

III. THE GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT AND AFTERMATH

(U) In March, May, and July the administration was forced to provide more aid for South Vietnam. Counterinsurgency operations were proving ineffectual in the face of demoralized Vietnamese leadership and rising Viet Cong strength and aggressive tactics. As a consequence, planning focused increasingly on airpower as a means to reverse defeats. Early in August, the Communists supplied the provocation needed to launch an air attack on North Vietnam.

U.S. Response in the Gulf of Tonkin

(TS) On 2 August the U.S. Navy destroyer Maddox, part of a patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin, detected three hostile patrol boats closing in at high speed. After three warning shots failed to halt them, the destroyer opened fire with its 5-inch batteries. One boat was disabled but succeeded in firing two torpedoes that missed the Maddox by 200 yards; a second boat lost power and retired, and a third, also struck, passed 1,700 yards astern the Maddox, firing a machine gun. In response the United States reinforced the patrol by adding a destroyer (the C. Turner Joy) and an aircraft carrier (Ticonderoga). On the night of 3 August enemy boats again attacked the patrol. In return fire, one was presumed sunk.