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HIS BUSINESS IS WAR

As master of the Pentagon, Robert S. McNamara is among the most powerful, and controversial, men alive.

By Stewart Alsop

PHOTOGRAPHS BY OLLIE ATKINS

The huge desk in McNamara's office was once Gen. John J. Pershing's. Portrait is of James Forrestal, first Defense Secretary.

"Now people realize what hardly anybody realized five years ago—*that it's impossible to win an all-out nuclear exchange.* Once you realize this, you arrive at certain rational conclusions."

The words in italics were spoken with great emphasis, in the rather rasping, oddly compelling voice of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. They were the most significant words in a long and remarkably candid talk which he recently had with this reporter. For they represent the basic, underlying thesis in a fascinating but little understood system of reasoning which has led McNamara to transform the entire defense structure of the United States.

More than five years ago, when he became Secretary of Defense, McNamara announced confidently that henceforth he expected the Defense Department to "speak with one voice." There was snickering among old hands at the Pentagon. No man on earth, they were quite certain, could force conformity on the three jealous and bitterly competing services.

Now, even in the midst of a small but cruel war, the Defense Department does indeed "speak with one voice"—and the voice is McNamara's. This is only one of the revolutionary changes which McNamara has forced on his great empire, although it is an extremely important change.

The Defense Department empire, over which McNamara now presides unchallenged, is an empire truly Roman in its reach, and it makes McNamara easily the second most powerful man in the United States and one of the half dozen or so most powerful men in the world. And yet very few people really understand what McNamara has done to the American defense structure, how he has done it—and why he has done it.

In one way or another, what happens in the American defense establishment is sure to affect the lives of all Americans, for it can cause the middle-aged to reach deeper into their pockets, or the young to risk their lives in a war half a world away. Almost four million Americans (a bit less than three million military, a bit more than a million civilians) are directly employed by the Defense Department. Indirectly, the department, which farms out contracts worth between $25 billion and $30 billion a year to industry, is far and away the largest employer in the country—more people work in the defense industries than in the steel and auto industries combined.

'I have only one real regret, and that's the Bay of Pigs.'

In terms of raw power—which includes the power to kill about half the human race—the world has never before seen anything remotely approaching the monstrous military machine which McNamara commands. Wars, even small wars, kill men, and since the purpose of the Defense Department is to enable the United States to fight wars, killing is, in a sense, what McNamara's department is all about.

Perhaps this is what makes the huge, gloomy Pentagon, with its 26,000 people, and its 17½ miles of corridor, such a depressing place. No one, it is said, has ever served in the Pentagon for any appreciable length of time without sooner or later experiencing an almost obsessive desire to be somewhere else. That desire has certainly been felt by Robert McNamara, who used to say that five years was the outside limit a Secretary of Defense could usefully serve. And even when McNamara was sworn in as Secretary on January 21, 1961, he was no stranger to the Pentagon.

A 1944 Pentagon telephone directory lists Lt. Col. R. S. McNamara, USAAF, in Room 4D1053, a room on an airwell with a view of an ugly ocher brick wall a few feet away, which is currently occupied by Maj. Edward Davis, a 46-year-old Air Force Reserve officer. It takes only a couple of minutes to walk from Maj. Davis's office to

3E880, the suite of the Secretary of Defense, but in terms of power and prestige the distance could hardly be measured in light-years. Yet the 28-year-old McNamara of 4D1053 was essentially the same remarkable human being as the McNamara of Suite 3E880, who will be 50 on June 9.

Soon after he moved into Suite 3E880, McNamara remarked that he wanted "thinkers, not gladiators." He might have had in mind someone like Lt. Col. R. S. McNamara, USAAF. That youthful officer led no raids, defied no flak. He was a specialist, and a brilliant one, in the unglamorous but essential art of "statistical control."

McNamara was fresh out of Harvard Business School, where he was an assistant professor, and newly married to pretty Margaret Craig, a classmate at the University of California, when he joined the Air Force as a captain in 1943. He became one of the "backroom boys" whose task it was to see that the Air Force got what it needed to fight the war—bombs, or planes, or oil, or underpants for WAAF's—at the right place, at the right time, and by way of what was even then the world's most formidable bureaucracy. To this task, the youthful McNamara brought certain very well-marked characteristics—the same characteristics which made him, by 1960, president of the Ford Motor Company, which he joined in 1946 immediately after leaving Room 4D1053. Those same characteristics make him today the most powerful and the most controversial member of Lyndon Johnson's Cabinet.

The first and most obvious of these characteristics is intelligence. McNamara displays this characteristic most conspicuously when he is testifying on Capitol Hill. To leaf through the thousands of pages of McNamara testimony is a mind-boggling exercise. McNamara is almost never at a loss for an answer, whether the question concerns the "current production rate of the UH-1B/D Iroquois helicopter" or the "Soviet damage potential in terms of millions of U.S. fatalities in an all-out nuclear strike." To read McNamara's testimony is to become convinced that the McNamara brain is a unique sort of muscle, different in some mysterious way from the flabby brain fiber of other persons.

McNamara's remarkable intelligence and near-total recall have not been an unalloyed asset on Capitol Hill. Members of Congress tend to regard him as the other boys in a class regard the boy whose hand is always up when teacher asks a question—with a mixture of admiration and irritation. A comment by Rep. Edward Hébert expresses the attitude of those who are more irritated than admiring.

Hébert was quizzing McNamara last year on his decision to close some 665 U.S. military bases. After McNamara cited facts and figures to defend the closing of each base in turn, the following colloquy (as Hébert remembers it) ensued:

HÉBERT: Well, do you think you were right in closing *every one* of those bases?

MCNAMARA: Yes, sir.

HÉBERT: Every one?

MCNAMARA: Yes, sir.

HÉBERT: Well, all I can say is, you sure as hell *are* infallible. Jesus Christ himself made one mistake out of twelve, when he chose Judas Iscariot, but you can't even make one mistake out of six-hundred and sixty-five.

McNamara makes no claim to infallibility. "With but one major exception," he told this reporter, "my mistakes have been mistakes of omission, not commission." The "one major exception" was his advice to President Kennedy at the time of the Bay of Pigs disaster.

"That's the only real regret I have, looking back over the last five years," McNamara said thoughtfully. "I told President Kennedy afterward, 'You know damn well where I was at the time of decision—I recommended it.' Of course, we'd only been in office sixty days, and none of us had had time really to get on top of our jobs, but that's no real excuse for bad judgment."

Although McNamara, by his own admission, can be wrong, his manner has contributed to his public reputation as an infallible human I.B.M. machine. He has a habit of ticking off the points he wants to make in neat succession, using either numerals or the alphabet, which makes him sound like a sort of mechanical oracle. For an example, there was the remarkably succinct advice which McNamara not long ago gave Dr. John Foster, his newly appointed Director of Defense Research and Engineering.

Foster was appointed to his job last September, just as the hideously complex budget-making process was getting in full swing. A physicist with little previous experience of the Pentagon bureaucracy, Foster soon felt as though he were drowning in a sea of top secrets—there were literally thousands of projects for which he was responsible. He had no idea which areas should be given priority, and the advice he received from his subordinates, all of whom had their pet projects, was hopelessly conflicting. At last, in despair, he took his problem to McNamara.

"That's easy," said McNamara briskly. "Number one—R and D for Vietnam. Number two—assured penetration. Number three—ABM, but don't precommit me. Number four—I want you to pay special attention to the F-111 series. Number five—ASW."

As this suggests, McNamara and his subordinates communicate in a special patois of their own. R and D means Research and Development, of course; assured penetration means making certain U.S. nuclear-strike forces can at all times penetrate Soviet defenses; ABM means the anti-ballistic missile; the F-111 is the descendant of the much criticized TFX dual-purpose plane, a subject on which McNamara is sensitive; and ASW is anti-submarine warfare. But what is interesting about this response is not the patois, but the picture it gives of the McNamara mental processes. His brain, it has been said, is like a huge filing cabinet, the contents of each file impeccably arranged, and the file neatly labeled and ready for instant reference.

This filing cabinet McNamara is the Secretary of Defense most visible to outsiders. But there are other McNamaras as well. There is, for example, a surprisingly genial and thoughtful McNamara. One recent recruit to the Pentagon recalls suddenly being exposed to this side of the man. Over a period of months he had been summoned several times, by the "hot line" which connects the Secretary directly to his subordinates, to Suite 3E880. In the first five or six encounters, the official recalls, about the same thing happened:

He would be ushered into McNamara's huge office, to find the Secretary seated at the elaborately carved eight-and-a-half-foot desk which once belonged to Gen. John J. Pershing. The Secretary, his head bent over a column of figures, would be scribbling on a pad, in his tiny handwriting. The official would approach the desk, stop, and stand for several seconds as McNamara continued to scribble. McNamara would look up, ask several incisive questions, scribble notes on the answers, thank the official in a perfunctory manner, and look down at his column of figures in a gesture of dismissal.

Then the hot line buzzed once more, and the official entered the huge office to find the Secretary sitting with his feet up on the desk, trousers rumpled halfway to the knee, exposing a generous expanse of white calf. McNamara genially waved his subordinate to a chair, asked if he had anything on his mind he'd like to talk about, and then chatted in a rather rambling fashion for more than half an hour. At the end of the interview, McNamara walked the bemused official to the door, inquiring

He insists the department "speak with one voice"—his.

with what seemed real interest about the health and happiness of the official's wife and offspring.

"I just couldn't believe it was the same man I'd seen before," the official recalls. There are other surprising McNamaras. There is the social McNamara, for instance. The Secretary and his unpretentious, attractive wife, Marg, are of course much sought after by Washington hostesses. They do not go out often, but when they do, McNamara is a gay and charming guest, who has been known to dance a mean Frug, and who also displays a dry wit and a fund of knowledge on all sorts of obscure subjects. McNamara is, in fact, a genuine intellectual, and his filing-cabinet memory contains facts a lot more interesting than the current production rate of the UH-1B/D helicopter.

Finally, there is a McNamara who shows himself very rarely—an emotional McNamara. This McNamara first appeared in public during the Senate hearings in 1963 on his much-disputed award of the $6.5-billion TFX plane contract to the General Dynamics Corp., against the recommendation of the Pentagon's experts. During the course of the inquiry, the incredible happened, and the chilly and self-controlled Secretary of Defense almost broke down.

"Last night when I got home after midnight, after preparing for today's hearings," he said, his voice breaking, "my wife told me that my own twelve-year-old son had asked how long it would take for his father to prove his honesty." Several

of those present saw—or thought they saw—tears in McNamara's eyes. The episode was the more remarkable because his "honesty" had not been called in question—only his judgment.

This suddenly emotional McNamara has been seen in public only on very rare occasions—most recently at a press conference in March. Hanson Baldwin had written a long report for *The New York Times* which charged in effect that President Johnson's decision, taken on McNamara's advice, not to call up the National Guard or the reserves for the war in Vietnam, had been a mistake. A much-leaked Senate subcommittee report, which McNamara had refused to clear on security grounds, charged much the same thing. The best-trained men in four supposedly combat-ready divisions, both Baldwin and the Senate report charged, had been sent to Vietnam, so that at least four divisions had become mere training divisions for draftees.

A long and very detailed defense of McNamara's policies was distributed when the press conference began. Thereafter, when a German reporter asked about the combat-readiness of U.S. forces in Europe, McNamara lashed out at him angrily. When an American reporter persisted in asking questions about the "suppressed" Senate report, McNamara accused him of "throwing rocks" and, pointing a furious finger at him, ordered him out of the room. The reporters present were as amazed as the senators at the TFX hearing had been three years before. As on that occasion, only McNamara's judgment, not his integrity, had been called in question.

"Everybody hates to *admit* they're wrong," an admiring colleague of McNamara's said subsequently. "But Bob McNamara hates to *be* wrong—and he damn rarely is. I think in the TFX affair he may have suspected that maybe he had been a bit hasty in awarding the contract to General Dynamics instead of Boeing, and I think he may have doubts himself about the decision not to call out the Guard or the reserves."

McNamara's hatred of being wrong—or, to put it positively, his passion for being right—is the second of his marked characteristics. As his rare

'You know, it's hard to make sense of this war.'

outbursts reveal, McNamara is no automaton. Strong emotions boil beneath the coolly assured surface, and these emotions are aroused by any reflection on the rightness of his decisions.

At the same time, McNamara has a deep distrust of all emotion, his own included. He is capable of talking about emotion much as an old-fashioned preacher might talk about sin, as the source of all error. Here, for example, is McNamara on a favorite subject—what he calls "the rationalization of the defense structure":

"It is the difference between emotion and reason. Your emotional reaction may be entirely different from mine, but if we consider the same set of facts on the basis of reason, not emotion, we're not likely to be very far apart in our conclusions. For a long time there was too much emotion in defense planning, and not enough reason. Previously, the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary couldn't agree even on the basic force structure. Now there is clear agreement on most basic matters between all the Chiefs and myself."

These, then, are the most clearly marked McNamara characteristics—the distrust of emotion, the passion for being right, the amazing intelligence. All three have strongly affected both the management of McNamara's department and the conduct of the war in Vietnam.

McNamara has a profound faith in the power of the human intellect to "rationalize" (a favorite McNamara word) any problem, by examining it in the light of what he calls "reason" rather than emotion. If all the facts are examined unemotionally, and if these facts are "quantified" (another favorite McNamara word) carefully and correctly, then a rational means of dealing with the problem more or less automatically emerges.

In the McNamara lexicon, there is no room for instinct or a seat-of-the pants "feel" when dealing with a problem. At one time, McNamara relied heavily on a civilian intelligence expert with long experience in Southeast Asia to brief him on the Vietnamese war. The expert recalls being summoned regularly to McNamara's office, to find McNamara poring over charts showing areas occupied by the Viet Cong and government forces, and columns of figures on every phase of the war—how many "incidents" there had been in the previous week; numbers on both sides killed, wounded, and captured; estimates of infiltration from the North; and so on. The expert had confined himself to factual briefings on the progress of the war, until one day when McNamara looked up from his charts and his columns of figures, and remarked musingly: "You know, it's hard to make *sense* of this war."

"Mr. Secretary," said the expert, "facts and figures are useful, but you can't judge a war by them. You have to have an instinct, a feel. My instinct is that we're in for a much rougher time than your facts and figures indicate."

McNamara gave him a long, thoughtful, faintly incredulous stare. The expert was never summoned to the Secretary's office again.

McNamara is a man who likes to have around him others who share his faith in "rationalization" and "quantification." The key men in the Pentagon are by no means carbon copies of McNamara. Nor are they, to borrow from Shakespeare, "slight unmeritable men meet to be sent on errands"—McNamara is not the sort of man who chooses weak or stupid subordinates so that he may shine by contrast. But the key men, whether military or civilian, are without exception distinctly McNamara-ish men—intelligent, competent, brisk, not given to striking heroic poses. They are "thinkers, not gladiators." Indeed, for the most part they were, like McNamara himself, staff men or back-room boys in World War II.

Who are the key men? The answers vary. But this reporter, after asking a number of Pentagon insiders, has found general agreement on the following list:

- Cyrus Vance, Deputy Secretary of Defense. Vance and McNamara work very closely together, and Vance is especially useful to McNamara on Capitol Hill, where he is well-liked. Vance is very able, and he is generally regarded as McNamara's heir apparent.
- Alain Enthoven, Assistant Secretary for Systems Analysis. Enthoven is a pleasant-mannered, rather reserved intellectual of 36, and he is the man red-faced general officers have chiefly in mind when they growl about "whiz kids" and "computer jockeys." Except for McNamara himself, Enthoven has more to say about how the money pie is to be sliced up than any other man in the Pentagon. Slicing the money pie is a job which automatically makes enemies.
- Dr. John Foster, Director of Defense Research and Engineering. Foster, a first-rate scientist, and a rather handsome, quick-spoken man with a mobile face, presides over a budget of almost seven billion dollars, and ranks officially as No. 3 man.
- John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. McNaughton is a highly articulate lawyer and former newspaperman, who is McNamara's chief foreign-policy adviser within the Pentagon. McNamara listens to his advice on foreign political problems, ranging from de Gaulle to the horrible complexities of Vietnamese politics.
- Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze and Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown. Nitze used to have McNaughton's job, and Brown used to have Foster's. They are accounted key men, not because they are service secretaries, but because they have worked with McNamara ever since he became Secretary and have his ear. The other service

At a press conference in the Pentagon, the Secretary uses map and pointer to enlighten reporters on progress of recent American air strikes against North Vietnam.

secretary. Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor, a newcomer, is on nobody's list of key men. Interestingly, as a World War II infantryman, he is the only top civilian in the Pentagon with first-hand experience of combat on the ground, which is where the war in Vietnam is being fought.

• Gen. Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Gen. Wheeler is a well-built man with a quick mind, who made full colonel as an Army staff officer in World War II. He works well with McNamara, although he disagrees with him on at least two important points. Wheeler, together with the other Chiefs, recommended months ago the bombing of the oil depots near Hanoi and Haiphong in North Vietnam. Wheeler also believes that McNamara should give an unequivocal green light to the development of an operational anti-ballistic-missile system. But neither he nor the other Chiefs is ready to lead an anti-McNamara revolt on these or any other presently visible issues.

It is significant that, like Wheeler, three of the four Chiefs of Staff have made their reputations as staff officers rather than combat commanders which reflects McNamara's preference for "thinkers" over "gladiators." It is more significant that Wheeler is the *only* man in uniform to appear on most lists of the Pentagon's key men—and even he does not appear on some lists.

This suggests one of the really basic differences between McNamara's Pentagon and the Pentagon of the past. In the past, the Secretary of Defense has been rather like one of the early French kings, surrounded by proud and powerful dukes with private armies of their own, who acknowledged a purely nominal allegiance—if any— to the sovereign. The first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, could not even get the Chiefs of the three services to agree on their respective roles and missions in case of war with Russia, and the hideous frustrations of responsibility without real power drove him to his death. At least two of his successors left Suite 3E880 with their reputations sadly tarnished.

In those days, a Chief of Staff had command power, both as No. 1 officer in his service, and as a member of the Joint Chiefs. Nowadays, as one of the Chiefs recently remarked, "the military don't command a damn thing anymore." As far as the military men in the Pentagon are concerned, the remark is substantially accurate. McNamara listens to the advice of the Chiefs, and he sends his orders to the "joint and specified commands" in the field "through" the Chiefs. But they are *his* orders—or the orders of the President, as Commander-in-Chief.

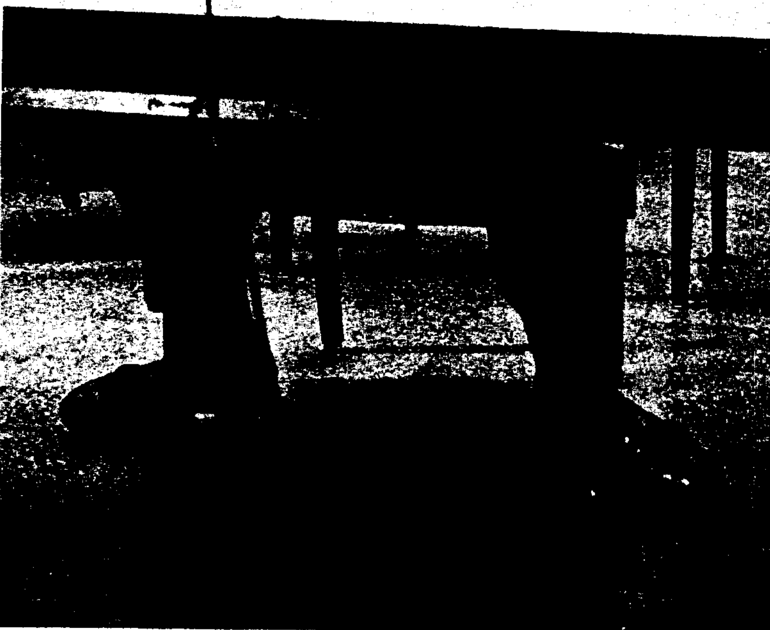
In the past, moreover, the task of slicing up the money pie was largely left to the Joint Chiefs, although the President and his Secretary of Defense (or his Secretary of the Treasury, in the days of George Magoffin Humphrey) decided how big the whole pie would be. The result, as Gen. Maxwell Taylor pointed out in his book, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (which greatly influenced McNamara's thinking), was a purely arbitrary division of the money, on the principle of the animals dividing the weapons in *The Wind in the Willows:* "One for the rat, one for the mole, one for the badger." The glamorous and politically powerful Air Force usually got almost half the money, the Army less than a quarter, and the Navy the rest.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff no longer have either the command power or the money power they once had (although they can, and sometimes do, appeal any McNamara ruling to the President). To understand one reason for this loss of authority by the military, compare these two lists:

Dwight D. Eisenhower	Harold K. Johnson
Carl (Tooey) Spaatz	John P. McConnell
Chester Nimitz	David L. McDonald

The names on the left are those of the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and the Air Force, and the Chief of Naval Operations (*Continued on Page 94*)

Testifying before Congress, McNamara sometimes irks legislators with his self-assurance. "Well," one snorted, "all I can say is that you sure as hell are infallible."



HIS BUSINESS IS WAR

A sparkling welcome from Mrs. McNamara marked his return from Vietnam last July.

immediately after World War II. Those on the right are the names of the men who hold the same titles today. Most people, at least those old enough to remember World War II, will recognize the names on the left. Only the very knowledgeable will be able to identify the names on the right.

The fact is that the day of the military giants, the men who made legendary names for themselves in the last world war, is over. The last of the giants—Gen. Curtis LeMay, who gave McNamara a lot of headaches—left the Pentagon in 1964. Some of the World War II giants seemed less gigantic when seen close up—this reporter vividly recalls one of them shoving a cigar in his face and growling the idiotic remark: "The only difference between this coming war and the last, Alsop, is that some of you civilians are going to get hurt." But they *seemed* gigantic, and this gave the older generation of Chiefs a bargaining power, especially on Capitol Hill, which their successors wholly lack.

Thus the passage of time accounts in part for the erosion of the power of the Chiefs. Another reason is that the Defense Reorganization Act of 1958 vastly increased the power of the Secretary of Defense, at the expense of the power of the Chiefs and the service Secretaries. A third reason is that McNamara, soon after he became Secretary, quickly decided both what he wanted to do and how he wanted to do it. A man who knows what he wants to do and how he wants to do it almost always has his way.

McNamara has at least one of the attributes of genius—an ability to recognize the obvious. To cite a single example of this kind of genius, it was surely a rather obvious notion in the 1930's that it would be sensible for Britain to rearm in the face of the Nazi threat. But when Winston Churchill kept hammering at this idea, all sorts of highly intelligent people dismissed him as a crackpot. When McNamara and his subordinates converse in the professional patois, his basic strategic ideas can be made to sound very esoteric. In fact, they are really almost as simple and obvious as Churchill's notion that Britain should rearm.

At the very heart of McNamara's strategic thinking are the words quoted at the beginning of this report: "It's impossible to win an all-out nuclear exchange." This would have been regarded as pro-Communist heresy in the days of the "bigger bang for a buck," or even, as McNamara says, when he first took office. But no knowledgeable person seriously disputes it now. Given this basic conviction, "you arrive at certain logical conclusions." These conclusions, as summed up by McNamara with his usual succinctness, are:

"(A) You must have a sure second-strike capability, to deter a massive attack. (B) You need sufficient control, on both sides, so that both sides have the capability of stopping short of an all-out nuclear exchange. (C) Nuclear superiority has a limited application—all you deter is mutual suicide. You do not deter lesser military threats. Thus a military structure wholly based on nuclear superiority is a bankrupt military structure."

McNamara's "A" explains why, in his talk with Dr. Foster, he gave "Assured Penetration" so high a priority. If Soviet anti-missile defenses ever reach a stage in which this country's "penetration" is not "assured," even after a surprise Soviet nuclear attack, the world balance of power will be catastrophically upset.

McNamara's "B" relates to what is, or used to be, a favorite McNamara theory—"the controlled response." If both sides were to retain full "command and control" of their nuclear-striking forces, even during a nuclear war, there might then be "a possibility of avoiding a full nuclear exchange," and thus avoiding mutual suicide. In the words of one McNamara subordinate: "We might exchange a Minsk for a Hartford, and then stop there."

This is why, in McNamara's words, "it is important to assess the possibility of avoiding a full exchange in case nuclear war starts." But, he adds, "I must admit that the possibility seems to me marginal." The fact is that the more closely he and his experts have examined the possibility of a "controlled response," the more *any* nuclear exchange has come to seem like a lethal cancer, which cannot be stopped once it has started.

McNamara's "C" relates to what he calls "the conventional option." Since a nuclear exchange leads to mutual suicide, a military structure which is not "bankrupt" must have sufficient non-nuclear power to avoid a nuclear war except *in extremis*. To this end, McNamara had beefed up the true combat power of the conventional forces, even before combat troops were sent to Vietnam, by something like 100 percent.

These, then, are the three goals which McNamara set for the American defense structure, once he reached his basic conclusion that nuclear war meant mutual suicide. In the Pentagon patois, what McNamara wants to have are: "assured penetration," "controlled-response capability," and "the conventional option." Despite their seeming complexity, all three goals are essentially simple. McNamara has also had three basic ideas about how to go about getting what he wants to have.

These ideas, too, can be so wrapped up in the professional patois—complete with phrases like "program packaging" and non-words like "Jaysop"—that they can be made to sound totally incomprehensible. But they are essentially simple enough.

Simple Idea No. 1 is that the old division of defense functions into Army, Navy and Air Force—or ground, sea and air—is outdated. This conclusion was brought home to McNamara very forcibly soon after he became Secretary of Defense. The Navy had arranged for him one of the elaborate briefings which have become a Pentagon art form, complete with charts, pictures, movies, and impressive offstage voices. This briefing concerned the top-secret targets of the Polaris missile system. Halfway through, McNamara asked the obvious question—how did these targets tie into the Air Force targets?

The assembled admirals were aghast. Air Force targets? What targets the Air Force hit was strictly the business of the Air Force. McNamara got up and stamped out of the room. Soon thereafter, he made it abundantly clear to admirals and generals alike that he regarded the mission itself as important and didn't care which service performed it, and that in the future he expected plans to be made and budgets prepared on that basis.

He subsequently designated nine principal interservice missions, of which the most important are these: Strategic Offensive (nuclear attack, which involves the Air Force and Navy); Strategic Defensive (Nuclear defense—Air Force and Army); General Purpose (conventional warfare—all three services); and Airlift and Sealift (Air Force and Navy).

Simple Idea No. 2 is that, as a McNamara subordinate puts it, "a year is a wholly arbitrary way of measuring time—it relates to the movement of the sun and moon, but not to intelligent defense planning." Under the old system in which the three services split up a strictly limited pie on an annual basis, the U.S. Government was committed to vast future expenditures which nobody bothered to estimate in advance in any sensible way. Typically, a weapons system costs very little in the initial stages, but may become enormously costly when the "hardware"—the actual weapons—begins to pour into the inventory, which may be four to ten years after the system has been approved.

Moreover, in the pre-McNamara era, future costs were fantastically underestimated, because they were based largely on optimistic estimates by firms which were bidding low in order to get contracts. A recent study of the final costs of weapons systems shows the actual cost of aircraft as much as six times higher than estimates, and the cost of missiles a fantastic 14 times higher.

Now the whole system has been transformed. The Joint Chiefs produce a hallowed document called a JSOP (pronounced "Jaysop") for Joint Strategic Objectives Plan. The Jaysop attempts to forecast the national defense requirements five years in advance. This is not easy, since five years from now the world may conceivably be disarming, or at least as conceivably destroying itself. But, as Gen. Wheeler explains the process, "the basic commitment" in terms of the essential national-defense requirements can be pretty well foreseen. Requirements to meet a changed situation—a larger ground war in Asia for example—can then be added as a "plussage."

The results of this crystal-ball-gazing by the Chiefs is then "costed out" by Alain Enthoven's Systems Analysis office, which puts a price tag on the five-year Jaysop. This is a tricky business, of course, and Dr. Enthoven makes no claims to perfection. "I think we'll average out at about fifty percent plus or minus," he says, "and I'd hope to do better." Being wrong by a factor

to measure these effects. So even given a considerable damage-limiting effort, it's extremely important to realize that a full nuclear exchange would destroy both sides. Thus it is important to assess the possibility of avoiding a full exchange in case nuclear war starts.

A significant change made by McNamara shows on section of typescript which Alsop had submitted to him to verify a quotation.

of 50 percent is a lot better than being wrong by a factor of 600 percent or 1,400 percent, as in the past.

Another part of Enthoven's job is to analyze "cost effectiveness," a fashionable phrase in McNamara's Pentagon. "Cost effectiveness" is, in fact, McNamara's Simple Idea No. 3. The idea is that dollar costs provide a useful yardstick with which to measure military effectiveness. Secretary of the Navy Nitze gives an example of how the system works:

"Suppose your cost analysis shows that for a given sum you can buy either three nuclear-powered guided-missile destroyers or four conventionally powered guided-missile destroyers. The nuclear-powered ships have certain advantages, notably in virtually unlimited range. But mightn't it be better to have four ships, instead of three? In the end, as McNamara says, you have to make a military judgment, but cost effectiveness at least makes it possible to arrive at that judgment rationally."

"Cost effectiveness" is *not* a way of limiting spending. As Nitze points out: "You don't escape the choice by saying, 'Let's spend more money and buy *six* nuclear-powered ships,' because then you still have to ask yourself whether you wouldn't rather have *eight* conventional ships." Cost effectiveness, in short, is a yardstick, not a ceiling.

The final test of military planning is a war. McNamara's plans and theories have been tested, and tested hard, by the war in Vietnam. McNamara himself sums up one result of this test:

"We moved one hundred thousand troops ten thousand miles in about one hundred and twenty days, with all their supporting matériel, and those troops immediately began operating damned effectively and with tremendous morale. I consider that quite an accomplishment."

It *is* quite an accomplishment. As one of his assistant secretaries has said: "If McNamara hadn't increased our conventional capability all along the line, we probably wouldn't have gone into Vietnam, because we couldn't. You could argue that we went into Vietnam because we *could* go into Vietnam, just as you could argue that we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima because we had the bomb to drop."

McNamara himself disputes this view. He believes that even with much weaker forces we would have gone into Vietnam anyway, because we had no real choice. However that may be, no one—or no one this reporter has been able to find—doubts that McNamara has done a remarkable job in increasing the ability of the United States to fight a limited war like the war in Vietnam. And no one doubts that he has also done a remarkable job in maintaining the nuclear balance of power with the Soviet Union. Indeed, although his grumpier critics in Congress will not go so far, most close observers of his performance describe the job he has done in both respects as "superb."

What, then, is the case *against* McNamara?

His critics, in Congress, in the press, and in uniform, make three points against him.

His critics in Congress repeat endlessly a cliché which they attribute to Sen. Richard Russell, powerful chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee: "Like Dick Russell says, McNamara understands everything but human beings."

What this really means is that McNamara's brisk super-competence and lack of humility annoy a lot of Congressmen. As one chairman of a subcommittee puts it: "Cy Vance comes up here and says, 'I may be wrong about this, and if so it won't be the first time.' It's just not in McNamara to say a thing like that."

And yet, as in most clichés, there may be a kernel of truth in this one. McNamara, like all men, is a product of his past, and there is nothing in his past to make him understand, for example, the importance of the Marines' belt buckle or their cordovan shoes.

The Marines boast a unique belt buckle, which can be used to open beer bottles, and until recently they, alone in the American armed forces, wore cordovan shoes. McNamara has insisted that all the services wear the same black shoes, in the name of economy and efficiency, and he is trying to standardize belt buckles too.

"What he can't understand," says Robert Heinl, a recently retired Marine colonel, "is that cordovan shoes or a belt buckle can be the hook a man hangs his loyalties on."

Such "hooks"—a green beret, a blue scarf, black buttons, a regimental badge—have nothing to do with economy or efficiency, and nothing to do with what McNamara calls "reason." But they can make a very real difference in the way men behave in combat. It is, of course, a difference which cannot be "quantified." The fact is that war, in the nature of things, defies "quantification."

This suggests the second point that his critics score off McNamara—that he does not understand what war is really like. The characteristics of the man—his filing-cabinet intelligence, his passion for being right, his profound distrust of emotion—fit him ideally for the infinitely complex task of "rationalizing" a military force structure. But, his critics contend, rationalizing a force structure and running a war are two entirely different things, and neither McNamara's characteristics nor his experience fits him to run a war. For war is an emotional and irrational affair.

McNamara has tried very hard to "quantify" the war in Vietnam. He has an absolute passion for collecting statistics about the war, and citing them to prove his points. But as the intelligence expert warned him, "facts and figures are useful, but you can't judge a war by them."

His critics can cite chapter and verse to prove that McNamara has more than once misjudged the war. His most famous bad guess was his statement in October, 1963, that "the major part of the U. S. military task" could be completed by 1965, and most U. S. troops withdrawn by then. This statement was based in large part on his "quantification" of the war. A three-year plan for winding up the war had been drawn up under his direction, and when he made his statement, all his graphs and figures showed that the plan was statistically on schedule. Alas, wars have a way of defying schedules.

McNamara can point to many statements in the past in which he has warned of a "long and hard" war. But his critics can point to other bad guesses, like his statement early last

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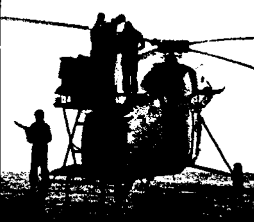

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year that the newly arrived Marines would "probably" not have to "tangle with the Viet Cong," a forecast which proved almost as spectacularly wrong as the October, 1963, statement.

As he has about most things, McNamara has a theory about the war in Vietnam which he has stated repeatedly. It is that "the essence of our military effort there must be to show the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong that they can't win in the South." Once this has been proved to the satisfaction of the Communist side, "we presume that they will move to a settlement, either through negotiation or other action."

Like all McNamara's theories, this one is eminently logical. If McNamara's "quantification" of the war is correct, in terms of the real balance of power and the comparative damage inflicted on both sides—and if Ho Chi Minh had been McNamara—the Communist side would have "moved to a settlement" months ago. But Ho Chi Minh is not McNamara, and this country's adversaries in Vietnam, from Ho Chi Minh down to the skinniest Viet Cong, may be motivated by emotions (including simple hatred of the white man) quite impossible to quantify, and totally alien to McNamara's rational and emotion-distrusting mind. It may seem quite good enough to the Communist side that the "American imperialists and their stooges"—our side—"can't win in the South."

McNamara himself, during one of the bad moments of the war some months ago, expressed uncharacteristic self-doubts to a visitor to his office: "I've been given all the resources I've asked for to solve this problem in Vietnam, and I've failed. Perhaps it's time for someone else to try." Such remarks gave rise to rumors, which are being heard again as this is written, that McNamara will soon move out of Suite 3E880, and hand on the poisoned chalice of the Secretaryship to Vance. But most of those who know him well believe that McNamara is locked in by the war in Vietnam, and that he will not leave 3E880 until the war takes a decisive turn, for better or for worse.

In any case, if McNamara has been wrong about the war, he has not been alone. He is, he says, "in basic agreement" with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "We all agree that the foundation of our military strategy lies in the South, that the effort in the North is secondary. I'd say that we agree ninety percent, and disagree ten percent."

The 10 percent area of disagreement concerns the pace of the war. The Chiefs want not only to bomb the Hanoi and Haiphong oil deposits but also to accelerate the pace toward a "decisive crunch," while the President and McNamara are more cautious. But on the two key decisions—the decision to bomb in the North, and the decision to commit American combat forces in the South—the Chiefs were in unanimous agreement with McNamara.

So much for the second point his critics raise against McNamara. History will judge its validity. If McNamara's theory about Vietnam proves correct, and an honorable settlement results, McNamara will be triumphantly vindicated. Otherwise, Clemenceau's sour joke about generals will be cited in reverse—"War is too serious a matter to be left to civilians."

For make no mistake about it, the civilian McNamara is running the Vietnamese war. "My predecessor, Carl Vinson," says Rep. Mendel Rivers, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, "always warned against having a single Chief of Staff, because he would have too much power. Now we have a single Chief of Staff—and by God, he's a civilian, of all things."

This is the third charge that his critics bring against McNamara—that he has concentrated too much power in 3E880. "He's designed an enormous engine, and he's the only man with the driver's license," says one old Pentagon hand. "I hate to think what will happen when he goes, especially if a second-rater takes over."

"When people talk about centralization of power," McNamara said when questioned on this point, "they don't realize that my power is strictly limited. If you had someone in this office who was cutting back the force structure drastically, and trying to conceal it, the system, the five-year force-structure system, would flush him out."

He produced his 200-page force-structure report to Congress, and flipped through the pages till he came to the table on airlift. "The committee members would ask him," McNamara said, "'where's your table eleven, on airlift—don't you have an airlift table for fiscal year 1973?' If he tried to claim you can't project your structure that far ahead, he'd never get away with it."

Yet even some of his devoted admirers feel a trifle nervous about the concentration of power in McNamara's hands. One reason is suggested by his idea that, as he put it to this reporter, "the basic principles of administration are the same, whether in the Catholic Church, the Ford Company, or the Defense Department."

Subordinates are not given to criticizing the president of the Ford Company, in public at least, and a priest who publicly differs with the Pope on basic church policy is severely disciplined. Both the Ford Company and the Church "speak with one voice." So, as pointed out at the beginning of this report, does the Defense Department.

The "monitoring" system introduced by McNamara helps to make sure that the Defense Department will continue to speak with one voice. When a reporter talks with a ranking Pentagonian, there is usually an unobtrusive young man sitting in a corner taking notes. If not, the reporter can be sure that, on McNamara's orders, the substance of the conversation will be reported to the office of Public Affairs. Quite obviously, the monitoring system works as a gag. With that young man scribbling away in a corner, no normally ambitious officer or official is at all likely to criticize the Secretary or dissent from his policies.

The result is summed up by Richard Fryklund of the Washington *Star*, one of the best of the defense reporters and an admirer of McNamara: "The people don't get to know about the rejected options, so they are never debated in public." A decision, whether it concerns the commitment in Vietnam or a crucial weapons system, may be hotly debated inside the Pentagon—McNamara insists on "examining the options." But the debate is secret, and once the decision is made, all argu-

ment, public and private, is expected to end forthwith. Some members of Congress, moreover, accuse McNamara of using his power of censorship to suppress reports critical of his policies, like the Senate subcommittee report on army shortages, while at the same time declassifying secret material when it suits his purposes.

McNamara himself stoutly defends his monitoring system and the other disciplines he has imposed on his department. He contends that without such disciplines the department would again become what it has undeniably been at times in the past—a Babel of conflicting and parochial voices. He cites Xavier Rynne's *Letters from Vatican City* to prove that even the saintly Pope John used a closed-circuit television system to keep an eye on the rebellious conservative cardinals during the Ecumenical Council.

But a Secretary of Defense is not a Pope, and there is one important difference between the Defense Department and the Ford Company or the Church. The Defense Department is part of the government of the United States—in terms of both money and manpower, it is *most* of the government of the United States. If the theory of political democracy is valid, the citizenry, not any appointed official, is the ultimate boss of the government; and thus the relationship between the Secretary of Defense and his department is different in an essential way from the relationship between the president of Ford and his company or the relationship between the Pope and his church. This is why it is dangerous when "the people don't get to know about the rejected options."

Yet it must be said in fairness that some of the "rejected options" have been debated thoroughly and publicly. A case in point is McNamara's decision not to order the B-70 bomber, which was most thoroughly debated. "There's not a single senior military or civilian leader in the department who now believes that we should have ordered the B-70," McNamara says. "It would have been in operation next year, if we had ordered it, and approximately fifteen billion dollars would have been just plain wasted."

Congress, the press and the public have also been provided by McNamara with the essential facts related to most of the crucial issues of national security. This is true, for example, of the great, looming decision involved in McNamara's cryptic instruction to Dr. Foster: "Number three—ABM, but don't precommit me." Soon McNamara is going to have to make up his mind whether or not to recommend to the President and the Congress a Herculean effort to reduce the number of Americans who would die in a nuclear war. According to his current estimates, a full nuclear exchange in which the Soviets struck first, at the present level of U.S. defense, would kill between 130 million and 135 million Americans. Even these gruesome estimates, he told this reporter, "are almost certainly conservative."

"They're based on AEC computations involving blast and radiation," he explained. "These factors are measurable, in terms of experience in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and controlled tests, tethered animals, and so on. But they do not include thermal effects—there is simply no way to measure thermal effects in advance—fire storms, for example. And they do not include fatalities resulting from chaos, disease, and so forth, after an attack—again, there is no way to measure these effects. So even given a considerable damage-limiting effort, it's extremely important to realize that a full nuclear exchange could destroy both sides."

To be sure it was accurate, this reporter submitted the above paragraph to McNamara. The last sentence in the paragraph came back with one deeply significant correction. The word "could" was changed to "would," in McNamara's neat handwriting, and a little cross was made in the margin to make sure that the change was noted.

What McNamara calls a "considerable damage-limiting effort" might cost as much as $30 billion, over a period of several years. For that kind of money, a fully operational ABM weapons system could be bought. The ABM is a missile which can knock down a missile. It is the weapon Nikita Khrushchev had in mind when he boasted that the Soviets could "hit a fly in the sky." The state of the missile-makers' art, both in the Soviet Union and the United States, is now reaching the point where an incoming ballistic missile really can be hit.

Some incoming missiles would penetrate even a fully operational ABM system. But with such a system, plus shelters, U.S. deaths in case of nuclear war might be reduced from 135 million to 75 million, maybe as low—if "low" is the proper word—as 50 million. At $30 billion, the price comes to a few hundred dollars per life saved. Is it a price worth paying?

Until now, McNamara has been able to put off answering that question. But within six to nine months, by current estimates, the research-and-development stage will be complete, and the almost incredibly complex ABM weapons system will be ready for the production phase. Then, every day that the "go/no go" decision is delayed will mean a delay in achieving a weapons system which might save 85 million American lives, according to McNamara's estimates.

Gen. Earle Wheeler and most of the military are for a "go" signal. Both the CIA and McNamara's own DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency, which reports directly to McNamara) report that the Soviet Union is making a very great effort to achieve an anti-missile defense, and the military men are convinced that the Soviet effort must be matched. But McNamara, clearly, is not convinced, for if a "full nuclear exchange *would* destroy both sides," even with a "considerable damage-limiting effort," what is the point?

The final decision is up to the President and the Congress, of course, but the President and the Congress will no doubt in the end take McNamara's advice. Obviously, this decision which confronts McNamara, like many others which have confronted him in the past, is not really comparable to a decision by the Ford Motor Company on a new model, for example—or even to a decision by the Catholic Church on, say, mixed marriages.

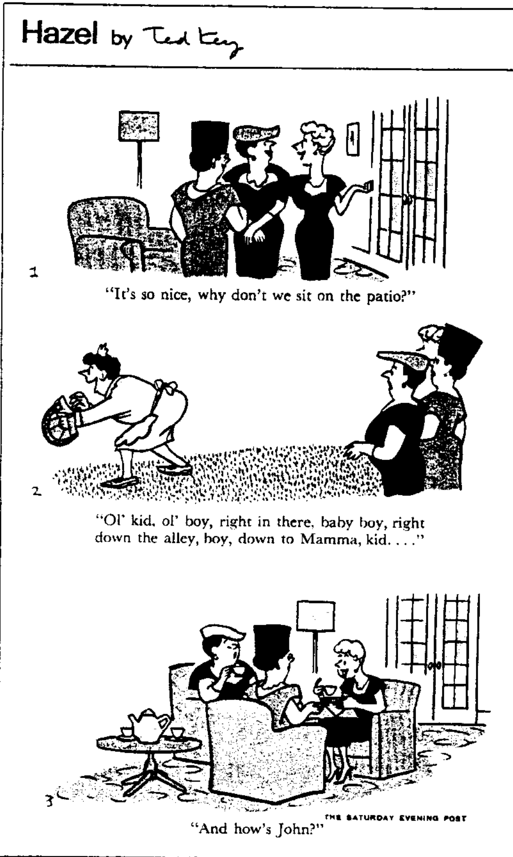
McNamara, in fact, has to make up his mind how to answer a question which is inherently unanswerable, because there are too many unknowns involved; and yet a question which, if wrongly answered, could lead to national disaster.

Yet McNamara will make his decision when he must, as he has made similar decisions in the past. This is why, to the three marked McNamara characteristics already listed in this article, a fourth must be added—simple courage. To make the kind of decisions McNamara is called upon to make requires courage of the highest order and of a very special sort. "Making decisions is what the Secretary of Defense is paid for," Gen. Maxwell Taylor has remarked, "and I must say, this Secretary earns his pay."

He does indeed. The courage and competence which McNamara has so often displayed, in making the hideously difficult decisions with which he has been faced, are enough vastly to outweigh the "case against McNamara." In fact, after watching McNamara in action for more than five years, this reporter suspects that there is a close connection between McNamara's public reputation as inhuman—"an IBM machine with legs"—and the terrible nature of the decisions he is called upon to make.

Any man under very great pressure needs a release or a support—a sense of the ridiculous, perhaps, or a religious faith. To McNamara, his beloved "quantifications," the columns of figures and the reams of facts, which he so determinedly examines "on the basis of reason, not emotion," are both his release and his support, when he is under the terrible pressure of trying to answer the unanswerable.

There is no sure way to "quantify" war, whether a small war like the war in Vietnam or the kind of war which McNamara "quantifies" in terms of 135 million dead Americans. But at least when McNamara tries to answer the unanswerable, he does so on the basis of "reason," which is the most favored of all his favorite words. "There is nothing more habit-forming than reason," he says. "Reason" helps to shield him from the terrible pressures to which a Secretary of Defense is subjected—the pressures which killed James Forrestal, the great public servant whose picture hangs above McNamara's chair. And whatever happens—but above all if an honorable settlement of the war in Vietnam is achieved—Robert S. McNamara seems likely to go down in history as one of the very greatest public servants this country has produced. □



"It's so nice, why don't we sit on the patio?"

"Ol' kid, ol' boy, right in there, baby boy, right down the alley, boy, down to Mamma, kid. . . ."

"And how's John?"