

Divergent Views at Home

The opposition to General Westmoreland had "its day in court," late in June and early in July, the study says. The embassy in Saigon, "while recognizing the seriousness of the situation in South Vietnam, was less than sanguine about the prospects for success if large numbers of foreign troops were brought in."

Another critic of General Westmoreland's recommendations, the account reports, was Under Secretary of State Ball who was "convinced that the U.S. was pouring its resources down the drain in the wrong place."

"In Ball's view, the account continues," there was absolutely no assurance that the U.S. could with the provision of more ground forces achieve its political objectives in Vietnam. Instead, the U.S. risked involving itself in a costly and indeterminate struggle. To further complicate matters, it would be equally impossible to achieve political objectives by expanding the bombing of the North. . . ."

William Bundy in the Middle

Assistant Secretary William P. Bundy, the study says, "like so many others found himself in between Westmoreland and Ball."

In a memorandum to the President on July 1, Mr. Bundy gave his position, as summarized in the Pentagon study:

"The U.S. needed to avoid the ultimate aspects of the 44 battalions and also the Ball withdrawal proposal. . . . The U.S. should adopt a policy which would allow it to hold on without risking disasters of scale if the war were lost despite deployment of the full 44 battalions. For the moment, according to Bundy, the U.S. should complete planned deployments to bring in-country forces to 18 maneuver battalions and 85,000 men. . . . The forces in Vietnam, which Bundy assumed would be enough to prevent collapse, would be restricted to reserve reaction in support of RVNAF. This would allow for some experimentation without taking over the war effort—a familiar theme." [See text, George Ball memo, July 1.]

As for Secretary McNamara's views, the study comments: "It is difficult to be precise about the position of the Secretary of Defense during the build-up debate because there is so little of him in the files."

"There are plenty of other indications in the files that the Secretary was very carefully and personally insuring that the Defense Establishment was ready to provide efficient and sufficient support to the fighting elements in Vietnam," the study continues. "From the records, the Secretary comes out much more clearly for good management than he does for any particular strategy."

The Secretary went to South Vietnam for a four-day inspection starting July 16. The study says that while he was in Saigon on July 17, he received a cable from Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance informing him that the President had decided to go ahead with the plan to deploy 34 battalions.

"The debate was over," the analyst says. "McNamara left Saigon bearing Westmoreland recommendations for an even greater increase in forces. . . ."

The study says 34 battalions. This is not entirely clear, because in his request General Westmoreland had asked for a total of 33, and if the battalions of the 173rd Airborne Brigade were added, the total would be 35. The explanation apparently is that when the Airmobile Division was finally organized, it had eight rather than nine battalions. The 34 battalions were, of course, to be supplied immediately. The nine others were to be requested later if needed.

The Pentagon analyst apparently did not have access to White House memoranda, so he is able to give only a sketchy account of Mr. Johnson's role. But he says: "There is no question that

the key figure in the early 1965 build-up was the President."

On May 4, the President asked Congress for a \$700-million supplemental appropriation "to meet mounting military requirements in Vietnam."

"Nor can I guarantee this will be the last request," he said in a message. "If our need expands I will turn again to the Congress. For we will do whatever must be done to insure the safety of South Vietnam from aggression. This is the firm and irrevocable commitment of our people and nation."

On July 28, the President held a press conference in which he said, "The lesson of history dictated that the U.S. commit its strength to resist aggression in South Vietnam."

As for the troop increases, the President said:

"I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. We will meet his needs."

"I have today ordered a Vietnam the Airmobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested. . . ."

"I have concluded that it is not essential to order Reserve units into service now."

'It Does Not Imply Change'

During the questioning after the announcement, this exchange took place:

"Q. Mr. President, does the fact that you are sending additional forces to Vietnam imply any change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard installations and to act as emergency back-up?"

"A. It does not imply any change in policy whatever. It does not imply change of objective."

On July 30, the Joint Chiefs approved 44 maneuver battalions for deployment, involving a total of 193,887 United States troops. By the end of the year, United States forces in South Vietnam numbered 184,314.

"The major participants in the decision knew the choices and understood the consequences," the study says in summation. The decision taken in mid-July to commit 44 battalions of troops to battle in South Vietnam "was perceived as a threshold—entrance into an Asian land war. The conflict was seen to be long, with further U.S. deployments to follow. The choice at that time was not whether or not to negotiate, it was not whether to hold on for a while or let go—the choice was viewed as winning or losing South Vietnam."

Accompanying this decision to give General Westmoreland enough troops to embark on the first phase of his search-and-destroy strategy "was a subtle change of emphasis," the study says.

"Instead of simply denying the enemy victory and convincing him that he could not win, the thrust became defeating the enemy in the South. This was sanctioned implicitly as the only way to achieve the U.S. objective of a non-Communist South Vietnam."

"The acceptance of the search-and-destroy strategy. . . left the U.S. commitment to Vietnam open-ended. The implications in terms of manpower and money are inescapable."

"Final acceptance of the desirability of inflicting defeat on the enemy rather than merely denying him victory opened the door to an indeterminate amount of additional force."

Precisely what President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara expected their decisions of July to bring within the near term "is not clear," the study says, "but there are manifold indications that they were prepared for a long war."

Tomorrow: The Kennedy Administration increases the stakes.