

House Unit Lashes

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Out at McNamara

Overruling On B-58s Is Urged

Hebert Report Says Secretary Is Alone In His Opposition

By John G. Norris
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Secretary of Defense

Robert S. McNamara stands virtually alone at the Pentagon in his opposition to manned bombers and should be overruled on his decision to scrap the B-58 supersonic bomber, a House Armed Services subcommittee reported yesterday.

The subcommittee, headed by Rep. F. Edward Hebert (D-La.), issued a caustic and strong report that lashed out not only at the Secretary of Defense but at the entire decision-making system of the Defense Department.

In a direct attack on judgment exercised at the Pentagon, the subcommittee recommended that "the National Security Act be amended to require the 'advice' of Congress before the Executive Branch eliminates any major weapons system."

Backed by censored Pentagon testimony, the lengthy re-

port contained these highlights:

- The subcommittee was "shocked" to discover that McNamara's decision to scrap the Air Force supersonic B-58 bomber fleet by 1971, was neither "recommended nor truly supported" by any Air Force, civilian or military chiefs, and was opposed by most.

- All Pentagon witnesses, except McNamara, questioned during a closed-door investigation of the bomber cutback plans held in late January and early February, favored development of a new replacement of the B-52 as necessary to supplement the Nation's long-range missile force.

- All witnesses, except McNamara also testified that the FB-111 fighter-bomber, a slightly modified version of the TFX, was suitable only as an "interim" replacement for the earlier and lighter B-52 C through F models, and was not a "true" strategic bomber capable of replacing the later, long-range B-52Gs and B-52Hs.

- Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, retired Air Force Chief of Staff, said the United States is "below the minimum safe level" of strategic bomber strength for a nuclear war, and "far short" of the total needed for a conventional bomber war.

Dissent came from only one member of the nine-man subcommittee and, predictably, from the Defense Department, which said the majority report did not properly reflect McNamara's manned bomber views.

The committee dissenter,
See BOMBERS, A13, Col. 1.

Rep. Lucien N. Nedzi (D-Mich.) made his strong objections known in a minority report. He said the Hebert report "fails to deal adequately or objectively with the central issue involved in the inquiry—the future role of (strategic) manned bombers."

Nedzi said the majority was more concerned with "demonstrating the fallibility" of McNamara and "insinuations" against his credibility than getting at the facts. He said it was his understanding, despite the majority conclusion, that not all members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other top officials are convinced that a new strategic bomber, in addition to the FB-111, is clearly required.

Pentagon's Reply

At the Defense Department, Assistant Secretary of Defense Arthur Sylvester issued a statement saying that the majority report has not "properly or fairly reflected the views" of the Secretary on the future of manned bombers.

Sylvester added that the Defense Department shares Nedzi's views as to the "trivialities" expressed and "insinuations" made against McNamara in the majority report.

A spokesman for the House Armed Services Committee said an "overwhelming" majority of the full Committee approved the Hebert report. He would not disclose how many dissenters there were.

The published subcommittee hearings disclosed that Gen. John P. McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff, testified that while the Air Force rec-

commended the phaseout of 345 earlier B-52s and their replacement by 210 B-111s it had not proposed the elimination of the Air Force's 80 supersonic B-58s.

In fact, said McConnell, the first he heard of McNamara's plan to eliminate the B-58s was when he received the first

draft of the Pentagon's memo to President Johnson on the 1967 budget. McConnell made it plain that he was opposed to the move, but said he had not strenuously objected because he would have the opportunity of persuading McNamara to reverse the decision before it was accomplished.

Among the Pentagon witnesses who testified in favor of the development of a big new, long-range strategic replacement for the B-52 were Air Force Secretary Harold Brown, formerly McNamara's research chief, and John S. Foster Jr., Brown's successor as the Pentagon's Director of Research and Engineering. Foster testified that he knew of no one at the Pentagon who shared McNamara's position.

Air Force military chiefs, including McConnell, LeMay, and Gen. John D. Ryan, SAC commander, urged that "full development" of the USAF's project for such a plane—the advanced manned strategic system or AMSA—should be launched immediately if it is to be ready when the later B-52s wear out in the mid-1970s. Brown and Foster felt there was time for further study of its characteristics.

McNamara testified that the need for such an aircraft was not clear and he would approve only limited funds for development of some components as a "hedge" against later developments that would prove it necessary. LeMay and the subcommittee said they were convinced that McNamara had made a "firm" decision against such a bomber but would not say so.

"AMSA will always be a step away," said the Hebert report. "Always held out as a hope and a promise but with little possibility of becoming a fact. SAC will be kept on tippytoes but it won't be kissed."