

Pressure for Wider War

As 1967 began, the study asserts, the stage was set for "a running battle" inside the Johnson Administration "between the advocates of a greatly expanded air campaign against North Vietnam, one that might genuinely be called 'strategic,' and the disillusioned doves who urged relaxation, if not complete suspension, of the bombing in the interests of greater effectiveness and the possibilities for peace."

"The 'hawks,' of course, were primarily the military," the study continues, "but in wartime their power and influence with an incumbent administration is disproportionate. McNamara, supported quantitatively by John McNaughton . . . led the attempt to de-escalate the bombing. Treading the uncertain middle ground at different times in the debate were William P. Bundy [Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs], Air Force Secretary Harold Brown and, most importantly, the President himself. Buffeted from right to left, he determinedly tried to pursue the temperate course, escalating gradually in the late spring but leveling off again in the summer."

With the exception of a diplomatic interlude during the holiday truce at Tet, the Lunar New Year celebration in early February, the pressures for widening the war were unrelenting, according to the Pentagon account.

Mr. Rostow, the President's special assistant for national security, said in a memorandum on Dec. 12, for example, that he found the allied military position "greatly improved" in 1966 and pictured a dominant—even potentially victorious—position by the end of 1967.

In Congress, the study also notes, the military received support from Senator John C. Stennis, chairman of the influential Senate Preparedness Subcommittee. On Jan. 18, the Mississippi Democrat declared that General Westmoreland's troop requests should be met, "even if it should require mobilization or partial mobilization."

He Presses Washington for Speed

In Saigon, General Westmoreland was pressing Washington to speed the troop shipments already promised. In support of his requests, the study notes, General Westmoreland described the growth of "enemy forces as of Jan. 2:

"... 9 division headquarters, 34 regimental headquarters, 152 combat battalions, 34 combat support battalions, 196 separate companies, and 70 separate platoons totaling some 128,600, plus at least 112,800 militia and at least 39,175 political cadre . . . (a) strength increase of some 42,000 during 1966 despite known losses."

For the allies, he explained, this posed the danger that in any of the three military regions north of Saigon, "the enemy can attack at any time selected targets . . . in up to division strength" of roughly 10,000 men.

Diplomatic activity reached a peak during Tet, Feb. 8 to 12, as the United States halted the bombing. In London, Prime Minister Harold Wilson, acting on President Johnson's behalf, met with the Soviet Premier, Aleksei N. Kosygin, in an effort to get the bombing stopped permanently and peace talks started.

Then, on Feb. 13, after a pause of nearly six days, the bombing of North Vietnam was resumed. Mr. Johnson said he had based his decision on what he

termed the unparalleled magnitude of the North Vietnamese supply effort.

Excerpts from Mr. Wilson's memoirs, "The Labor Government, 1964-70: A Personal Record," published two months ago in *The Sunday Times* of London and *Life* magazine, blamed President Johnson for the collapse of the talks, charging that at the last moment he had changed his terms for a bombing halt by demanding a cessation of enemy infiltration as a precondition.

By Mr. Wilson's account, this was a "total reversal" of the offer Washington first authorized him to pass through Mr. Kosygin to Hanoi: a secret agreement under which the bombing would be stopped first, infiltration second and the American troop build-up third.

The sections of the Pentagon study available to *The New York Times* provide no insight into why Mr. Johnson's position changed suddenly.

The study makes it clear, however, that the collapse of the diplomatic efforts was a turning point, for shortly afterward President Johnson began approving additional targets in North Vietnam for attack.

A Four-Phase Offensive

"The President perceived the [air] strikes as necessary in the psychological test of wills between the two sides to punish the North," the study adds, "in spite of the near consensus opinion of his [civilian] advisers that no level of damage or destruction that we were willing to inflict was likely to destroy Hanoi's determination to continue to struggle."

President Johnson approved what the Pentagon account calls the "spring air offensive" in the following phases:

¶On Feb. 22, for attacks on five urban thermal power plants, excluding those in Hanoi and Haiphong, and on the Thainguyen steel plant; for mining of rivers and estuaries and conducting naval barrages against the coastline up to the 20th Parallel.

¶On March 22, the two Haiphong thermal power plants.

¶On April 8, by relaxing the previous restrictions on raids around Hanoi and Haiphong, for raids against Kep airfield, the power transformer near the center of the city; for attacks on petroleum storage facilities, an ammunition dump and cement plant in Haiphong.

¶On May 2, for a raid on the thermal power plant a mile north of the center of Hanoi.

By early May these raids, the Pentagon study relates, had become a focus of controversy among Presidential advisers. General Wheeler sent the President a memorandum on May 5, justifying the raids on such targets as power plants with this assertion:

"The objective of our attacks on the thermal electric power system in North Vietnam was not . . . to turn the lights off in major population centers, but . . . to deprive the enemy of a basic power source needed to operate certain war-supporting facilities and industries."

In rebuttal to this was the position of McGeorge Bundy. As President Johnson's assistant for national security until he left the government on Feb. 28, 1966, Mr. Bundy had been one of the foremost original advocates of the air

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war against North Vietnam. But in a personal letter to President Johnson, evidently received by the White House on May 4, Mr. Bundy termed the "strategic bombing" of North Vietnam "both unproductive and unwise," especially the raids on the power plants. [See text, McGeorge Bundy's memo to Johnson.]

"The lights have not stayed off in Haiphong," he said, "and even if they

had, electric lights are in no sense essential to the Communist war effort."

Mr. Bundy emphasized that he was "very far indeed from suggesting that it would make sense now to stop the bombing of the North altogether" because that would be "to give the Communists something for nothing." But as for the power plants, he commented: "We are attacking them, I fear, mainly because we have 'run out' of other targets. Is it a very good reason?"