



Still at odds: McNamara rebuking critics at press conference with Deputy Defense Secretary Cyrus Vance

THE GNAWING DEBATE

Like a deep-seated cough in the body politic, the Vietnam debate just would not quiet down. The President had tried to end it with a Freedom House speech designed to sound like the last word. And last week he tried to make the Senate's passage of a money bill for the war (page 26) seem like a healing of differences over Vietnam. Yet even as he did so, the nagging persistence of those differences prodded one of his chief spokesmen into a vehement and sometimes irritated defense against two major charges by the Administration's critics.

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara came to grips first with the critical view that the U.S. commitment in South Vietnam had weakened the nation's defensive strength in other parts of the world—an impression heightened by newspaper stories and Congressional leaks charging that many U.S. military units are hamstrung by grave shortages of men and matériel. He dealt also with the more ominous charge that the U.S. in Vietnam is on a collision course with Communist China.

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In two separate presentations, the usually implacable McNamara showed rare sparks of emotion in trying to put both criticisms to rest. In the process, he disclosed that 20,000 additional U.S. troops would be in Vietnam by June—and notably failed to advance the Administration's position with Sen. J. William Fulbright and his liberal Democratic colleagues who are taking potshots at U.S. policy in Vietnam.

McNamara was angry and testy in his first appearance, a formal press conference at the Pentagon, at which he distributed two fact-and-figure packed statements designed to rebut charges of essential shortages in the Defense establishment. Highlights:

■ "If required, we could deploy . . . to Southeast Asia another 21 battalions between now and June for a total of 64 battalions by that date without call of reserves . . . In an emergency, with a reserve callup . . . we could have ready for deployment from the U.S. within about three months the equivalent of nine division forces (about 81 battalions) beyond what is deployed today."

■ "It can be stated categorically that no shortages have impeded our combat operations in Southeast Asia or affected the morale or welfare of our men."

■ "The United States has a far stronger military posture than at any time since World War II, and our capability for graduated response has never been greater . . . We are fully capable of substantially expanding the South Vietnam deployments above the level of forces deployed during the Korean War, if required, and without calling reserves . . . and while maintaining our six divi-

sion equivalents and associated tactical air support in Europe."

McNamara made it clear that his review of U.S. military preparedness was aimed at a wider audience than the Pentagon press corps. He revealed the hitherto top-secret number of nuclear warheads available for the Pentagon's strategic alert force—2,623—and disclosed that the U.S. will have doubled the number of tactical nuclear warheads in Western Europe by next June.

"I have given you more information of a classified character than I have ever disclosed before," the Defense Secretary said, ". . . to insure that none of us, friend or foe alike, miscalculates this nation's capability . . ."

Then, under prodding by newsmen, McNamara lost his fabled aplomb. At one point, a German correspondent asked if the U.S. had not stripped its combat forces by sending the best units to Vietnam. McNamara bristled. "It is absolutely not true," he said. ". . . I am sick and tired of having implications made that we have drawn down forces in Western Europe . . . The Seventh Army [in Germany is] the most combat-ready army in the world." (Next day, McNamara called in the German reporter and apologized to him.)

Rocks: McNamara's second outburst came under questioning by Des Moines Register and Tribune correspondent Clark Mollenhoff, a persistent McNamara gadfly who kept demanding to know if the Secretary had refused to release a Senate subcommittee report alleging military shortages. "I unfortunately haven't been able to dodge all the rocks you have thrown at me for five

*note - no mention of
reserves, Dan Nam, etc.*