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Story Today on Vietnam Document Release Copyright 1997 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. The  
information contained in this news report may not be published, broadcast or otherwise distributed without  
the prior written authority of the Associated Press. By MIKE FEINSILBER Associated Press Writer WASHINGTON  
(AP) -- Newly declassified government documents support the theory that weeks before his assassination John  
F. Kennedy wanted his military leaders to draw up contingency plans for a U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam  
following the 1964 presidential election. The documents add to the historical controversy over whether the  
nation might have been spared the loss of 58,000 American lives in Vietnam had Kennedy not been killed.  
Some historians believe that Lyndon B. Johnson, upon succeeding Kennedy, deepened the U.S. commitment  
out of eagerness not to be seen as the first American president to lose a war. But historian Ronald Spector of  
George Washington University said the execution of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem three weeks  
before Kennedy's murder in 1963 may have been more decisive than the change at the top of the U.S.  
government. American leaders soon discovered that Diem had been hiding reports from the field that showed  
the war was going badly for the South Vietnamese, said Spector, who teaches a course on the U.S. role in  
Indochina. And Diem's successors proved even more ineffective than Diem in combatting the Viet Cong. The  
newly released documents did not discuss Kennedy's role in sanctioning Diem's assassination -- another  
contentious issue from those days. The document on plans for a withdrawal was among 800 pages of Joint  
Chiefs of Staff records that were made public Monday by the government's Assassination Records Review  
Board. The board was created by Congress to amass for public inspection any records that might shed light on  
Kennedy's murder. "All planning will be directed towards preparing RVN (South Vietnamese) forces for the  
withdrawal of all U.S. special assistance units and personnel by the end of calendar year 1965," said an Oct. 4,  
1963 memo from Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Taylor drafted the message for  
discussion by the joint chiefs. But their reaction was not reflected in the new documents. Less than a month  
after Kennedy's assassination, Johnson told his commanders to plan for "increased activity" against North  
Vietnam, another paper showed. In making such plans, Johnson directed, commanders should take into  
consideration "the plausibility of denial," the possibility of North Vietnamese retaliation and "other  
international reaction" -- all suggesting Johnson wanted to act against Hanoi surreptitiously. Historian George  
Herring at the University of Kentucky, author of "America's Longest War," said there was no doubt that  
American officials discussed a withdrawal by 1965 "but the question is whether you read this (document) as  
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