he has in the country.

So, General, we want to say that, speaking personally, and also as President, that it is a great pleasure to welcome you as the new Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

GENERAL LEMAY: Thank you very much, sir. Mr. President, I appreciate very much your taking time out from your busy schedule to participate in this ceremony. I am sure you realize that for a member of the Armed Services to become a Chief of Staff of the Services is the highest honor that can come to him. And this is a proud moment for me.

I can't help but think, however, of the many people that have worked beside me in peace, and fought beside me in war, that must share with me this moment.

I am very fortunate that I inherit from General White a strong and vigorous Air Force, and it now becomes my job to take the resources that are allocated to us in the future, and build it even stronger.

We have a very excellent team assembled, not only militarily but a very superior team in the Secretary's office. I think we can do just that for you.

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# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. The “Stone Age” quote is from Curtis E. LeMay with MacKinlay Kantor, *Mission with LeMay: My Story* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 565. As noted later in the introduction, LeMay insisted that Kantor wrote the “Stone Age” statement. See note 45 below.

2. LeMay remains in need of a scholarly biography. Two detailed, somewhat sympathetic works are Thomas M. Coffey, *Iron Eagle: The Turbulent Life of General Curtis LeMay* (New York: Crown, 1986); and Warren Kozak, *LeMay: The Life and Wars of General Curtis LeMay* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2009). For a more critical look at LeMay’s central role in the Air Force in the 1950s and first half of the 1960s, see Mike Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals: The Problem of Air Force Leadership, 1945–1982* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1998).

3. LeMay, who was not a part of the decision-making process on the use of nuclear weapons in 1945, stated in a 1984 interview that “the war would have been over in time without dropping the atomic bombs, but every day it went on we were suffering casualties, the Japanese were suffering casualties, and the war bill was going up.” He also understood the concern in Washington about having to move forward with the invasion of the Japanese home islands if conventional bombing did not end the war by a certain time frame. Richard H. Kohn and Joseph P. Harahan, eds., *Strategic Air Warfare: An Interview with Generals Curtis E. LeMay, Leon W. Johnson, David A. Burchinal, and Jack J. Catton* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1988), 69–70, <http://media.defense.gov/2010/Sep/29/2001329790/-1/-1/0/AFD-100929-052.pdf>.

4. For an overview of LeMay’s role, see Herman S. Wolk, *Cataclysm: General Hap Arnold and the Defeat of Japan* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2010), 103–34. For a detailed, critical assessment of the bombing of Japan and LeMay’s central part in it, see Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 256–316. For the broader ethical implications, see Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 107–76; Mark Selden, “A Forgotten Holocaust: U.S. Bombing Strategy, the Destruction of Japanese Cities, and the American Way of War from the Pacific War to Iraq,” in *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History*, ed. Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young (New York: New Press, 2009), 77–96.

5. One of LeMay’s greatest sparring partners, Robert S. McNamara, later called SAC “perhaps the most highly disciplined element of the military force. General LeMay did a fantastic job in shaping that command to a standard of perfection that was unequaled elsewhere in the military.” Robert S. McNamara, interview by WGBH for *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age*, March 28, 1986, [http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V\\_823171902](http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_823171902)

44B46168DFDFB0314E8E7B8. For the SAC/LeMay ascendancy during this period, see Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals*, 55–101. As Worden put it (p. 62), “The peerless LeMay was the absolute ruler of SAC, and he ruled absolutely.” For LeMay’s thoughts on his time and accomplishments with SAC, see Curtis E. LeMay, interview by SAC History Office (John T. Bohn), March 9, 1971, transcript, IRIS no. 01001829, Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA), Maxwell Air Force Base, AL.

6. According to historian John Lewis Gaddis, the goal of the Eisenhower/Dulles “new look” national defense strategy was “to achieve the maximum possible deterrence of communism at the minimum possible cost.” The approach involved an overall reduction of U.S. forces after the Korean War and an increasing reliance on the threat of the use of nuclear weapons, what came to be called “massive retaliation.” John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 127–97 (quote, 164).

7. Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 345–52 (White and LeMay quotes, 345–46); David C. Jones, interview by WGBH for *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age*, June 28, 1986, [http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V\\_4C9DD9F57A6041ACB0695FC332B548F8](http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_4C9DD9F57A6041ACB0695FC332B548F8) (hereafter Jones interview); Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals*, 65–66, 80–89; Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 29. For further commentary on LeMay’s struggles with the way Washington worked, see comments by Generals White, Delmar E. Wilson, and Theodore R. Milton in Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 438–39.

8. Earl H. Tilford Jr., *Crosswinds: The Air Force’s Setup in Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 3. Later in the book (p. 64), Tilford observed that “the Air Force of 1965 was, in many ways, the Air Force of 1947—only bigger and faster.” He added that “faith in technology, wedded to the doctrine that strategic bombardment would be decisive in any conflict, provided an underlying certainty that air power could accomplish virtually anything asked of it.”

9. H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 9–17. Bundy was national security advisor, succeeded by Rostow in 1966. Rostow was deputy national security advisor during 1961 and subsequently became director of policy planning for the State Department, although he was still integrally involved in White House decision-making. Taylor consulted with Kennedy during the campaign and in the early weeks of the administration but did not go to work full time as a military advisor until July 1961. He remained in this unofficial position until Kennedy named him chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, duty he assumed on October 1, 1962.

10. Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 357–59; Kozak, *LeMay*, 334–35. Roswell L. Gilpatric, the deputy secretary of defense, recalled that as the Kennedy administration considered new members for the Joint Chiefs, “some choices were pretty obvious. LeMay was obviously destined to be the successor to White. And in light of hindsight, it probably was a mistake, but I don’t know what we could have done about it. I mean, we would have had a major revolt on our hands if we hadn’t promoted LeMay.” Roswell L. Gilpatric, interview by John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Dennis J. O’Brien), June 30, 1970, transcript, 69, <https://archive1.jfklibrary.org/JFKOH/Gilpatric,%20Roswell%20L/JFKOH-RLG-03/JFKOH-RLG-03-TR.pdf>.

11. For Kennedy’s curious decision to fault the military for the Bay of Pigs disaster, a CIA-directed operation with very little U.S. military input, see McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 6–7. LeMay commented in an interview that blaming the military for the Bay of Pigs “is just a bunch of hogwash because it was not a military operation.” Curtis E.

LeMay, interview by Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Joe B. Frantz), June 28, 1971, typescript, 7, [http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/lemay\\_curtis\\_1971\\_0628.pdf](http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/lemay_curtis_1971_0628.pdf) (hereafter LeMay interview [1971]). As LeMay noted in the text that follows, from what he could see, the Joint Chiefs had very little involvement in the arrangements. McNamara stated in an oral history that the operation was “planned by the CIA and implemented and directed by the CIA,” but that “we in Defense had an opportunity to present our recommendations with respect to it to the president.” McNamara indicated that he “recommended in favor of it.” Robert S. McNamara, interview by Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Walt W. Rostow), January 8, 1975, transcript, 24, [http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral\\_histories/mcnamara\\_r/McNamara1.PDF](http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/mcnamara_r/McNamara1.PDF) (hereafter McNamara interview [1975]).

12. The historical work most focused on the Joint Chiefs and Vietnam decision-making is McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, which has a background chapter on the Kennedy administration. Official histories include Jack Shulimson and Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2009–12), [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/history/jcsvietnam\\_pt1.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/history/jcsvietnam_pt1.pdf) (v. 1), [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/history/jcsvietnam\\_pt2.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/history/jcsvietnam_pt2.pdf) (v. 2); and Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense*, Vol. 5: *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961–1965* (Washington, DC: Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), [http://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/secretaryofdefense/OSDSeries\\_Vol5.pdf?ver=2014-05-28-133758-613](http://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/secretaryofdefense/OSDSeries_Vol5.pdf?ver=2014-05-28-133758-613). Works on the civil-military decision-making include George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); David M. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

13. LeMay interview (1971), 12–13 (quotes 1–3), 29 (quotes 4–7), 41; Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 365–80. For extensive commentary by LeMay on the B–70 debate, see Curtis E. LeMay, interview by John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Dennis J. O’Brien), June 7, 1969, transcript, Air Force Historical Research Division, Washington, DC (hereafter LeMay interview [1969]). See also LeMay interview (1971), 9–10.

14. Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 99 (quotes); McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 10–11. For “flexible response” and its implementation as a national security policy, see Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 198–273. For the initial Air Force response to Taylor’s recommendations, see Warren A. Trest, *Air Force Roles and Missions: A History* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998), 180–83, <http://media.defense.gov/2010/Sep/22/2001330059/1/-1/0/AFD-100922-020.pdf>. As Trest noted, while Taylor had been Army chief of staff, he had also begun rebuilding organic air mobility capabilities for the Army, to the consternation of many Air Force leaders, including LeMay.

15. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 912. Schlesinger stated that “people sometimes wondered why Kennedy kept on Chiefs who occasionally seemed so much out of sympathy with his policy. The reason was that, in his view, their job was not policy but soldiering, and he admired them as soldiers.”

16. Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: Norton, 1972), 252; LeMay interview (1971), 24. When he assumed the chairmanship, Taylor was already aware that McNamara had been suppressing JCS advice. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 21.

17. Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 423 (quotes 1–4); LeMay interview (1971), 25 (quote 5); McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 43.

18. Nicholas J. Schlosser, ed., *The Greene Papers: General Wallace M. Greene Jr. and the Escalation of the Vietnam War, January 1964–March 1965* (Quantico, VA: History Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2015), 7, <https://www.usmcu.edu/sites/default/files/HD/Publications/GreenePapers.pdf>. Curiously, in his 1972 memoir, Taylor recounted that when he had been Army chief of staff, he had “always resented efforts by the Chairman to impose uniformity or to obtain it by compromise.” Taylor wrote that as he became chairman in October 1962, he told McNamara that “I respected the individual views of the Chiefs and felt that any dissent should be reported to the Secretary [of Defense] or even to the President without trying to circumvent the issue by noncommittal or ambiguous statements. McNamara said that he felt exactly the same way.” Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 253.

19. Kohn and Harahan, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 112 (LeMay quote); Roswell L. Gilpatric, interview by WGBH for *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age*, March 3, 1986, [http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V\\_811D901070AC4D8795327AC6431ABB1D](http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_811D901070AC4D8795327AC6431ABB1D). Gilpatric added that Kennedy “knew that he couldn’t fire LeMay,” pointing out that doing so “would have caused a great crease with the Congress, as well [as] with the military. He just had to rely on Taylor and the chiefs as a corporate body to temper the kind of military advice that LeMay is, by nature, prone to give.” Gilpatric stated in another interview that at some meetings, LeMay did not even wear his hearing aid, which Gilpatric believed significantly limited what LeMay was able to understand. Roswell L. Gilpatric, interview by Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Ted Gittinger), November 2, 1982, transcript, 9–10, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/Gilpatric-R/GilpatricR.PDF> (hereafter Gilpatric interview [1982]).

20. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 43.

21. Roswell L. Gilpatric, interview by John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Dennis J. O’Brien), August 12, 1970, transcript, 116, <https://archive2.jfklibrary.org/JFKOH/Gilpatric,%20Roswell%20L/JFKOH-RLG-04/JFKOH-RLG-04-TR.pdf> (hereafter Gilpatric interview [August 1970]).

22. Jack Valenti, *A Very Human President* (New York: Norton, 1975), 138.

23. Kozak, *LeMay*, x, 311–13; Eric Schlosser, “Almost Everything in ‘Dr. Strangelove was True,’” *New Yorker*, January 17, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/almost-everything-in-dr-strangelove-was-true>. Gen. David C. Jones, who served as Air Force chief of staff and subsequently chairman of the Joint Chiefs in 1970s, had a comment in a 1986 interview that directly addressed any actual *Dr. Strangelove* tendencies by LeMay: “I think the allegation that somehow General LeMay would have used military force or nuclear force without presidential permission is absolutely wrong. There was a mystique about LeMay, there was an image of what you expected from LeMay. Some people who questioned the buildup of strategic forces expected LeMay to be the type that would go off on his own and do something. And I have known him for a long time, and I was his aide for years in the ’50s, and we’ve been close associates. I have never seen any indication at all, in any time, back in the ’50s when [he was with] the Strategic Air Command or subsequently when he was chief of staff of the Air Force, any inclination to do anything but to fully respect civilian authority. Now, he would tell civilian authority what he believed, in unmistakable terms, and tell them when he thought they were wrong, and give them a capability they may have even thought they didn’t need with regard to capability with strategic forces. But [he was] certainly a strong advocate for civilian control and to follow presidential orders.” Jones interview.

24. Kozak, *LeMay*, 374–75; LeMay, *Iron Eagle*, 445–47. LeMay explained why he got “into this political racket” in more detail in a 1971 interview: “Coming up to the 1968

election, I firmly believed that if we didn't get a conservative government in power in 1968 that we probably would never have another chance." He thought that "we were just that close to socialism or communism." LeMay supported Richard Nixon but became impatient when the former vice president tacked toward the political center after the nominating conventions. LeMay rejected several offers from the Wallace campaign but finally became convinced that he could "move some people over to the right a little bit by getting out some truths on war and things I was qualified to talk about." LeMay "expected to get cut up pretty badly" by the media, adding that "I did get cut up, but not as bad as I expected to be." He encountered a "completely hostile press," though. He also insisted that Wallace was "not the racist that the newspapers had made out." LeMay interview (1971), 36–39.

25. John Kenneth Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times: Memoirs* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 479 (quote); LeMay interview (1971), 8–9, 24. LeMay stated (p. 8) that despite the obstacles in talking with Kennedy, "I'm sure he understood my feelings." After making his comments that Kennedy had fits when he met with LeMay, Roswell Gilpatric added that "we just resigned ourselves to living with him, and the president avoided, whenever he could, having to deal with the individual Chiefs rather than with General Taylor." Gilpatric interview (August 1970), 117. LeMay's successor as chief of staff, Gen. John P. McConnell, said that he had "very frequent" interaction with Johnson and developed "a very harmonious, shall I say, official relationship" with the president. He also said that "I could see him at any time," whether through channels or by request for a direct meeting. John P. McConnell, interview by Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Dorothy Pierce McSweeney), August 28, 1969, transcript, 6–7 (quotes), 9–12, [http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/mcconnell\\_john\\_1969\\_0814.pdf](http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/mcconnell_john_1969_0814.pdf) (hereafter McConnell interview).

26. Schlosser, *Greene Papers*, 61. Arthur Schlesinger had noted that such a trend was evident even right after the Bay of Pigs in April 1961: "It soon began to look to the White House as if they [the Joint Chiefs] were taking care to build a record which would permit them to say that, whatever the President did, he acted against their advice." Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 338.

27. Schlosser, *Greene Papers*, 63.

28. LeMay interview (1971), 20–22 (quotes); Jack Raymonds, "President Names Vice Chief for Air; J. P. McConnell also seen as Likely Successor to LeMay," *New York Times*, May 2, 1964, 8; Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 432–35. Kennedy had also given LeMay a one-year extension in 1963, for much the same reason. Roswell Gilpatric stated that while many in the Kennedy administration had found LeMay "unreconstructable," the president made "a policy decision that it would be rougher with him out than with him in. So he was given an extension of one year." Gilpatric interview (August 1970), 112. When Johnson interviewed McConnell in the spring of 1964 before selecting him, the president told him that he was considering him as either vice chief or chief. McConnell interview, 5–6. LeMay had not wanted to make any recommendations of a potential successor for fear that he might "give them a kiss of death." LeMay interview (1971), 20.

29. Schlosser, *Greene Papers*. This volume contains numerous mentions by Greene of LeMay and his positions. For an example of Greene's support for LeMay's call for a sustained bombing campaign in early September 1964, before the other service chiefs were on board, see also Edwin E. Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 246–47.

30. Kaplan, Landa, and Drea, *McNamara Ascendancy*, 509.

31. McNamara to LeMay, August 31, 1964, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam* (Gravel ed.), 5 vols. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971–72), 3:555–56. The target list had been under devel-

opment for months, with the concept originating in March 1964, long before the Gulf of Tonkin activity in August. On May 30, the Joint Chiefs had submitted a list of ninety-one potential targets to McNamara. The number had grown to ninety-four by August, which included eighty-two fixed sites and twelve transportation lines, to be knocked out over sixteen days of bombardment. Cosmas, *Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 2:36–38, 45–49, 125–28; Mark Clodfelter, “Solidifying the Foundation: Vietnam’s Impact on the Basic Doctrine of the U.S. Air Force,” in *Air Power History: Turning Points from Kitty Hawk to Kosovo*, ed. Sebastian Cox and Peter Gray (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), 305; Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 51. In a war-gaming exercise at the Pentagon in 1964, LeMay’s team simulated strategic bombing of North Vietnam and was unable to achieve its objectives, leaving LeMay furious. Tilford, *Crosswinds*, 64–65.

32. Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Dell, 1964), 526–27. LeMay repeated this statement in the March 1972 interview published here. See page 41.

33. W. Hays Parks, “Linebacker and the Law of War,” *Air University Review* 34 (January–February 1983): 4–15, <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1983/jan-feb/parks.html>. For Linebacker I, see also Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: The USAF and North Vietnam, 1966–1973* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2000), 219–54, <http://media.defense.gov/2010/Oct/01/2001329749/-1/-1/0/AFD-101001-049.pdf>; Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 158–76; Tilford, *Crosswinds*, 145–60. In a 1966 article under his byline, LeMay did mention “irrigation systems” among the list of potential targets that could be hit, which could be interpreted as a reference to the dikes. Curtis E. LeMay, “General LeMay Tells How to Win the War in Vietnam,” *U.S. News & World Report*, October 10, 1966, 38. As General McConnell explained in a 1969 interview, he never supported bombing the dikes during his time as Air Force chief of staff: “I never agreed to bombing the dikes. That’s a very unprofitable business, too difficult to do for the damage that they would have done. A lot of people thought that if you bombed the dikes, you could just flood the whole countryside. But bombing a dike, as people who have been in this business know, is, with conventional weapons, a pretty fruitless operation.” McConnell interview, 21.

34. Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 209–10. See note 111 below for the threat of Chinese intervention. For Clodfelter’s examination of the Linebacker II campaign, see *Limits of Air Power*, 177–202. For another critical look at Linebacker II written by a pilot who flew several of the missions, see Marshall L. Michel III, *The 11 Days of Christmas: America’s Last Vietnam Battle* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2002). See also Tilford, *Crosswinds*, 163–70, 190–91; Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, 255–80. Clodfelter made a crucial point in a later essay: “the type of conflict that the communist armies fought during the Rolling Thunder era was not the same as that waged during the Linebacker campaigns.” Clodfelter, “Solidifying the Foundation,” 306–7. For further elaboration, see notes 126 and 127 below. In response to the question of whether an earlier, massive use of strategic air power could have ended the conflict, Michel pointed out that “throughout the war, while most senior military officers believed that a heavy bombing campaign would dramatically shorten the war and cut American casualties, none thought it was critical to winning. The U.S. military believed that the U.S. was already winning the war, albeit slowly. The thought that the United States might eventually lose the war was ludicrous” (italics in original). He also observed how the North Vietnamese came to celebrate Linebacker II as a great victory, which they described as “Dien Bien Phu in the skies.” Michel, *11 Days of Christmas*, 232–34.

35. Brian D. Laslie, *The Air Force Way of War: U.S. Tactics and Training after Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 1.

36. For more detail on the debates of the Joint Chiefs during this period, see Cosmas, *Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, vol. 2; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*; Schlosser, *Greene Papers*; Buzzanco, *Masters of War*. Literature on the broader intervention/escalation debates is voluminous. Key works include Fredrick Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000); Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*; Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors*; Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York: Norton, 1982); George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Dallek, “Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam: The Making of a Tragedy,” *Diplomatic History* 20 (Spring 1996): 147–62, in which the Johnson and Kennedy biographer presented what became known as his inevitability thesis, arguing that based on what Johnson and his advisors knew at the time, “it is difficult to imagine them doing anything else” (p. 149). Logevall countered in *Choosing War* by detailing the options other than war that Johnson did have. When asked about the debate, George Herring stated that while Logevall made a “solid case that there were options there,” whether Johnson “ever saw that there were options is another issue entirely. I just don’t think that he ever saw himself as having that sort of availability of options.” Kenneth H. Williams, ed., “The Issues Raised by Vietnam Go to the Very Heart of Who We Think We Are”: An Interview with the University of Kentucky’s George C. Herring,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 102 (Summer 2004): 330–31.

37. Cosmas, *Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 2:136–41, 146.

38. *Ibid.*, 2:126–28. Cosmas wrote (p. 128) that “the Johnson-LeMay exchange was significant for two reasons. First, it was an example of the inter-Service disagreements that often weakened the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their dealings with Secretary McNamara. Second, it brought into focus two quite different strategic approaches to Vietnam.” These were the Army’s ground-based belief that the key to victory was securing South Vietnam, juxtaposed against the Air Force’s insistence that the enemy’s resources could be destroyed and will broken by intensive bombing of North Vietnam. “These conflicting approaches would persist throughout the planning and execution of United States military intervention in Southeast Asia. Never choosing definitively between them, a succession of presidential administrations and Joint Chiefs of Staffs would apply both in varying combinations, never with complete success.”

39. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 59 (quote); Robert Buzzanco, “The American Military’s Rationale against the Vietnam War,” *Political Science Quarterly* 101 (Winter 1986): 559–76. Shoup had a much better relationship with McNamara than did LeMay, and a much more positive view of him as well. See David M. Shoup, interview by John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Joseph E. O’Connor), April 7, 1967, transcript, 2–7, <https://archive1.jfklibrary.org/JFKOH/Shoup,%20David%20M/JFKOH-DMS-01/JFKOH-DMS-01-TR.pdf>. It is also possible that LeMay misunderstood Shoup’s positions on some points. Gilpatric stated that “for a while, nobody in OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] could figure out just where Shoup stood. He could be very cryptic and sort of Delphic in his utterances.” Gilpatric interview (August 1970), 112.

40. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 178–79.

41. Curtis E. LeMay with Dale O. Smith, *America is in Danger* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 17.



42. Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 114–15, 121 (quote). Taylor made even less mention of LeMay in his 1972 book, *Swords and Plowshares*, and only in reference to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

43. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 11.

44. Quoted in Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 437.

45. Kozak, *LeMay*, 341 (quote); Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 442. According to Coffey, who had direct interaction with LeMay, the general “never said it,” but the Stone Age remark “did more damage to LeMay’s public image than anything he ever did say. And it made him shy about saying anything publicly.”

46. For LeMay’s discussion of how Kantor constructed the book from a series of interviews, see Curtis E. LeMay, interview by Air Force History (Edgar F. Puryear Jr.), November 17, 1976, transcript, ISIS no. 01053318, AFHRA (hereafter LeMay interview [1976]).

47. The interview does not appear among the oral histories listed on the Kennedy Library website or at AFHRA, so the typescript cited here may be the only extant copy. LeMay did allow an interview conducted for the Johnson Library to be deposited there, but he restricted its use until after his death. He wrote in a cover note that “I have never thought much of oral interviews for historical programs because in my case at least I have never been sure that my statement would be interpreted by the interviewer the way I intended it.” LeMay interview (1971), cover letter.

48. Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), <http://media.defense.gov/2010/May/25/2001330284/-1/-1/0/AFD-100525-052.pdf>; Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam, 1965–1966* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Programs, 2002), <http://media.defense.gov/2010/May/26/2001330292/-1/-1/0/AFD-100526-034.pdf>.

49. For McNamara’s initial enthusiasm in 1965, see Edward J. Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam, 1965–1969* (Washington, DC: Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011), 51–67, [http://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/secretaryofdefense/OSDSeries\\_Vol6.pdf?ver=2014-05-28-134006-577](http://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/secretaryofdefense/OSDSeries_Vol6.pdf?ver=2014-05-28-134006-577). Curiously, in his own Vietnam memoir, McNamara discussed the positions of President Johnson and other advisors on the Rolling Thunder decision, but not his own. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 167–77. After Taylor became U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam in July 1964, he came to believe that bombing was the best way to strike against the Vietnamese communists, particularly bombing North Vietnam. Taylor stated in a 1981 interview that before the February 1965 attack at Pleiku, “It had been like pulling teeth to get the president [Johnson] to agree to the use of air power, but strangely enough, he was more inclined to use forces on the ground. The former seemed to me a much less difficult decision to make, although both were hard.” Taylor then proceeded to lay out the reasoning for a sustained bombing campaign, using arguments similar to those LeMay made in the interviews that follow. “We could have flattened everything in and around Hanoi,” Taylor said. “That doesn’t mean it would stop the war, but it would certainly have made it extremely difficult to continue it effectively.” He added that “no one ever asked me the question, but of course our strategy was always militarily unsound. We should never have been fighting the war in the south; we should have been fighting it in the north to begin with.” Maxwell D. Taylor, interview by Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Ted Gittinger), September 14, 1981, transcript, 4–9, [http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/taylor\\_maxwell\\_1981\\_0914.pdf](http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/taylor_maxwell_1981_0914.pdf) (hereafter Taylor interview [September 1981]).

50. Robert D. Schluzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941–1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 171–72. Former North Vietnamese officials confirmed in the 1990s that the local Viet Cong commander at Pleiku launched the attack on his own, not under orders from Hanoi. In fact, the incident and its aftermath distressed the North Vietnamese senior leadership, which had anticipated a longer period to fight the South Vietnamese military without more direct U.S. involvement. Chester L. Cooper, *In the Shadows of History: Fifty Years Behind the Scenes of Cold War Diplomacy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), 288; Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 206.

51. Schlosser, *Greene Papers*, 349. For the Joints Chiefs and consideration of options after the Pleiku attack, see Cosmas, *Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 2:213–35; for the Pentagon civilians, see Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 51–63. Gen. John McConnell, LeMay's successor as Air Force chief of staff, put forward the ninety-four-target list, to be destroyed in a twenty-eight-day bombing campaign. The Joint Chiefs eventually settled on a plan that would hit many of the proposed targets, but over a three-month period. Earl Tilford observed that as Rolling Thunder began in March 1965, "No one—not the civilians in the Defense Department or the State Department, not the president, and certainly not the generals—believed North Vietnam could endure the bombing for more than six months." Tilford, *Crosswinds*, 62–71 (quote, 69).

## PART I: JANUARY 1965–MARCH 1972

### JANUARY 1965

52. Curtis E. LeMay, interview by Air Force History, January 12, 26, 27, 1965, transcript, AFHRA, ISIS no. 00904841. The interviewer was not identified. Page numbers in the transcript are given at the end of each excerpt. The interview was originally marked secret and declassified in 1973.

53. *Ibid.*, 3–4.

54. *Ibid.*, 4. LeMay's reference to the "boss" was apparently to Secretary McNamara.

55. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

56. *Ibid.*, 15–16. For the debate over whether the Chinese would have intervened, see note 111 below.

### JULY 1965

57. LeMay, *Mission with LeMay*, 564–65. Although this book contained LeMay's most-remembered comment on Vietnam, the brief passage reprinted here is the sum of his discussion of Vietnam in the book. It should be remembered that at this time, LeMay was very limited in what he could say in an unclassified publication.

58. LeMay's recounting of the time line of support here is essentially correct. See the introduction for discussion of how his story on the Joint Chiefs' progression on Vietnam began to vary, as well as secondary sources cited there for further information.

59. Maxwell Taylor, as ambassador to South Vietnam, also came to argue that bombing the north would "raise the morale in South Vietnam." Taylor interview (September 1981), 7.

60. For North Vietnam's improvement of its air defenses, see Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 131–33.

61. For the debate over whether to strike the North Vietnamese oil storage facilities, see *ibid.*, 92–102. The first mission against oil tanks in Hanoi and Haiphong did not take place until June 24, 1966.

62. Ellipsis in original. LeMay, *Mission With LeMay*, 565.

63. The postwar Strategic Bombing Survey found that LeMay's mining of Japanese sea lanes had proven quite successful. Sherry, *Rise of American Air Power*, 309. The U.S. Army Air Force laid aerial mines in Haiphong harbor as well, in October 1943. The U.S. Navy led an effort that removed five of the devices in October 1945—when Ho Chi Minh's government was already establishing itself in Hanoi—but these apparently were not all of the mines. Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. 7 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948–58), 4:531, <http://media.defense.gov/2010/Nov/05/2001329889/-1/-1/0/AFD-101105-010.pdf>; Edwin B. Hooper, Dean C. Allard, and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict*. Vol. 1: *The Setting of the Stage to 1959* (Washington, DC: Naval History Division, 1976), 108–9; David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 286–87. For the U.S. decision in 1972 to mine Haiphong harbor, see note 122 below.

## OCTOBER 1966

64. LeMay, “General LeMay Tells How to Win the War in Vietnam,” 36–38, 43.

65. *Ibid.*, 36.

66. *Ibid.*, 37–38.

67. *Ibid.*, 43.

## 1967/1968

68. LeMay, *America is in Danger*, 257–59. LeMay devoted a full chapter (pp. 222–63) to his thoughts on the development of the Vietnam War and what he saw as the maldeployment of U.S. resources in the counterinsurgency effort. As noted in the introduction, even though this book was published in 1968, subject matter seems to indicate that it was written in 1967.

## JUNE 1969

69. LeMay interview (1969). As noted in the introduction, this interview was conducted as part of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library oral history program, but General LeMay did not allow the tape to be deposited at that institution. The interview was conducted as unclassified. Page numbers in the transcript are given at the end of each excerpt.

70. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

71. *Ibid.*, 11–14.

72. *Ibid.*, 25.

73. *Ibid.*, 27–28. LeMay stated in a later interview that he did not even vote until the period when he was chief of staff as he considered “national defense to be a nonpolitical question. . . . But when I saw what was happening starting with the Kennedy administration, then I became convinced that the military ought to vote, like any other citizen, and then I did.” LeMay interview (1976).

74. LeMay interview (1969), 29.

75. *Ibid.*, 35–36. For more elaboration by LeMay on what he thought was McNamara’s interest in reducing the missile stockpile to 1,000, see LeMay interview (1971), 31–34.

76. For the long and complicated peace negotiation process, see Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

77. Eisenhower suggested the same approach in Vietnam. McNamara recorded that at a meeting with Johnson and his senior leadership on February 17, 1965, Eisenhower stated that “if the Chinese or Soviets threatened to intervene, he said, ‘We should pass the word back to them to take care lest dire results [i.e., nuclear strikes] occur to them.’” McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 173.

78. Accountings of South Vietnamese casualties vary widely. According to one, for the years 1960 through 1974, the South Vietnamese military suffered 254,256 killed in action and 783,602 wounded. The numbers of killed and wounded increased exponentially in the years after LeMay made this statement. Jeffrey J. Clarke, *United States Army in Vietnam: Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1988), 275, [http://www.history.army.mil/banner\\_images/focus/dr\\_clarke\\_ret\\_comm/the\\_final\\_years.pdf](http://www.history.army.mil/banner_images/focus/dr_clarke_ret_comm/the_final_years.pdf).

79. President Johnson halted Rolling Thunder at the end of October 1968 in an effort to stimulate peace talks with the North Vietnamese. There was political motivation behind the move, as Johnson was seeking to bolster Hubert H. Humphrey’s presidential campaign. Any hope for progress evaporated, however, when South Vietnamese president Nguyen Van Thieu refused to have his country participate in the peace negotiations. Information that came to light nearly fifty years later confirmed the long-rumored story that intermediaries of then-candidate Richard Nixon convinced Thieu to stall. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, 149–50; John A. Farrell, “Tricky Dick’s Vietnam Treachery,” *New York Times*, January 1, 2017, SR9, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/31/opinion/sunday/nixons-vietnam-treachery.html>; Peter Baker, “Nixon Looked for ‘Monkey Wrench’ in Vietnam Talks to Help Win Race,” *New York Times*, January 3, 2017, A11, <http://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/02/us/politics/nixon-tried-to-spoil-johnsons-vietnam-peace-talks-in-68-notes-show.html>. See also Robert S. McNamara, interview by Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Robert Dallek), March 26, 1993, transcript, 8–9, [http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral\\_histories/mcnamara\\_r/McNamara-SP1.PDF](http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/mcnamara_r/McNamara-SP1.PDF).

80. For Shoup’s statements against the war, see Buzzanco, “American Military’s Rationale against the Vietnam War.”

81. For the largely clandestine U.S. Air Force efforts in Laos during the early 1960s, see Victor B. Anthony and Richard R. Sexton, *The War in Northern Laos, 1954–1973* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993), <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA512223>. The PDF is of the declassified version cited in this work.

82. LeMay interview (1969), 47–62. For the Kennedy administration debates on Laos, see William J. Rust, *So Much to Lose: John F. Kennedy and American Policy in Laos* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

## MARCH 1972

83. Curtis E. LeMay, interview by Air Force History (Thomas G. Belden), March 29, 1972, transcript, AFHRA, IRIS no. 00904611. The interview was originally marked secret and later declassified.

84. For the Army’s Howze Board in 1962, see John J. Tolson, *Airmobility, 1961–1971* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1973), 10–24, <http://www.history.army>.

mil/html/books/090/90-4/CMH\_Pub\_90-4-B.pdf; for the Air Force's response, see Trest, *Air Force Roles and Missions*, 193–96.

85. The clandestine operation in Laos that LeMay referenced is unclear. The Army's loss of rotary-wing aircraft in Vietnam was staggering. According to one accounting compiled by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots' Association, the Army lost 5,086 of the approximately 12,000 helicopters in service in Vietnam. Gary Roush, "Helicopter Losses during the Vietnam War," <http://www.vhpa.org/heliloss.pdf>.

86. A coup led by Gen. Duong Van Minh overthrew President Ngo Dinh Diem on November 1–2, 1963. The United States did not "engineer" the change in government, but an August 24 cable from State Department official Roger Hilsman contributed to the spiraling circumstances. As the planning progressed, U.S. officials had some communication with the plotters via a CIA operative and did not attempt to stop them. CIA director John A. McCone opposed an overthrow, as did Secretary of State D. Dean Rusk, and Maxwell Taylor and Robert F. Kennedy both expressed reservations. In Vietnam, the commander of MACV, Gen. Paul D. Harkins, did not support the plotting, but the new ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., did. President Kennedy was more favorably disposed to the idea of a change of government than many of his advisors, and he instructed the State Department and Lodge not to interfere with the coup planning. There had been so much plotting over prior months with nothing happening, however, that the actual coup caught the Americans by surprise. Kennedy was horrified when Diem was assassinated during the overthrow. John Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945–1975* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 77–81; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 62–64; Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 315–24; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 51–85; Taylor interview (September 1981), 11; Maxwell D. Taylor, interview by Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Ted Gittinger), June 1, 1981, transcript, 22, [http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/taylor\\_maxwell\\_1981\\_0601.pdf](http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/taylor_maxwell_1981_0601.pdf) (hereafter Taylor interview [June 1981]).

87. For the ninety-four targets, see note 31 above; for the debate over whether to strike oil storage and refineries, see note 61. For the dispersing of the oil, including into villages and along dikes the North Vietnamese believed would not be bombed, see Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 132.

88. See Robert C. Mikesch, *Flying Dragons: The South Vietnamese Air Force* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 2005).

89. For the "Buddhist crisis" in South Vietnam in 1963 and Diem's suppression of the Buddhist opposition to his government, see Miller, *Misalliance*, 260–78.

90. LeMay met Diem when he visited Vietnam in April 1962. Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 383.

91. U.S. frustration with Diem's unwillingness to follow advice or reform his government had been a long-standing issue even before the fighting in South Vietnam intensified in the early 1960s. See Michael R. Adamson, "Ambassadorial Roles and Foreign Policy: Elbridge Durbrow, Frederick Nolting, and the U.S. Commitment to Diem's Vietnam, 1957–61," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32 (June 2002): 229–55. Miller, *Misalliance*, offers much explanation for the courses that Diem often charted that ran counter to U.S. advice.

## PART II: JUNE 1972

92. Curtis E. LeMay, interview by Air Force History (Robert F. Futrell, Jacob Van Staaveren, and Thomas G. Belden), June 8, 1972, transcript, AFHRA, IRIS no. 00904608. The interview was originally marked secret and declassified in 1980.

93. During World War II, the United States dropped approximately 2,700,000 tons of bombs in the European Theater and 650,000 tons in the Pacific Theater. The figures for the war in Southeast Asia are approximately 4 million tons used against Viet Cong/North Vietnamese targets in South Vietnam, 1 million tons dropped on North Vietnam, 3 million tons on interdiction efforts in Laos, and 500,000 tons on Cambodia. Kohn and Harahan, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 129 n. 152; Earl H. Tilford Jr., “Bombing Our Way Back Home: The Commando Hunt and Menu Campaigns of 1969–1973,” in *Looking Back on the Vietnam War: A 1990s Perspective on the Decisions, Combat and Legacies*, ed. William P. Head and Lawrence E. Grinter (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 123.

94. Senior state department official Roger Hilsman wrote that “by 1961 it was a shibboleth among the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the United States ought never again to fight a limited war on the ground in Asia or perhaps ought never again to fight any kind of war on the ground in Asia [after the experience in Korea]. So often was the view expressed, in fact, that people in Washington began to speak of the “Never Again” Club. . . . Not all of the Joint Chiefs fully subscribed to the “Never Again” view, but it seemed to the White House that they were at least determined to build a record that would protect their position and put the blame entirely on the President no matter what happened. The general thrust of their memoranda seemed to imply that they were demanding an advance commitment from the President that, if they agreed to the use of American force and there were any fighting at all, then there would be no holds barred whatsoever—including the use of nuclear weapons.” Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, 129. It should be noted that the specific period Hilsman was discussing in this section was the March 1961 debate over whether to intervene in Laos, which was before LeMay became chief of staff of the Air Force. He certainly would have been aware of such talk, however, and the broadness of Hilsman’s statement indicated that the military thinking carried over to the Vietnam debates. See also LeMay’s comments on page 21 above.

95. Smith titled the memorandum “Atomic Weapons in Limited Wars in Southeast Asia,” submitted by the Fifth Air Force on July 22, 1958. Smith later published an unclassified article on the subject, “Nuclear Weapons and Limited War,” *Air University Quarterly Review* 12 (Spring 1960): 3–27. For the substance of Smith’s argument, see Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 46.

96. The plan that probably made it to the highest level of consideration was one Gen. Thomas White submitted on September 8, 1959, for consideration by the Joint Chiefs titled “Preparation for Decisive Termination of Hostilities in Laos.” LeMay likely was involved in the formulation of the concept since it called for a SAC B–47 squadron to be moved to Clark Air Base in the Philippines in preparation for potential strikes along the then-developing Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and against targets in North Vietnam. The memorandum suggested a preattack warning for the North Vietnamese and the use of either conventional or nuclear weapons. Anthony and Sexton, *War Against Northern Laos*, 25.

97. Issues of the level and the timing of direct North Vietnamese government and troop involvement in the conflict in South Vietnam remain complicated. For recent works that draw heavily on documents in Vietnamese archives, see Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War*; Lein-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Communist military engagement with South Vietnamese forces increased in September–October 1961, leading Diem to claim from that time forward that Hanoi was directly behind the effort. Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 72–74.

98. For the response of the Joint Chiefs to the attack at Bien Hoa, see Cosmas, *Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 2:149–56. Interestingly, support for an air strike in

retaliation for Bien Hoa came from Maxwell Taylor, who by that time was ambassador to South Vietnam. Taylor interview (September 1981), 2–3.

99. Taylor served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from October 1, 1962, until July 1, 1964. From July 1964 to July 1965, he was U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam.

100. Twining was chairman of the Joint Chiefs from August 15, 1957, until September 30, 1960. Taylor was chief of staff of the Army from June 30, 1955, until June 30, 1959.

101. H. R. McMaster noted that when Taylor became chairman of the Joint Chiefs, he “discovered that McNamara often suppressed JCS advice in favor of the views of his civilian analysts. On several defense issues McNamara either failed to consult the JCS or did not forward their views to the White House. Taylor’s staff reported that, in addition to McNamara’s strict control over the JCS, greater centralization in the Kennedy White House prevented military advice from reaching the president. The president had increased his reliance on ad hoc gatherings of ‘principals’ that usually included [McGeorge] Bundy and McNamara. Informal committees with responsibility for particular issues conducted closed deliberations and often sent papers directly to the president.” McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 21.

102. For the operation, see Howard Jones, *The Bay of Pigs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For another LeMay retelling of this story, in quite a similar manner, see LeMay interview (1971), 4–7.

103. Kennedy made the decision to scrub the air cover himself, with little or no consultation with the military or the CIA. He also cancelled a CIA mission with sanitized U.S. Air Force aircraft and personnel over Laos that was scheduled for the same time. For an overview that includes the most recently declassified material, see Timothy N. Castle, “From the Bay of Pigs to Laos: Operation Millpond, the Beginning of a Distant Covert War,” *Studies in Intelligence* 59 (June 2015): 1–17, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol-59-no-2/pdfs/Castle-MILLPOND-June-2015.pdf>.

104. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was activated on February 8, 1962. Its first commander was Gen. Paul D. Harkins. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006), 3, 27, [http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/091/91-6/CMH\\_Pub\\_91-6.pdf](http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/091/91-6/CMH_Pub_91-6.pdf).

105. LeMay visited Vietnam on April 16–21, 1962, and met with Harkins while there. Despite LeMay’s reputation for being direct and blunt, he was much more passive-aggressive with the MACV commander. Harkins recalled that all LeMay requested of him directly was money for a barracks at Pleiku. In his diary, however, LeMay railed about the lack of understanding of how air support should be used. He wrote that MACV should have an Air Force deputy commander of lieutenant general rank. Back in Washington, LeMay wrote blistering memos to McNamara and the Joint Chiefs about Harkins, but they brought about no changes. Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 383–84.

106. Maxwell Taylor had insisted on Harkins and apparently conveyed to McNamara and Kennedy that the Joint Chiefs had agreed on him. According to Roswell Gilpatric, McNamara was skeptical about Harkins. Gilpatric interview (1982), 8. For Taylor’s background with Harkins, see Taylor interview (June 1981), 12.

107. For Air Force operations during the latter part of the war, see Bernard C. Nalty, *Air War over South Vietnam, 1968–1975* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2000), <http://media.defense.gov/2010/Sep/24/2001330077/-1/-1/0/AFD-100924-004.pdf>; Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*.

108. See Bernard C. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1986), <http://media.defense.gov/2010/May/26/2001330289/-1/-1/0/AFD-100526-029.pdf>.

109. According to historian George Herring, McNamara used disagreement among the Joint Chiefs to circumvent them: “Using the age-old technique of divide and conquer, he took advantage of the differences among the Joint Chiefs of Staff to dominate them. He contained them politically by restricting their ability to testify before Congress and speak with the press. When they were able to secure congressional funding for items he opposed, he refused to spend the money. Eventually, he got rid of the recalcitrants,” including LeMay. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 29.

110. For Flaming Dart, see Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, 9–22. In his memoir, Johnson wrote that “our intelligence analysts believed Red China would not enter the war unless there was an invasion in the northern part of North Vietnam or unless the Hanoi regime was in danger of being toppled.” Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 125.

111. See also LeMay interview (1971), 28–29. The question of what the Chinese in particular, and the Soviets to a lesser extent, might have done if the United States had moved more aggressively against North Vietnam earlier in its direct involvement in the war has remained a point of contention. On one side are some military strategists and scholars of the so-called revisionist school; on the other are diplomatic historians who have spent time examining Chinese and Vietnamese records. Col. Harry G. Summers Jr., U.S. Army, expressed the thinking of the former group when he wrote in 1982 that the United States learned the wrong lessons from Korea that “allowed us to be bluffed by China throughout most of the [Vietnam] war.” Harry G. Summers Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1982), 25, 59–61, 69, 88, 99, 178 (quote, 59). For a more document-based development of this concept, see Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 321–25. In rebuttal, Qiang Zhai quoted several Summers statements and concluded, based on his work in Chinese archives, that “if the actions recommended by Summers had been taken by Washington in Vietnam, there would have been a real danger of a Sino-American war with dire consequences for the world. In retrospect, it appears that Johnson had drawn the correct lesson from the Korean War and had been prudent in his approach to the Vietnam conflict.” Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 155–56. See also George C. Herring, “Fighting Without Allies: The International Dimensions of America’s Failure in Vietnam,” in *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*, ed. Mark J. Gilbert (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 84. Maxwell Taylor stated after the war that he had “supported the gradualism at the start,” but after “only a month or two of a slow advance,” he came to believe that the Chinese and Soviets were not that concerned and began pressing for “increasing the magnitude of the attacks.” Taylor interview (September 1981), 8. McNamara said that the gradual approach was “solely a result of a desire to minimize the risk of confrontation.” He believed that “in one very important respect, our policy in respect to Vietnam succeeded. We avoided a military confrontation with either the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China. This was a major objective of the president [Johnson] from the beginning. It was certainly a major objective of mine.” McNamara interview (1975), 27–28.

112. For the committee and the working group, see Cosmas, *Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 2:15, 156; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 180–84.

113. McGeorge Bundy, McNamara, and Rusk had already briefed Johnson on the November 1964 working group’s analysis before General Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, received a coordinating draft from the working group. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 181–82.

114. For the origins of Farm Gate, see Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 79–84.



115. The United States gave the Royal Lao Air Force ten T-6 aircraft in January 1961, funneled to the Laotians by way of the Royal Thai Air Force, which provided cursory training for the Lao pilots. The Laotians did begin flying combat missions in these planes, with negligible results. Anthony and Sexton, *War in Northern Laos*, 35–39. LeMay’s reference to activities in Laos in the previous paragraph is unclear but likely occurred in 1959–60, when LeMay was vice chief of staff of the Air Force.

116. The aircraft with which the 4400th deployed were T-28s, C-47s, and B-26s. The first two types of planes were extensively modified. The T-28s were outfitted with armor plating and carried around 1,500 pounds of bombs and rockets as well as two .50-caliber machine guns with 350 rounds per gun. The C-47s were augmented with tanks to carry twice the fuel load of the stock aircraft. They were also fitted with stronger landing gear to facilitate use on dirt air strips as well as jet-assisted takeoff (JATO) racks for operations from short runways. The modified C-47s were redesignated as SC-47s. Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 79.

117. Col. Benjamin H. King, the first commander of the 4400h CCTS, had an hour-long predeployment briefing with General LeMay in October 1961. King came away from the discussion convinced that his unit was being sent for offense operations—which had been the primary focus of its training—and that LeMay “wanted us to go in there and counteract some of the inroads into the Air Force’s mission that were being made by the Army, to counteract some of the favorable publicity that the Green Berets were getting, that the Special Forces were getting.” According to King, LeMay also told him that he and the unit were to report directly to LeMay, verbal orders that created a significant chain-of-command issue when the 4400th arrived in Vietnam and came under MACV’s predecessor organization, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam (MAAG), and the commander of the 2d Air Division, Brig. Gen. Rollen Anthis. Benjamin H. King, interview by Corona Harvest (Maj. Samuel J. Riddlebarger and Lt. Col. Valentino Castellina), September 4, 1969, transcript, AFHRA, IRIS no. 00904092, 29–39 (quote, 38); Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 82–84.

118. This directive from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs on December 26, 1961, effectively ended the prospect of an independent U.S. Air Force air combat role in Vietnam during this period. Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 83–84.

119. For the origins of Operations Plan [OPLAN] 34A, which outlined limited covert operations in Vietnam, see Cosmas, *Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 2:13–14, 187–88; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 59–60, 86, 95, 119–24, 130.

120. For the JCS debate in the fall of 1961 and the Taylor-Rostow mission to survey the situation in Vietnam, see Schulimson, *Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 1:109–40.

121. For restrictions during the Operation Linebacker campaign (Linebacker I) that was underway at the time LeMay spoke, and comparison of allowable targets during the Rolling Thunder years, see Parks, “Linebacker and the Art of War”; Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, 250–53.

122. The Nixon administration’s decision to mine Haiphong harbor was not as straightforward as LeMay made it sound. There were a number of issues of international law, diplomacy, and politics involved in the consideration, as Nixon was running for reelection that year and also trying to arrange a nuclear summit with the Soviet Union. On May 9, 1972, a carrier-launched Marine medium attack squadron laid thirty-six mines across the narrow single channel that led into Haiphong as President Nixon announced the action during a televised address. Prados, *Vietnam*, 473–75.

123. A senior Air Force officer who raised this concern was one who had an intimate knowledge of Vietnam, Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale. He stated in a 1971 interview that “I was initially quite opposed to the bombing since it broke almost every rule that I know of for success in a political war. . . . I expressed myself rather plainly on this at that time to some of

our top U.S. officials in the administration by pointing out the advantages—politically—that it gave an enemy who had been having trouble with the people up to that point. As with the Luftwaffe attacks in Britain [in 1940], it permitted Ho Chi Minh and some other smart political leaders in Hanoi to do a Winston Churchill and prove that an enemy was attacking them and therefore the people must hold together and unify and defy this enemy. So in effect, we were doing something that would look good from our rules of warfare, but in terms of the actual war that was being conducted in Vietnam, we were letting the aggressors and our enemies take full political and psychological advantage of something. We gave them a very priceless way of maintaining and strengthening their leadership at the very time when we wanted it weakened.” Edward G. Lansdale, interview by U.S. Air Force Academy Oral History Program (Maj. Kenneth J. Alnwick), April 25, 1971, transcript, AFHRA, IRIS no. 01000329, 80–81. See also Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 136–39. For the North Vietnamese view of U.S. air power, see Douglas Pike, “North Vietnamese Air Defenses during the Vietnam War,” in Head and Grinter, *Looking Back on the Vietnam War*, 161–72.

124. Although the subject of “collateral damage” is often mentioned in relation to U.S. bombing in Vietnam, very little has been written on the topic. Two theses on collateral damage that include discussion of Vietnam are Patrick M. Shaw, “Collateral Damage and the United States Air Force” (master’s thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, 1997), <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA391809>; Calvin M. Campbell Jr., “The Strategic and Political Impacts of Collateral Damage from Strike Warfare” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA620602>. For the broader ethical implications, see Marilyn B. Young, “Bombing Civilians from the Twentieth to the Twenty-first Centuries,” in Tanaka and Young, *Bombing Civilians*, 154–74. For the targeting restrictions during various phases of the conflict, see Parks, “Linebacker and the Law of War”; W. Hays Parks, “Rolling Thunder and the Law of War,” *Air University Review* 33 (January-February 1982), 2–21, <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1982/jan-feb/parks.html>. It is also important to note that the intelligence staff with the Seventh Air Force was perpetually undermanned, leading to issues with both targeting and poststrike assessment. Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 130–31.

125. Operation Barrel Roll consisted of a series of very restricted strikes against communist supply and communications lines in Laos. The missions began in December 1964, while LeMay was still chief of staff. Anthony and Sexton, *War in Northern Laos*, 144–63; Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 256.

126. Mark Clodfelter used a similar argument to support why he believed a massive strategic bombing campaign would not have worked early in the war: “The main enemy in the South from 1964 to the 1968 Tet Offensive was not the North Vietnamese but the Viet Cong, which totaled roughly 245,000 men in a 300,000-man enemy force five months before Tet (the remaining 55,000 troops were from the North Vietnamese Army). The entire force waged an infrequent guerrilla war and fought an average of *one* day in *30*. Thus, its supply needs from sources outside of South Vietnam were minimal—only 34 tons a day, which equated to *seven* two-and-a-half-ton truckloads of supplies.” With so few supplies, there were few supply sources to strike in North Vietnam, as well as only a trickle of resources to attempt to interdict. Clodfelter, “Solidifying the Foundation,” 306. Political scientist Robert A. Pape laid out an argument along similar lines that went even further, writing that “I believe that North Vietnam during the Johnson years was essentially immune to coercion with air power.” Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 176–95 (quote, 176).

127. Clodfelter continued by explaining how much had evolved by the time LeMay was speaking in June 1972: “The situation had changed dramatically in 1972. By then,

the 1968 Tet Offensive had decimated the leadership cadres of the Viet Cong, and the 12-division force that attacked South Vietnam in the Easter Offensive consisted almost exclusively of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops. Large numbers of T-54 tanks and 130mm artillery backed that advance. The fast-paced, conventional offensive demanded enormous quantities of fuel and ammunition to sustain it, and made air power's attacks on lines of transportation and oil-storage areas enormously successful; mining Haiphong harbour also significantly damaged the North Vietnamese logistical effort. . . . In sum, Vietnam consisted of two very different types of conflicts fought at different times by different enemies, and air power's ability to achieve success varied in direct relation to the type of war being waged and who was doing the bulk of the fighting." Clodfelter, "Solidifying the Foundation," 306–7. See also Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 197–210.

128. The Yankee Team operations that began in the summer of 1964 sought to document Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese violations of Laos's neutrality under the 1962 Geneva agreement as well as provide reconnaissance of activities along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Anthony and Sexton, *War in Northern Laos*, 107–20.

129. The Joint Chiefs and CINCPAC expressed concern very early in Seacoord's existence that it might interfere with the military chain of command. Cosmas, *MACV*, 163–64.

130. Taylor was also uncomfortable with Johnson's directive, and with being named ambassador, a position he had not sought and did not want. He did note however, that the directive "gave me a feeling of confidence to alight in Saigon with such a paper in my pocket." Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 313–14, 316 (quote); Taylor interview (June 1981), 34–40.

131. For the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, see Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

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132. Kohn and Harahan, *Strategic Air Warfare*. Page numbers are indicated at the end of each excerpt.

133. *Ibid.*, 112.

134. *Ibid.*, 121–22.

135. *Ibid.*, 123. For the target list, see note 31 above. For its use as the basis of discussion for the campaign that became Rolling Thunder, see note 51.

136. Marshall Michel, who flew Linebacker II missions, was not as enthusiastic about the results: "It is important to acknowledge that the United States came close to suffering a major defeat in Linebacker II. SAC's planning failures, leading to the losses of the third and fourth nights, and the failure of nerve in Omaha that shifted the bombing away from Hanoi when the North Vietnamese were out of missiles gave their leadership the confidence they needed to hold out long enough for Congress [to] cut off funds for the war. Had SAC—prodded by [Alexander M.] Haig [Jr.], [Gen. Glenn R.] Sullivan, and [Adm. Thomas H.] Moorer—not acknowledged its mistakes and turned most of the mission planning over to Eighth Air Force, or had the U.S. suffered a large number of B-52 losses the night of December 26, it is difficult to see how B-52 attacks on Hanoi could have continued. There seems to be little doubt that the United States Congress would have cut off all funding for the war at that point." Michel, *11 Days of Christmas*, 236.

137. Kohn and Harahan, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 125–26.

138. President Nixon sought "psychological as well as physical results" from Linebacker II. He ordered the Joint Chiefs to not "allow military considerations such as long term

interdiction, etc., to dominate the targeting philosophy. Attacks . . . must be massive and brutal in character. No other criteria is acceptable and no other conceptual approach will be countenanced.” As a result, many of the targets were more political than strategic, such as the small, difficult-to-strike building that housed the Hanoi International radio station. The Joint Chiefs ceded targeting decisions to SAC headquarters in Omaha, much to the consternation of the commands of the Eighth and Seventh Air Forces that were flying the missions. Michel, *11 Days of Christmas*, 51–70 (quote, 51); Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power*, 184–90.

139. See note 93 above.

140. Kohn and Harahan, *Strategic Air Warfare*, 128–30.

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