

VIETNAM WAR PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS

In March 1965, Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton prepared a top-secret memo for Defense secretary Robert McNamara. In it, he listed America's aims for the conflict in Vietnam as well as describing a "deteriorating situation" in South Vietnam (SVN). Analyze the excerpt here, then respond to the questions.

TOP SECRET

ANNEX -- I OF ACTION FOR SOUTH VIETNAM

3/24/65 (first draft)
Seven

1. US aims: 70% - To avoid a humiliating US defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor)
20% - To keep SVN (and then adjacent) territory from Chinese hands
10% - To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life
ALSO - To emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from methods used
NOT - To "help a friend," although it would be hard to stay in if asked out
2. The situation: The situation in general is bad and deteriorating. The VC have the initiative. Defeatism is gaining among the rural population, somewhat in the cities, and even among the soldiers -- especially those with relatives in rural areas. The Hop Tac area around Saigon is making little progress; the Delta stays bad; the country has been severed in the north. GVN control is shrinking to enclaves, some burdened with refugees. In Saigon we have a remission: Quat is giving hope on the civilian side, the Buddhists have calmed, and the split generals are in uneasy equilibrium.
3. The preliminary question: Can the situation inside SVN be bottomed out (a) without extreme measures against the DRV and/or (b) without deployment of large numbers of US (and other) combat troops inside SVN? The answer is perhaps, but probably no.

3/24/65 (first draft)

ANNEX -- PLAN OF ACTION FOR SOUTH VIETNAM

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Use the top-secret memo on the other side of this sheet to answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. What is the **date** on the document?

2. Who **wrote** the memo? Who was it intended for?

3. Based on the memo, what was the overwhelming **aim** of the Vietnam War?

4. One of the aims states that US needs to emerge "without unacceptable taint from methods used." What do you think the author means by "**taint**"?

5. How does the document describe the current situation in Vietnam?

6. Based on this document, what do **you** think the US should attempt to do in Vietnam?