

JOHNSON HID INVOLVEMENT

Times Report Traces Start Of Major Combat Role

By CHARLES W. CORDRY
Washington Bureau of The Sun

Washington, June 15—Pentagon records published today show that President Johnson made his momentous decision to use United States ground troops for offensive action in Vietnam on April 1, 1965, but banned any immediate publicity or official concession that a drastic policy shift was involved.

Events surrounding this major departure from the "never-again" attitude against ground war in Asia, which had persisted from the end of the Korean war, formed the highlights of the third in a series of New York Times articles.

The articles are based on "top secret" defense department studies of American involvement in Indochina from World War II to mid-1963. The government obtained a federal court order in New York today suspending further publication at least until Saturday.

Much Already Known

Much of what has been published, in news reports and textual material, documents in detail what had been generally known on the course of the war—particularly from the time just before the Tonkin Gulf episode of August, 1964, to the post-Tet offensive studies in the winter and spring of 1963 which ended the U.S. build-up in Vietnam.

But the secret documents and accompanying narrative in the Pentagon papers also dramatically expose instances when major policy shifts were concealed.

One was the decision on commitment of ground forces to offensive action, described in the Times as a result of the Johnson administration's discovery that the bombing of North Vietnam in early 1965 would not prevent the South's collapse.

Mr. Johnson's decision was recorded in a National Security Action Memorandum dated April 6, 1965, signed by McGeorge Bundy, and one of the huge numbers of documents the Times has published. Mr. Bundy was President Johnson's special assistant for national security.

The memo was addressed to Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, and John A. McCone, director of central intelligence. It reported decisions taken April 1, including expansion of the forces in Vietnam, especially including additional marine battalions, and a "change of mission" for the Marines. That change called for "more active use" under conditions to be fixed by Secretaries McNamara and Rusk.

The Pentagon study called this a "pivotal" change and a "departure from a long-held policy" with momentous implications. But the Bundy-memorandum said Mr. Johnson desired that "premature publicity be avoided by all possible precautions."

The military actions were to be taken rapidly, "but in ways that should minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy." Mr. Bundy wrote that "the President's desire is that these movements and changes should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy."

The public learned officially of the shift of ground forces to a combat—rather than defensive—role almost inadvertently when the State Department referred to it vaguely on the following June 8.

By that time, however, observers recall, Mr. Johnson's course was beginning to be apparent, for all the lack of official comment. In February, Marine anti-aircraft units had been deployed at Da Nang to protect the air base from which bombing originated.

In March, a battalion of Marine infantry had been sent to Vietnam, followed in May by activation of the big Marine headquarters in Da Nang and arrival of Army airborne troops.

The original purpose of the March deployment had been defense of the air base.

It had become clear during this period that the fragile South Vietnamese government and its Army faced collapse and that the "Rolling Thunder" bombing campaign against the North, started in February, 1965, would not prevent it.

The Pentagon study said "the bombing effort seemed to stiffen rather than soften Hanoi's backbone," and optimism waned after a month of the air campaign.

The choice then was to withdraw, or to go to war on the ground. There were deep differences within the administration, the Times noted, citing views of George W. Ball, then under secretary of state, and Mr. McCone.

Mr. Ball believed neither bombing nor ground fighting would solve the problem and proposed in a memorandum June 28 that the United States "cut its losses" and get out, according to the Pentagon account.

Mr. McCone, on the other hand, had argued in April that it would be unwise to commit ground troops unless there were also willingness to bomb the North with "minimum restraint" in an effort to break Hanoi's will.

But at that time, President Johnson was accepting the counsel of Gen. William C. Westmoreland, then American commander in Vietnam, using combat troops, and was in no mood for compromise, the Pentagon account indicates.

Regarding the commitment of ground forces, the Pentagon papers say there was a "subtle change in emphasis."

"Instead of simply denying the enemy victory and convincing him he could not win," the study says, "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."

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LBJ's

secret war

step-up

By Thomas B. Ross
Sun-Times Bureau

WASHINGTON — Former President Lyndon B. Johnson purposely concealed his decision to send U.S. troops into offensive operations in Vietnam, according to top secret Pentagon documents revealed Tuesday.

In the third installment of a series of disclosures on a massive Defense Department history of the war, the New York Times reported that on April 1, 1965, Mr. Johnson decided to order the marines into combat because the bombing of North Vietnam showed no sign of preventing the collapse of the Saigon government.

The President transmitted his decision, the Times revealed, in an April 6 National Security Action Memorandum which warned he desired that "premature publicity be avoided by all possible precautions" so as to "minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy."

Mr. Johnson's decision was successfully obscured until June when the State Department, apparently inadvertently, declared that U.S. troops were "available for combat support."

A question and an answer

But even in announcing an increase in the troop level from 75,000 to 125,000 men the following month, Mr. Johnson denied any change in the original policy of keeping U.S. forces in a defensive role.

"Mr. President," a reporter asked during a July 28 press conference, "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 act as emergency backup?"

Mr. Johnson replied: "It does not imply any change in policy whatever. It does not imply change of objective."

In fact, as the Times quotes from the Pentagon history, it was well recognized within the administration that the July decision had "momentous implications" and that the July

decision was "a threshold — entrance into an Asian land war."

Prepared for 'long war'

"The conflict," the history reportedly goes on to declare, "was seen to be long, with further U.S. deployment to follow . . . 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 . . . there are manifold indications that they (Mr. Johnson and his top advisers) were prepared for a long war."

The Times report on the Pentagon history provides the following chronology of events on the fateful decision to enter a major ground war in Vietnam.

Within one month of the start of full-scale bombing attacks on North Vietnam, the Johnson administration realized that the raids "seemed to stiffen rather than soften Hanoi's backbone."

Despite public assertions of optimism, there was also intense awareness within the administration that things were rapidly deteriorating in South Vietnam.

McNamara warned

On March 24, 1965, John T. McNaughton, a native of Pekin, Ill., and assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, warned Defense Sec. Robert S. McNamara that "there is consensus that efforts inside SVN (South Vietnam) will probably fail to prevent collapse."

"The situation is general," McNaughton's memo declared, "is bad and deteriorating. The VC (Viet Cong) have the initiative. Desecration is gaining among the rural population, somewhat in the cities and even among the soldiers."

But the administration was determined to prevent such operations at that juncture of weakness and issued terms that were designed to

"compromise" but, in reality, were "a demand for their (North Vietnam's) surrender."

Along among Mr. Johnson's top advisers, Undersecretary of State George Ball was urging that the United States "cut its losses" and withdraw. Ball recognized that the nation would lose face in Asia but insisted the setback would be temporary and in the long run it would emerge "wiser and more mature."

CIA misgivings

John A. McCone, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, had misgivings about the commitment of U.S. troops to offensive operations but for a different reason. He argued that the policy change would prove futile without a great intensification of the bombing of North Vietnam.

"We will find ourselves," he said in a memo of April 2, "mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win and from which we will have extreme difficulty extracting ourselves."

Mr. Johnson was constantly being stirred to stronger action by his leading intellectual, Walt W. Rostow, who wrote at one point: "There may be a tendency to underestimate both the anxieties and complications on the other side and to underestimate that limited but real margin of influence on the outcome which flows from the simple fact that at this

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The CIA said stay out

Whatever the outcome of the publication by *The New York Times* of a secret documentary on the American presence in Indochina may be in the light of the granting of a temporary federal court injunction sought on the ground that the law had been violated, one thing already is very clear. That is, the role ascribed by its critics to the Central Intelligence Agency as the evil genius of U.S. involvement proves to be more myth than reality.

The fact is the record now revealed shows that the CIA warned against deeper involvement as early as November, 1964. In describing the attitude of the intelligence community, the *Times* says the study shows the people involved "tended toward a pessimistic view."

An intelligence panel composed of members of the three leading agencies—the CIA, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and the Defense (Department's) Intelligence Agency—ordered to study a Joint Chief's recommendation that North Vietnam be bombed into surrender, concluded that there was no "strong chance of breaking Hanoi's will."

"The course of actions the Communists have pursued in South Vietnam over the past few years implies a fundamental estimate on

their part that the difficulties facing the U.S. are so great that U.S. will and ability to maintain resistance in that area can be gradually eroded—without running high risks that this would wreak heavy destruction on the D.R.V. (Hanoi) or Communist China," the panel said. ". . . We do not believe that such actions (large-scale bombing of industry) would have a crucial effect on the daily lives of the overwhelming majority of the North Vietnam population . . ."

In April, 1965, John McCone, then head of the CIA, warned against plans to undertake combat operations on the ground against Viet Cong guerrillas without commensurate increase in bombing of North Vietnam; in short, we cannot win cheaply and to win at all we must go all out.

"In effect, we will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty extricating ourselves."

These advices are hardly what one would expect from an organization so many believe is at the bottom of all our overseas adventures. In fact, instead of urging the U.S. to escalate the war, the CIA was warning the U.S. not to increase our commitment. It ran up the danger flags, and acted as responsibly as its harshest critics could have hoped it would.

FBI Checking All Having Access To Known 15 Copies of Viet Study

By Marilyn Berger
and Michael Getler
Washington Post Staff Writers

There are 15 "legitimate" copies of the controversial Pentagon report on Vietnam, the administration disclosed yesterday, and a massive hunt is on to identify the one to which The New York Times was given access.

Sources at the Justice Department said that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was ordered Monday to call on all persons who have legitimate copies. It is assumed that these calls were made yesterday.

According to administration sources, the copies are distributed as follows: six in the Pentagon, one in the White House, one each in the State Department files of Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, former Under Secretary, and William Bundy, former Assistant Secretary for Asia and the Far East, one in the LBJ library in Austin, Tex., two in the National Archives, two with the Rand Corp. and one with former Defense Secretary Clark M. Clifford.

In the Xerox age, no one has ruled out the possibility that the report could have been duplicated, or photographed, but officials note that it would be a tremendous undertaking to assemble a complete set of the 7,000-page, 47-volume report.

Government officials said they were reasonably confident that they could find the source of the leak of the top-secret documents. "We know who worked on the study and who had access to it," said one official.

"We know where all the sets are supposed to be and we think we ought to be able to track it down."

The Vietnam study was ordered by former Defense Chief Robert S. McNamara and entrusted first to the late John T. McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and later to Paul C. Warnke, his successor. Overall direction of the study was given to Leslie H. Gelb, a staff member of ISA who is now at the Brookings Institution.

Others who worked on the study to a greater or lesser degree include Morton Halperin, who worked with Gelb in ISA and is also at Brookings while working for Common Cause; Daniel Ellsberg, now of MIT, who worked with Gen. Edward Lansdale of the CIA in Saigon; Richard Holbrooke, formerly on Katzenbach's staff and on the U.S. delegation to the Paris peace talks, currently with the Peace Corps in Morocco; Col. Paul Gorman, also a former staff member of the ISA and of the peace talks delegation, now serving in Vietnam; Mel Gurtov of Rand; and Richard Moorstein, former ISA staff member, currently at Rand.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers said that 36 persons worked on compiling the documents.

The disclosures in the documents contained in the Pentagon study have brought widespread expressions of concern in official Washington.

One official of the CIA, one of the few organizations

which came off well in the disclosures, said only half in jest, "Whoever did it ought to be shot at dawn at the Washington Monument." On second thought, he added: "High noon will do; more people will see it."

-Another former official, whose opposition to the war is well known, said that everyone with anything to do with government is upset about it. One current official said, "If this doesn't get tracked down, then nothing is safe."

"The problem with the study," said one official noting the critical remarks by the analysts writing the report, "is that it is a prosecution brief masquerading as a dispassionate study."

There were some in town to whom the report came as no surprise. The President's national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, was quoted as saying he first learned about it when he picked up his copy of the Times from his doorstep, and it was said that Secretary of State William P. Rogers was similarly unaware of it.

But Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), longtime critic of the war, had long ago written to Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird in search of a copy. He disclosed in a speech on Aug. 7, 1970 that he regretted that the Pentagon had withheld it.

"As the old saw goes," he told the Senate, "nothing is secret for long in Washington." He added: "I hope that the first enterprising reporter who obtains a copy of this history will share it with the committee."

Even Nat Hentoff, in a May 20 column in the Village Voice, reported that he had heard that the New York Times had gotten hold of "a breakthrough unpublished story concerning the White House, the Pentagon and Southeast Asia."

Back in October, 1970, Parade Magazine reported that an in-depth study had been undertaken at the behest of McNamara by a "task force under Les Gelb." The magazine said: "There are no plans to make it public."

Finally there is the impact of the disclosures on those authors whose books have been completed but have yet to be published. Chief in this category is former President Johnson, whose administration is shown to have said things in public that were substantially different from private plans disclosed in the Pentagon report. His book, "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969," is said to contain much about the Vietnam experience.

A spokesman for Holt, Rinehart, the publisher, said, however, that there were no plans for revisions. "The book is finished and will be published as written," he said. "No changes are being contemplated in the text as it now exists."

LBJ Hid Buildup In 1965

By Murrey Marder
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Johnson ordered public silence initially on a critical decision of April 1, 1965, which started the massive buildup of American ground forces in the Vietnamese war, it was revealed in official documents published yesterday by The New York Times.

The basic shift in U.S. strategy from defense and retaliation to offense and calculated escalation did seep out piecemeal in later months. But the orders, details, and consequences of that change—described as "pivotal" in the U.S. share of the war—are disclosed for the first time in the secret documents assembled in the Pentagon in 1967-68.

Administration officials were instructed to take "all possible precautions" to avoid "premature publicity" on the President's April 1 decision on a "change of mission" for two U.S. Marine battalions which had landed at Danang on March 8, 1965, for airbase defense, and for an initial increase of 18,000 to 20,000 more U.S. troops in Vietnam.

Even the change in the troop mission was only guardedly identified in a secret National Security Action Memorandum, number 328, as an authorization "to permit their more active use." Instructions were given to act rapidly, "but in ways that should minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy," to make the new actions appear to be "gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy."

In fact, the United States was embarking upon the first use of major combat forces in a land war in Asia since the Korean conflict of the early 1950s. The U.S. position on entering into negotiations that might freeze U.S. activities without ending the Vietcong challenge to the Saigon government was described in totally negative terms.

McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's national security adviser, told him in a memorandum dated Feb. 7, 1965:

"We want to keep before Hanoi the carrot of our desisting as well as the stick of continued pressure. We also need to conduct the application of force so that there is always a prospect of worse to come . . .

"We should accept discussion on these terms in any forum, but we should not now accept the idea of negotiations of any sort except on the basis of a standdown of Vietcong violence."

President Johnson told Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor in Saigon on May 10, 1965, that he was planning to order the first pause in the recently launched sustained bombing of North Vietnam. The President said he would use the pause "to good effect with world opinion."

"You should understand," he told Taylor, "that my purpose in this plan is to begin to clear a path either toward restoration of peace or toward increased military action, depending upon the reaction of the Communists."

That five-day bombing pause produced nothing, to the surprise of few administration strategists. By June 1, the administration already had secretly approved plans for deploying about 70,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam but the official U.S. public position concealed those plans and intentions.

What a Pentagon analyst describes in the documents as "an honest and superficially innocuous statement by Department of State Press Officer Robert J. McCloskey on June 8" was the first public hint of the major strategy shift authorized on April 1. McCloskey said, "American forces would be available for combat support together with Vietnamese forces when and if necessary," and had engaged in "combat."

President Johnson exploded over this admission, even though there already had been news "leaks" on the secret change in strategy. The White House, "hoisted by its own petard," according to a Pentagon analyst, tried to equivocate but was forced into an admission.

A White House statement said, "There has been no change in the mission of United States ground combat units in Vietnam in recent days or weeks." The statement said "The primary mission" was to "secure and safeguard" installations such as the Danang air base, but "if help is requested" in "support of Vietnamese forces faced with aggressive attack" the U.S. Commander, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, "also has authority" to supply it.

Even that backhanded admission that a military threshold had been crossed, however, gave the public only fragmentary awareness of what was actually happening in a U.S. troop buildup that eventually grew to over half-a-million men.

A State Department cablegram to U.S. diplomatic missions abroad, on Feb. 18, 1965, instructed them that "focus of public attention will be kept as far as possible on DRV (North Vietnamese) aggression; not on joint GVN-US (South Vietnamese-American) military operations."

The United States had moved with great speed through multiple stages of military involvement, starting in February. "Operation Flaming Dart," initiated Feb. 6, 1965, had authorized "tit-for-tat" retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam. On Feb. 13, President Johnson had crossed the next major dividing line, authorizing "Operation Rolling Thunder"—continuing bombing of the North, which began March 2.

But before a month was out "optimism began to wane," even among the optimists, about the prospects for getting North Vietnam and the Vietcong to agree to negotiations to break off the war. Many military and civilian planners had been convinced from the outset that those hopes were highly misplaced anyhow.

While these initial actions were being launched the Joint Chiefs of Staff and many other strategists were intensively planning, and urging, the introduction of U.S. ground troops in multiple division strength.

One footnote illustrates the military coordination problem during that first hectic period. South Vietnamese Marshal

Nguyen Cao Ky, who was leading South Vietnamese bombers on a Feb. 8 joint reprisal strike against the North, reportedly "dumped his flight's bomb loads on an unassigned target in the Vinh area" in order, as Ky maintained, to avoid colliding with U.S. aircraft that he said were hitting his assigned target.

The Pentagon study states that once "the bombing effort seemed to stiffen rather than soften Hanoi's backbone . . . The U.S. was presented essentially with two options:

"(1) to withdraw unilaterally from Vietnam leaving the South Vietnamese to fend for themselves, or (2) to commit ground forces in pursuit of its objectives. A third option, that of drastically increasing the scope and scale of the bombing, was rejected because of the concomitant high risk of inviting Chinese intervention."

John T. McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense, in a March 24, 1965, memorandum to McNamara, said "U.S. policy appears to be drifting . . . because while there is consensus that efforts inside South Vietnam to arouse more effective civilian and military improvements "will probably fail to prevent collapse, all . . . of the possible remedial courses of action have so far been rejected."

But large-scale U.S. troop deployments were precisely what the Joint Chiefs and Gen. Westmoreland in Saigon were contemplating. The Joint Chiefs, especially since March 20, were urging the initial introduction of three divisions, two Americans and one South Korean, for "destroying the Vietcong."

Initially the Joint Chiefs were pushing for more forces than was Westmoreland, but as the South Vietnamese forces began to crumble under a Vietcong offensive in the summer of 1965, with the first North Vietnamese units reported in the South, Westmoreland became the advocate of what was described as a "44 battalion" input strategy.

At first, the United States embarked on an "enclave" strategy, to establish and hold base positions on the South Vietnamese coast. Ambassador Taylor, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the

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The Road to War

THE disclosures of the so-called McNamara Report, which traces the origins of this nation's maximum commitment to the survival of South Vietnam, should remind Americans once again of how poorly they are kept informed by any presidential administration — and how lightly, almost off-handedly the government moves to deceive the American people when this seems necessary.

Thoughtful Americans have known for years that the truth is simply not in most government officials when they are discussing U.S. policies in Vietnam. For them, misleading statements and outright lies are merely handy cattle prods of public opinion.

What was not realized, perhaps, was the extent of these fabrications. In the sense that it details the two levels of our growing involvement in Vietnam — one level dealing with what the public knew, the other level dealing with what the public did not know — this voluminous, detailed report is a unique document of the war.

Primarily, these disclosures show that the White House and the Defense Department were jointly planning "covert" military operations against North Vietnam as early as February, 1964, some seven months before the Tonkin Gulf war resolution.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1964, in fact, elements in the U.S. government favoring massive intervention developed "scenarios" of what ought to happen in Vietnam, and detailed plans for provoking the North Vietnamese into attacking American forces.

And on Sept. 7, 1964, a week after President Johnson solemnly declared that he had rejected advice "to load our planes with bombs and drop them on (North Vietnam)," the White House was developing a "provocation strategy" designed to steer North Vietnam into attacking U.S. forces first — which would give Washington its excuse to bomb the North.

And through it all, operating on the assumption that the American voter was a fool and Sen. Barry Goldwater, the Republican presidential candidate, an expendable dupe, the White House busily devised an "image" for

President Johnson: He was to be the great peacemaker (as contrasted to Goldwater's "hawkish demands for air attacks on North Vietnam"). He was to be the "candidate of reason and restraint."

But by this time, the Joint Chiefs had already recommended a systematic air offensive against North Vietnam, which in turn led to a White House strategy meeting on Sept. 7 at which the "provocative strategy" plan was discussed. Throughout September, as plans were shaping up for initiating air attacks on North Vietnam in early 1965, the White House was piously bemoaning Sen. Goldwater's suggestion that the war would eventually have to include the bombing of North Vietnam.

It was an elaborate *ruse de guerre*, and it worked. President Johnson was re-elected by a landslide.

There are other revelations of this nature, such as the uses that could be made of the press and television by the White House; and the need to begin making "presidential noises" that would prepare the American people for the coming "action" statements.

There was also one prime example of stubborn ignorance: The White House intellectuals, led by Walt Rostow, refused to heed the Central Intelligence Agency's warning that air attacks would not bring North Vietnam to its knees; on the contrary, said the CIA, such bombing might provoke even heavier troop intervention from the north. But so certain were they of American power and authority, and so eager they were to demonstrate it, that the White House advisers simply rejected the findings.

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But it was the Gulf of Tonkin "scenario" (using one of the Pentagon's favorite euphemisms for war plans) which indicated how furtively these high-level officials moved toward a broader, deeper involvement in Vietnam. It is as though they knew, deep down, that what they were doing was wrong, that any exposure of their plans to provoke North Vietnam on the sly would almost surely

turn public opinion against them. Like small boys bolstering their own confidence, they traded their prejudices and ill-informed conjectures back and forth, pumping one another up to the point where they could all march off in search of Lyndon Johnson's famed "coonskin hat."

Hungry to assert American power in a way that would demonstrate once and for all that the United States was the biggest power on earth, they took us into the quicksand of Vietnam — most of them whistling a merry tune, certain of their predictions, and apparently free of any guilt over their deceptions.

It was the sorriest episode of that whole sorry era; and it should remain, for us, the most instructive.