

New Trend of Policy

The climax for what the study calls the "disillusioned doves" came in Secretary McNamara's May 19 memorandum to President Johnson, which marshaled the arguments against the strategy of widening the war and sharpened the case for curtailing the air war.

What gave the May 19 "draft Presidential memorandum" a new and radical thrust, the analysts observe, were its political recommendations, reflecting Mr. McNaughton's earlier point about the need to argue out "the philosophy of the war."

The May 19 paper not only recommended a cutback of the bombing to the 20th Parallel and only 30,000 more troops for General Westmoreland, but also advocated a considerably more limited over-all American objective in Vietnam that, in the words of the Pentagon study, "amounted to . . . a recommendation that we accept a compromise outcome." [See text, McNamara position.]

As Mr. McNamara and Mr. McNaughton put it in the memorandum. "Our commitment is only to see that the people of South Vietnam are permitted to determine their own future. . . . This commitment ceases if the country ceases to help itself."

However much the United States might "strongly hope" for a non-Communist government that would remain separate from North Vietnam, they said, "our commitment is not" to guarantee and insist on those conditions.

"Nor do we have an obligation to pour

in effort out of proportion to the effort contributed by the people of South Vietnam or in the face of coups, corruption, apathy or other indications of Saigon's failure to cooperate satisfactorily with us," the writers declared.

The United States was committed, they went on, "to stopping or offsetting the effect of North Vietnam's application of force in the South, which denies the people of the South the ability to determine their own future."

The Pentagon study underscores the significance of Mr. McNamara's break with policy. The paper, it says, "pointedly rejected the high blown formulations of U.S. objectives in NSAM 288 ('an independent non-Communist South Vietnam,' 'defeat the Vietcong,' etc.), and came forcefully to grips with the old dilemma of the U.S. involvement dating from the Kennedy era: only limited means to achieve excessive ends."

The reference was to National Security Action Memorandum 288, issued on March 17, 1964, which had since provided the basic doctrine for Johnson Administration policy.

The emphasis in the "scaled-down" set of goals" put forward by the McNamara-McNaughton memorandum, the analysts observe, was on South Vietnamese self-determination, which envisioned an eventual "full-spectrum government."

At several points the Pentagon study emphasizes the sharp departure that this represented from established policy. "Let there be no mistake," the study comments, "these were radical positions"

for a senior U.S. policy official within the Johnson Administration to take. They would bring the bitter condemnation of the [Joint] Chiefs and were scarcely designed to flatter the President on the success of his efforts to date."

In addition to advancing its own views, the McNamara-McNaughton paper developed the counterarguments against the military option of large reinforcements and a wider war, emphasizing the increasing popular discontent with the war among the American public.

The memorandum acknowledged that a cutback on the bombing "will cause psychological problems" for allied officers and troops "who will not be able to understand why we should withhold punishment from the enemy."

However, the paper added: "We should not bomb for punitive reasons if it serves no other purpose. . . . It costs American lives; it creates a backfire of revulsion and opposition by killing civilians; it creates serious risks; it may harden the enemy."

Moreover, it expressed moral qualms about the reaction of world and domestic opinion to the kind of expanded air campaign advocated by senior military commanders. "The picture of the world's greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1,000 non-combatants a week, while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed is not a pretty one," Secretary McNamara told President Johnson. "It could conceivably produce a costly distortion in the American national consciousness and in the world

image of the United States—especially if the damage to North Vietnam is complete enough to be 'successful.'"

The paper also pointed out that the bombing in the Hanoi and Haiphong regions took an extremely high toll in American pilots' lives. On May 5, Ms. McNaughton commented that the loss rate over Hanoi-Haiphong was six times as great as over the rest of North Vietnam. Now, on May 19, the McNamara-McNaughton paper noted that the campaign against these heavily defended areas lost "one pilot in every 40 sorties." It predicted that if the bombing was held below the 20th Parallel, these losses would be cut "by more than 50 per cent."

Their arguments against granting General Westmoreland the scale of reinforcements that he had requested were centered on what the Pentagon analysts refer to as the growing fear that such forces would engender "irresistible pressures" for carrying the battle beyond the borders of South Vietnam.

The mobilization of reserves to provide the necessary manpower, according to the McNamara-McNaughton paper, would almost certainly stimulate a "bitter Congressional debate."

"Cries would go up — much louder than they have already—to 'take the wraps off the men in the field,' " their memorandum asserted. It foresaw pressures not only for ground operations against Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam, but also, at some point, for proposals to use tactical nuclear arms and bacteriological and chemical weapons if the Chinese entered the war "or if U.S. losses were running high."