

Dilemma for President

Secretary McNamara showed his paper to President Johnson on May 19, the day it was completed, the study says. Although the analyst provides no documentary record of Mr. Johnson's reaction, he comments that it was "not surprising" that the President "did not promptly endorse the McNamara recommendations as he had on occasions in the past."

"This time," the study continues, "he faced a situation where the Chiefs were in ardent opposition to anything other than a significant escalation of the war with a call-up of reserves. This put them in direct opposition to McNamara and his aides and created a genuine policy dilemma for the President."

In any event, the study says, Secretary McNamara quickly got the message intended by the President's inaction. On May 20, Mr. McNamara—"perhaps reflecting a cool Presidential reaction"—ordered a new study of bombing alternatives.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff needed no spur. Within four days, they had submitted three memorandums, renewing earlier recommendations for more than 200,000 new troops and for air attacks to "shoulder out" foreign shipping from Haiphong and to mine the harbors and approaches, as well as raids on eight major airfields and on roads and railways leading to China. "It may ultimately become necessary," they said, to send American troops into Cambodia and Laos and take "limited ground action in North Vietnam."

Their sharpest rebuttal to Mr. McNamara, however, came on May 31 in a paper contending that the "drastic changes" in American policy advocated by the Secretary "would undermine and no longer provide a complete rationale for our presence in South Vietnam or much of our efforts over the past two years."

Moreover, the parts of this paper quoted in the Pentagon narrative asserted that the McNamara-McNaughton memorandum "fails to appreciate the full implications for the free world of failure" in Vietnam.

On the issue of public support for the war, the Joint Chiefs said they were "unable to find due cause for the degree of pessimism expressed" in the McNamara paper. They asserted their belief "that the American people, when well informed about the issues at stake, expect their Government to uphold its commitments."

Addressing the specific proposal for a bombing cutback, the Joint Chiefs were doubtful that such a step would induce Hanoi to move toward negotiations. They contended it would "most likely have the opposite effect" and "only result in the strengthening of the enemy's resolve to continue the war."

In conclusion, the military leaders urged that the McNamara proposals "not be forwarded to the President" because they represented such a divergence from past policy that they were not worthy of consideration. The Chiefs were unaware that Mr. Johnson had seen the paper 12 days before.

In other agencies, the Pentagon study relates, official viewpoints fell between the two extremes and the debate floundered toward a compromise on the issues of tactics, rather than aims.

Under Secretary of State Katzenbach, for example, proposed on June 8, according to the study, that the United States add 30,000 ground troops "in small increments over the next 18 months" and "concentrate bombing on lines of communication throughout" North Vietnam but shifting away from strategic targets around Hanoi and Haiphong. The American political objectives, he said, should be to leave behind a stable democratic government in Saigon by persuading Hanoi to end the war and by neutralizing the Vietcong threat internally.

In the Pentagon, Mr. McNaughton found mixed views on the air war and summarized them for Mr. McNamara in another memorandum on June 12. The findings, cited in the study, were that Cyrus R. Vance, Deputy Secretary of Defense; Paul H. Nitze, Secretary of the Navy; and Mr. McNaughton favored the cutback in bombing; the Joint Chiefs renewed their case for escalation; and Secretary Brown of the Air Force recommended adding a few targets.

The Pentagon study says it is unclear whether this paper was formally presented to President Johnson who, in any case, was preoccupied in June, 1967, with the six-day Arab-Israeli war and with preparations for his meeting with Premier Kosygin at Glassboro, N.J.

Secretary McNamara's primary attention remained on the unresolved troop

issue. According to the Pentagon account, he went to Saigon from July 7 to July 12 under President Johnson's instructions "to review the matter with General Westmoreland and reach an agreement on a figure well below the 200,000 [Westmoreland] had requested in March."

On Mr. McNamara's final evening in Saigon, the Pentagon account says, the two men agreed on a 55,000-man increase, to a total of 525,000 troops. President Johnson approved the compromise, far closer to Mr. McNamara's position than General Westmoreland's, and announced it in a tax message on Aug. 4.

But in a series of decisions on the air war during July and August, the President adopted a course that differed markedly from the strategy of de-escalation that Secretary McNamara had urged on him.

His first decision, in mid-July, added only a few fixed targets, but in the next two months he approved all but about a dozen of the 57 targets the Chiefs of Staff wanted. On July 20, the Pentagon study reports, he added 16 targets, including a previously forbidden airfield, a rail yard, two bridges and 12 barracks and supply areas, all within the restricted circles around Hanoi and Haiphong.

The day before the authorization of Rolling Thunder 57—each number signaling an extension of the air war—Secretary McNamara lost perhaps his closest adviser and staunchest ally. On July 19, Mr. McNaughton and his wife, Sarah, and their 11-year-old son Theodore were killed in a plane collision over North Carolina.

Hard-Line Senators Act

By late July, the study continues, the frustrations of the military commanders over the restraints imposed upon them had prompted the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee to schedule hearings on the conduct of the air war. Although conducted in secret, the hearings gave the public its first real knowledge of the policy division between Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs over bombing.

"The subcommittee unquestionably set out to defeat Mr. McNamara," the analyst comments. "Its members, Senators Stennis, Symington, Jackson, Cannon, Byrd, Smith, Thurmond and Miller, were known for their hard-line views and military sympathies. . . . They viewed the restraints on bombing as irrational, the shackling of a major instrument which could help win victory."

Such powerful Congressional backing for the air war, the study observes, "must have forced a recalculation on the President."

The study finds it "surely no coincidence" that on Aug. 9, the day the Stennis hearings opened, President Johnson authorized "an additional 16 fixed targets and an expansion of armed reconnaissance."

"Significantly," the study continues, "six of the targets were within the sacred 10-mile Hanoi inner circle. . . . Nine targets were located in the north-east rail line in the China buffer zone [formerly a proscribed zone], the closest one eight miles from the border. . . . The tenth was a naval base, also within the China buffer zone."

The raids began promptly, the study recounts, and more targets were approved shortly afterward. The prohibited zone around Hanoi was restored from Aug. 24 to Sept. 4 to permit a follow-up to what the study calls "a particularly delicate set of contacts with North Vietnam." The military sections of the Pentagon study give no details, but published reports have identified this as a secret effort to test Hanoi on what became known later as the San Antonio formula.

It was made public by President Johnson in a speech on Sept. 29 at San Antonio, Tex., when he offered to halt the bombing provided that action would lead to prompt and productive negotiations, on the assumption that the North Vietnamese would "not take advantage" of the halt militarily. Hanoi rejected these terms as imposing conditions on a halt in bombing.

For months the secret diplomatic probing went on fruitlessly while the air war widened slowly—although still short of the desires of the Joint Chiefs. Not until March, 1968—a few days after Secretary McNamara had left the Government—did his proposal for a reduction of the bombing to the 20th Parallel re-emerge and open the way toward negotiations in Paris in May.

*Articles on the Pentagon study
will continue tomorrow.*