

Acheson's Attack on JCS

Hoopes' Book Says

Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson "shocked" President Johnson in February, March, 1968, by telling him he was being "led down a garden path" in the Vietnam war by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Hoopes' account is a history of the 1968 struggle over reversing the escalation of the war. It is given by Townsend Hoopes, Under Secretary of the Air Force from 1967 to early this year.

Clayton K. Clifford, who was then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was the "hawk" side of that critical decision. Hoopes himself was not in the top echelon of the clashing principals; he was in the supporting cast behind Clifford's fight to reverse U.S. policy, and he was heavily engaged in planning options for air strategy in the war.

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LBJ Urged to Ignore JCS, Book Says

HOOPES, From A1

Hoopes states:

• In late February, 1968, when Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, submitted a military request for 206,000 more American troops, Acheson told the President: "With all due respect, Mr. President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff don't know what they're talking about."

• When "the President replied that was a shocking statement," Acheson answered that if so "perhaps the President ought to be shocked." Acheson told the President two weeks later, after an intensive study, that "he was being led down a garden path by the JCS."

• Dean Rusk, then Secretary of State, is described in Hoopes' book, an Armed Forces Journal interview reports, as "a major contributor to the national confusion over Vietnam." But Clifford's challenge to existing war policy led Clifford to believe Rusk was "troubled and sincerely anxious to find some way to the negotiating table." Rusk, who "in the summer of 1967" had proposed "a heavily qualified partial (bombing) halt," finally gave the Clifford plan "implicit endorsement."

• Walt W. Rostow, President Johnson's national security adviser and a leading "hawk" along with Rusk and Wheeler, made Mr. Johnson "the victim" of "selective briefings—the time-honored technique of underlining, within a mass of material, those particular elements that one wishes to draw to the special attention of a busy chief."

• Robert S. McNamara, Clifford's predecessor as Defense Secretary, who started as a "hawk" but became pro-

gressively disenchanted with the war, "finessed serious debate on basic issues," and sought to "muffle the differences, and thereby avoid a bruising confrontation within the administration." McNamara, "in every instance" before going to Saigon to "bargain" with the military on manpower, "reached his own conclusion before departing Washington and had meticulously prepared his own position, including a draft of what he would report to the President on his return."

• Clifford, as the former Defense Secretary himself already indicated, stunned Mr. Johnson—who expected him to be a firm supporter of the war. "Then, as Clifford later said wryly, 'this Judas appeared,'" when Clifford led the fight to halt escalation of the war. The Johnson-Clifford relationship "grew suddenly formal and cool." In the following summer, when Clifford led the next fight for a total bombing halt, "the President refused to see him alone."

• Abe Fortas, then a Supreme Court justice and one of President Johnson's closest confidants, "continued to play the curious role he had assumed on other occasions in the running debate on Vietnam—as spokesman for those private thoughts of Lyndon Johnson (on pursuing the war) that the President did not wish to express directly." Rostow "and Justice Abe Fortas had a major hand" in drafting "two thoroughly truculent speeches" that Mr. Johnson delivered in mid-March, 1968, in the Midwest while the intense secret-war policy debate was under way.

• Paul Nitze, deputy secretary of defense, although "basically a hard-liner" on communism as Acheson is, "advised

Clifford that he (Nitze) was not in a position to defend the administration's Vietnam policy" in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Nitze offered to resign; Clifford advised him to stay. Hoopes describes Nitze as "a pearl of great price."

• Paul Warnke, then assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, "was to have perhaps more influence on Clifford's change of position than any other single person." Nitze and Warnke at Defense, joined by Phil G. Goulding, assistant secretary for public affairs whose role in the internal debate has not been revealed previously, took a major role in providing Clifford with arguments to contest the military leaders' strategy. They were "supported" by Under Secretary of State Nick deB. Katzenbach (as was previously revealed).

• If the military request for 206,000 more men for the Vietnam war—"a 40 percent increase"—had been approved, it would have caused the defense budget to rise "by \$10 billion in 1969" and would have created "a requirement for about 400,000 more men on active military service," reservists and draftees. "Goulding argued that the shock wave would run through the entire American body politic."

Many portions of other highlights in the Hoopes account previously have been aired in public, but his version adds more detail.

Hoopes wrote that "one of the major ironies" in the course of events that set off the policy challenge was the fact that McNamara, in February, did not accompany Gen. William C. Westmoreland to Saigon. If McNamara had done so, Hoopes speculated, the troop reinforcement figure

probably would have been whittled to about 50,000 and the showdown would have been averted.

When Mr. Johnson assigned the military's request for 206,000 troops to a task force headed by Clifford, who had just been confirmed in January, Hoopes said, "As the principals understood it, the assignment from the President was a fairly narrow one—how to give Westmoreland, U.S. commander in South Vietnam, what he said he needed, with acceptable domestic consequences."

"Rostow, Wheeler, and Taylor expounded the hard line," said Hoopes, "arguing that the Tet offensive was in reality new and unexpected opportunity," and they, joined by Rusk and Treasury Secretary Henry Fowler "were strong for meeting the request and getting on with the war."

Hoopes said Clifford was "uneasy" about the report but "passed (it) along" while "Nitze, Warnke, Goulding and I were profoundly discouraged." Hoopes said that to him the report "was mindless folly." Then, said Hoopes, as the dismay of these men and others, and the consequences of continuing existing policy began to have impact on Clifford, "about March 16" the Clifford doubts "crystallized into a firm conviction that the administration's policy in Vietnam was indefensible."

Then Acheson's opposition began to register. Hoopes recalled that after a two-week inquiry during which U.S. experts, including Philip Harb and State George Carver of the Central Intelligence Agency and Maj. Gen. William DuPuy of the staff of the Joint Chiefs.