

The 200,000 Request

The main catalyst for the sharp debate in the Johnson Administration in the spring of 1967, however, was not the air war but General Westmoreland's request for 200,000 more troops.

According to the Pentagon account, General Westmoreland first notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff on March 18 of his additional troop needs and then, at their suggestion, submitted a more detailed request on March 26. He spoke with concern about the large enemy build-ups in sanctuaries in Laos, Cambodia and parts of South Vietnam as well as about the threat posed by large North Vietnamese forces just north of the DMZ.

"The minimum essential force" needed to contain the enemy threat and maintain the "tactical initiative," as he put it in his March 18 message, was two and one-third divisions—with support troops, 100,000 men, the study says—"as soon as possible but not later than 1 July 1968." For an "optimum force," he said he needed four and two-thirds divisions in all—201,250 more troops, including support forces—to boost the ultimate strength of American forces in Vietnam to 671,616 men. [See text, Westmoreland memo, March 18, 1967.]

The reinforcements, General Westmoreland asserted, would enable him to destroy or neutralize enemy main forces "more quickly" and deny the enemy long established "safe havens" in South Vietnam.

In some regions, however, his picture sounded less hopeful. In the northernmost portion of South Vietnam, and in the Central Highlands along the Laotian border, he wanted more troops largely "to contain the infiltration" of North Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam.

One point that quickly aroused controversy in Washington, the Pentagon study notes, was General Westmoreland's argument that the American build-up would "obviate the requirement for a major expansion" of South Vietnamese forces. This, the authors report, "prompted many who disagreed with the basic increases to ask why the U.S. should meet such expanded troop requirements when the Government of South Vietnam would neither mobilize its manpower nor effectively employ it according to U.S. wishes."

The Joint Chiefs transmitted General Westmoreland's main troop requests to Secretary McNamara on April 20 with their endorsement. "Once again," the Pentagon analyst notes, the Joint Chiefs "confronted the Johnson Administration with a difficult decision on whether to escalate or level off the U.S. effort."

New Commitment Sought

"What they proposed," the study says, paraphrasing their April 29 memorandum to Secretary McNamara, "was the mobilization of the reserves, a major new troop commitment in the South, an extension of the war into the VC/NVA sanctuaries (Laos, Cambodia and possibly North Vietnam), the mining of North Vietnamese ports and a solid commitment in manpower and resources to a military victory. The recommendation not unsurprisingly touched off a searching reappraisal of the course of U.S. strategy in the war."

The Joint Chiefs spoke for mobilization despite President Johnson's previous opposition to such a move.

Without a reserve call-up, the Joint Chiefs told Mr. McNamara, the Army could provide only one and one-third of the four and two-thirds divisions that General Westmoreland wanted by July, 1968, and a second division could probably not be provided until late in 1969. "A reserve call-up and collateral actions," they asserted, "would enable the services to provide the major combat forces required."

General Westmoreland and General Wheeler put the military case before President Johnson on April 27 when, according to the Pentagon account, ostensibly to deliver a speech, General Westmoreland returned to the United States.

According to unsigned "Notes on Discussions With the President," which the writers of the Pentagon study found in the files of Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton and attributed to him, General Westmoreland told President Johnson that if he did not get the first 100,000 men, "it will be nip and tuck to oppose the reinforcements the enemy is capable of providing," though he acknowledged this would not risk defeat. The second 100,000 troops, he said, were needed to push the allied strategy to success. [See text, notes on Johnson discussion, April 27, 1967.]

"Where Does It All End?"

That was the point at which President Johnson, worried about enemy infiltration, asked, "When we add divisions, can't the enemy add divisions? If so, where does it all end?"

General Westmoreland replied that the Vietcong and North Vietnamese now had 285,000 troops, or roughly eight divisions, in South Vietnam and had "the capability of deploying 12 divisions. . . . If we add 2½ divisions, it is likely the enemy will react by adding troops."

Later, according to the notes, the general warned of prolonged fighting. He predicted that "unless the will of the enemy is broken or unless there was an unraveling of the VC infrastructure the war could go on for five years." Reinforcements would shorten the time—"with a force level of 565,000, the war could well go on for three years," General Westmoreland said. "With a second increment of 2 1/3 divisions leading to a total of 665,000 men, it could go on for two years."

General Wheeler, presumably citing other reasons for a reserve call-up, voiced his concern that the United States might face military threats else-

where—in South Korea or in the form of Soviet pressure on Berlin.

In Indochina, he went on, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were deeply concerned about the North Vietnamese build-up in Cambodia and Laos and felt that American troops "may be forced to move against these units." Beyond that, he was quoted as putting forward the idea of possible invasion of North Vietnam: "We may wish to take offensive action against the D.R.V. with ground troops."

Picking up that theme, General Westmoreland told the President that he had an operational plan that "envisioned an elite South Vietnamese division conducting ground operations in Laos against D.R.V. bases and routes under cover of U.S. artillery and air support." In time, he foresaw "the eventual development of Laos as a major battlefield," as the analysts put it.

According to the Pentagon account, General Westmoreland also told President Johnson "that he possessed contingency plans to move into Cambodia in the Chu Pong area, again using South Vietnamese forces but this time accompanied by U.S. advisers."

Turning to the air war, General Wheeler argued that it was time to consider action "to deny the North Vietnamese use of the ports" because otherwise the American air strategy was "about to reach the point of target saturation—when all worthwhile fixed targets except the ports had been struck."

The Pentagon study says that President Johnson concluded this discussion by asking: "What if we do not add the 2-1/3 divisions?" General Wheeler was quoted as replying that the allied military momentum would die and in some areas the enemy would recapture the initiative, meaning a longer war but not that the allies would lose. General Westmoreland's reply, if any, was not recorded.

The President then reportedly urged his commanders to "make certain we are getting value received from the South Vietnamese troops."

Katzenbach Lists Options

The cleavage between the military and civilian views in the Johnson Administration emerged at once.

On April 24 Under Secretary of State Katzenbach, acting in Secretary Rusk's absence, ordered an interagency review of two major options that in effect set out the two opposing views:

¶Course A—providing General Westmoreland with 200,000 more troops and, as the analysts put it, "possible . . . intensification of military actions outside South Vietnam including invasion of North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia."

¶Course B—confining troop increases, in Mr. Katzenbach's words, to "those that could be generated without calling up the reserves." Coupled with this, the various agencies should consider "a cessation . . . of bombing North Vietnamese areas north of 20 degrees (or, if it looked sufficiently important to maximize an attractive settlement opportunity, cessation of bombing in all of North Vietnam.)"

The resistance of high civilian officials to the military proposals was virtually unanimous, according to the Pentagon study, though the position of Secretary of State Dean Rusk is not described. The three most sensitive issues were the reserve call-up, attacks on the port of Haiphong, and allied ground offensives into Laos, Cambodia or North Vietnam.

At the State Department, Assistant Secretary Bundy, in a memorandum on May 1 to Under Secretary Katzenbach, came out "totally against" ground operations against North Vietnam, asserting that the odds were 75 to 25 that it would provoke Chinese Communist intervention. He was also "strongly opposed" to sending a South Vietnamese division into Laos.

Except for allowing attacks on the Hanoi power station, Mr. Bundy was against further expansion of the air war, especially the mining of Haiphong so long as the Soviet Union refrained from sending combat weapons through the port. Both Mr. Bundy and the C.I.A., in a special intelligence estimate in early May, warned of the dangers of Soviet counteraction if the port was attacked, according to the Pentagon account.

The mobilization required to provide large troop reinforcements for the ground war, Mr. Bundy contended, would entail "a truly major debate in Congress." With signs of rising domestic dissent over the war, he advised that "we should not get into such a debate this summer."

The Assistant Secretary felt the "real key factors" were the political development in the South leading up to presidential elections in September. The internal political turmoil in Communist China, he suggested, was an important and potentially helpful factor because of the worry it caused in Hanoi.

In the Pentagon, resistance to the Westmoreland-Wheeler strategy came from another angle. The systems-analysis section, headed by Assistant Secretary of Defense Alain C. Enthoven, produced a series of papers late in April and early in May arguing that, contrary to General Westmoreland's expectations, American troop increases did not produce correspondingly sharp increases in enemy losses.

"On the most optimistic basis, 200,000 more Americans would raise [the enemy's] weekly losses to about 3,700, or about 400 a week more than they could stand," Dr. Enthoven told Secretary McNamara in a memorandum on May 4. "In theory we'd then wipe them out in 10 years." [See text, memo on force levels.]

A major effort to oppose the military strategy and to limit the air war was building in Secretary McNamara's office. The moving force, the Pentagon study shows, was Assistant Secretary McNamara, who eventually wrote key

portions of Mr. McNamara's controversial May 19 memorandum.

Roughly two years before, Mr. McNamara had been an advocate of the "progressive squeeze" on Hanoi through air power. But by October, 1966, he was so doubtful of its effectiveness that he helped Secretary McNamara draft the first suggestion for a cutback in the air war and for political compromise.

Now, in May, 1967, the Pentagon account relates, both he and the Secretary of Defense were preparing for a more vigorous argument. First, on May 5, Mr. McNamara sent Mr. McNamara a paper intended for inclusion in a memorandum from the Secretary to President Johnson, known as a Draft Presidential Memorandum—D.P.M.—because it not only stated the Secretary's views but also was intended to become a policy document for the President's signature.

The core of Mr. McNamara's paper was a recommendation that "all of the sorties allocated to the Rolling Thunder program be concentrated on the lines of communications—the 'funnel' through which men and supplies to the South must flow—between 17-20 degrees, reserving the option and intention to strike (in the 20-23 degree area) as necessary to keep the enemy's investment in defense and in repair crews high throughout the country."

The proposed cutback of the air war, he said, was to reduce American pilot and aircraft losses over heavily defended Hanoi and Haiphong and not primarily to get North Vietnam to negotiate. No favorable response should be expected, Mr. McNamara said, but "to optimize the chances" for such a response he proposed this scenario:

"To inform the Soviets quietly (on May 15) that within a few (5) days the policy would be implemented, stating no time limits and making no promise not to return to the Red River Basin to attack targets . . . and then to make an unhurried shift as predicted on May 20."

What to Tell the Public

Without what he called "an ultimatum-like time limit," Mr. McNamara suggested that North Vietnam "might be in a better posture to react favorably than has been the case in the past." The American public should be told, he said, that the bombing was being concentrated on the southern infiltration routes to "increase the efficiency of our interdiction effort" and because "major northern military targets have been destroyed."

According to the Pentagon account, the McNamara paper, combined with other Defense Department proposals on the ground war, was read by Secretary McNamara at a White House meeting on May 8, although it is not clear whether Mr. McNamara also signed it and sent it to President Johnson.

Its significance, the Pentagon study reveals, is that for the first time a specific recommendation was put before President Johnson urging a cutback on the bombing to the 20th Parallel. That went a step further than the McNamara memorandum of Oct. 14, 1966 which urged the President "to consider" narrowing the bombing campaign as a possible step toward negotiations.

Several other papers went before President Johnson on May 8, according to the Pentagon account. They included one, recommending a bombing cutback, by Mr. Rostow, described in the study as a "strong bombing advocate" long in favor of attacks on the "North Vietnamese industrial target system."

Mr. Rostow's memorandum, quoted at length in the Pentagon study, rejected proposals for mining North Vietnamese harbors and bombing port facilities lest these steps lead to a "radical increase in Hanoi's dependence on Communist China" and increase United States tensions with the Soviet Union and China. [See text, Rostow memo, May 6, 1967.]

He was considerably more positive than Mr. McNamara on the results of the strategic bombing campaign, but urged that the bombing be concentrated on the supply routes in southern North Vietnam supplemented by "the most economical and careful attack on the Hanoi power station" and by "keeping open the . . . option" of bombing the Hanoi-Haiphong area in the future.

A more equivocal position, the Pentagon study discloses, was taken by Assistant Secretary of State Bundy. His paper, completed on May 8, favored tactics that would "concentrate heavily on the supply routes" but would also "include a significant number of restrikes" north of the 20th Parallel. Without restrikes, he argued, "it would almost certainly be asked why we had ever hit the targets in the first place." Moreover, it would keep Hanoi and Moscow "at least a little bit on edge."

But he was opposed to hitting such

new and "sensitive targets" as the Hanoi power station, the Red River bridge at Hanoi and Phucyen airfield, 13 miles outside the city.

The Pentagon study comments that "this significant convergence of opinion on bombing strategy in the next phase among key Presidential advisers could not have gone unnoticed in the May 8 meeting." The account notes that a new effort began after the session to combine the various views in one paper largely drafted by Mr. McNaughton for Secretary McNamara and finally submitted to the President on May 19.

Even before the White House meeting, Mr. McNaughton was uneasy about the over-all Pentagon position, especially the willingness to provide General Westmoreland with considerable reinforcements. The Pentagon study does not say who drafted the portions of the May 5 memorandum on the ground war or precisely what was proposed, although it reports that Secretary McNamara had been told that 66,000 more soldiers could be provided without calling up the reserves. Later the figure rose to 84,000.

McNamara Saw 'Fatal Flaw'

In a note to Secretary McNamara on May 6, Mr. McNaughton indicated that the May 5 memorandum proposed giving General Westmoreland 80,000 more men. Excerpts from that note vividly portray Mr. McNaughton's unhappiness about this course of action:

"I am afraid there is a fatal flaw in the strategy in the [May 5] draft. It is that the strategy falls into the trap that has ensnared us for the past three years. It actually gives the troops while only praying for their proper use and for constructive diplomatic action." (The emphasis was Mr. McNaughton's.)

"Limiting the present decision to an 80,000 add-on," he continued, "does the very important business of postponing the issue of a reserve call-up (and all of its horrible baggage), but postpone is all that it does—probably to a worse time, 1968. Providing the 80,000 troops is tantamount to acceding to the whole Westmoreland-Sharp request. This being the case, they will 'accept' the 80,000. But six months from now, in will come messages like the '470,000-570,000' messages, saying that the requirement remains at 201,000 (or more). Since no pressure will have been put on anyone, the military war will have gone on as before and no diplomatic progress will have been made.

"It follows that the 'philosophy' of the war should be fought out now so everyone will not be proceeding on their own major premises, and getting us in deeper and deeper; at the very least, the President should give General Westmoreland his limit (as President Truman did to General MacArthur). That is, if General Westmoreland is to get 550,000 men, he should be told, 'That will be all, and we mean it.'" (The parentheses were Mr. McNaughton's.)

The note to Secretary McNamara, the study reveals, expressed uneasiness about the breadth and intensity of public unrest and dissatisfaction with the war. As a man whose 18-year-old son was about to enter college, the study notes, Mr. McNaughton was especially sensitive to the unpopularity of the war among the young.

"A feeling is widely and strongly held that 'the Establishment' is out of its mind," he wrote. "The feeling is that we are trying to impose some U.S. image on distant peoples we cannot understand (any more than we can the younger generation here at home), and that we are carrying the thing to absurd lengths.

"Related to this feeling is the increased polarization that is taking place in the United States with seeds of the worst split in our people in more than a century. . . ."

A major assault on Administration policy drew near. In early May, the Pentagon study recounts, there were three C.I.A. intelligence papers "to reinforce the views" of civilian opponents of the bombing.

One report concluded that 27 months of American bombing "have had remarkably little effect on Hanoi's over-all strategy in prosecuting the war, on its confident view of long-term Communist prospects; and on its political tactics regarding negotiations." A second, issued on May 12, characterized the mood in North Vietnam after prolonged bombing as one of "resolute stoicism with a considerable reservoir of endurance still untapped."

The third said that as of April, the American air campaign had "significantly eroded the capacities of North Vietnam's industrial and military bases. These losses, however, have not meaningfully degraded North Vietnam's material ability to continue the war in South Vietnam."