

2. A New Look At the "Plimsoll Line": Alternatives to Increases Restudied

Shortly after the first hard signs of resistance began to surface in May an SNIE analyzing Soviet attitudes and intentions toward the Vietnam war was published. It was an SNIE which in effect reinforced the fears which many held about increasing the intensity of the Vietnamese conflict. The SNIE concluded that at some point the USSR would create an atmosphere of heightened tension with the United States if, in fact, U.S. force increases and intensified bombing continued. In the words of the estimate:

This document, coming as it did at such a crucial juncture in the deliberations over ground force strategy and deployments in Vietnam, had a significant impact upon the thinking of those charged with making the decision of "go" or "no go," and the document itself was quoted throughout some of the explicit development of alternatives which followed its publication in both Systems Analysis and in ISA.

As McNaughton worked on a series of drafts preparing the 19 May DEM which was to follow, a number of leads were being pursued throughout the government, all related in some way to relieving the pressures for more United States troops in Vietnam. One of these was a directed effort to obtain more allied troops especially from the nations on the periphery of South Vietnam or near Southeast Asia. On 4 May McNaughton asked that an analysis of South Vietnamese troop deployments in relation to population of the participating countries be prepared. This analysis, based upon population of the countries involved, concluded that for an increase of 100,000 U.S. troops the "allocable" share for various countries would range from 14.5 thousand for Korea to 53.4 thousand for Indonesia. For the details of this particular study see the following table: 21/

fact, he had already set John McNaughton to preparing a Draft Presidential Memorandum setting forth the same basic political arguments that Systems Analysis was making. The "hard" data in the Enthoven memorandum was the kind of back-up McNamara understood and appreciated and it buttressed most of the beliefs he already held. He asked Enthoven for some detailed follow-up related to VC/NVA control of engagements and casualties. There is no record that the Assistant Secretary left the signed memorandum with the Secretary of Defense, but there seemed little requirement for that. The ideas and position in it had been escalated to the DPM level where such ideas would receive the highest level attention and consideration.

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The Soviets might take certain actions designed to bolster North Vietnam and possibly to warn the United States such as the provision of limited numbers of volunteers or crews for defense equipment or possibly aircraft. They might also break off negotiations with the United States on various subjects and suspend certain agreements now in effect. The mining or the blockade of the North Vietnamese coast would be most likely to provoke these responses, since this would constitute a direct challenge to the Soviets and there would be little they could do on the scene.

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Somewhat along the same line, on 11 May, Walt W. Rostow prepared a paper devoted to what he termed a "troop community chest operation for Vietnam."