

FP02 5/12/66

U. S. Saved Asia, Says McNamara

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara said Wednesday that if American troops had not been rushed in, the Communists would have overrun South Viet Nam, butchered thousands, and brought turmoil to all of Southeast Asia.

McNamara, pulling secret reports from his arsenal of statistics, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the Viet Cong "is losing what support it had from the population."

Also, he said, heavy pounding from ground and air has dented the enemy's morale and expect-

tations of victory.

But still, he said the "dominant theme" of war and peace in Viet Nam is what he saw as a "firm decision" by the North Vietnamese to intensify the war.

McNamara based this judgment on a continuing flow of men from the North — at a rate

of about 4,500 men a month.

But he sought to assure the committee, a center of criticism of the war policy, that the United States has a "limited political objective" and wants to fight a war that kills as few as possible, including enemies.

"We have a limited objective," he said. "We are seeking to achieve that with the lowest possible cost in human life, to the United States, to the South Vietnamese and to our adversaries."

All this, McNamara said, is being weighed by the White House discussion on Viet Nam which he preferred to call a "progress report" rather than a re-examination of policy.

McNamara said he shied away from "re-examination" because "I didn't want to give the impression that some change of policy would be announced at any time, and I don't think that is the case."

But Chairman J. W. Fulbright, D-Ark., one of the foremost critics of the administration Viet Nam policy, said he thought a "change in policy would be in the national interest."

McNamara's appearance ostensibly was in support of the administration's \$3.4-billion foreign aid program. Fulbright indicated previously that he expected that McNamara would be the last witness before the committee went into closed sessions on the measure.

The committee plans to hear from the U.S. ambassador to Saigon, Henry Cabot Lodge, at a closed meeting Thursday.