



SEPTEMBER 2014

EXPANDING THE SECRETARY'S ROLE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ROBERT MCNAMARA AND CLARK CLIFFORD
1963-1968



COLD WAR FOREIGN POLICY SERIES

SPECIAL STUDY 5

Joel C. Christenson

Series Editors Jeffrey A. Larsen • Erin R. Mahan

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Cover Photos

Left: Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and President Lyndon Johnson listen during a bipartisan congressional leadership meeting on Vietnam, July 1965.

Right: Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford speaks at a White House meeting as General Earle Wheeler listens, December 1968.

Source: LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX, used with permission.

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Foreword

This is the fifth special study in a series by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Historical Office that emphasizes the secretary's role in the U.S. foreign policymaking process and how the position evolved between 1947 and the end of the Cold War. The study focuses on the continued growth in the secretary's role during the tenures of Robert McNamara and his successor, Clark Clifford, under President Lyndon Johnson. It is not meant to offer a comprehensive look at these secretaries, but rather to examine one particularly important aspect of their work. Unlike that of the secretary of state, the impact of the secretary of defense in overseas affairs is rarely studied and is not as well understood. Our intent is to address a deficiency in general knowledge by illustrating how McNamara and Clifford participated in U.S. foreign relations to a greater degree than their predecessors.

This series is part of an ongoing effort to highlight various aspects of the secretary's mission and achievements. It began as a book manuscript by Dr. Steve Rearden, author of *The Formative Years, 1947–1950*, the first volume in our Secretaries of Defense Historical Series. We anticipate that future series will cover a variety of other defense topics as they relate to the position of the secretary.

I wish to thank Cheryl Bratten at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, for crossing organizational lanes and providing much-needed editorial support. I also continue to be indebted to Kathleen Jones in OSD Graphics for her expertise and design.

The series titles printed to date as well as other publications are available on the OSD Historical Office website. We invite you to peruse our selections at <http://history.defense.gov/>.

Erin R. Mahan
Chief Historian
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Executive Summary

The presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson solidified the secretary of defense's position as a central figure in the conduct of U.S. foreign affairs. This is in large part because Johnson, who exercised an intensely personal style of management but preferred domestic policy to foreign and defense affairs, came to depend on Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to an even greater degree than had his predecessor. In the wake of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, Johnson saw the defense secretary as a "source of great strength" and drew comfort and confidence from McNamara's presence. The secretary's management acumen and strength relative to his cabinet peers lent an air of authority to his advice that Johnson, who distrusted the professional military, found reassuring. From the spring of 1965 (the pivotal year of escalation in Vietnam) through mid-1967, the president met only occasionally with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He preferred instead to run policy options through McNamara and later Clark Clifford, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and his other civilian national security aides in much more frequent "Tuesday Lunches." The Tuesday Lunch quickly became the primary mechanism through which national security policy got coordinated during the Johnson administration. For its part, the National Security Council, which retained formal responsibilities but had fallen into disuse as a de facto bureaucratic force under Kennedy, devolved even further under Johnson. Attempts to revitalize the formal interagency national security policy process, such as the establishment of the Senior Interdepartmental Group, failed in part because those individuals responsible for making them work—including Walt Rostow, the president's national security

adviser after March, 1966—saw greater value in supporting the more personalized, informal mechanisms that Johnson favored.

The secretary's deepening involvement in foreign affairs stemmed also from the military character of the foreign crises that demanded Johnson's attention outside of Vietnam. Certain predicaments, such as growing instability in the Dominican Republic and North Korea's seizure of the U.S. intelligence ship *Pueblo*, confirmed administration officials' belief that a communist monolith was conspiring to pile on the United States as its military commitment in Southeast Asia grew. The specter of communist advances elsewhere in the world put containment in Vietnam at risk and caused Johnson to embrace military power as the key component of his approaches to both situations. This ensured that the secretary of defense would occupy center stage in the U.S. responses. In the Dominican Republic, McNamara orchestrated the deployment of more than 22,000 military personnel to prevent the island nation from "go[ing] to Castro." Johnson ordered the Dominican intervention in part because he felt the stakes were so high, but also, undoubtedly, because U.S. escalation in Vietnam was still in its early stages. A brief operation in the Caribbean could be carried out, Johnson believed, with relative ease. Nearly three years later, with more than a half million U.S. troops bogged down in Vietnam and no clear end in sight, Johnson again turned to military power as part of the U.S. response to the seizure of the *Pueblo*. In this case, he deployed military assets in a limited show of force mindful that, as Clifford stressed, the United States could ill-afford to let the situation spiral toward war. The positioning of additional U.S. naval and air forces in and around the Korean Peninsula—managed by both McNamara and Clifford during their transition—helped facilitate the direct diplomatic negotiations that ultimately secured the release of the *Pueblo*'s crew.

McNamara's managerial innovations within the Pentagon also aided the secretary's continued rise in foreign affairs during the Johnson administration. Perhaps the most important innovation in

this regard was the Office of International Security Affairs, which had been given a broad mandate during the Kennedy years and which McNamara continued to invest with considerable resources and organizational clout. The assistant secretary who led ISA until mid-1967, John McNaughton, developed an extraordinarily close relationship with McNamara. He provided the secretary with the kind of rigorous, detailed analyses of international problems that the analytically minded McNamara required in preparation for his myriad White House commitments. McNaughton marshaled all of his analytical strength, and most of his professional energy, in a vigorous, persistent attempt to convince the secretary to reverse course on Vietnam. Privately he argued to McNamara that the administration's faith in graduated pressure was leading it down an unsustainable path, and that, unlike the Cuban missile crisis, the strategic and operational advantages in Vietnam did not lay with the United States. Over time, McNaughton's case—carried on after his tragic death by successor Paul Warnke—began to have the desired effect. In May 1967 McNamara urged a progressive de-escalation of U.S. military operations in Vietnam. It was one in a series of developments throughout that year that signaled his growing disillusionment with Johnson's approach to the war. McNamara's drift away from the administration's Vietnam policy eroded his relationship with the president. As evidenced by the role both he and Clifford played in resolving the *Pueblo* crisis, however, McNamara's position on Vietnam did not undermine the growing importance of the position of secretary of defense in foreign affairs.

Johnson replaced McNamara with Clifford in March 1968 on the expectation that his longtime friend and confidant would support the administration's Vietnam policy. Clifford, who had been both a hawk and a dove at different points on Southeast Asia, came to office as a strong supporter but quickly changed positions after canvassing the Joint Chiefs on General William Westmoreland's request in late February for more than 200,000 additional troops to bolster the war effort. Convinced that his senior military leaders had little idea what practical good such an escalation would have on

the conduct of the war, the new secretary set about convincing the president of the need to scale back the U.S. military commitment and seek a negotiated settlement. As he did, Clifford became even more deeply enmeshed in the inner workings of the Johnson White House than McNamara had been. By the time Johnson left office in January 1969, his administration had reinforced the institutional precedent set during the Kennedy years: the secretary of defense was a central, indispensable contributor to U.S. foreign policy.

Introduction

The growing importance and visibility of the secretary of defense in foreign affairs during John F. Kennedy's presidency continued uninterrupted under his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. Several factors explain the leading foreign policy role that both Robert S. McNamara and Clark M. Clifford played in the mid-to-late 1960s. First and foremost, it arose from a combination of President Johnson's own personal style of decision making and his lack of comfort with national security affairs. After assuming the presidency under tragic circumstances, Johnson moved quickly to ensure continuity with Kennedy's policy priorities, staff, and modes of doing business. Johnson's deep-seated penchant for secrecy during policy deliberations reinforced this instinct and caused the president to extend Kennedy's institutional realignment of the national security policy process, which had significantly reduced the role of the National Security Council (NSC). At the same time, Johnson, a dyed-in-the-wool New Deal liberal with little interest or experience in foreign relations, laid out an ambitious program of domestic reforms and made it clear that he intended to devote less attention than Kennedy had to foreign and military affairs. As a result, even as they consumed an ever-larger share of his time, Johnson attended to foreign and defense affairs through less regimented, more personalized mechanisms (such as the "Tuesday Lunch") that concentrated high-level discussions within a small, handpicked circle of trusted advisers. The net effect was to give McNamara, and then Clifford, more direct, frequent contact with the president than any previous secretary of defense had enjoyed—and in a forum ideally suited for influencing major national security decisions.¹

The secretary's deepening involvement in foreign affairs arose also from the nature of the overseas crises that confronted President Johnson between 1963 and 1969. The escalating war in Vietnam fostered an especially close, personal connection between Johnson and Secretary McNamara, one that exacerbated the growing chasm between civilian and military leaders in the Department of Defense (DoD) and drew the secretary more firmly into the center of presidential decision making. The president also faced a daunting array of problems in places such as the Dominican Republic (1965), where he feared the emergence of a Castro-like communist regime, and on the Korean Peninsula (1968), where North Korea's seizure of the electronic intelligence ship *Pueblo* threatened to imperil the nation's ongoing and increasingly costly fight to contain communism in Southeast Asia. Given these stakes, the threat or use of force quickly became a principal policy option in both cases. As he had with Vietnam, Johnson adopted the practice of rarely acting on a major foreign policy decision without fully canvassing his closest advisers, especially his secretaries of defense.²

The secretary's role in foreign policy was further bolstered by McNamara's managerial innovations within the Defense Department. By late 1963 he had initiated a number of far-reaching changes to DoD's internal policy operations that, as the decade progressed, institutionalized his direction, authority, and control over day-to-day activities. Among the most important were the creation of a new resource allocation process (the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System, or PPBS) to more clearly relate defense budgeting decisions to national objectives and strategy; the creation of the civilian-led Office of Systems Analysis, which specialized in producing independent quantitative assessments of program costs across the department; and the reinvigoration of the Office of International Security Affairs (ISA), which provided the secretary with an efficient, responsive source of politico-military analysis on the full range of overseas challenges confronting the United States. Together, these mechanisms strengthened the connections between foreign and defense policy. The emergence

of ISA, in particular, enhanced the defense secretary's credibility relative to the president's other foreign affairs advisers and increased the department's stature and influence on foreign policy matters within the administration.³

Johnson's Style of Decision Making

Addressing a joint session of Congress five days after President Kennedy's assassination, Johnson solemnly promised a grieving nation that "the ideas and ideals which he [Kennedy] so nobly represented must and will be translated into effective action." It signaled the beginning of Johnson's drive to make the fallen president's priorities his own, to continue Kennedy's push for major reforms such as federal civil rights legislation in the domestic realm, and, in world affairs, to continue to demonstrate what he called his predecessor's "courage to seek peace" and "fortitude to risk war." Yet differences in presidential style and temperament between Kennedy, the Boston patrician, and Johnson, the brash Texas legislator, were obvious from the start. The product of a rough-and-tumble variety of politics, Johnson had built his career around developing a power base in Congress, rising to national prominence there as Senate majority leader in the late 1950s. Accordingly, his skills were those of a parliamentarian and dealmaker whose preferred milieu was the Senate cloakroom, where he focused on domestic policy, forged countless legislative compromises, and bartered votes for immediate favors or later considerations. Johnson had acquired firsthand exposure to national security affairs while serving as vice president from 1961 to 1963, but the experience had not kindled any deep interest in foreign or military matters by the time he assumed the presidency. Indeed, he was considerably more at ease—and generally more effective—handling domestic matters. As a result, Johnson gave his secretaries of defense broad latitude to direct the nation's defense policy.⁴

Johnson was conversant with the accepted Cold War concepts of containment, bipolarity, and limited war, but lacked the same

instinct for foreign policy that made him so effective in domestic affairs. Instead of involvements abroad, Johnson wanted to be remembered as the architect of the most ambitious agenda of domestic reforms since Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s. In fact, he saw his program, which he dubbed the "Great Society," as the New Deal's heir—something that would complete the work that Roosevelt had begun three decades earlier. Johnson recognized, however, that the overarching contest with the Soviet Union could not be ignored or neglected and that even though he preferred to work on domestic issues, his administration would need steady hands tending to foreign affairs. This realization formed the basis of his dependence on advisers inherited from Kennedy, nearly all of whom he implored to stay on during the dark opening days of his presidency.⁵

Secretary McNamara was at or near the height of his power and reputation when Johnson took office, and had won plaudits from the Kennedy White House both for mastering the unwieldy Pentagon bureaucracy and for bringing a new level of efficiency and effectiveness to the defense establishment. Johnson had observed firsthand as vice president the extraordinarily close association McNamara had developed with Kennedy. He understood that, because the two men had not met until after the 1960 election, McNamara's rise was attributable mainly to his intellect, managerial prowess, and capacity to produce results, and not because of deeply rooted political connections. McNamara enjoyed an aura of strength and confidence unmatched in the cabinet Johnson inherited, and the new president drew comfort and confidence from his defense secretary's reassuring presence. Johnson later noted that McNamara was a "source of great strength" during the administration's first days. Possessed of an exceptionally quick and retentive mind, the former Ford Motor Company chief executive officer quickly solidified his place in Johnson's inner circle. Some longtime associates close to the president felt that his faith in McNamara, so quickly established, was misplaced. Johnson's mentor, Senator Richard B. Russell (D-GA), thought McNamara

was overly emotional in matters of foreign policy and took a dim view of what he considered the secretary of defense's "hypnotic influence" over the president. Such views carried little weight with Johnson, however. As U.S. involvement in Vietnam intensified from 1964 to 1966, the president relied increasingly on McNamara both for policy advice and implementation of his decisions on military matters.⁶

Johnson operated on somewhat different terms with McNamara's successor, longtime Democratic political operative and close friend Clark Clifford, whose connections to the White House dated to his service during Harry S. Truman's administration. Although McNamara had grown close to the president during his seven-year tenure as secretary, he always related to Johnson as an aide or adviser relates to a superior. Clifford, on the other hand, acted as an old and trusted confidant. His involvement in foreign and defense affairs had generally been behind the scenes in the Truman administration, as one might expect given his role as the White House Counsel who oversaw the drafting of the 1947 National Security Act. Clifford preferred this to any official role and in subsequent years continued to make routine detours from his successful legal practice to offer outside advice whenever Kennedy or Johnson needed someone to take on a sensitive, discrete mission—be it as a watchdog over the intelligence community (as a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board), or as a roving troubleshooter on matters ranging from Vietnam to the *Liberty* incident. When viewed in context, Clifford's agreement to step onto center stage and serve as secretary of defense appears out of character with his established way of doing business.⁷

While rooted in their competence and strong personal relationships with the president, the intimate involvement of Johnson's secretaries of defense in foreign affairs can also be attributed to his strong preference for civilian over military authorities and to a dearth of strong, effective foreign affairs advisers elsewhere in the administration. Like Kennedy, who blamed military leadership for

his administration's early stumbles on the world stage, Johnson harbored a healthy suspicion of the professional military. As the challenges facing the United States in Vietnam mounted during the election year of 1964, Johnson looked less and less to his military advisers when assessing his options. The marginalizing of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) from policymaking during this pivotal period was the White House's way of minimizing dissent within the administration and, by extension, limiting the exposure of its emerging Vietnam policy to public scrutiny ahead of the election. Johnson continued to hold the Joint Chiefs at a distance after winning his own term. Indeed, between March 1965 and June 1967 he met with them on only ten occasions, and then not so much to seek advice on pressing problems as to ratify decisions he had made in consultation with civilian authorities such as Secretary McNamara and key staff from within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). The exclusion of the JCS from Vietnam deliberations, especially during the critical year of 1965, further boosted the defense secretary's already strong standing within Johnson's foreign affairs team, but had the unfortunate effect of alienating and marginalizing his military leadership.⁸

The one cabinet officer who might have challenged the defense secretary's continued rise in foreign affairs during the Johnson administration was Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Despite early expectations to the contrary, however, his influence on overseas matters had fallen behind that of Secretary McNamara during the Kennedy administration. Johnson had a genuine depth of respect for Rusk's views on foreign affairs. His desire for continuity with Kennedy's personnel and policy initiatives saved the secretary of state's position early on, and as time wore on, Rusk's unswerving loyalty in the face of mounting criticism on Vietnam led Johnson to retain him as a member of his foreign affairs team.⁹

The fact that Rusk enjoyed a better rapport with Johnson than he had with Kennedy, however, did not automatically translate into a more prominent role in the Johnson administration's foreign

policy team. The State Department was plagued by internal fissures over Vietnam that Rusk proved unable to resolve as U.S. involvement deepened and intensified. Over time, those problems manifested themselves as costly inefficiencies that hampered the State Department's participation in the foreign policy process. State Department offices often proved incapable of providing the White House with the kind of prompt advisory support the president needed. When this happened, McNamara's efficient staff—principally his favored offices, Systems Analysis and International Security Affairs—stepped into the void, further enhancing the defense secretary's reputation as one who could quickly and efficiently deliver high-quality results on pressing foreign policy matters when the State Department could not.¹⁰

Also aiding the secretary of defense's rise was the fact that, after holding together in the immediate aftermath of Kennedy's assassination, key members of Johnson's foreign policy team began departing after the president won his own term in 1964. Many would have left anyway, but after the election Johnson hastened the process by stepping up the recruitment of his own senior advisers. In March 1966, McGeorge Bundy, national security adviser since 1961, left to become president of the Ford Foundation. Bundy's departure came as a blow to McNamara, who could no longer count on having as trustworthy a personal friend coordinating policy in the White House. To replace Bundy, Johnson settled on Walt W. Rostow, an academic economist who had served both as Bundy's deputy on the NSC and as head of the State Department's Policy Planning Council.¹¹

Little in Rostow's background foreshadowed the forceful role he would play in support of Johnson's Vietnam policy as national security adviser. At the State Department, he had spent considerable time working on the ill-fated multilateral nuclear force for Western Europe that Johnson abandoned in late 1964. He had been involved only on the fringes of Johnson's decision to escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam in 1965. Despite this, one White House

insider remembered Rostow as “a fervid, almost an exuberant hawk” on Vietnam at the helm of the NSC staff. McNamara provided a similar assessment, writing later that Rostow was “optimistic by nature,” that he viewed U.S. political and military objectives in Vietnam “uncritically,” and that, over time, he “tended to be skeptical of any report that failed to indicate we were making progress” in Southeast Asia. Rostow’s strong commitment to Johnson’s Vietnam policy contrasted with McNamara’s growing doubts throughout late 1966 and 1967. When Johnson made the decision to replace McNamara with Clifford in early 1968, he was seeking a defense secretary whose views on Vietnam were more in tune with Rostow’s.¹²

Although it was not immediately apparent, Rostow’s promotion also heralded a further stage in the devolution of the NSC apparatus. Although the council had lost considerable prestige and influence under Kennedy, who preferred informal, issue-oriented advisory groups to official NSC channels, it had remained an important mechanism for processing policy directives, planning covert operations, and managing crises. Johnson shared Kennedy’s preference for a more personal style of national security policymaking but also harbored an instinctive dislike for the NSC system. He considered its meetings, which had grown under Kennedy to include a sizable number of nonmember advisers, too large and potentially porous to allow forthright discussion. Moreover, he believed that large, crowded meetings were not conducive to presidential decision making. Finding even less use for the NSC than Kennedy had, Johnson gave Rostow virtually a free hand to redesign its procedures and wound up effectively relegating it to the status of a part-time consultative committee with limited responsibilities. Not only did the president hold fewer NSC meetings than his predecessors, he also cut back on the number of written policy directives it vetted from an annual average of 90 under Kennedy to 19 under Johnson.¹³

With the NSC a less integral player in the policymaking process, Johnson managed policy by other means. His favorite was to hold small, fairly regular White House meetings with his senior advisers—gatherings that became known as the Tuesday Lunch, even though they were not always held on Tuesdays or even at lunchtime. Beginning in August 1964, these meetings quickly became the true focal point of high-level policy deliberations for the remainder of Johnson’s presidency. They tended to be informal and leisurely gatherings, but did adhere to preset agendas in order to keep discussion from wandering. In preparation for these sessions, McNamara often lunched the day before with his deputy secretary and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and then phoned the White House with a list of subjects he wanted placed on the agenda. Items selected for discussion were invariably matters requiring prompt attention. Vietnam typically dominated, but topics ranged widely over other issues such as the 1964 Cyprus crisis, NATO, East-West trade, relations with Latin America, the use and stockpiling of nuclear weapons, and even ambassadorial appointments. In the early days, Bundy would compile and circulate summaries of the discussions. But fearful of leaks, Johnson soon ordered that all records related to the lunches remain in the White House. It then fell to the various participants to communicate the sessions’ results to the senior members of their staffs.¹⁴

The Tuesday Lunch reflected Johnson’s personal style of decision making. Its organization and function closely resembled that of an inner cabinet of top officials, handpicked by the chief executive, meeting in seclusion to hash out their most difficult issues in uninhibited discussion. British governments had operated in this fashion for years, but for an American administration it was a novel development. The lack of structure often made it hard for even the participants to understand what the meetings were supposed to accomplish. Rostow, for one, described the Tuesday Lunch as a “stock-taking session,” partly to air opinions, but more importantly, to come up with decisions. McNamara had a somewhat different

assessment. He saw the meetings not as policymaking gatherings, but as opportunities to “isolate problems” for the president’s attention. “I thought them extremely useful opportunities for the President to exchange views informally with his key national security advisors,” McNamara later recalled, “And for the President . . . to probe intensively the views of each of the participants” without deputies and lower-level policy types in the room.¹⁵

Despite the obvious advantages of having a small forum for high-level discussion, the Tuesday Lunch turned out to be an overly personalized, often inefficient means for conducting business and making policy. For those left out of the inner circle, its exclusivity, coupled with the diminished importance of the NSC to policymaking under Johnson, severely complicated interagency coordination and made influencing the direction of policy virtually impossible. Initiatives to strengthen formal policy development channels within the administration, such as the creation of the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) under the NSC to give “full, prompt, and systematic consideration” to foreign policy problems across interagency lines, failed due to lack of top-level support. Operating a tier below the NSC, the SIG was a deliberative body of under secretaries whose first chairman, Under Secretary of State George Ball, likened it to government-by-committee and gave it only grudging support. SIG meetings were irregular at first, the schedule and agenda inhibited by Ball’s ambivalence as well as by members’ uncertainty about how to approach their tasks. As a result, the organization never delivered the kind of results that General Maxwell Taylor, who proposed it, envisioned. The president preferred to deal with his most valued national security aides on a more personal basis and had little use for the NSC, let alone for any underlying support structure. Although Johnson did allow the SIG some degree of latitude in dealing with lesser problems, he denied it any large policy-shaping role on the most pressing challenges confronting the nation, such as Vietnam. The president’s action limiting the SIG’s reach was consistent with his personal style of decision making and

reflected the broader reality that national security policymaking in the Johnson administration was organized around personal contacts and ad hoc arrangements.¹⁶

Crises Confronting the Johnson Administration

The secretary of defense’s deepening involvement in foreign affairs arose also from the nature of the overseas crises that confronted President Johnson between 1963 and 1969. Force was an essential component of U.S. foreign policy well before Johnson assumed the presidency due to the distinctly military character of the Cold War’s superpower competition for strategic influence. By the midpoint of his tenure, however, as the U.S. troop commitment in South Vietnam ballooned to more than a half million, military power defined the tenor and direction of U.S. foreign policy to an even greater extent than it had before. As the administration escalated the war in Vietnam, it began to evaluate other foreign crises—some of which, even absent a war in Southeast Asia, might have merited military action—in light of how intervention might affect both the conduct of the war and the increasingly delicate political balance the president had to strike in the face of a budding antiwar protest movement. In some cases, such as instability in the Dominican Republic in the spring of 1965 and the January 1968 seizure of the intelligence ship USS *Pueblo* by North Korea, the depth and intensity of U.S. involvement in Vietnam exacerbated top officials’ already ingrained tendency to see individual provocations elsewhere in the world as parts of a broader communist conspiracy. These realities made military power an indispensable component of Johnson’s diplomacy and further enhanced the secretary of defense’s foreign policy role as the administration confronted crises near and far.

Intervention in the Dominican Republic

Overshadowed by the concurrent buildup of U.S. forces in Vietnam, the military intervention in the Dominican Republic

during the spring of 1965 underscored the secretary of defense's pivotal role in foreign affairs during Johnson's presidency. The immediate cause of U.S. involvement was the president's determination to prevent what he and his advisers believed was a communist-supported opposition movement from overthrowing a fledgling noncommunist government. By 1965 Johnson believed that he had, in his own words, "just about lived down the [1961] Bay of Pigs" fiasco. Emboldened, he resolved to do everything within his power to prevent communism from gaining another foothold in the Caribbean. At a deeper level, though, Johnson's decision to intervene in the Dominican Republic also reflected the prominent role that military power had played for decades in U.S.-Dominican relations.

Throughout the 30-year dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo y Molina, which ended in 1961, military ties had served as the diplomatic channel of first resort between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Trujillo had risen to power on the strength of contacts he had developed with American military officers, especially Marines, during the 1916–1924 U.S. occupation of the island nation. He owed much of the generous support he received from Washington throughout his decades in power to the fact that misgivings about his growing repressiveness, concentrated in the U.S. State Department, were often drowned out by American military voices that stressed his value as a regional ally. This enabled Trujillo to destroy systematically the seeds from which democracy might have sprouted after his fall. It is not surprising, then, that the United States looked first to military power when confronting the damaging effects of the post-Trujillo power vacuum that engulfed the Dominican Republic by 1965. Not only did military power seem like an appropriate tool for confronting communism in the hemisphere at that moment, by 1965, it had been the primary currency of U.S.-Dominican relations for more than four decades.¹⁷

One factor that might have acted as a check on the use of force in the Dominican Republic was Johnson's dramatic escalation that same year of the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. However, the

president and his close advisers, McNamara chief among them, saw the two situations in different parts of the world as manifestations of the same communist problem. "How," Johnson asked his aides rhetorically, "can we send troops 10,000 miles away [to Vietnam] and let commies take over right under our noses" in the Caribbean? Far from seeing the Dominican challenge as a distraction from Vietnam, Johnson and McNamara saw it as a necessary and even vital endeavor in the nation's Cold War struggle against communism. Accordingly, the president devoted so much time and personal attention to Dominican affairs in the earliest days of the crisis (late April 1965) that Secretary Rusk jokingly referred to him as "the desk officer for the Dominican Republic." As was his preference, Johnson managed the crisis not through formal structures and procedures, but by convening an ad hoc working group. Rusk and the State Department had lead responsibility, but from the beginning all involved agreed that military power—whether engaged in hostilities or merely in a show of force—would be the United States' primary diplomatic instrument for achieving a favorable resolution. Given Johnson's well-documented reluctance to engage with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this gave Secretary McNamara the central role in one of the most urgent foreign policy crises to face the early Johnson administration.

McNamara quickly dove into the problem of identifying forces he could commit to a U.S. response. Almost immediately, on 25 April 1965 the administration dispatched a naval squadron with orders to evacuate U.S. citizens whose lives or property were threatened by the spiraling violence. Shortly thereafter, Johnson approved the landing of a small Marine contingent to protect Americans and escort them to the safety of the ships waiting offshore. As the first marines landed, an influx of intelligence reports and dispatches from the U.S. embassy in Santo Domingo (some, as scholars have since noted, of dubious quality) confirmed the president's suspicion that communist elements had infiltrated the antigovernment rebels. At the White House, Johnson's working group worried that the initial Marine landing was insufficient and that the deteriorating

tactical situation required a more vigorous response. The president approved the landing of an additional 500 marines on 29 April, and later that same day, acting at McNamara's behest, the Joint Chiefs directed remaining elements of the 6th Marine Expeditionary Unit and two battalions of paratroopers from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division to deploy.¹⁸

From beginning to end, McNamara demonstrated an awareness of the intervention's diplomatic and political sensitivities befitting his role as the president's key foreign affairs adviser. His determination to prevent the Dominican Republic from, in Johnson's words, "going communist," led him to recommend applying "overwhelming force" to the brief operation—more than 22,000 troops at the peak. At the same time, the secretary was attuned to the concerns of Latin American nations, many of which were predisposed to seeing Washington's response less as a justifiable response to the communist threat than as a return to the gunboat diplomacy that defined inter-American relations in the early decades of the twentieth century. As the second week of the crisis dawned, McNamara advised President Johnson that additional deployments to the Dominican Republic should be accompanied by a call on Latin American nations, through the Organization of American States (OAS), to join the U.S. effort to restore stability and bring sustainable governance to the Dominican Republic. Although in his view a substantial commitment of U.S. forces had been necessary to avert a collapse to communism, McNamara recognized that U.S. and global public opinion would not support an open-ended commitment in the Caribbean as American involvement in Vietnam deepened. The sooner a sustainable cease-fire could be reached, and the sooner the United States could transition a major share of the responsibility for monitoring that cease-fire to a coalition of partner nations, he reasoned, the better.¹⁹

The announcement of a negotiated cease-fire on 30 April and the establishment of an Inter-American Peace Force (or IAPF, headed by a Brazilian officer and consisting of forces from Brazil, Costa

Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Paraguay) in late May enabled the Johnson administration to slow its buildup of forces and begin planning for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. In June, as the pace of U.S. withdrawals accelerated, Johnson turned to McNamara—clearly his most trusted hand on overseas matters—to provide a retrospective that the administration could use to explain and defend its intervention before the American public and the world. The secretary's assessment stressed that the initial U.S. deployments had been intended to protect American citizens and property in the Dominican Republic, and that the administration had approved subsequent infusions of forces both to establish internationally recognized security zones between the warring factions and to secure vital lines of communications through unstable areas. The limited number of American forces that would remain as part of the IAPF, McNamara concluded, would be there to stem the tide should the fighting between loyalists and rebels resume and destroy the cease-fire agreement. The reasons the secretary highlighted to explain Washington's intervention, especially the need to protect American citizens and property, were certainly valid. However, they were also incomplete. His assessment avoided the most important cause that drove Johnson's decision to act: the administration's underlying fear of "another Cuba" emerging in the hemisphere. In avoiding this central issue, McNamara was attempting to shield the Johnson administration from the criticisms of Latin Americans who remained skeptical of U.S. motivations for intervening. Rather than dwelling on the Cold War imperative, he crafted a narrow, defensible case intended to ruffle as few feathers as possible while permitting the administration to refocus its energy from the Dominican operation to the more urgent problem that confronted the United States in Vietnam. In doing so, McNamara demonstrated a keen sensitivity to the political dimensions of national defense and foreign affairs and further enhanced his credibility on overseas matters with President Johnson.²⁰

The Pueblo Crisis

The secretary of defense also factored prominently in Washington's response to North Korea's 23 January 1968 seizure of an American electronic intelligence collection ship, the *Pueblo*, which had been operating in international waters off the Korean Peninsula. From the beginning, President Johnson and Secretary McNamara viewed North Korea's action as part of a broader communist plot approved, if not orchestrated, by Moscow to divert U.S. military resources and attention from the fight in Vietnam, pressure South Korea to withdraw its support for the American war effort there, and generally hasten U.S. strategic exhaustion. The defense secretary believed that a response that could be construed as weak internationally would therefore give communist aggression a window of opportunity to "prolong the Vietnam war substantially." However, neither McNamara nor Johnson believed that a strong response necessarily required military action. Instead, both recognized that a show of military power in the region would lend weight to U.S. efforts to forge a diplomatic solution. Accordingly, on 24 January, the day after the seizure, McNamara recommended a general deployment of air and sea forces to the area of the Korean Peninsula, along with a presidential call-up of military Reserves and a mandatory extension of enlistments. These recommendations went further than Clifford, the defense secretary-designate who would take over for McNamara a month later, thought prudent. He was uncertain that the *Pueblo* had remained entirely outside North Korea's territorial waters throughout its mission and was convinced that, even if it had, significant American deployments in the region to redress the injustice of the seizure had the potential to provoke a conflict the United States could ill afford to wage.²¹

Although his drift away from Johnson's Vietnam policy had diminished McNamara's standing in the White House by early 1968, in this situation the defense secretary's counsel held sway with the president. By the end of that first day, McNamara had convinced Johnson to approve the deployment of approximately

250 Air Force and Marine fighter jets and bombers to the Korean theater along with the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise*. In addition, the United States would resume intelligence collection of the sort the *Pueblo* had been conducting before its seizure and would make a private diplomatic overture to Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin to request assistance in securing the release of the ship and its crew from North Korean captivity. Sensing that military power was perhaps his greatest source of diplomatic leverage, Johnson went one step further than McNamara on force levels, ordering the aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk* to Korea from Southeast Asian waters and urging the secretary to immediately dispatch 300 additional aircraft to the peninsula. Throughout the deliberations surrounding these deployments, Johnson, McNamara, and the Joint Chiefs stayed focused on the diplomatic objective, the return of the *Pueblo's* crew, and sought to minimize the risk of armed conflict.²²

In practice, however, this was a difficult thing to accomplish. Years of deep resentment and mistrust (and the absence of formal diplomatic relations) between the United States and North Korea had left displays of military power as the only real instrument of diplomacy between the two nations. However, attempts to strengthen the U.S. hand by dispatching more forces to the region could increase the risk of armed conflict. It was this eventuality that Clifford, who continued to urge caution, injected into the debate. Keenly aware that his administration was walking a diplomatic high-wire, Johnson ordered that aircraft deployments be carried out at a reduced pace to avoid the appearance of provocation. At the same time, he launched diplomatic initiatives aimed at signaling the United States' intent to find a peaceful resolution. On 25 January 1968, he directed U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg to request an urgent meeting of the U.N. Security Council. When two days of deliberations yielded little in the way of demonstrable progress, the president took the extraordinary step of approving direct negotiations with Pyongyang through the Military Armistice Commission at the border enclave of Panmunjom.²³

Secretary of Defense Clifford and his staff remained at the center of the contentious, months-long negotiations that followed. The fundamental issue was North Korea's demand for, and the United States' steadfast refusal to give, an apology for violating North Korea's territorial waters. Clifford joined Rostow and Rusk in rejecting that demand. However, as time wore on, the seed of a compromise emerged from the Pentagon's resurgent Office of International Security Affairs. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA, Paul C. Warnke, proposed giving Pyongyang the apology that it desired in order to secure the *Pueblo* crew's release—on the assumption that, once the crew was free, American authorities could confirm that the ship had never left international waters and then retract the apology. The fact that this basic approach prevailed underscores the enduring importance of the secretary of defense to U.S. foreign policy during the Johnson administration. For his part, during his last month on the job McNamara worked seamlessly within the ad hoc advisory group President Johnson convened to manage the U.S. response. He orchestrated the essentially diplomatic buildup of U.S. military forces in the Korean area and performed effectively despite the fact that, by the waning days of his Pentagon tenure, his relationship with the president had eroded over Vietnam. As did the Dominican intervention three years earlier, McNamara's efforts, and the central roles both he and Clifford played in resolving the *Pueblo* crisis, underscore the degree to which Johnson relied on his secretaries of defense when confronting crises overseas.²⁴

McNamara's Managerial Innovations

Bolstered by personal connections to the president and prominent roles in international crises, the secretary of defense's growing role in foreign policy during the Johnson administration was reinforced by McNamara's managerial innovations within the Pentagon. During the Kennedy years McNamara established mechanisms such as the PPBS and the Office of Systems Analysis, which institutionalized his direction, authority, and control over DoD's day-to-day activities and enhanced his reputation relative to his cabinet peers. It was his

concurrent effort to strengthen ISA, however, that most directly supported the secretary of defense's growing influence in overseas matters. McNamara's well-established status as first among equals on Johnson's foreign policy team ensured that ISA would remain at the center as the Johnson administration confronted early foreign policy challenges—none more pressing than the question of how to contain communism in Southeast Asia. Leading ISA through this consequential period was John McNaughton, a lawyer and McNamara confidant who had served as deputy assistant secretary for arms control and as DoD general counsel before taking over ISA from William P. Bundy in early 1964. His close personal relationship with McNamara solidified ISA's position, as the secretary later recalled, as “one of the two or three most significant posts in the whole department” during the Kennedy-Johnson years. This proximity and the depth of the analytical talent he supervised would make McNaughton and ISA the secretary's most influential sources of advice on the difficult problem the United States confronted in Vietnam.²⁵

An able debater, McNaughton publicly defended the administration's position on Vietnam at each and every turn. This public stance helped give rise to the notion that he was McNamara's “right-hand man” for what was increasingly being called “McNamara's war.” Indeed, when the *New York Times* released the *Pentagon Papers* in 1971, it made McNaughton appear manipulative and a leading advocate of going to war in Southeast Asia. When McNaughton's long-secret private journal surfaced in the mid-2000s, however, it validated the contrary observation that journalist David Halberstam had made in his 1972 best seller, *The Best and the Brightest*, that McNaughton harbored “profound doubts” from the outset of the war. Indeed, no one individual was more influential than McNaughton in slowly turning McNamara against the very escalatory Vietnam policy he had done so much to design and implement.²⁶

The United States had already begun to intensify its involvement in Vietnam by the time McNaughton took the reins of ISA in the

summer of 1964. The war was quickly becoming “Americanized,” even though the first large infusions of U.S. combat troops would not arrive for another year. McNaughton believed the United States should not become more deeply involved because the South Vietnamese government lacked popular support among its own people. Moreover, he maintained, with each passing day, as the United States got more deeply involved in the war, it would become harder and harder to pull out. Eventually, he feared, the commitment would become its own justification. “Each day we lose a little control,” McNaughton told presidential aide Michael Forrestal that spring, because “each decision that we make wrong, or don’t make at all, makes the next decision a little bit harder because if we haven’t stopped it today, then the reasons for not stopping it will still exist tomorrow, and we’ll be in even deeper.”²⁷

At a time when U.S. policymakers were justifying involvement on the basis of the “domino theory,” McNaughton was an outspoken critic of such geopolitical reductionism. The struggle over Vietnam was only a small portion of a long tug-of-war over Asia, he believed, and it had to be recognized that in some locales the odds were against the United States, whereas elsewhere they were more favorable. “We do not believe that the loss of South Vietnam and Laos would be followed by the rapid, successive communization of the other states of the Far East,” McNaughton wrote in an internal memorandum in June 1964. His view remained largely unaltered by the Gulf of Tonkin incident later that summer even though, because of his position, he had to aid in the selection of bombing targets for the retaliatory air strikes that followed. This stands as an early example of what Townsend Hoopes, McNaughton’s principal deputy in ISA, later called “a detectable distinction between his public and private positions” on Vietnam. McNaughton would express his views on the folly of intensifying U.S. military action in Vietnam privately with McNamara, but, personally devoted to the secretary and convinced that he could do more long-term good from inside the national security establishment than he could by leaving, he remained “punctilious in his public support of the administration” and its approach in Southeast Asia.²⁸

McNaughton intensified his internal lobbying against increased U.S. involvement in Vietnam following Johnson’s landslide victory in the 1964 presidential election, taking care at every turn to avoid contradicting the still-optimistic McNamara at any meetings they attended together. As early as December, he urged that the United States should seek a negotiated settlement, even on unfavorable terms, because the Saigon government “had almost no legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.” Moreover, he argued, further Americanizing the war would make the operational situation worse and, contrary to arguments advanced by hawks about the need to intensify the war in order to preserve U.S. credibility, would hurt rather than help the global reputation of the United States. McNaughton’s voice was not the only one McNamara heard being raised against the war. Formal estimates from the intelligence community supported McNaughton’s views about the unpopularity of Saigon’s ruling class. However, his was the “most consistent and persistent” voice lobbying the secretary against escalation, and as one recent assessment has concluded, no other administration insider put the situation in starker terms that could not be easily rationalized away.²⁹

Quick to deduce President Johnson’s inclinations and preferences and keen on preserving his favored place within the White House inner circle, McNamara remained committed to a policy of military escalation throughout 1965 and into 1966. He and Johnson’s other key foreign affairs advisers believed that the application of carefully calibrated, graduated pressure, which had supposedly worked so well during the Cuban missile crisis, would persuade North Vietnam to forego its ambition to unify the country. McNaughton was openly critical of this thinking, believing that few strong parallels could be drawn between the two situations. As high as the stakes were in Cuba in 1962, Soviet vital interests had not been involved, and all the military equities had been overwhelmingly in the United States’ favor. In Vietnam, he argued, it was not evident that vital U.S. interests were at stake, while U.S. superiority in the military balance on the ground was “by no means clear.”³⁰

Although McNamara generally continued to advocate intensifying the U.S. war effort, he did respond positively when McNaughton proposed opening the door to negotiations for a political settlement by declaring a unilateral cease-fire during the 37-day bombing halt in late 1965 and early 1966. The secretary had recently returned from a fact-finding mission to Vietnam and had been shocked by the extent of the casualties the U.S. Army's 7th Cavalry Regiment had suffered in battle with North Vietnamese main-force units in the remote Ia Drang Valley the previous November. McNamara's support for a cease-fire was short-lived, however, as he quickly abandoned the idea when faced with staunch opposition from Bundy, the national security adviser. Although the defense secretary put the odds of a military victory in Vietnam at no better than one-in-three now, he was still telling the president what he wanted to hear, that the war could be won on the battlefield.³¹

McNaughton's faith in metrics and the analytical rigor that defined ISA's work under his leadership endeared him to McNamara, whose own passion for statistical analysis and desire to chart the war's progress quantitatively were well known. As time wore on, the ISA chief grew increasingly certain that the facts and figures pouring into Washington from the field did not tell the whole story and did not serve as an accurate barometer of U.S. progress in Vietnam. The fundamental issue, in his view, was that the North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front (NLF, also known as Viet Cong) forces fighting against the United States were more interested in ridding their country of foreign occupiers than they were in championing the spread of communism. The tenacity with which the North Vietnamese Army and NLF fought, McNaughton believed, sprang from a deep well of nationalism that no politically acceptable quantity of American blood and treasure could overcome. His consistently pessimistic reports throughout 1966 and early 1967 corroborated the bleak returns that the defense secretary was receiving from his commanders in the field. Over time, McNaughton's persistence—and, after his tragic death in an airplane crash in July 1967, that of successor Paul Warnke—eroded

McNamara's belief that the United States could achieve its aims in Vietnam at an acceptable cost.³²

McNamara to Clifford

McNamara's conversion on Vietnam led Johnson to replace him in early 1968 with longtime political associate and friend Clark Clifford, whom the president believed would offer stronger support to the administration's policy. However, McNamara's departure developed slowly because the secretary remained unwilling to express his growing doubts about U.S. prospects for winning the war to President Johnson for fear that doing so would alter their close relationship. As McNaughton's diary notes, the issue actually began to come to a head in 1966. That year began with McNamara offering a stout defense of U.S. policy in Vietnam in nationally televised hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Privately, however, McNamara had begun to express skepticism not only about the efficacy of U.S. bombing efforts, but about the entire American war effort. Yet the secretary, still unwilling to acknowledge that the policy he had done so much to forge was not working, remained upbeat about U.S. prospects in meetings with President Johnson. McNamara kept his doubts private through the spring of 1966, even as an internal rebellion threatened the viability of yet another South Vietnamese government. Echoing his earlier assessments, McNaughton again made the case for disengagement, arguing that this latest bout of internal instability and the unwillingness of successive South Vietnamese regimes to undertake genuine reforms gave Washington ample grounds for pulling back. A winning military effort could not be built on a foundation of political quicksand, he maintained. Increasing force deployments in order to gain bargaining leverage was folly, he concluded, if Washington was not truly willing to compromise.

The first cracks in McNamara's relationship with the president appeared in November 1966, when the president overruled the secretary's advice on bombing targets within North Vietnam

in favor of targets recommended by the Joint Chiefs. Although the president quickly reversed course, Johnson's decision served as a first indication that the secretary of defense's once-unrivaled influence and power was on the wane. Indeed, the next month, targets in Hanoi and Haiphong Harbor that had previously been off limits were bombed. Deep divisions over war-fighting strategy that had been bubbling just beneath the administration's surface finally burst into the open in the summer of 1967, during hearings conducted by the Senate Armed Services Committee's Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. While McNamara gamely defended the doctrine of limited war before the public, as he had before (the bombing targets advocated by the Joint Chiefs could easily lead to Chinese intervention, he asserted), the secretary of defense lacked the self-assured, some would say arrogant, demeanor that had characterized his appearances before Congress many times before. McNamara's performance prompted rumors that the close relationship between the president and his defense secretary, an article of faith in Washington dating back to the beginning of the Kennedy administration, had begun to fray.³³

Adding fuel to the fire was the fact that, shortly before the hearings convened, McNamara had advanced one of his most clear-cut disengagement initiatives of the war: a draft presidential memorandum he sent to Johnson on 19 May 1967, declaring the war unwinnable in a traditional sense and urging a progressive de-escalation of all military operations and a more vigorous search, with the offer of concessions, for a negotiated settlement. In later years McNamara attributed the elusiveness of such a settlement to several causes, not the least of which was flawed coordination between Washington and U.S. commanders in Saigon. But it was also true that McNamara was not forthright with the president early enough when he sensed that the limited strategy he had championed was failing. As historian Edward Drea concludes, McNamara, to his discredit, "officially went along with the administration's expansion of the conflict," providing ground reinforcements and support for the air war long after he had become convinced of the futility of U.S. strategy.³⁴

President Johnson's hopes that Clifford would faithfully toe the administration's line on Vietnam were dashed shortly after his 1 March 1968 swearing-in as secretary of defense. Clifford concluded just days into his tenure that U.S. policy on Vietnam required dramatic change. Central to the new secretary's rapid conversion were the efforts of McNaughton's successor as assistant secretary for ISA, Paul Warnke, a self-described opponent of the war whom McNamara had brought into his inner sanctum amid his own growing disillusionment. The setback of the Tet Offensive in late January had exposed the naiveté of previously upbeat military assessments of the war's progress and gave the pessimistic views that had long been emanating from ISA fresh credibility. A personal friend of Clifford's (and later his law partner), Warnke supplied much of the substantive analysis that the secretary used in his private meetings with President Johnson to rebut JCS proposals for wider military action and to persuade the president to open unconditional negotiations. Johnson, irked at being second-guessed, began to look on Warnke and his ISA staff, in Clifford's words, as "an infectious virus" that had poisoned the thinking of two of his top advisers—first McNamara, and then Clifford. Yet for Johnson, it was easier to concentrate his wrath on Warnke, someone he barely knew, rather than on his friend, Clifford. In any case, by taking some of the heat of Johnson's anger, Warnke may have helped to preserve Clifford's relationship with the president—thereby improving the chances, in the long run, that ISA's recommendations for turning the war around would be adopted.³⁵

In terms of Vietnam policy, Clifford's brief stewardship was almost indistinguishable from what might have occurred had McNaughton lived and ascended to the top job. Back in the pivotal year of 1965 Clifford had written the president an eloquent dissent from what ultimately became U.S. policy, warning Johnson against introducing ground troops into Vietnam. Along with George Ball, Clifford had been among the very first people to warn Johnson that Vietnam "could be quagmire" and could turn into "an open end[ed] commitment on our part that would take more and more

ground troops, without a realistic hope of victory.” Subsequently, however, in his role as Democratic Party elder, Clifford had developed a more hawkish reputation vis-à-vis the war with his perspective almost indistinguishable over time from the president’s. In general, through the years of intensifying U.S. involvement, Clifford had been an advocate of keeping up the pressure on the North via bombing, avoiding rash actions that could widen the war to include China, and seeking peace talks on favorable terms. Paul Nitze, who served as deputy secretary of defense from mid-1967 through the end of the Johnson administration, wrote that Clifford had become a “fire-breathing hawk” on Vietnam by the time he took the Pentagon’s reins from McNamara in late February 1968—an overstatement, for sure, but one grounded in truth. It was on this basis of Clifford’s expressed views on Vietnam, after all, that Johnson implored him to become defense secretary.³⁶

The development that drove Clifford’s retreat from hawkishness as secretary more than any other was a request from General William Westmoreland, commander of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), for 205,179 additional troops in the wake of the Tet Offensive. Clifford’s first order of business as secretary was to provide the president with a full review of U.S. policy in Vietnam, and in particular, to evaluate the validity of Westmoreland’s request. When the new secretary of defense queried the Joint Chiefs about what the United States could expect to achieve from such a large infusion of manpower, he discovered that his military leaders had little idea what difference additional troops would have on the outcome of the war. They saw no evidence that the enemy’s will was weakening, or that the flow of men and materiel from the North could be stopped, and they believed that winning, in a traditional sense, would be impossible given the limitations that the Johnson administration had imposed on fighting the war. Beyond that, Clifford concluded, a request for such a massive amount of manpower conflicted with the administration’s public line that the Tet Offensive, while disruptive, had not dealt a crippling blow to the U.S. war effort. The secretary’s exchange with the Joint Chiefs over

Westmoreland’s request shattered any lingering optimism about Vietnam that he may have brought with him to the Pentagon.³⁷

Clifford’s close personal association with Johnson quickly established him as the president’s most important foreign policy adviser as the difficult year of 1968 unfolded. The struggle to alter the course of the war in Vietnam consumed his brief tenure. Unambiguously and outspokenly, the new defense secretary sought to extricate the United States from the war as swiftly as possible, even to the disadvantage of the South Vietnamese government, which he scathingly criticized as corrupt and obstructionist. In this role he clashed not only with the president, but with Rusk, Westmoreland, and General Creighton Abrams (Westmoreland’s successor as commander of MACV), who, in his words, stuck to a “more-of-the-same-approach.” Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze noted that Clifford “spent much more time on the telephone with the president or over in the White House” than McNamara had late in his tenure and that the war left the secretary with “precious little time” to direct the Defense Department’s sprawling operations. As a result, Clifford delegated even more day-to-day Pentagon management tasks to his deputy than had been the norm under his predecessors while he focused on Vietnam and communications with the White House and the Congress.³⁸

Conclusion

The growing importance of the secretary of defense to foreign affairs that marked Kennedy’s time in office continued unabated during the Johnson administration. The relationship between McNamara, the supremely self-confident defense secretary who had been Kennedy’s most trusted national security aide, and the new president intensified through 1964 and 1965 as Johnson confronted critical decisions about whether to expand the U.S. military commitment in South Vietnam. Their close association reinforced Johnson’s highly personal style of decision making and freed him to manage foreign and defense affairs outside formal

policy channels. While Johnson's faith in McNamara would later erode over the latter's change of heart on Vietnam, through the critical years of the war's escalation the president rarely acted on any foreign policy matter without consulting his Pentagon chief. Together with his unprecedented longevity in office, McNamara's outsized influence on the United States' seminal foreign challenge of the 1960s helped redefine the position of secretary of defense as a central figure in the development and conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

The secretary's deepening involvement in foreign affairs also resulted from the nature of the crises that demanded Johnson's attention outside of the war in Vietnam. By the mid-1960s the military nature of the Cold War's superpower competition had made force a central feature of U.S. foreign policy. Growing U.S. involvement in Vietnam amplified this dynamic and caused the Johnson administration to evaluate other crises through the military prism of that broader conflict. In the Dominican Republic (1965), where Johnson feared the emergence of a Castro-like regime, and in the seizure of the USS *Pueblo* by North Korea (1968), the administration saw the forces of international communism conspiring to threaten American efforts at containment in Southeast Asia. In the Dominican Republic crisis McNamara played an essentially diplomatic role, orchestrating the rapid deployment of more than 22,000 American troops to bolster that nation's fledgling noncommunist government while laboring to convince skeptical Latin American nations to send troops. Nearly three years later, with the war in Vietnam at a low ebb, McNamara and designated successor Clark Clifford directed a buildup of naval and air forces in and around the Korean Peninsula. Their efforts provided essential support to the diplomatic effort that eventually ended the standoff. Both responses underscored the importance of military power to U.S. diplomacy and helped cement the secretary of defense's position at center stage in managing overseas affairs.

The secretary's rise in foreign affairs stemmed also from the strength of certain managerial innovations McNamara implemented within the Pentagon. Most important was the Office of International

Security Affairs, which McNamara continued to invest with new resources, stature, and influence. ISA's rise was tied closely to Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA John McNaughton, who quickly became McNamara's closest aide. McNaughton's most significant contribution came from his persistent attempts to convince the defense secretary to reverse course on Vietnam. He believed that the Johnson administration's approach of applying graduated pressure had no chance of ultimately defeating the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. In time, McNaughton's case, always argued privately, began to square more and more clearly with the frustrating progress reports McNamara received from U.S. commanders on the ground in South Vietnam. By mid-1967 the secretary began pushing a reluctant President Johnson to disengage from the war that he, McNamara, had done so much to escalate. McNaughton's successor, Paul Warnke, played a similar role vis-à-vis Clark Clifford, who surprised the president by opposing further escalation after he succeeded McNamara in early 1968. ISA's influence on the eventual shift in Johnson's Vietnam policy toward disengagement was clear. More broadly, the support ISA provided to both McNamara and Clifford aided the secretary of defense's institutional rise in foreign affairs. By the time Johnson handed power to president-elect Richard Nixon in January 1969, his administration had reinforced the institutional precedent set during the Kennedy years: the secretary of defense was a central, indispensable contributor in the development and execution of U.S. foreign policy.

Notes

¹ On the devolution of the NSC under Kennedy (continued under Johnson), see Edward J. Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam, 1965–1969*, vol. 6 of Secretaries of Defense Historical Series (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, 2011), 15–18.

² On the growing divide between DoD’s civilian and military leaders during the Vietnam War, see H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

³ For good overviews of McNamara’s efforts to reform the Pentagon’s policy operations, and for background on the young, generally civilian “Whiz Kids” he recruited, see Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961–1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972); and Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea, *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961–1965*, vol. 5 of History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense series (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, 2006).

⁴ For Johnson’s remarks to the joint session of Congress, see “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress,” 27 Nov 1963, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963–64, Book I* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 8–10. For Johnson’s early career and rise to the vice presidency, see Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). For Johnson’s Senate career, see Robert Caro, *Master of the Senate* (New York: Knopf, 2002). Both Dallek and Caro stress Johnson’s enduring preference for domestic affairs.

⁵ The conspicuous exception in Johnson’s drive to retain Kennedy’s advisers was Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman, who had been Kennedy’s point-man in the U.S.-backed overthrow of South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem just weeks before Johnson was thrust into the presidency. For Johnson’s view of Hilsman, see Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the*

Presidency, 1963–1969 (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 29. On Hilsman's exit from the administration, see Kaplan, Landa, and Drea, *McNamara Ascendancy*, 504. Halberstam writes that Johnson made “an all-out effort to keep Kennedy people of all sizes, shapes, and persuasions” in early in 1964, but that Hilsman was an exception—“Johnson did not like him, did not like his bumptiousness, the policies he had followed and the enemies he had made . . . he simply had to go.” See Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 374.

⁶ In his memoir, Johnson wrote that “McNamara carried more information around in his head than the average encyclopedia.” See Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 20.

⁷ On Clifford's background and longstanding relationship with Johnson, see John Acacia, *Clark Clifford: The Wise Man of Washington* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009). See also Clark Clifford, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1991). The “*Liberty* incident” refers to the attack on the U.S. intelligence ship *Liberty* by Israeli warplanes during the 1967 Six Day War. At Johnson's direction, Clifford led an inquiry following the attack that found the attack to be accidental. See Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 446–454. Prior to offering Clifford the position of secretary of defense, Johnson had tried to bring him into the administration as attorney general, director of Central Intelligence, and under secretary of state. See Acacia, *Clark Clifford*, 246.

⁸ See Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 10–15. On Johnson's distrust of the military, see also McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 52–53.

⁹ For “mild-mannered,” see Bart Barnes, “Dean Rusk, '60s Foreign Policy Leader, Dies,” *Washington Post*, 22 Dec 1994, A1. In his 1965 retrospective on the Kennedy administration, Arthur Schlesinger writes, “With reluctance, because he still liked Rusk and thought he had useful qualities, he [President Kennedy] made up his mind to accept his resignation after the 1964 election and seek a new Secretary. He always had the dream that a McNamara might someday take command and make the [State] Department a genuine partner in the enterprise of foreign affairs (though he also said that he had to have a McNamara at Defense in order to have a foreign policy at all).” See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), 1017. In his memoir, Johnson wrote that he “knew Rusk was a loyal, honorable, hard-working, imaginative man of conviction, and I decided to ask him to remain as my Secretary of State.” He also noted

that Rusk “served me with distinction and great ability. He stood by me and shared the President's load of responsibility and abuse. He never complained. But he was no ‘yes man’. He could be determined, and he was always the most determined when he was telling me I shouldn't do something that I felt needed to be done.” See Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 20.

¹⁰ On fissures within the State Department and on DoD's analytical responsiveness (especially the Office of International Security Affairs), see Erin R. Mahan and Jeffrey Larson, eds., *The Ascendancy of the Secretary of Defense: Robert S. McNamara, 1961–1963* (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, 2013), 9, 13–17.

¹¹ On Bundy's departure and Rostow's appointment, see Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 235–236. For a deeper look at Bundy and his brother, William P. Bundy (assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs and, after February 1964, assistant secretary of state) during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, see Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy, Brothers in Arms: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 270–375.

¹² For Rostow's work on the Multilateral Force, see Kaplan, Landa, and Drea, *McNamara Ascendancy*, 385–420. For a recent treatment of Rostow, see David Milne, *America's Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009). For Rostow's fervent support of continued escalation as Johnson's national security advisor, see *ibid.*, 158–180. For characterization of Rostow as “a fervid, almost an exuberant hawk since the far, far JFK days” regarding Vietnam, see Eric F. Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 509–510. For McNamara quotes on Rostow, see McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 235.

¹³ On the devolution of the NSC as a formal policymaking body during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, see David C. Humphrey, “NSC Meetings During the Johnson Presidency,” *Diplomatic History* 18 (Winter 1994): 29–32; John P. Burke, *Honest Broker? The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision Making* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 56–104; David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 80–85; and Bromley K. Smith, *Organizational History of the National Security Council During the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (Washington, DC: National Security Council, 1988), 23.

¹⁴ On the Tuesday Lunch, see David C. Humphrey, “Tuesday Lunch at the Johnson White House: A Preliminary Assessment,” *Diplomatic History* 8 (Winter 1984): 81–101. See also Burke, *Honest Broker?* 314–316; Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 99–100. Bromley Smith writes, “The first luncheon meeting was held . . . in August 1964. . . . Further lunches were scheduled irregularly at first with month-long lapses, but later, almost every Tuesday, sometimes immediately following scheduled NSC meetings.” See Smith, *Organizational History of the National Security Council During the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations*, 63.

¹⁵ For Rostow’s assessment of the Tuesday Lunch, see Walt W. Rostow, *Diffusion of Power: An Essay in Recent History* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 360. For McNamara’s, see Henry F. Graff, *The Tuesday Cabinet: Deliberation and Decision on Peace and War Under Lyndon B. Johnson* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 34. See also Robert McNamara, oral history interview by Walt W. Rostow, 8 Jan 1975, Oral History Collection, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

¹⁶ The membership and duties of the SIG were similar to the NSC’s old Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), dismantled by McGeorge Bundy in the first weeks of the Kennedy administration in early 1961. David Rothkopf notes that, in the Eisenhower administration, the OCB existed “to ensure the implementation of policies” determined by presidential decisions taken at NSC meetings. The board “reported back to the NSC on the progress that was being made in implementing policies and on decisions taken to implement them.” See Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 67–68. On General Taylor’s review and the role he envisaged the SIG playing, see Maxwell D. Taylor, “New System for Coping with Our Overseas Problems,” Speech to the American Foreign Service Association, 31 Mar 1966, in U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, *The Secretary of State and the Problem of Coordination: New Duties and Procedures of March 4, 1966* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966), 17–22. For NSAM 341, see National Security Action Memorandum 341, 2 Mar 1966, <www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/nsams/nsam341.aspl>, accessed 21 May 2013. For the SIG not representing a change in the Johnson administration’s approach to managing foreign policy, see “Administrative History of the Department of Defense, 1963–1969” (MS, copy in OSD Historical Office), Section 1, 256–257. On Ball’s view of the SIG, see Clark and Legere, *The President and the Management of National Security: A Report* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 93–94; William I. Bacchus, “Obstacles to Reform in Foreign Affairs: The Case of NSAM 341,” *Orbis* 18 (Spring 1974): 270–271. Also see I. M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy*, rev. ed. (New York:

Touchstone, 1985), 200–201. For General Taylor’s view of the SIG at the end of the Johnson administration, see Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 360–362. For evidence that Vietnam and counterinsurgency were largely absent from the agendas of the SIG’s 39 total meetings (from 8 March 1966 to 13 June 1968), see “Administrative History of DoD,” Section 1, 258–261. For NSC insider assessment of the SIG’s impact, see Roy M. Melbourne, “Odyssey of the NSC,” *Strategic Review* 11 (Summer 1983): 57.

¹⁷ Under Trujillo, the city of Santo Domingo was renamed “Ciudad Trujillo.” For Johnson quote on living down the Bay of Pigs, see Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 293. On Trujillo’s dictatorship and close military relations with the United States, see Eric P. Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). For a good treatment of the 1965 U.S. intervention in historical context, see Hal Brands, *Latin America’s Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 37–69.

¹⁸ Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 293–299.

¹⁹ For Johnson quotes and subsequent actions, see Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 300–309. On Latin America’s collective memory of early twentieth century U.S. gunboat diplomacy, see Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898–1934* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002). See also Abraham F. Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 113–131. For a firsthand account from the U.S. commander on the ground, see General Bruce Palmer, *Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989). For a recent assessment, see Russell Crandall, *Gunboat Democracy: U.S. Interventions in the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Panama* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 35–104.

²⁰ Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 311–312.

²¹ This section on the *Pueblo* crisis is based on the account provided by Drea in *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 488. See also Mitchell B. Lerner, *The Pueblo Incident: A Spy Ship and the Failure of American Foreign Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

²² On deployments, see Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 488–489.

²³ *Ibid.*, 490–492.

²⁴ Ibid., 493–495.

²⁵ On McNamara's selection of aides, see Kaplan, Landa, and Drea, *McNamara Ascendancy*, 6–10. For a brief overview of the origins of Systems Analysis and ISA during the Kennedy administration, see Mahan and Larson, eds., *Ascendancy of the Secretary of Defense*. Nitze served as assistant secretary of defense for ISA until November 1963 when he became secretary of the navy. His successor, William Bundy, served for a very brief time (November 1963 to March 1964) before accepting an appointment in the State Department. McNaughton took over ISA in July 1964. On Nitze's time at the head of ISA, see Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Picador, 2009), 170–194. On McNamara's assessment of ISA's influence, see Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 5.

²⁶ For more on the characterization of McNaughton as McNamara's "right-hand man" on Vietnam, and for Vietnam as "McNamara's War," see Benjamin T. Harrison and Christopher L. Mosher, "John T. McNaughton and Vietnam: The Early Years as Assistant Secretary of Defense, 1964–1965," *History* 92 (October 2007): 308, 496. For Halberstam's assessment of McNaughton vis-à-vis escalation in Vietnam, including the "profound doubts" McNaughton harbored about U.S. policy in Vietnam, see Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 362–363. For a more recent assessment based on McNaughton's diary—which confirm Halberstam's judgment—see Benjamin T. Harrison and Christopher L. Mosher, "The Secret Diary of McNamara's Dove: The Long-Lost Story of John T. McNaughton's Opposition to the Vietnam War," *Diplomatic History* 35 (June 2011): 505–534.

²⁷ Cited in Harrison and Mosher, "McNaughton and Vietnam," 501. Original quote in Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 368.

²⁸ For McNaughton's view that "the loss of South Vietnam and Laos would be followed by the rapid, successive communization of the other states of the Far East," see Harrison and Mosher, "McNaughton and Vietnam," 499. For Hoopes' assessment of McNaughton, see Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention (An Inside Account of How the Johnson Policy of Escalation in Vietnam Was Reversed)* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 33–56 (see 51 for quote on McNaughton's "punctilious" public support of the Johnson administration's approach to Vietnam).

²⁹ Harrison and Mosher, "McNaughton and Vietnam," 502–503.

³⁰ Harrison and Mosher, "The Secret Diary of McNamara's Dove," 517–518.

³¹ Ibid., 511. For a critical assessment of U.S. decisions in the wake of the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley, see George C. Herring, "The 1st Cavalry and the Ia Drang Valley, 18 October–24 November 1965," in Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, eds., *America's First Battles: 1776–1965* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 300–326.

³² For McNaughton's penchant for statistics and facts, see Townsend Hoopes, *Limits of Intervention*, 48–52 and Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 616–617. For quote on McNaughton's modus operandi with respect to McNamara, see Harrison and Mosher, "McNaughton and Vietnam," 499.

³³ Harrison and Mosher, "The Secret Diary of McNamara's Dove," 523–524.

³⁴ On McNamara's 19 May 1967 DPM, see Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 138–139. On poor coordination, see McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 247–251. For conclusion on McNamara, see Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 534–535.

³⁵ On his selection as assistant secretary of defense for ISA, Warnke later said, "I was very much opposed to the Vietnam War. I made that clear to both Cy Vance and Bob McNamara. They said that that didn't matter, that they were sure I could still contribute." See Paul C. Warnke, interview by Maurice Matloff and Roger Trask, 10 Sep 1984, 10, OSD Historical Office Oral History Collection. On Clifford's use of Warnke's analysis in meetings with the president, see *Pentagon Papers*, IV: 263–264. For Johnson's assessment of Warnke as an "infectious virus," see Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, 492.

³⁶ For the best recent treatment of the development of Clifford's thinking on Vietnam, from his 1965 warning of a "quagmire," to his hawkishness between 1966 and 1967, to his reversion upon becoming secretary of defense in 1968, see Acacia, *Clark Clifford*, 236–282 (see 239 for "quagmire" quote). For Nitze's characterization of Clifford's views on Vietnam prior to becoming secretary of defense, see Paul H. Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision—A Memoir* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 274.

³⁷ On Westmoreland's request for additional troops, see Acacia, *Clark Clifford*, 264.

³⁸ On the Clifford task force and his evaluation of JCS views of Westmoreland's troop request, see Acacia, *Clark Clifford*, 264–265. See also Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam*, 536. Nitze wrote in his memoir that, because of the demands of Vietnam on Clifford's time, the secretary “left the running of the Pentagon, for the most part, to me as his deputy, while he concentrated on the White House, the war in Vietnam, the Congress, and the press.” See Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 274.

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