

The US in Vietnam: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

Directions: Analyze the documents to answer the question: **Was the U.S. planning to go to war before the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution?**

Document A (Modified) Gulf of Tonkin Resolution Congressional Joint Resolution, August 7, 1964

The North Vietnamese Navy, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace...

...These attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and other free the nations...

The United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way...

...Therefore the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America have decided that we approve and support the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary military actions to combat Communist forces and to prevent further aggression...

...The United States is prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom...

1. According to this document, what did the North Vietnamese do?
 2. Why did the United States feel compelled to respond at this point?
 3. According to this document, was the U.S. planning to go to war in Vietnam before August 1964? Explain your answer.
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Document B (Modified) Memorandum from Foreign Affairs Advisor (Bundy) to the President Washington, May 25, 1964.

It is recommended that you make a Presidential decision that the U.S. will use selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam. . . This basic Presidential decision is recommended on these premises:

- (1) that the U.S. cannot tolerate the loss of Southeast Asia to Communism;
- (2) that without a decision to resort to military action if necessary the present prospect is not hopeful, in South Vietnam or in Laos;
- (3) that a decision to use force if necessary, backed by resolute and extensive deployment, and conveyed by every possible means to our adversaries (enemies), gives the best present chance of avoiding the actual use of such force.

It is further recommended that our clear purpose in this decision should be to use all our influence to bring about a major reduction or elimination of North Vietnamese interference in Laos and in South Vietnam, and not to unroll a scenario aimed at the use of force as an end in itself.

1. When was this document written? Who wrote it?
 2. What did Bundy suggest to the President?
 3. What are three reasons why Bundy made this recommendation?
 4. According to this document, was the U.S. planning to go to war in Vietnam before August 1964? Explain your answer.
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Document C (Modified) Telegram From the Department of State (Rusk) to the Embassy in Vietnam (Lodge) Washington, May 22, 1964—7:40 p.m.

On the other question, whether initial substantial attacks – [against North Vietnam] could proceed without notice, it is our present view here that this would simply not be possible. Even if Hanoi (North Vietnam) itself did not publicize them, there are enough observers in North Vietnam who might pick them up and there is also the major possibility of leakage at the South Vietnam end. Thus, publicity seems almost inevitable to us here for any attack that did significant damage.

Once such publicity occurred, I think you can see that the finger would point straight at us and that the President would then be put in perhaps a far more difficult position toward the American public and the Congress.

Thus, we are using a GVN-or-U.S.-acknowledged plan at the present time, although we do recognize that something a little stronger than the present OPLAN 34-A* might be carried out on the basis you propose.

**OPLAN 34-A was implemented in 1961. It was a covert or secret operation to collect information about North Vietnam.*

1. When was this document written? Who wrote it?
2. How did Rusk feel about the South Vietnamese government's ability to fight the Communists? Support your answer with evidence.
3. Why did Rusk think attacking the North Vietnamese is not a smart idea?
4. According to this document, was the U.S. planning to go to war in Vietnam before August 1964? Explain your answer.

Document D (Modified) Telephone Conversation Between President Johnson and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) Washington, May 27, 1964, 11:24 a.m.

Johnson: I will tell you the more, I just stayed awake last night thinking of this thing, and the more that I think of it I don't know what in the hell, it looks like to me that we're getting into another Korea. It just worries the hell out of me. I don't see what we can ever hope to get out of there with once we're committed. . . . I don't think it's worth fighting for and I don't think we can get out. And it's just the biggest damn mess that I ever saw.

Bundy: It is an awful mess.

Johnson: And we just got to think about it. . . . I just thought about ordering all those kids in there. And what in the hell am I ordering them out there for? What in the hell is Vietnam worth to me? . . .

Bundy: Yeah, yeah.

Johnson: Of course, if you start running from the Communists, they may just chase you right into your own kitchen.

Bundy: Yeah, that's the trouble. And that is what the rest of that half of the world is going to think if this thing comes apart on us. That's the dilemma, that's exactly the dilemma. . . .

Johnson: But this is a terrible thing that we're getting ready to do.

Bundy: . . . I think, also, Mr. President, you can do, what I think Kennedy did at least once which is to make the threat without having made your own internal decision that you would actually carry it through.

1. What type of document is this? How trustworthy do you think this type of document is?
2. What is the dilemma facing President Johnson?
3. According to this document, was the U.S. planning to go to war in Vietnam before August 1964? Explain your answer.

Essay:

Using all four documents, write a paragraph in response the question:

Was the U.S. planning to go to war in Vietnam before August 1964?

Source B: Johnson Library, National Security File, Aides File, McGeorge Bundy, Luncheon with the President, Vol. I, Part 1. Top Secret Sensitive.

Source C: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S. Top Secret: Priority; Nodis. Drafted by William Bundy, cleared by Sullivan, and approved by Rusk.

Source D: Johnson Library, Recordings and Transcripts, Recording of a telephone conversation between the President and McGeorge Bundy, Tape 64.28 PNO 111.U.S.
Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-68

Eighty-eighth Congress of the United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

*Begun and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday, the seventh day of January,
one thousand nine hundred and sixty-four*

Joint Resolution

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

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

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

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

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

SEC. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

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

John W. McClellan
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

APPROVED

Lee Harvey Oswald
Acting President pro tempore of the Senate.

AUG 10 1964

Lyndon B. Johnson

