

Pressure From Military

The strategy of base security having been ended by National Security Action Memorandum 328, a high-level meeting began in Honolulu on April 20 to "sanctify" and "structure", as the Pentagon analyst puts it, "an expanded enclave strategy."

Present at the meeting were Secretary of Defense McNamara; William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs; Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton; Ambassador Taylor; Admiral Sharp; Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and General Westmoreland.

"Some of these men had helped produce the current optimism in situation reports and cables," the Pentagon study says, "and yet the consensus of their meeting was that the then-present level of Vietcong activity was nothing but the lull before the storm."

"The situation which presented itself to the Honolulu conferees was in many ways the whole Vietnam problem in microcosm. What was needed to galvanize everyone to action was some sort of dramatic event within South Vietnam itself. Unfortunately, the very nature of the war precluded the abrupt collapse of a front or the loss of large chunks of territory in lightning strokes by the enemy. The enemy in this war was spreading his control and influence slowly and inexorably but without drama. The political infrastructure from which he derived his strength took years to create, and in most areas the expansion of control was hardly felt until it was a fait accompli."

In a Rear-Guard Action

Of the conferees, the study says, "by far the most dogged protagonist of the enclave strategy was Ambassador Taylor." It had already become apparent, however, and was to become manifestly clear at Honolulu, that the Ambassador was fighting a rear-guard action against both civilian and military officials in the Pentagon who were bent on expansion of U.S. forces in South Vietnam and an enlargement of their combat mission.

On March 18, in a message to Washington, Ambassador Taylor had suggested that if a division were sent to South Vietnam as had been proposed by the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Harold K. Johnson, then consideration should be given to deploying it in either a highland or coastal enclave.

When he got no response, Ambassador Taylor sent another message on March 27, stating that if United States forces were to come, his preference was, as the study says, that they be used in a combination of defensive or offensive enclave plus reserve for an emergency, rather than in "territorial clear and hold" operations.

The Ambassador, the study notes, interpreted the pivotal National Security Action Memorandum as supporting his position, because in it the President seemed to make plain that he "wanted to experiment very carefully with a small amount of force before deciding whether or not to accept any kind of ground war commitment."

For Guerrillas, Tanks

Therefore, the study says, "the Ambassador was surprised to discover that the marines [the two additional battalions that landed April 11-14] had come ashore with tanks, self-propelled artillery, and various other items of weighty equipment not 'appropriate for counterinsurgency operations.'"

In his April 17 cable to McGeorge Bundy, Ambassador Taylor had also

protested the "hasty and ill-conceived" proposals for the deployment of more forces with which he was being flooded.

"Thus was the Ambassador propelled into the conference of 20 April 1965, only one step ahead of the Washington juggernaut, which was itself fueled by encouragement from Westmoreland in Saigon," the study comments. "Taylor was not opposed to the U.S. build-up *per se*, but rather was concerned to move slowly with combat troop deployments . . . He was overtaken in Honolulu."

According to Mr. McNaughton's minutes, the conference in preliminary discussions on April 20 agreed that:

"(1) The D.R.V. was not likely to quit within the next six months; and in any case, they were more likely to give up because of VC failure in the South than because of bomb-induced 'pain' in the North. It could take up to two years to demonstrate VC failure.

"(2) The level of air activity through Rolling Thunder was about right. The U.S. did not, in Ambassador Taylor's words, want 'to kill the hostage.' Therefore, Hanoi and environs remained on the restricted list. It was recognized that air activity would not do the job alone.

"(3) Progress in the South would be slow, and great care should be taken to avoid dramatic defeat. The current lull in Vietcong activity was merely the quiet before a storm.

"(4) The victory strategy was to 'break the will of the D.R.V./VC by denying them victory.' Impotence would lead eventually to a political solution."

6,700 Men Below Strength

At the time of the Honolulu conference, the study notes, "the level of approved U.S. forces for Vietnam was 40,200," but 33,500 were actually in the country at that time.

"To accomplish the 'victory strategy' described above," the study continues, the conferees agreed that U.S. ground forces should be increased from 4 to 13 maneuver battalions and to 82,000 men. The United States, they agreed, should also seek to get additional troops from Australia and South Korea that would bring the so-called third-country strength to four maneuver battalions and 7,250 men.

Thus, the Honolulu conferees proposed raising the recommended United States-third country strength to 17 battalions.

The conferees also mentioned but did not recommend a possible later deployment of 11 U.S. and 6 South Korean battalions, which, when added to the approved totals, would bring the United States-third country combat capability to 34 battalions. In this later possible deployment was included an Army airmobile division.

Secretary McNamara forwarded the Honolulu recommendations to the President on April 21, together with a notation on possible later deployment of the airmobile division and the Third Marine Expeditionary Force.

Detailed Deployment Plan

On April 30 the Joint Chiefs presented a detailed program for deployment of some 48,000 American and 5,250 third-country soldiers. "Included were all the units mentioned in the Honolulu recommendations plus a healthy support package," the study says.

The Joint Chiefs said that these additional forces were "to bolster GVN forces during their continued build-up, secure bases and installations, conduct counterinsurgency combat operations in

coordination with the RVNAF, and prepare for the later introduction of an airmobile division to the central plateau, the remainder of the third M.E.F. [the marine force] to the Danang area, and the remainder of a ROK [Republic of Korea] division to Quangnai."

From the thrust of this memorandum

by the Joint Chiefs, the analyst comments, "it is apparent that the enclave strategy was no stopping place as far as the Chiefs were concerned. They continued to push hard for the earliest possible input of three full divisions of troops. They were still well ahead of the pack in that regard."