

## **ABSTRACT**

DEMPSEY, CHRISTOPHER MARTIN. *The Other Side of the Story: Vietnam Escalation and Global Army Readiness, 1965-1968.* (Under the direction of Nancy Mitchell.)

From 1965-1968, the United States Army bore the brunt of President Lyndon B. Johnson's military escalation of the Vietnam War, while attempting to maintain its Cold War deterrent responsibilities around the globe. While scholars have exhaustively researched the varying aspects of the former, fewer have studied the implications of these decisions on the latter. This paper examines the devastating effects of escalation in Southeast Asia on the army's ability to remain ready to fight another war should one have arisen anywhere else in the world. Specifically, it traces the downward trend of army readiness as a result of Johnson's decision not to call up the reserves until 1968, paired with the rapid expansion of the army from 1 million soldiers in 1965 to 1.5 million in 1968.

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The Other Side of the Story: Vietnam Escalation and Global Army Readiness, 1965-1968

by  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 – ‘YOU CAN’T GET THERE FROM HERE’ .....	16
Merging the Reserves.....	22
Further Reductions.....	32
Readiness Hearings.....	36
‘You Can’t Get There From Here’ .....	43
‘Out of Forces in this Country’ .....	49
CHAPTER 2 – ‘PERILOUS INSUFFICIENCY’ .....	51
Baldwin vs. McNamara.....	54
Not Combat Ready.....	60
Readiness Revisited.....	63
Rusk, McNamara, and The World’s Policemen.....	68
Worldwide Military Posture.....	72
A ‘Shocking’ Decrease.....	75
CHAPTER 3 – A ‘YEAR OF ADJUSTMENT’ .....	77
The Reserves’ Changing Mission.....	80
An Active DMZ.....	83
A Downward Trend in Europe.....	89
Reinforcements.....	92
Domestic Deployment.....	94
Toward the Brink.....	99
CHAPTER 4 – ‘A CONCERTED, WORLD-WIDE COMMUNIST EFFORT’ .....	101
Flashpoint in Korea.....	104
Too Little, Too Late.....	109
A Final Report.....	114
The Impact of Vietnam.....	116
Czech Invasion.....	119
Resignation.....	122
CONCLUSION – FROM CONTAINMENT TO THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR....	124

## Introduction

“Combat readiness matters even if conflict does not result in war, because it can affect deterrence, calculations of risk, political maneuvering, brinkmanship, and thereby the diplomatic outcome.”

– Richard K. Betts, *Military Readiness*

This is a story of how limited war affects the entire army. Specifically, it is the story of how gradual escalation in Vietnam from 1965-1968 affected the United States Army’s ability to maintain adequate levels of combat readiness around the world. Although the army’s primary mission throughout the Cold War was the deterrence of war in Europe, the bipolar U.S.-Soviet environment of the period required the United States to maintain readily deployable conventional forces to respond to aggression elsewhere. Because of the vast resource requirements diverted to the American effort in Southeast Asia, however, this goal was unattainable, and the buildup in Vietnam left the army’s global forces unready for conflict anywhere else.<sup>1</sup>

There is a certain subtlety to this argument that must be addressed. It involves the small but important difference between the terms “preparedness” and “readiness.” Preparedness indicates a psychological state of mind for an event at some point in the future, as well as an implementation of the structures needed to accomplish a given task. For example, the United States Army was certainly “prepared” for war outside of Southeast Asia, as it was willing to fulfill any mission its civilian counterparts deemed necessary for national

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<sup>1</sup> Most historians, when studying the concept of deterrence, have concentrated on nuclear rather than conventional deterrence. As this paper deals with the latter, the best works on the subject include James Reed Golden, Asa A. Clark, and Bruce E. Arlinghaus, *Conventional Deterrence: Alternatives for European Defense* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1984); John R. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Robert B. Killebrew, *Conventional Defense and Total Deterrence: Assessing NATO’s Strategic Options* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1986).

security, and it had the plans, units, doctrines, and strategies in place for contingencies around the world.

Readiness, on the other hand, indicates a present-tense ability to accomplish an imminent mission. Though the army may have been willing to fulfill any assigned mission and may have had the structures in place with which to accomplish a given task, it may simply not have had the capacity (in terms of manpower, equipment, and training) to do so. This, then, is the argument: that while the army had prepared itself psychologically and structurally for war outside of Vietnam, the units required to fight such a war were not ready for combat as a result of the massive redirection of resources to Southeast Asia.

The requirement for army readiness came not only from the aforementioned Cold War environment, but also from the national military strategy of flexible response. Introduced by General Maxwell Taylor in his book *The Uncertain Trumpet*, implemented by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, and continued by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the strategy essentially required a force able to deter, or respond to, Soviet aggression anywhere in the world at any level of warfare. The logic behind such a strategy was to provide a greater range of options to the United States than was allowed for under President Dwight D. Eisenhower's massive retaliation strategy. Eisenhower's critics claimed that his strategy reduced America's choices in confrontation with the Soviets to an "all or nothing" scenario that, with its over-reliance on nuclear weapons, risked disastrous consequences both in victory and in defeat.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960); William W. Kaufmann, *The McNamara Strategy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 131. This is the conventional view of Eisenhower's



Kennedy's administration, therefore, set out to increase the number of possible American responses to Soviet aggression. It attempted to place greater emphasis on conventional, or general-purpose, forces than had Eisenhower. Kennedy's national security policy held that "if a balance must be struck in the training and equipping of these forces as between non-nuclear and nuclear combat, that balance should be struck in favor of non-nuclear combat."<sup>3</sup> Though Kennedy knew there were situations in which nuclear weapons could be employed, he looked to a strategy that allowed a broader range of possible alternatives.<sup>4</sup>

To achieve this goal, the United States needed to have a conventional force that was, as a 1961 Department of Defense study on U.S. defense posture noted, "effective, invulnerable, and reliable." A convincing presence in Europe and Asia and a bolstering of the NATO alliance were essential to achieving American foreign policy objectives. Only then could the United States "present our allies and the Communists with tangible evidence of our capacity to respond to aggression."<sup>5</sup>

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policy. Yet John Lewis Gaddis argued that the implied threat of using nuclear weapons was only part of Eisenhower's "asymmetrical" strategy. He believed that Eisenhower ultimately attempted to gain the initiative in U.S.-Soviet relations while reducing costs, using "alliances, psychological warfare, covert action, and negotiations" in addition to the threat of nuclear retaliation. See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 145.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Editorial Note," Document 70, Volume 8: National Security Policy, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1961-1963*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/viii/33819.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> For discussion of Kennedy and flexible response, see Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 198-236; Jane E. Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response: NATO's Debate Over Strategy in the 1960s* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988); Lawrence S. Kaplan, et al., *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961-1965*, vol. 5 of *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), 293-322.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Letter from Secretary of State Rusk to Secretary of Defense McNamara" with Enclosure, 4 Feb. 1961, Document 10, Volume 8: National Security Policy, *FRUS 1961-1963*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjf/viii/32069.htm>.

As a consequence, flexible response required a much greater reliance on the army than did Eisenhower's massive retaliation. Rather than relying on the threat of strategic and nuclear weapons to deter Soviet aggression, Kennedy and Johnson relied on general-purpose forces. They believed that a credible American force deployed in close proximity to the potential Soviet threat would more effectively prevent Soviet expansion than would the possibility of a nuclear retaliatory strike.<sup>6</sup> In the event that this deterrent force did not prevent such action, the White House expected the army to be ready to deploy, fight, and win limited wars around the world.<sup>7</sup>

In light of such a strategy, this story does not explicitly examine the nuclear option, or the part it may have played in the deterrence of limited war. This is certainly not meant to imply that nuclear weapons were unimportant, for their mere existence surely influenced the actions of both superpowers throughout the Cold War. Instead, it is meant to place the burden of deterrent responsibility on the shoulders of the army, where Kennedy and Johnson meant it to be. Their adoption of a flexible response strategy precludes the argument that the decrease in army readiness during this period was insignificant, as nuclear weapons were readily available.

For the same reasons, this story focuses specifically on army readiness without considering the other services. While naval and air forces made invaluable contributions to

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Editorial Note," Document 70, *FRUS 1961-1963*.

<sup>7</sup> Ingo Trauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army: Building Deterrence for Limited War* (University Press of Kansas, 2008), 2-3. Trauschweizer succinctly outlines the differing interpretations of what various agencies considered to be limited war. He notes "The army defined it as any war below the level of strategic nuclear exchange. Defense officials of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations considered a more specific type of conflict: counterinsurgency warfare in places such as Laos, Indonesia, or Vietnam. Scholars thought in terms of a conflict such as the Korean War, where political objectives were limited and use of nuclear weapons was avoided."

United States combat power during the Cold War, the Vietnam War was primarily the army's fight. Although an extraordinary number of bombs were dropped in Southeast Asia by the Air Force, and naval deployments to the region increased, the vast majority of manpower deployed to Vietnam came from the army. As a result, the effects on the army's global readiness were far greater than the effects on any other service.

It is necessary to discuss the concept of army readiness, how it was defined, and how it was measured. This is not a simple task, for the idea of readiness is somewhat abstract. After all, military readiness can only truly be measured in a combat situation. If the army responds quickly and effectively, it is retroactively assumed to have been "ready." If not, it's readiness is questioned. Without such a conflict, however, readiness is nearly impossible to quantify.

Still, the army attempted to do just that as it adopted a reporting system in 1963. Yet the army's definition of readiness was a narrow one based on the only measurable factors that it believed would indicate readiness levels. Every unit in the army submitted a quarterly report based on personnel, equipment, and training. As each unit was authorized a certain number of soldiers and certain pieces of equipment, and was required to conduct individual and unit training, the quarterly readiness report detailed the percentage of soldiers and equipment available to each unit, as well as its progress in completing essential training. Chapter 1 discusses the numerics of this system in more detail, but essentially, if an army unit achieved a certain percentage in these three areas, it was considered "combat-ready."

Problems abound with such an evaluation. First, all three factors are cyclical, due to the fact that personnel and equipment come and go, and training periods expire. As a result,

a unit's combat-ready status could fluctuate dramatically with each quarterly report. Second, these reports were self-generated, meaning the unit commander could influence the report either positively or negatively. Though one might therefore expect reports during this period to be much more optimistic than they should have been, the truth is that they were surprisingly pessimistic, reinforcing popular and political criticism that the army was unready for conflict anywhere except Vietnam. Third, the reporting system itself looked at numbers only, failing to take into account subjective factors such as leadership, competence, and esprit de corps. Thus, two units of similar size, makeup, and training would have similar levels of readiness even if one was much better led and possessed much better soldiers.

Nevertheless, these reports must be the starting point for an examination of the army's readiness for war. From these reports, this paper builds outward, cross-referencing them with press reports, congressional hearings, army commanders' oral interviews, and personal memoirs.

The army's is a concrete view of readiness. A more theoretical approach comes from Richard K. Betts. He looks at the concept of readiness as a three-part question: readiness for what, readiness for when, and readiness of what?<sup>8</sup> In answering the first two questions, a little more explanation is needed to discuss the missions of the army's units in the Continental United States, Europe, and Korea. In answering the last question, as previously discussed, this paper will focus only on the readiness of the army's forces, both active and reserve, around the world.

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<sup>8</sup> Richard K. Betts, *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Consequences* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 33.

Once again, a discussion of the army's missions is not as easy as one might expect. Today, anyone with internet access can navigate to an army unit's home page and quickly ascertain its mission statement. Every unit in the army has one, and a unit's readiness is based on its ability to fulfill that mission. Such was not the case with the army of the 1960s. Even major army commands did not possess mission statements akin to those of today. This is not to say that army units had no clear goal, but rather that it was much more loosely defined. What follows is a brief explanation of the major army commands that will be addressed in this paper, their "missions" as pieced together from a variety of sources, and the difficulties they encountered in accomplishing them throughout the three year period from 1965-1968.<sup>9</sup>

For the combat divisions stationed in the United States, also known as the Strategic Army Forces (STRAF), the mission was a simple one. They were to be ready to reinforce the army's forward deployed forces in the event of an outbreak of war anywhere in the world. Although certain units within the STRAF were designated for certain contingencies (i.e. the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions were earmarked for the European theater), they were all designated as the nation's strategic reserve. As such, the Defense Department required that they be maintained at readiness condition C-1, which, as established by the army in

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<sup>9</sup> The gist of this information was received by the author in an email from David Keough at the Military History Institute (MHI) in Carlisle, PA. The email was in response to a request for information regarding the mission statements of major army commands from 1965-1968. MHI contains a large number of army documents, including unit histories, but Mr. Keough was unable to find anything resembling a mission statement. Still, his assistance was illuminating.

1963, meant that these units must be “fully prepared for and capable of undertaking sustained combat operations within 24 hours.”<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after the decision to increase U.S. troop levels in Vietnam, the readiness of the STRAF to fulfill this requirement began a downward spiral from which it would not recover by the end of 1968. By then, four of its original nine divisions had been deployed to Southeast Asia, leaving it at just over half of its 1964 strength. Worse, the five remaining divisions were far from capable of acting as a combat reinforcement anywhere in the world. This was due primarily to two factors. First, in order to fill the needs of units preparing to deploy to Vietnam, the army diverted personnel and equipment from the STRAF. Second, the large and rapid increase in the army’s size that began in 1965 overwhelmed the army’s training capacity. As a result, STRAF units took on the additional burden of training new recruits and draftees. In doing so, they were unable to focus on their primary mission of preparing for war.

Seventh Army, the army’s primary ground force in Europe, had a much more complicated and less-defined mission. Its mere existence, along with the United States’ NATO allies, was meant to act as a deterrent to Soviet aggression. Should deterrence fail, however, Seventh Army was required to be ready for conventional war with Soviet forces up to, and including, nuclear war. Due to its forward deployed position, this force needed to be ready to respond at a moment’s notice, and was therefore also required to maintain a C-1 readiness condition.

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<sup>10</sup> Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, *U.S. Army Readiness*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, 7, 9-10. Unit readiness condition C-2 indicated the unit was not fully prepared for combat, but could attain a C-1 status in 15 days. C-3 indicated the unit could attain a C-1 status in 30 days. C-4 indicated the unit required more than 30 days to attain C-1.

Although Seventh Army's forces were not as affected by the war in Vietnam as was the STRAF, the diversion of resources took its toll here as well. In addition to losing personnel and equipment to Southeast Asia, Seventh Army also lost personnel to the United States. The army used these personnel as instructors to bolster its overall training capacity, and also as cadre to establish and train new units preparing for Vietnam deployments. Because the types of personnel needed for both of these tasks were experienced leaders, and because the soldiers Seventh Army received to replace them were young and inexperienced, the quality of the army in Europe was significantly degraded.

In Korea, Eighth Army's mission had a duality that was somewhat similar to that of Seventh Army. In conjunction with the Republic of Korea's (ROK) military force, Eighth Army's mission was to defend South Korea from all forms of North Korean attack. Although the ROK provided a vastly greater number of soldiers than did the Americans, these forces were combined under the United Nations Command, which was headed by an American general. This responsibility was one the United States took seriously. At the same time, however, Johnson's administration also took seriously the potentially disastrous consequences of the outbreak of another land war in Asia. Thus, the addendum to Eighth Army's mission was to deter the North from attempting an attack. Both of these missions required a C-1 readiness condition.<sup>11</sup>

Eighth Army was affected by the Vietnam buildup in ways the STRAF and Seventh Army were not. It too lost soldiers and equipment to Southeast Asia and the United States

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel P. Bolger, *Scenes from an Unfinished War: Low-Intensity Conflict in Korea, 1966-1969* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1991), 71.

training establishment, leaving it well below its required levels. But while neither the STRAF nor Seventh Army was called upon to fight during Vietnam escalation, Eighth Army was. From late 1966 through 1968, North Korea conducted low-level guerilla warfare against the UN Command. During this period, tensions along the Demilitarized Zone increased, firefights occurred daily, 37 American service members lost their lives, and over one hundred were wounded.<sup>12</sup> Yet because of the larger war in Vietnam, Eighth Army received little help, and even less credit for preventing what very well could have been a second war in Asia.

As evident by the vagueness and multifaceted missions of the army's U.S.-based, European, and Korean forces, an evaluation of whether or not a given unit was ready to fulfill its mission at any one moment in time is difficult. On the one hand, the missions were not clearly defined, and on the other, snapshots of readiness are nearly impossible to quantify. Therefore, a combination of Betts's three-question approach, the army's reports, and assessments by Congressional and press personnel will be used to arrive at the most accurate estimation of the army's readiness.

So what caused all of these problems in the STRAF and in Seventh and Eighth Armies? After all, the army as a whole numbered almost a million soldiers in 1965 and over 1.5 million by 1968. Was this force unable to handle the so-called limited war in Vietnam while maintaining combat-ready units around the world? Even by September 1968, rather late in the escalation period, the army had only 354,000 soldiers deployed to Southeast Asia,

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<sup>12</sup> UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1969, "All-Korea Casualties," Item 2-6, 31 Dec. 1968, Box 107, Record Group (RG) 550, Records of United States Army, Pacific, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).



which accounted for only 23 percent of its total force. Was the contribution of this small percentage so great as to cause such dangerous reductions in readiness around the world?

In short, yes. Much more than one might expect.

Two primary factors led to the degradation in army readiness. The first was President Johnson's decision in 1965 not to call the reserves to active duty. By doing so, Johnson asked the army to do more than it was capable of effectively doing. The army could focus entirely on the war in Vietnam or it could focus on maintaining combat-ready units around the world, but without access to the reserves, it could not sufficiently do both. The end result was a prioritization of manpower and equipment to Vietnam at the expense of global army readiness. While this may have been necessary in facilitating the American effort there, it was certainly disruptive and dangerous to the army's ability to fight anywhere else.

The second factor that negatively affected the army's readiness was the large increase in its size. At first, this may seem counterintuitive and one may question how more soldiers could lead to less readiness. The short answer is that the army grew in inexperienced personnel. These individuals were unable to contribute to either the war in Vietnam or the rebuilding of readiness elsewhere until they were properly trained. This training took months and required experienced army leadership. Because the army's training establishment did not grow in conjunction with the growth of the force, it was unable to effectively train such a large influx of recruits and draftees. As a result, the army directed its STRAF to act as training divisions, and it removed experienced soldiers from Europe and Korea to act as cadre both for training units and newly established units preparing to fight in Vietnam. This

focus on training took the army's focus away from preparing for war and led to decreased combat readiness.

It cannot be posited that had the reserves been mobilized, the army's units around the world would not have seen a decline in combat readiness. Nor can it be said that maintaining the army's force at 1965 levels would have been a more prudent approach. Instead, this paper simply explains the ways in which these two policies negatively affected the army's readiness for war outside of Vietnam.

Perhaps because of the difficulties in undertaking such a study, few historians have chosen to focus on army readiness during times of war, and fewer still on its readiness during the Vietnam War. Though the subject is mentioned tangentially in a number of works, it is normally done in a few sentences, and the authors quickly conclude that Vietnam greatly reduced the army's readiness around the world. While this is true, a more in-depth examination of the causes of this reduction is needed.

Because of the lack of a substantial body of scholarly work on the subject, it is perhaps more prudent to discuss a few works that were influential in directing and focusing this paper. The first is William Donnelly's July 2007 article, "The Best Army That Can Be Put Into the Field Under the Circumstances." In this essay, Donnelly did for the Korean War what this paper aims to do for Vietnam. He examined the impact of the war in Korea on the large military build-up required by NSC-68, and both of these events' effects on army readiness levels around the world.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> William M. Donnelly, "The Best Army that Can Be Put in the Field in the Circumstances': The U.S. Army, July 1951-July 1953," *The Journal of Military History* 71 (July 2007): 809-47.

The second is Richard Betts's *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Consequences*. His is an exhaustive and extremely useful theoretical framework with which to discuss the issue of readiness. Although he discusses readiness during Vietnam when outlining the difficulties with military readiness, he did not intend the book as a historical examination of readiness. Rather, it is a guide to the ways in which policies affect readiness. In both instances, it is extremely useful. Particularly relevant to this paper is his three-question guide to framing the concept of readiness.<sup>14</sup>

Most recently, Ingo Trauschweizer published *The Cold War U.S. Army*. This contains perhaps the most thorough discussion to date of the specific effects of the war in Vietnam on the army's readiness in Europe. However, Trauschweizer is not as concerned with these effects as he is with the ways in which the army changed throughout the Cold War and how those changes affected the army's deterrent capabilities. Indeed, his scope is much broader, as he discusses the evolution of the army from the end of World War II through Desert Storm. Still, his chapters dealing with the army in Europe during the Vietnam War were invaluable.<sup>15</sup>

Two papers published by the United States Army's Command and General Staff College provided significant contextual information from a military perspective. Lawrence A. Yates's 1988 paper, *Powerpack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, detailed the army's Dominican intervention, and Daniel P. Bolger's 1991 work, *Scenes from an Unfinished War: Low-Intensity Conflict in Korea, 1966-1969*, examined how an

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<sup>14</sup> Betts, *Military Readiness*.

<sup>15</sup> Trauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army*.

undermanned and underequipped Eighth Army was able to defend against North Korean insurgent attacks while preventing a larger war.<sup>16</sup>

If so little work has been done on the subject, then why write about it at all? Does the lack of scholarship not indicate that there is little interest? As Betts wrote, “Why not just say that the United States was as ready as it needed to be?”<sup>17</sup> The answer, as Betts also noted, is because such disinterest would be shortsighted and preclude a comprehensive understanding of the total effects of limited wars. The truth is that this subject is an extremely important one. Since World War II, the United States Army has not been wholly committed to any one war. From Korea through Iraq and Afghanistan, and with all of the more minor interventions in between, there has always been a larger percentage of the army not committed to combat. This part of the army has been responsible for American interests around the world. This is their story, one that describes the effects of limited wars on the rest of the army.

This paper proceeds chronologically, following the downward trend in army readiness from 1965-1968. Chapter 1 examines the initial impacts of President Johnson’s 1965 decision to escalate American troop involvement in Vietnam without reserve mobilization, as well as Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s attempts to reduce the size of both the active army and the reserves. Chapter 2 shows the immediate ramifications of Johnson’s policy, as four of the five U.S.-based combat divisions became training units incapable of reinforcing a combat theater by 1966, and explores a Joint Chiefs of Staff estimate on the dire effects of continuing to fulfill Vietnam manpower requirements. Chapter

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<sup>16</sup> Lawrence A. Yates, *Powerpack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1988); Bolger, *Scenes from an Unfinished War*.

<sup>17</sup> Betts, *Military Readiness*, 13.

3 details the dangerous and aggressive North Korean actions against the undermanned, underequipped, and American-led United Nations Command in 1967, as well as the deployment of federal troops to assist local authorities in subduing violent civil disturbances inside the United States. Chapter 4 discusses the continuing violence in Korea in 1968, the inadequate reserve call-up, Congressional reports on the impact of Vietnam on American commitments around the world, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

## **Chapter 1 - 'You Can't Get There From Here'**

Over the span of three months in mid-1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson made two significant military decisions. The first was to invade the Dominican Republic on 28 April to prevent a communist takeover. The second was to announce on 28 July that the United States would increase its troop commitment in Vietnam without mobilizing any reserve forces, a decision that would hurt the army's global readiness for the next three years.

The Dominican intervention was important in terms of army readiness for contextual reasons. It was certainly not a large or lengthy deployment of troops, but it did indicate the need for army units to be available on short notice. Because the intervention happened early in the Vietnam troop buildup, the ramifications of deploying troops to another combat zone simultaneous to the conflict in Southeast Asia were not fully felt. Still, it showed that such a contingency was quite possible.

On 28 April, the same day that Johnson and his advisors were preparing plans for large-scale escalation in Vietnam, Johnson was handed a cable from Ambassador W. Tapley Bennett that reported the deteriorating situation in Santo Domingo and requested military assistance. In short, Bennett reported that the Dominican military had split into two factions. Left-leaning rebels clashed with a right wing group, and American lives were now in danger. Johnson's immediate response was to order the deployment of four hundred Marines to the island, the first of nearly 24,000 troops that would occupy that country's capital at the peak of the conflict in May 1965.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Randall B. Woods, "Conflicted Hegemon: LBJ and the Dominican Republic," *Diplomatic History* 32, 5 (Oct. 2008): 753; Alan McPherson, "Misled By Himself: What the Johnson Tapes Reveal about the Dominican

Two primary factors drove Johnson's decision to intervene in the Dominican Republic. The first was a Cold War mindset that portrayed the leftists as being led and orchestrated by Cuba's Fidel Castro. While evidence of this fact was circumstantial and unproven, Johnson simply could not accept the existence of another communist-led country so close to America's shores. He stated his intention not "to sit here with my hands tied and let Castro take that island."<sup>2</sup> The second factor, closely related to the first, was Johnson's concern over the domestic political ramifications of failing to effectively deal with the Dominican situation. Although the international community opposed a unilateral American intervention, the political costs of failing to act drove Johnson's decision. Just as President Harry Truman faced criticism for "losing" China to communism, Johnson felt he would face similar criticism if the Dominican Republic fell to a communist faction. As he phrased this conundrum, "If I take over [the Dominican Republic], I can't live in the world. If I let them [communist rebels] take over, I can't live here."<sup>3</sup>

Domestic political concerns led Johnson to an altogether different conclusion with regard to Vietnam. Instead of taking a hard line against the communist North by declaring a national emergency and mobilizing the nation's reserve forces, his desire to implement his

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Intervention of 1965," *Latin American Research Review* 38, 2 (2003): 131; Yates, *Powerpack*, Appendix: Chronology of Crisis Events. For more detailed analysis of the Dominican intervention itself, see Piero Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis: The 1965 Constitutionalist Revolt and American Intervention* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Eric Thomas Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies: The U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001); and Herbert Garrettson Schoonmaker, *Military Crisis Management: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> On Johnson's fear: McPherson, "Misled By Himself," 137; Woods, "Conflicted Hegemon," 753. Quote in John Bartlow Martin, *Overtaken by Events: The Dominican Crisis from the Fall of Trujillo to the Civil War* (New York, 1966), 61.

<sup>3</sup> McPherson, "Misled By Himself," 136. Quoted from recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, 30 Apr. 1965.

Great Society led him to seek “a pragmatic guns-and-butter solution for avoiding what he believed would have surely been a divisive national debate.”<sup>4</sup> This “solution” required the army to fight a war in Vietnam without access to its reserves and with no reduction in global responsibilities. While much has been written about the political and economic effects of this decision, the military effects have been less studied. However, these effects resulted in a dangerous reduction in the army’s global readiness posture at a time when readiness, and perhaps more importantly the perception of it, was paramount to both of the world’s superpowers.

Johnson frequently mentioned the importance of readiness in 1965. On January 18, he delivered a Defense Message address to the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States. This address was to both houses and was separate from his State of the Union Address. His theme was the importance of military readiness to the nation’s security. Johnson explained that American military strategy was a balance “of strength and readiness, capable of countering aggression with appropriate force from ballistic missiles to guerilla bands.” He asserted that the armed forces of the United States were stronger than they had ever been, and so they must remain “to insure that we are never limited to nuclear weapons alone as our sole option in the face of aggression.” Johnson concluded his speech by reiterating the need for preparedness as summarized in the words of President George Washington one hundred and

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 150.



seventy-five years earlier: “To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.”<sup>5</sup>

Johnson was not alone in his emphatic insistence on the importance of military readiness. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, in the Defense Department’s annual report to the president, stated that until “a more peaceful world order has been established and armaments reduced, the United States must continue to maintain large, versatile, and highly ready forces capable of dealing with the entire spectrum of military threats, ranging from strategic nuclear war to guerrilla wars and insurrections.”<sup>6</sup> Secretary of the Army Stephen Ailes reiterated this belief, stating “the primary task of the Department of the Army is to provide combat-ready land forces,” and supporting Johnson’s claim that army forces were “in a better state of readiness today than they have ever been in any previous peacetime period.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet this rhetoric did not coincide with action. Although Johnson spoke of the importance of military strength and readiness, his decision to withhold any mobilization of the reserve forces until 1968 began a downward spiral of that very readiness around the world. And while McNamara claimed to believe in the need for large forces, he repeatedly attempted to reduce the size of the army’s reserves during a troop escalation in Vietnam that seemed to require a large pool of reserve manpower. He also endeavored to place ceilings on troop levels in strategic commands around the world, including Europe and Korea.

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<sup>5</sup> Lyndon Johnson, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office), 1965.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Defense Department (DoD), *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1965* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1967), 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

Both men would claim that a drastic increase in the aggregate size of the army compensated for these problems. Johnson saw the increase as a substitute for reserve mobilization, while McNamara saw it as justification for his attempts to reduce the army's reserves. In fact, the rapid expansion of the army had the opposite effect. In fiscal year 1965 alone, the army grew from 972,546 to 1,002,427, a 3 percent increase of almost 30,000 soldiers. While such an increase does not necessarily seem significant, the army had grown by less than 10,000 soldiers during the previous three years from 1962-1964. The difficulties of training these new recruits and draftees were twofold. First, the army's training base was structured around a standard number of trainees per year, and even that standard number was becoming more difficult to produce given increased deployments to Vietnam by U.S.-based units. This led to the second problem of a draw down in experienced troops in both Europe and Korea to fill positions as cadre.<sup>8</sup>

This draw down reduced personnel levels in key leadership positions, a problem exacerbated by the fact that these units in Europe and Korea had already lost experienced soldiers to the war in Vietnam. As an indicator, Vietnam had already taken a large percentage of the army's total personnel in the key officer ranks of captain and major by early 1965. Just over 4 percent of the army's captains and 3.6 percent of majors were deployed in Vietnam, while the highest percentage of any other officer rank was 1.7. Among the enlisted ranks, the key position of Sergeant First Class (E-7) was hurt the most, with

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<sup>8</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1964-1965), <http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/websites/dodandmilitaryejournals/siadapp.dior.whs.mil/personnel/MILITARY/history/309hist.htm>.

nearly 3 percent deployed and no other enlisted rank over 2 percent.<sup>9</sup> And it was these three ranks that would be most needed to train the large numbers of new recruits.

In aggregate numerical terms, the army in 1965 had over 420,000 troops stationed around the world, accounting for approximately 42 percent of the entire army. Included in this percentage were the troops in Vietnam, a number that grew from 10,892 in September of 1964 to 75,025 by September of 1965, and reached over 100,000 by the end of the calendar year, meaning that almost 25 percent of the army outside of the United States was deployed to Southeast Asia.<sup>10</sup>

As Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson noted, by 1964 the army had already reached a point “with its many missions scattered throughout the world, where it could not be stretched much further.”<sup>11</sup> Yet the president now asked it to do just that by fulfilling growing commitments to a land war in Vietnam without the use of its reserve forces. Throughout the year, Johnson, McNamara, and members of Congress discussed the issue of army readiness and attempted to determine the correct course of action for the coming years. McNamara’s proposal to merge the Reserve and National Guard, which ultimately called for a reduction in the total reserve force, provoked discussion over the proper use of these reserves. The Senate’s Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee (SPIS), a subset of the Senate’s Committee on Armed Services that dealt with military readiness

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<sup>9</sup> Memorandum from LTG J.L. Richardson, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, to General Harold K. Johnson, 3 Feb. 1965, Inclosure 1, “Grade Comparison—Republic of Vietnam Versus Total Army,” Box 264 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 3 Thru 16, RG 319, Records of the Army Staff, NARA.

<sup>10</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics*, 1965.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Sorley, *Thunderbolt: General Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 180.

issues, held hearings on army readiness, and showed that escalation in Vietnam posed a significant challenge to the army's global readiness.

Most significantly, however, Johnson decided that the war in Vietnam would be fought without using reserve forces. Despite the warnings brought about by the hearings and discussions in Washington, and despite the recommendations made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and McNamara himself, Johnson made a political decision based on political factors. His commitment to his Great Society social agenda led him to prefer a path to war without reserves because he believed this would avoid a public and divisive debate on the war that would ultimately cost him legislative votes. This path significantly affected the army's readiness levels around the world.

### *Merging the Reserves*

In December 1964, McNamara and Secretary of the Army Stephen Ailes proposed a realignment of the nation's reserve forces that would merge the Reserve and National Guard forces under one command. As early as January 1965, debate began in the press, on Capitol Hill, and within the ranks of the army over the plausibility, effectiveness, and consequences of this proposal. McNamara and Ailes developed this plan as a means of streamlining the nation's reserves, reducing costs, and increasing readiness. In essence, the plan called for an aggregate reduction in both Reserve and National Guard personnel from a 29-division force of 700,000 to an 8-division force of 550,000. This 150,000 soldier reduction would occur in what the Secretaries deemed low-priority units, those units that were not part of U.S. contingency war plans. The remaining soldiers and units would be realigned under the command of the National Guard, would be supported with 100% of their authorized

equipment, and would be brought to an increased state of readiness in the event they were needed to respond to a conflict. McNamara, a staunch advocate of reducing costs, claimed that this realignment would not only improve readiness but also have the added benefit of saving over \$150 million per year.<sup>12</sup>

The greatest backlash from this proposal came not from the fact that McNamara intended to reduce the total number of reserve forces, but rather from the idea of any sort of a merger between the two entities. Following World War II, the Reserves and the National Guard had developed separate functions with regard to national and civil defense. The Reserves were primarily made up of combat support units, responsible for logistics and training, while the National Guard held the majority of reserve combat units. Furthermore, the National Guard held a dual status as both a state and federal force, while the Reserves were entirely under federal control. This meant that, unless the Guard was mobilized for deployment, it fell under control of the state governor for use in domestic emergencies.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps because of these differences, a sense of rivalry developed between the two organizations. Though not openly confrontational, they each established separate associations with strong political ties, and they lobbied Congress independently for money. Thus, McNamara's merger announcement touched off a flurry of opposition on Capitol Hill.

Understandably, its greatest critic was the Reserve Officers Association, an organization which would essentially be eliminated by the proposed realignment to an all-National Guard reserve force. In letters to members of Congress and statements to the press,

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<sup>12</sup> Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee (SPIS) of the Committee on Armed Services, *Proposal to Realign the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve Forces*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, 2. For discussion on the army's readiness levels in 1965, see p. 18-21 of this paper.

<sup>13</sup> William F. Levantrosser, "The Army Reserve Merger Proposal," *Military Affairs* 30, 3 (Winter, 1966): 136.

the Association's leaders attacked the proposal's claims of increased readiness and cost-effectiveness. They felt that the turbulence of reorganization, the lack of active duty experience of the majority of National Guard soldiers, and the decrease in manpower would impair reserve readiness. As for cost reduction, they believed equipping all high-priority reserve units with 100% of their authorized equipment would exceed the savings resulting from personnel cuts.<sup>14</sup>

McNamara and his Office of Systems Analysis thought otherwise. These so-called "Whiz Kids" conducted their analyses of any proposal based on its projected costs over a five-year period, as well as its comparative effectiveness to any alternative. Though military leaders feared this method of decision-making would lead to a preference for low-cost programs in place of high-quality ones, McNamara did not believe such a tradeoff needed to be made. In this instance, the analysts convinced him that the elimination of low-priority reserve units would result in monetary savings that would allow for an increase in the readiness of the remaining high-priority reserves.<sup>15</sup>

Some state governors, who were responsible for their respective Guard units, were nonetheless skeptical of a plan that would reduce the total number of soldiers available to them to respond to local emergencies such as riots or natural disasters. Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama, Governor Frank G. Clement of Tennessee, and Governor John B. Connally, Jr. of Texas led these protests. In addition, these governors resented that they had

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<sup>14</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, "Congress Is Preparing Studies Of Pentagon Plan for Reserves," *The New York Times*, 17 Jan. 1965, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> Jaya Krishna Baral, *The Pentagon and the Making of US Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Vietnam, 1960-1968* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978), 64-65; *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1965*, 28-29.

been left out of the planning process for the merger and saw the move as taking away some of the authority they had always had over their soldiers. They viewed the merger as a centralization of power from state-controlled militias to federally controlled troops at a time when their southern states were struggling with dangerous racial tensions.<sup>16</sup>

The concern over McNamara's actions was not new. During his tenure, McNamara made a number of decisions that were criticized by military and civilian leaders alike as attempts to consolidate power within the Defense Department. Aside from his repeated modifications of the reserve forces, McNamara had also streamlined active components, in one case unifying all aspects of military intelligence under a single agency. All the while, according to one of the foremost scholars of the McNamara years, he implored the military services to speak with one voice, suppressed dissent, pressured members of the Joint Chiefs to agree to, and actively promote, his policies, and virtually required military leadership to toe the party line. This consolidation of authority stemmed from the Secretary of Defense's "faith in a small group of men with the best information deciding the fate of many."<sup>17</sup>

Lawmakers met McNamara's unilateral changes with a growing level of disdain. He seemed to relish any opportunity to prove his case, rebut criticism, and win fights with Congress, at times boasting that he had never lost such a fight. An attitude like that was not likely to win many friends on Capitol Hill, and as a result, McNamara lost the trust and

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<sup>16</sup> Gene Roberts, "Governors Decry Reserves Merger," *The New York Times*, 15 Sep. 1965, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Deborah Shapley, *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 233, 459.

confidence of many members of Congress, who were increasingly unwilling to give him the benefit of the doubt on policy issues.<sup>18</sup>

For these reasons, both the Senate and the House scheduled hearings to review the proposed realignment in a public forum. In the House, a subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, chaired by Representative F. Edward Hébert (D-LA), heard testimony intermittently from March through September. Hébert's concerns were mainly procedural, as he believed that McNamara's announcement of the proposal prior to any discussion with either legislative body indicated "hand-is-quicker-than-the-eye methods" and implied a "contemptuous disregard of the Congress."<sup>19</sup> In the Senate, the SPIS, chaired by Senator John C. Stennis (D-MS), heard similar testimony from March through May. Though the House and Senate witnesses were similar, it was in the Senate hearings that the important issues of the consequences of such a merger were discussed most thoroughly. As Stennis noted, "The basic and controlling question is the effect which the merger will have upon the combat readiness and military preparedness of the Nation."<sup>20</sup>

In order to answer this question, supporters of the merger as well as its critics were called upon to outline the proper role of the nation's reserve force. At a time when American involvement in Vietnam was increasing, the issue of how the reserves should be used was especially important. McNamara believed that reserve forces should be used as a part of the nation's limited or contingency war planning. Those units designated as high-priority, or

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<sup>18</sup> Levantrosser, "The Army Reserve Merger Proposal," 143; Shapley, *Promise and Power*, 235.

<sup>19</sup> "Guard Merger Plan Draws Fire In House," *The New York Times*, 30 Mar. 1965, p. 23; House Subcommittee No. 2 of the Committee on Armed Services, *Merger of the Army Reserve Components*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, 3561.

<sup>20</sup> SPIS, *Proposal to Realign the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve Forces*, 3.



crucial to a contingency plan, should be fully manned and equipped. Those units designated as low-priority, which served no function in the war plans, should be eliminated. Ailes concurred, stating “Our contingency and war plans call for a combat ready, immediately deployable, well-equipped Reserve force of approximately 550,000 men.” Anything above that level would be unable to be supported under current budget constraints and would thus be ineffective and of little use to the army. General Harold K. Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, added that the reserve forces “must consist of a high proportion of fully trained manpower, they must have the ability to fill these units to their full strength from a reservoir of trained manpower . . . and the units must have immediately available 100 percent of their equipment.”<sup>21</sup>

Critics of the merger believed that the reserve forces should not be earmarked for specific contingency plans, but rather used in the event of a large mobilization. In this way, they need not be ready to deploy immediately, but would provide a pool of reinforcements over an extended period of time. As Hanson W. Baldwin, the military correspondent for *The New York Times* aptly put it, “There is real worry that the nation’s reserve forces are being reduced too greatly in tactical units and in numbers and that too much emphasis is being placed on ‘readiness potential’—the capability of fielding quickly forces ready to fight—and not enough on ‘mobilization potential’—the capability of building up large forces more slowly after an emergency.”<sup>22</sup> Baldwin’s explanation made even more sense when viewed in

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 5, 12, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, “Cut in Reserves an Issue on Hill,” *The New York Times*, 28 Mar. 1965, p. 24.

light of the growing commitment to Vietnam, and the possibility of an imminent mobilization of reserves to support the effort there.

Troop requests from General William Westmoreland, commander of Military Assistance Command Vietnam, indicated this rapid growth of the American commitment in Southeast Asia. In February, Westmoreland asked for thirty-five hundred Marines to guard Da Nang air base. The following month, he requested a three-division force to be used for combat operations. In June, he raised the troop requirement to 150,000 soldiers, or thirty-four battalions. By September, Westmoreland's request had ballooned to a requirement of between 175,000 and 210,000 soldiers. Still, these numbers remained relatively small in relation to the country's overall military manpower, and McNamara therefore believed that the reserves' readiness potential was more important and relevant than its mobilization potential.<sup>23</sup>

Senators and Reserve officers alike questioned McNamara on this point, and were skeptical of the Defense Department's ability to accurately predict future contingencies. Senator Stuart Symington (D-MO) cited General Johnson's written statement as "a pretty high-class prognostication . . . when you say you have always been able to measure, fairly accurately, our requirement for contingency plans and operations less than general nuclear war." The Reserve Officers Association, in a letter provided to the Subcommittee, responded to the claim of aligning reserve forces with contingency war plans by writing "War plans contingent upon what? A partial mobilization of 100,000 men? 500,000 men? . . . The fact is that our mobilization base should be structured to counter enemy capabilities, not what the

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<sup>23</sup> Shapley, *Promise and Power*, 327, 334, 336, 352.

Pentagon's cost effectiveness experts hope an enemy will do." Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) asked McNamara if it was his "opinion that we will never face the situation within the foreseeable future where we may need more ground troops than that set forth in your proposal?" McNamara, fully aware of increasing American involvement in Vietnam, replied, "Yes, that is my opinion."<sup>24</sup>

Again, at this point in the gradual escalation process, McNamara's opinion was somewhat understandable. He did not share General Johnson's estimate that the ground war in Vietnam would require five hundred thousand troops and five years. Instead, he went along with Westmoreland's requests without forcing "a knock-down, drag-out debate" over the military strategy in Southeast Asia. As McNamara recalled, "I had spent twenty years as a manager identifying problems and forcing organizations—often against their will—to think deeply and realistically about alternative courses of action and their consequences. I doubt I will ever fully understand why I did not do so here."<sup>25</sup> In short, it seemed that McNamara believed the conflict would remain somewhat limited, and would be similar to other American wars: if needed, young people would enlist or be drafted and thus the military's manpower issues would be solved. He maintained this position until late June when Westmoreland's request of forty-four battalions caused him to re-evaluate the upper limit of troop deployments. In light of this evaluation, McNamara recommended a mobilization of

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<sup>24</sup> SPIS, *Proposal to Realign the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve Forces*, 26, 29, 86.

<sup>25</sup> Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), 203.

235,000 reservists, but did so “not because they were needed militarily but to emphasize to the public the magnitude of the war effort.”<sup>26</sup>

In spite of McNamara’s beliefs, many of the subcommittee’s senators expressed concern with the timing of his proposal. Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D-WA) stated, “My only point is that there is a real serious question in my mind as to whether or not the present planning is adequate in light of the commitments that we have around the world, and the present situation that we face right now in southeast Asia.” Senator Howard W. Cannon (D-NV) expressed his belief that “this is a rather ill-timed moment for us to be cutting back in the size of our potential Reserve forces for future possibilities that might occur,” adding, “Does not the mere fact that you are proposing a reduction of a 700,000-man Reserve Force to 550,000, give the impression worldwide, let us say, that we are unilaterally reducing our military structure?” Colonel Vernon B. McMillen, Chief of Staff, 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Ohio National Guard, best expressed these concerns in a letter to the subcommittee: “True, weapons have changed vastly, even in the past few years, but there is much reason to believe that in a limited war—our most likely problem—man is still vastly more important than sophisticated weaponry. Our experience in Korea and current events in Vietnam substantiate this opinion.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet McNamara continued to insist that his proposal was necessary. He firmly believed that a smaller number of highly ready reserve forces was more essential to the nation’s security than the currently large level of units that were not combat ready. This

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<sup>26</sup> Shapley, *Promise and Power*, 334, 353, 340; Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, and Robert K. Brigham, with Thomas J. Biersteker and Col. Herbert Y. Schandler, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999), 353.

<sup>27</sup> SPIS, *Proposal to Realign the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve Forces*, 128, 135, 196.

emphasis on increased readiness would allow quicker deployment capability, which would bring these forces into line with contingency war plans. House and Senate members, however, were unmoved. On June 23, the House approved a \$45.1 billion defense appropriation bill, which included funds to maintain the reserves at their current levels.<sup>28</sup> The Senate modified and approved the bill on September 21, with an additional provision that barred the Defense Department from going ahead with the reserve merger for at least one year unless it received prior Congressional approval.<sup>29</sup> McNamara certainly did not win this fight on Capitol Hill.

Undeterred, McNamara proposed a new plan on September 30 that would create a “select force” of 150,000 reservists from both Reserve and National Guard units, and would eliminate over 600 Reserve units totaling approximately 55,000 soldiers “on the grounds that they were ‘not required for contingency plans.’”<sup>30</sup> McNamara announced on November 13 that he would go ahead with this reduction, stating the move would “make available quickly additional trained manpower for units which are required by our contingency war plans and will enable them to increase combat readiness at the earliest possible date.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus ended, for the time being, the debate over a reserve merger. Yet McNamara had found a way to achieve at least a partial victory in his goal of reducing the nation’s reserve forces.

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<sup>28</sup> “\$45 Billion Voted Pentagon By House,” *The New York Times*, 24 Jun. 1965, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> “Defense Funds Voted in Senate,” *The New York Times*, 22 Sep. 1965, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Jack Raymond, “Pentagon Delays On Reserve Plan,” *The New York Times*, 2 Nov. 1965, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> John D. Morris, “Pentagon To Cut Reserves Despite Congress Protests,” *The New York Times*, 14 Nov. 1965, p. 1.

### *Further Reductions*

This reserve reduction coincided with attempts by McNamara to reduce the army's strength around the world. In a memorandum to Ailes on 17 February 1965, McNamara called for an implementation of a cap on total army forces in all foreign countries, with the exception of Vietnam, at 316,800. Given that army strength in all foreign countries at the time (with the exception of Vietnam) was just over 400,000, this cap entailed a large reduction in total force.<sup>32</sup>

Although his reasons for the implementation of such a cap were not immediately apparent, it seems McNamara's rationale was based on three factors. The first was somewhat political, driven by a sentiment among congressional leaders who believed the United States did not need such a large presence abroad. This sentiment was bolstered by McNamara's frustration with Europe's over-reliance on protection under the American nuclear umbrella. He believed it was necessary to "attempt to move them gradually toward increased reliance on a major conventional defense" and therefore reduce the burden on U.S. forces overseas.<sup>33</sup>

This led to the second factor, which fit nicely with McNamara's call for readily deployable forces earmarked for specific contingencies. Essentially, a reduced presence abroad would act as a sort of "trip-wire strategy" of "keeping smaller token forces in Korea [or Europe] and flying in reinforcements if needed."<sup>34</sup> Certainly this strategy had the

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<sup>32</sup> Memorandum from McNamara to Ailes, 17 Feb. 1965, "Army Military Strength in Foreign Countries," Box 264 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Case 17, RG 319, NARA; DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics*, 1965.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Letter From Secretary of State Rusk to Secretary of Defense McNamara," Document 63, 28 Nov. 1964, Volume 10: National Security Policy, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/x/9057.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Emerson Chapin, "U.S. Military Men Warn Against Cutback in Forces in Korea," *The New York Times*, 7 Jul. 1965, p. 8.

potential to escalate into nuclear war, but McNamara believed that quick response forces could mitigate that risk.

The final factor in capping U.S. troop levels was an examination of cost effectiveness based on systems analysis. As McNamara wrote President Johnson in an accompanying document to his Defense Department budget for 1966, “I have attempted, as last year, to eliminate all non-essential, marginal, and postponable expenditures, with the objective of minimizing the costs of supporting the required forces.”<sup>35</sup> And as his analysts had determined, if the United States’ allies could be convinced to bolster their conventional defenses as McNamara intended, the alliance would be able to hold its own against the Warsaw Pact in a non-nuclear war, even with a reduced American presence.<sup>36</sup>

Still, McNamara’s decision was extremely unpopular with those most affected by the move, particularly commanders in Europe and Korea. Ailes warned that the abilities of both the Seventh Army, the major deterrent ground force in Europe, and the Eighth Army, the force stationed in Korea with responsibility for defending South Korea from Northern aggression, to remain ready for combat would be “seriously impaired.” He implored McNamara that the “currently programmed ceilings which are based on mission and readiness requirements be maintained.”<sup>37</sup>

General John K. Waters, Commander-in-Chief, United States Army Pacific, reported that the plan would have detrimental effects on his force’s readiness. He said that the Eighth

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Defense Department Budget for 1966,” Document 65, under “Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson,” undated, Volume 10: National Security Policy, *FRUS 1964-1968*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/x/9057.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Shapley, *Promise and Power*, 230-231.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum from Ailes to McNamara, 24 Feb. 1965, “Army Military Strength in Foreign Countries,” Box 264 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Case 17, RG 319, NARA.

Army was already operating with significant personnel and equipment shortages prior to any of McNamara's proposed reductions. Even with augmentation from Korean soldiers, it was currently operating at only 80 percent of its authorized strength. Yet Waters warned that this number was misleading, as U.S. soldiers accounted for only 64 percent of that strength. Given that McNamara's plan called for a reduction of 4,500 soldiers from this already under strength level, these cuts would further reduce the American defensive posture on the peninsula. In addition to losses of personnel and equipment to Vietnam, McNamara's plan would force the Eighth Army to either reorganize or deactivate units.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, General Johnson's office prepared a report on military manpower requirements detailing the already reduced strength of both the Seventh and Eighth Armies. With an emphasis on Europe, the report stated that the "readiness of the military forces in USAREUR [U.S. Army Europe] is less than that required considering the threat and the mission of this command," which was essentially to provide a ground deterrent to Soviet aggression. Instead of a reduction in force, the report recommended an increase of 8,320 soldiers.<sup>39</sup>

Yet more important to the European theater than these reductions were diversions of both personnel and equipment from Europe to Vietnam. Although McNamara published a

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<sup>38</sup> Message from CINCUSARPAC to Department of the Army (DA), 23 Mar. 1965, "Unit Readiness and Optimum Utilization of Resources," Box 264 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Case 17, RG 319, NARA; Summary Sheet from the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCSPER) to General Johnson, 20 Mar. 1965, "Proposed Joint State-Defense Message Concerning US Army Reductions in Korea," Box 264 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Case 17, RG 319, NARA; Fact Sheet to Office Memorandum from LTC Haldane to General Johnson, 8 May 1965, "Understrength in Eighth United States Army," Box 265 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 35 Thru 44, RG 319, NARA. This final document noted that about 2,200 enlisted personnel were diverted from Eighth Army in order to fill the 25th Infantry Division prior to its deployment to Vietnam.

<sup>39</sup> Office Memorandum from LTC Schroeder to General Johnson, 26 Mar. 1965, "Priority of Military Manpower Requirements," Tab C to Inclosure 2, Box 264 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Case 17, RG 319, NARA.



stringent directive not to divert any resources from army units in Europe and to honor the United States' commitment to NATO, this directive was difficult to fulfill given that Vietnam was to have the highest priority. Units in Europe were inevitably affected in two compounding ways. First, manpower and materiel initially designated for the army's units in Europe were redirected to Vietnam. Second, and perhaps more significantly, a number of U.S.-based units included in the army's contingency plans as reinforcements for the European theater in the event of war had been deployed to Southeast Asia. An Army Staff summary sheet noted that while "this impact was not reflected in the latest readiness reports (as of 31 March), it is anticipated that reports for the next quarter will show a decline for units in CONUS [Continental United States] and that this trend may eventually extend to USAREUR [U.S. Army Europe] as planned deployments to SEA [Southeast Asia] continue."<sup>40</sup>

Although the impact of diversions may not have shown up in the latest readiness reports, units in the United States already felt the effects of personnel and equipment shortages, and these effects were certainly not lost on General Fischer, the Deputy Commanding General of the Continental U.S. Army Command. As the organization responsible for the Strategic Army Forces, those units stationed in the United States and designated as reinforcements for war around the world, Fischer realized early on that increased deployments to Vietnam would have severely detrimental effects on his reinforcing

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<sup>40</sup> Summary Sheet to Office Memorandum from LTC Caldwell to General Johnson, 11 Jun. 1965, "Diversion of Forces and Equipment from NATO Assignment," Inclosure 2, Box 265 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 35 Thru 44, RG 319, NARA; Summary Sheet to Office Memorandum from LTC Caldwell to General Johnson, 11 Jun. 1965, "Diversion of Forces or Equipment from NATO Assignment," Box 265 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 35 Thru 44, RG 319, NARA.

units. In a telephone conversation with Lieutenant General Theodore J. Conway, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, Fischer expressed his concern that “STRAF is in an almost irreparable condition” and that “DA [Department of the Army] staff and higher authority were not, in fact, aware” of that condition. General Johnson responded that he was working on a solution, but that “it will be worse before it is better.”<sup>41</sup>

### *Readiness Hearings*

In truth, leaders of both the DA and Defense Department were aware of the depleted condition of these units, and Congressional leaders soon sought explanations. In May and June, the SPIS held hearings to discuss the current state of U.S. Army readiness. These hearings followed an extensive investigation into army readiness by Ben Gilleas and Stuart French, professional staff members of the SPIS. Gilleas and French had “talked to approximately 200 individuals from commanding generals of divisions on down to sergeants in individual squads and platoons” and visited four different army divisions stationed in the United States. Armed with the information obtained by these two staff members, the SPIS commenced the hearings with Stennis’s stated goal of ascertaining whether “we have the men, equipment, and materiel to fill our commitments in Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere as contingencies may arise. We must be equally certain that the requirements of these activities do not result in an unacceptable impairment of the combat readiness and effectiveness of other high-priority combat units in the United States and elsewhere.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Attachment to Office Memorandum from LTC St. Onge to General Johnson, 6 Aug. 1965, “Telecon with General Fischer, Deputy Commanding General, Continental U.S. Army Command,” Box 265 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 45 Thru 52, RG 319, NARA.

<sup>42</sup> SPIS, *U.S. Army Readiness*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, 2-3.

The hearings began with a report by Gilleas and French on the findings from their investigation. In concluding their opening statement, they reported that the army had three main problems: “(1) Shortages of equipment; (2) Shortages of repair parts; and (3) The serviceability of equipment now on hand.”<sup>43</sup> Though heavily redacted by the Pentagon, the report, and the hearings themselves, received a flurry of attention in the press. Initial press reports spoke of significant deficiencies in army equipment and shortages “attributable to an increased funneling of equipment to Vietnam.”<sup>44</sup> Secretaries McNamara and Ailes quickly denied these allegations, issuing a statement explaining that Gilleas’ and French’s conclusions were based on a misunderstanding of complicated military data.<sup>45</sup> Senator Stennis also attempted to make clear the subcommittee’s findings, stating that its conclusions referred to the possibility of future shortages, but that “we are not at any peril point” as of yet.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, the report given by Gilleas and French was not as negative as was portrayed in the press. They praised the army’s efforts to improve readiness and described in detail its recently adopted system of readiness reporting. In order to more effectively monitor its readiness posture, the army had developed a readiness reporting system to be used by unit commanders that it hoped would accurately and empirically reflect combat capability in terms of personnel, equipment, and training.

This was a significant step in the army’s evaluation of its readiness. Prior to the implementation of this reporting requirement in 1963, there had been no quantifiable method

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Eder, “Shortages in Army Supplies Indicated at Hearing,” *The New York Times*, 6 Sep. 1965, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> “Army Shortages Are Denied By U.S.,” *The New York Times*, 7 Aug. 1965, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> “Johnson Gets Senate Data On Shortages In Vietnam,” *The New York Times*, 2 Aug. 1965, p. 4.

of measuring the army's ability to deploy and fight the nation's wars. Instead, military leaders had relied on the qualitative judgment of their subordinate commanders to determine if they could accomplish a given mission. In essence, army readiness was evaluated by how willing these subordinate commanders were to commit their troops to a combat situation, which reflected a psychological preparedness rather than a measurable readiness. Such a system was obviously inconsistent and ineffective.

The army's new system used a scale of C-1 to C-4, with C-1 being the highest rating and C-4 being the lowest. An army unit obtained its rating based on a percentage of its actual totals of personnel, equipment, and training versus its authorized totals. In other words, a commander would submit "a C-1 condition if he has 97 percent or more of his authorized personnel. If he has 87-97 percent, he is in a C-2 condition. If it is 77-87 percent, he is in a C-3 condition. If he has less than 77 percent of his authorized strength, he is in a C-4 condition."<sup>47</sup> The commander would use the same process to determine his C rating in terms of equipment and training, and use all three ratings to determine the unit's overall readiness condition, from C-1 [ready for combat within 24 hours] to C-4 [required more than 30 days to attain C-1].

Gilleas and French also reported the potential for manipulation of these numbers. As an example, they showed how a recent change in some army units' Table of Organization and Equipment [a list of authorized personnel and equipment for a given unit] had reduced their authorized numbers which allowed them to report a higher C rating. As Gilleas explained, "For example, sir, under the table of organization they were operating under at the

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<sup>47</sup> SPIS, *U.S. Army Readiness*, 8.

time of our visit, they were authorized 437 machineguns. Under the new table of organization they are currently operating under, they are authorized 377. So if they were short 22 when they were authorized 437, then when the authorized figure is reduced to 377, they are no longer short.”<sup>48</sup>

For their part, the military witnesses were quick to point out that this system was a new one, and not without its flaws. Both General Creighton Abrams, the Army’s Vice Chief of Staff, and General Ferdinand Chesarek, Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, advised the Senators to view the reports as tools to aid army commanders rather than as perfect snapshots of unit capability. In fact, they requested the subcommittee not place too much stock in the unit shortages as reported in their readiness ratings. As Abrams noted, had the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division been rated prior to deploying, it likely would have been rated at less than C-1. However, it deployed rapidly and successfully in response to the crisis in the Dominican Republic and accomplished its combat mission. Similarly, Chesarek warned the subcommittee that “it would be certainly terribly wrong to get the impression from these shortage charts that the division can’t perform its mission.”<sup>49</sup>

Beyond examining the specifics of equipment shortages, the SPIS analyzed the impact of so-called ‘unprogramed’ requirements on the readiness of the army. These requirements were those that the army was not budgeted for and would therefore be expected to fulfill without additional resources. The unprogramed requirements discussed in the hearings were the establishment of the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division (which had occurred prior to

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 157.

1965), the buildup of pre-positioned stocks of equipment, and the increase in troop levels in Vietnam.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division was a test unit created to assess the feasibility of the army's new airmobile concept, in which troops were flown into battle on helicopters. However, because this was only a test unit, the manpower and equipment used to establish the division and conduct the testing were drawn from existing army units, which experienced a temporary loss of a significant amount of personnel and materiel. Upon completion of the testing, however, these resources were redistributed and the effect on army readiness was minimal.<sup>50</sup>

The discussion regarding pre-positioned stocks was more substantive, but also more theoretical. The concept behind the buildup of pre-positioned stocks was to place army equipment in a number of depots around the world that could be used in the event of a contingency in that area. For example, a division's worth of equipment could be placed on a ship in the Persian Gulf. If a conflict occurred in the Middle East that required the deployment of U.S. troops, these stocks would enable army units to deploy troops more quickly because they would not need to prepare, load, and transport their own equipment. Instead, they could use the equipment stored in pre-positioned stocks.

The difficulty arose in striking the balance between distributing enough equipment to active army units around the world while still building the pre-positioned stocks for contingency planning. As Stennis noted, "It just seems to me that [it] is a sound policy to have a great deal stored in different parts of the Nation and the world. How essential is it in

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 26.

good sound military policy to have 100 percent of everything?” Gilleas agreed, but noted that the “point is that the army should be funded . . . for this particular exercise rather than having to borrow equipment from existing units.” As Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC) pointed out, “No allowance was included in the logistic guidance for . . . the prepositioned equipment . . . Under these circumstances, is it not inevitable that either the Active or Reserve divisions must go wanting authorized equipment?”<sup>51</sup>

Though both of these unprogramed requirements had an impact on army readiness, they paled in comparison to the growing requirements of the war in Vietnam. The war had already begun to drain both manpower and materiel from active army units around the world, and as a result, much of the subcommittee’s questioning was in this direction. Abrams was the primary witness called to testify before the SPIS. Defending the army’s readiness was a difficult job in light of the many facts and figures presented by Gilleas and French. Indeed, they even presented statements from army officers that all but acknowledged the fact that diversions of men and equipment to Vietnam had caused shortages in other army units or forced them to use second-hand or outdated equipment.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the evidence presented by Gilleas and French, a number of the Senators had further concerns. Senator Stennis saw the escalation in Vietnam and its effect on the army as only the beginning of a protracted problem, stating, “If this thing gets worse—and I think it will get worse in Vietnam—it seems to me like you are going to have a terrific drain. I do not expect things to be better . . . There is no telling how many places we may have to go

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 16, 17, 112.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 26.

into.” Senator Jackson had similar concerns about the redistribution of equipment, noting that “for a time now we have been drawing on our assets within existing divisions and existing army units to meet the situation in Vietnam . . . But it does not follow though that because we have that one problem in Vietnam that we should not maintain that strategic reserve to the goals previously set.” Indeed, Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) concluded her review of the testimonies by saying, “I don’t believe that we are well off anywhere except in Vietnam, as to supplies and equipment.”<sup>53</sup>

In response to these charges, Abrams directly addressed the concept and purpose of the strategic reserve as mentioned by Senator Jackson. As with the debate over the proper function of the nation’s Reserve and National Guard forces, there was a vigorous discussion about the most effective use of the active army’s strategic reserve, namely those divisions stationed in the United States that would be the first units called upon in the event of a conflict. Abrams stated that the army preferred to look at the resources diverted to Vietnam as a deployment of this strategic reserve rather than a drain on the active army.

Yet such a drain did, in fact, exist, and had begun early in the process of the Vietnam buildup. The removal of experienced leadership from combat units in the United States and Europe was more than a deployment of the strategic reserve. It resulted in unit personnel shortages as well as a degradation of the units’ combat capabilities, as inexperienced individuals were placed in leadership positions.<sup>54</sup> The priority requests from Vietnam for repair parts and essential pieces of equipment resulted in significant equipment shortages

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 153, 108-109, 197.

<sup>54</sup> Lewis Sorley, *Honorable Warrior: General Harold K. Johnson and the Ethics of Command* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 160.



throughout the army. Though Abrams attempted to place an optimistic tone on his report, he nonetheless realized that, in March of 1965, “of 1,487 units submitting readiness reports 782 were not combat-ready. That amounted to more than half of all the units rated.” In total, of “the sixteen army divisions, nine were rated not combat-ready overall. None were considered fully combat-ready.”<sup>55</sup> Though these ratings may not have been fully accurate, as Abrams and Chesarek had warned, they were still cause for concern.

The greatest difficulty, as alluded to by Senator Jackson, was in maintaining, or rebuilding, a sufficient strategic reserve in spite of diversions to the Vietnam War effort. As Abrams himself succinctly described the dilemma, “If you have sent five companies to Vietnam, do you organize five companies and equip them in the United States? Or do you mobilize them from the Reserve components?”<sup>56</sup>

Unbeknownst to Abrams and the rest of the military leadership, President Johnson was in the process of answering these questions, and his answer to the reserve mobilization question would be a resounding and fateful ‘no.’

***‘You Can’t Get There From Here’***

The president’s decision to increase troop levels in Vietnam without mobilizing the nation’s reserve forces tied the respective subjects of mobilization and readiness together. Because the active army would be expected to maintain readiness for combat while meeting the demands of troop escalations in Vietnam, the strain on its ability to do the former would

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<sup>55</sup> Sorley, *Thunderbolt*, 182.

<sup>56</sup> SPIS, *U.S. Army Readiness*, 113.

increase greatly. And because the reserve forces were not mobilized, questions lingered about how they would be used and, when used, how effective they would be.

The decision not to mobilize came as a surprise to most of the nation's military leaders. Virtually all of the top decision makers favored a reserve call-up to offset increasing military deployments. Secretary McNamara made his recommendation to the President on July 20, 1965 "that Congress be requested to authorize the call-up of approximately 235,000 men in the Reserve and National Guard," along with an increase in the active army of approximately 250,000 soldiers.<sup>57</sup> General Earle Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advocated a call-up for two reasons. First, during a time of war, the military was not large enough to maintain its global readiness without the effective use of the reserves. Therefore, all of the nation's contingency plans required the mobilization of reserves to replace the active strategic reserve forces in the event of their involvement in a conflict. Second, if the military had to rely only upon its active forces, the result would be a military stretched "very, very thin."<sup>58</sup> General Johnson, in a conversation with McNamara, stated "I haven't any basis for justifying what I'm going to say, but I can assure you of one thing, and that is that without a call-up of the reserves that the quality of the army is going to erode and we're going to suffer very badly. I don't know at what point this will occur, but it will be

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<sup>57</sup> Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to President Lyndon Johnson, 20 Jul. 1965, "Recommendations of additional deployments to Vietnam," Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), Item VI01596.

<sup>58</sup> General Earle Wheeler, Interview by Dorothy Pierce McSweeney, 21 Aug. 1969, *Lyndon B. Johnson Oral History Collection*, Miller Center for Public Affairs, University of Virginia, Part 1, 18-19.

relatively soon. I don't know how widespread it will be, but it will be relatively widespread."<sup>59</sup>

On 28 July 1965, however, President Johnson announced that reserve units would not yet be called upon. General Donald V. Bennett, the army's Director of Strategic Plans, remembered that he "was probably the most shocked man in the world. At that time it didn't seem that you could get there from here, that you couldn't send the forces over there without mobilizing."<sup>60</sup> Bennett knew full well the implications of President Johnson's decision. Along with his planning committee, he had studied the problem of escalation in Vietnam and what it would require of the army. By July 1965, all were in agreement that there could be no large reinforcement of troop levels in Vietnam without a concurrent decision to mobilize the reserve forces.

Among his top advisors, Johnson claimed that his fear of the international consequences of a U.S. mobilization and declaration of war led him to seek an alternative. In a meeting with the National Security Council on 27 July, he stated that if the United States went onto a war footing, the North Vietnamese would immediately seek aid from China and Russia, which could escalate into a major war. Therefore, calling up the reserves in large numbers was something he considered "too provocative and warlike," and he had decided instead to "give our commanders in the field the men and supplies they say they need."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Sorley, *Honorable Warrior*, 212.

<sup>60</sup> General Donald V. Bennett, Interview by LTC Hatcher and LTC Smith, 4 May 1976, *U.S. Army Military History Research Collection: Senior Officers Debriefing Program*, United States Army Military History Institute (MHI), Carlisle Barracks, PA, 217.

<sup>61</sup> Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 149.

Privately, however, there were personal and political motivations behind Johnson's decision. His primary goal as president had been to enact his dream of the Great Society by "improving life for more people and in more ways than any other political leader."<sup>62</sup> With this dream in mind, he was determined not to let a public debate over the war in Vietnam destroy any chance of achieving it. As a result, Johnson made nearly all of his decisions regarding escalation in as secret a manner as possible. After conceding the need to increase the U.S. commitment, he consistently attempted to disguise the Americanization of the war and refused to publicly acknowledge it. Just as he had hoped to avoid international tension, he sought to avoid dramatics at home as well by requesting that anyone who knew of American plans for Vietnam "to show your patriotism by not talking to the press." Even his public announcement of increased troop commitments was muted, as he made the statement at an afternoon press conference, emphasized that reserves would not be called, noted that this was not at all a change in policy, and included discussion of Great Society goals.<sup>63</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, the rationale behind Johnson's attempts to avoid a public explosion over Vietnam does not make much political sense. Pragmatically, given the liberal majorities in Congress, it seems more likely than not that his agenda would have successfully passed, even with an intense public debate over escalation. Politically, the true bombshell was the draft, a mechanism that was necessary for the prosecution of the war in Southeast Asia precisely because Johnson did not mobilize the reserves. One can safely

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 276.

<sup>63</sup> Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 276; Francis M. Bator, "No Good Choices: LBJ and the Vietnam/Great Society Connection," *Diplomatic History* 32, 3 (June, 2008): 322-324, 334.

assume that the political ramifications of the draft and the antiwar movement were much more damaging than any potential fallout resulting from a reserve call-up.<sup>64</sup>

Yet it seems that two important factors were at play that influenced Johnson's decision. First, in July 1965, most of his advisors did not believe that the Vietnam War would be anywhere near as lengthy or as costly as it eventually became. Therefore, the divisiveness of the draft and ballooning troop levels were not something Johnson considered. Second, while Johnson was considering the reserve option, Congress was working on his Great Society initiatives. They would not complete this work until October 1965. Thus, if Johnson could avoid public scrutiny over the war until after the implementation of these laws, they would be given the chance for full funding as soon as the war in Vietnam came to an end.<sup>65</sup>

Whatever the workings of Lyndon Johnson's mind, the effects of his decision not to call up the reserves were obvious. Bennett described these effects and the difficulties they placed on the army. Using the example of combat engineer battalions, he recalled that the buildup plan mandated thirty such battalions in Vietnam by 1 July 1966, yet in July 1965 there were only ten combat engineer battalions in the entire army. This meant that the army would be forced to maintain those ten battalions, while fielding, equipping, and training thirty more for deployment. As he noted, "You can understand the impact on active units that weren't going to go to Vietnam. You can understand the impact on Reserve and

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<sup>64</sup> Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 292. For the best source on the Vietnam draft, see Lawrence M. Baskir and William A. Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Knopf, 1978).

<sup>65</sup> Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 277-284.

National Guard units in terms of equipment. You can understand the impact on the Engineers in the army because we were going to take them and spread them four times.”<sup>66</sup>

An added training burden for U.S.-based units became a secondary effect of Johnson’s policy. Though his administration justified the absence of a reserve call-up by mandating a large increase in the size of the active army, this increase was manifested in raw, untrained recruits and draftees rather than experienced reservists. Therefore, the number of individuals who required training increased “by about one-third and in the absence of a call-up of Reserve training divisions (designed for this task) the load must fall on the active army, which means stripping already lean CONUS forces of trained men.”<sup>67</sup> As General Paul L. Freeman, Jr., the commander of Continental Army Command stated in his yearly review, “To reduce time requirements, personnel assigned to the division, and to the brigade at Fort Devens, will undergo basic combat training and advanced individual training in these units rather than at army training centers.”<sup>68</sup> In the final months of 1965, this change would occur at more installations than just Fort Devens.

Indeed, without reserve mobilization, the strategic reserve became focused solely on supporting the nation’s efforts in Vietnam rather than on its combat readiness. Its new duties were to “beef up the training establishment, provide cadres for the new infantry division and three independent brigades that are to be created during the next few months, provide replacements for losses in Vietnam, replace the brigade of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, and

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<sup>66</sup> General Bennett Oral Interview, 219.

<sup>67</sup> Editorial, “1965 Status Report,” *Army* 15, 16 (November 1965): 28.

<sup>68</sup> General Paul L. Freeman, Jr., “CONARC Keynote: Readiness,” *Army* 15, 16 (November, 1965): 59.

man the new helicopter companies.”<sup>69</sup> Over the next year, these new duties would result in a strategic reserve that was a shell of its former self.

### *‘Out of Forces in this Country’*

Fortunately for President Johnson and for the army, the Dominican intervention proved to be a relatively minor occurrence from a military standpoint. At its height, the crisis required just under 24,000 soldiers (among all services) to quell the violence. In the end, U.S. casualties numbered only 47 dead and 127 wounded. The first troops began leaving the country in June, and the last would be home less than a year later.<sup>70</sup>

The American experience in Vietnam would not be so easy. By year’s end, troop levels had already reached the 100,000 mark. In order to support this deployed force, the army began diverting manpower and materiel from its strategic reserve units in the United States, as well as from its deterrent forces in Europe and Korea. Because these units were already operating with shortages, this increased drain on their resources resulted in significant declines in combat readiness.

Over the next three years, the drain would continue. With President Johnson’s decision to escalate the war in Vietnam without the use of the reserves, the army was forced to prioritize its resources. Inevitably, and understandably, the highest priority was accorded to the war in Southeast Asia. At the same time, the large and rapid increase in the army’s size required more trainers and more training bases than were available. The solution to both

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<sup>69</sup> Editorial, “1965 Status Report,” 28.

<sup>70</sup> Yates, *Powerpack*, Appendix A, Chronology of Events.

of these problems was to draw down the army's units around the world, as well as its strategic reserve at home, to support the war effort.

As Senator Stennis noted, the army had not yet reached a critical point in terms of readiness. However, the confluence of events that occurred during the year would certainly not make the army's maintenance of combat readiness any easier. Prior to his 28 July announcement, President Johnson had told his advisors that he planned to send more troops to Vietnam "out of forces in this country."<sup>71</sup> The unintended consequence of this policy, however, was that the combat power of the army's strategic reserve was so quickly eroded that, by the following year, the United States Army had not one division on the continent that was ready for combat operations. If any crisis occurred anywhere in the world, even a relatively minor one as in the Dominican Republic, there would soon be no troops immediately ready to fight.

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<sup>71</sup> Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 276.



## **Chapter 2 - 'Perilous Insufficiency'**

There were fewer conflicts involving U.S. Army personnel outside of Southeast Asia in 1966 than in any of the escalation years. With the crisis in the Dominican Republic resolved, and all American troops withdrawn by September, Vietnam was now the only designated combat zone with actively employed U.S. troops. This certainly did not mean that it was the only dangerous region in the world. Tensions remained high in the Middle East, and while no American soldiers were directly involved in fighting there, the potential for such an occurrence appeared real. In Korea, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) established by the armistice agreement of 1953 was increasingly active, as North Korean aggression and rhetoric paved the way for what would become an openly hostile environment in 1967.

Still, the only official war being fought in 1966 was in Vietnam, and there were widespread fears that it was depleting army readiness around the world. Because of the potential for conflict elsewhere, a number of different agencies put significant thought into the ability of the army to deal with another contingency outside of Southeast Asia should one (or more) arise. Members of the press interviewed soldiers and wrote scathing articles about the state of the military. Members of Congress interrogated both civilian and military leadership to determine if the nation's forces were able to fight if called upon to do so. Members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff organized an internal study examining the impact of future Vietnam deployments on the military's global readiness.

What they all determined was that President Johnson's decision not to mobilize the nation's reserve forces caused difficulties and turbulence for the army. As troop levels in

Vietnam rose from 75,025 in September 1965 to 192,975 by September 1966, the army's global deployments elsewhere remained relatively constant, with around 40 percent of all army personnel stationed overseas. Yet a growing portion of this deployed manpower was involved in the war in Southeast Asia. In fact, nearly 38 percent of all deployed troops in 1966 were stationed in Vietnam, leaving only 62 percent for all American commitments elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> With no assistance from the reserves, the army was forced to spread itself thin in order to fulfill these obligations.

Failure to mobilize was not the only factor that made for a difficult year, however. In order to meet the growing demands of war, the army increased in size by just over 30 percent, from around 1 million soldiers to about 1.3 million. Secretary McNamara, who now realized the war would not be won quickly, believed this increase would compensate for the "deployments then planned to Southeast Asia, provide additional forces for possible new deployments, and maintain our capabilities to deal with other crises elsewhere in the world." In addition, he claimed that U.S. deterrent forces around the world had in fact been strengthened, and that the reserve components had reached unprecedented levels of readiness.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the sheer size of this increase in the army's numbers, the speed at which it occurred, and the absence of aid from the reserves, caused significant problems that would ultimately challenge McNamara's assertions of strength and readiness. The swelling of the army's ranks required the creation of new army units, which required skilled leaders to train

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<sup>1</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1965-1966).

<sup>2</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics*, 1965 and 1966; *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1966* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 3-4, 13.

them and prepare them for service in Vietnam. In order to effectively establish these new units, Secretary Resor reported that the “army required the withdrawal of experienced cadre personnel from existing stateside and overseas units, causing a temporary reduction of their readiness.”<sup>3</sup> In essence, the war in Southeast Asia forced the army to consolidate its expertise in units preparing to deploy, thereby adversely affecting its worldwide combat readiness.

In addition to creating new units, the newly drafted or recruited soldiers needed to be trained. As the army’s training centers were not equipped to deal with such a large influx of trainees, a significant number of new recruits were unable to immediately begin training and were forced to wait their turn.<sup>4</sup> In order to deal with this problem, the army prepared to open three new training centers, as well as to transform the Continental Army Command’s combat divisions into training divisions.<sup>5</sup> These were the STRAF divisions, units that were designed to act as the active army’s reserve in the event of a conflict anywhere in the world.<sup>6</sup> Yet now, in addition to providing manpower and resources to deploying units, the army ordered the STRAF divisions to focus their efforts on training individual recruits for deployment, rather than training their subordinate units for combat. This would make it difficult for McNamara to defend his statement that U.S. deterrent forces had been strengthened.

As for the readiness of the reserves, McNamara placed an increased reliance and focus on the recently created Selected Reserve Force (SRF) of approximately 150,000

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<sup>3</sup> *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1966*, 121, 126, 161.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Raymond, “Army Due To Gain Up To 50,000 Men,” *The New York Times*, 12 Jan. 1966, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> John G. Norris, “Army Shortly Will Open 3 New Training Centers,” *The Washington Post*, 9 Apr. 1966, p. A11.

<sup>6</sup> *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1966*, 253.

Reserve and National Guard Soldiers that “would be brought up to and maintained at very high states of readiness.” These reserves “could serve a more useful function as a readily available backup capability for dealing with other crises or with possible future needs in Southeast Asia.”<sup>7</sup> While this seemed logical, the resources simply were not available to make it a reality. Vietnam held the top priority for manpower and equipment, and active army units elsewhere fell next in line. The reserves, including the SRF, were almost an afterthought, as their readiness levels indicated.

It is unclear whether a complete or partial mobilization of the army’s reserve forces would have been beneficial either to the war effort in Vietnam or to the army’s readiness status around the world. Perhaps, as President Johnson feared, such a move would have provoked dangerous suspicions in the Soviet Union and among its allies. Perhaps a Reserve call-up would have been more disruptive to American life than were draft calls.<sup>8</sup> What was clear, however, was that a complete reliance on the active army without any mobilization of its reserves rendered the STRAF divisions ineffective and reduced the army’s global readiness by forcing it to prioritize and focus on Vietnam.

### ***Baldwin vs. McNamara***

On 21 February 1966, *New York Times* journalist Hanson W. Baldwin published an article titled “U.S. Combat Forces Spread Thin.” Baldwin contended that all of the combat-ready forces in the United States had already been committed to Vietnam and that this increased commitment, paired with the continued U.S. military presence overseas, had

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Raymond, “Military Manpower: The Arithmetic Now,” *The New York Times*, 2 Jan. 1966, p. 140.

“reduced the forces in the United States to a training establishment.” He cited a “recently retired officer” who believed the army was “‘in a situation of perilous insufficiency,’ without much capability of ‘a graduated response to any serious challenge.’” According to Baldwin, the situation was just as grim in the Reserve forces; he quoted a National Guard general saying, “there is not a Guard division in the United States today that could fight its way out of a paper bag.”<sup>9</sup>

Baldwin blamed many of the army’s problems on McNamara’s management style, while attributing the significant personnel issues to President Johnson’s refusal to mobilize the reserves. He believed equipment shortages stemmed from “McNamara’s cost-effectiveness formulas” that “did not allow a sufficient ‘cushion’ of supplies and equipment for emergencies.” In addition, he chided the Defense Department’s centralization of control as too inflexible for military needs.<sup>10</sup> In short, Baldwin made a compelling case that the army was spread thin.

Baldwin’s conclusions were strikingly similar to the army’s own private evaluations of its readiness. A report by the army’s Inspector General in July concluded that the expansion of the “army within current resources resulted in extreme personnel turbulence, increased improper utilization of personnel, and a decline in the readiness status” of a number of units. The report noted that the “unanticipated personnel requirements of the

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<sup>9</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, “U.S. Combat Forces Spread Thin,” *The New York Times*, 21 Feb. 1966, p. 1, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Baldwin, “U.S. Combat Forces Spread Thin,” p. 28.

magnitude required by the build-up in Southeast Asia without call-up of the Reserves” was the driving factor behind the army’s decreased combat readiness.<sup>11</sup>

In an effort to defend himself and the administration, McNamara responded publicly to Baldwin’s allegations on March 3. He addressed the nation’s concerns about the readiness of the United States military forces and responded directly to twenty-three charges of military shortfalls. To the charge that the United States lacked sufficient deployable, combat-ready units, he stated that there were 21 battalions available to deploy on short notice without a mobilization of reserve forces, and a potential 81 battalions in the event of a reserve call-up. McNamara noted that only 15 percent of the total military force had been deployed to Vietnam; he downplayed the importance of a mobilization due to the fact that if “the reserves are called, they become a perishable asset because individual reservists will have to be released upon expiration of their authorized period of active service . . . at which time it would be necessary to replace them.”<sup>12</sup> McNamara defended his reorganization plans for the Reserve and National Guard by stating that the changes were undertaken to bring the nation’s reserve forces in line with current contingency plans. Finally, McNamara assured the public that there had not been, and would not be, any drawdown of the United States’ military posture in Europe.

McNamara can certainly not be blamed for attempting to put a positive spin on the readiness of the nation’s military during a time of war. In fact, it would have been ill advised for him to announce to the world that the forces of the United States were not combat ready.

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<sup>11</sup> Report of the Inspector General, 24 Jul. 1966, “Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations,” Tab A, Box 427 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Case 53, RG 319, NARA.

<sup>12</sup> “Text of Statement by McNamara Defending the Readiness of U.S. Military Forces,” *The New York Times*, 3 Mar. 1966, p. 16.

Yet the truth, as he fully knew, differed greatly from his public statement. Although there were, in fact, 21 battalions stationed in the United States, they were by no means readily deployable. A memorandum prepared by the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army in response to McNamara's query regarding army readiness noted that the capabilities of these units had "been reduced as the result of recent levies and the requirement to conduct individual training" and that critical personnel shortages prevented "any maneuver battalion deployment capability until after 30 June 1967." And though McNamara touted the availability of 81 battalions with a full reserve mobilization, the memorandum was less optimistic, stating that reserve readiness was no better. At best, the Selected Reserve Force, theoretically the most readily available organization in the reserves, could be deployed in no less than eight weeks. And it, along with the entire reserve structure, was plagued by "substantial shortages of selected equipment" throughout 1966 and 1967.<sup>13</sup>

McNamara's statement that only 15 percent of the army's fighting force had been deployed to Vietnam was also true. However, it failed to place this number in context. First, the army bore the brunt of the burden of the Southeast Asian military commitment. Of the approximately 317,000 U.S. forces in the region at the time, about 193,000 (or 61%) were army troops.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, this focus on the relatively small percentage of deployed troops failed to indicate how the army's other 85 percent was coping with these deployments.

McNamara's statement that there were no plans for a drawdown of forces in Europe was also somewhat disingenuous. Less than a month later, the army's Deputy Chief of Staff

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<sup>13</sup> Office Memorandum from LTC Rogers to General Johnson, 15 Aug. 1966, "Readiness of U.S. Army Forces," Tab A, Box 427 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 72-78, RG 319, NARA.

<sup>14</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics*, 1966.

for Personnel, Lieutenant General James K. Woolnough, prepared a memorandum for General Johnson in response to “Mr. McNamara’s wish to restore the drawdown of U.S. Army Europe by end December and furnish you with a fact sheet which would indicate problems, if any, this would pose.” Woolnough stated that approved plans for a drawdown included approximately 26,000 troops that were to be withdrawn from April through June for purposes of supporting deployments to Vietnam, increasing the training base, and reconstituting the STRAF. Although these troops would be replaced with 22,000 recent graduates of Advanced Individual Training, these replacements were young and inexperienced. Even with the replacements, McNamara’s plan reduced the army’s authorized troop strength in Europe by approximately 4,000 soldiers.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, McNamara’s defense of the President’s decision not to call up the reserves failed to give a complete picture. His line of reasoning was strikingly similar to an article by journalist Lloyd Norman in *Army* magazine in September 1965, which made virtually the same argument: the reserve forces were perishable commodities and once activated, they were only usable for a finite period. Therefore, expanding the size of the active forces, which were less time sensitive, was more prudent.<sup>16</sup>

There were two problems with this explanation, however. First, it assumed that Congress would authorize a reserve call up for only a maximum of one year with no extensions. Had President Johnson made the case for a full mobilization and placed the country on a war footing (which he was unwilling to do politically) there was at least the

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<sup>15</sup> Memorandum from DCSPER, LTG Woolnough, to General Johnson, 1 Apr. 1966, “Restoration of Personnel Strength in USAREUR,” Box 426 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 23-33, RG 319, NARA.

<sup>16</sup> Lloyd Norman, “Anatomy of a Decision,” *Army* 15, 14 (Sep. 1965): 25-34.



possibility that Congress would have authorized a longer period of reserve service. Second, it failed to account for the significant problems that the dual factors of non-mobilization and a rapid expansion of the active army had on readiness. Even if the reserves were called up only for a short period, they would have at the very least slowed the drain resulting from escalation in Vietnam. In fairness to McNamara, though, he had supported a reserve call-up the previous year, and in this case was simply defending an administration decision.

Following his published statement, McNamara held a news conference to continue his defense of military readiness. At the press conference, he alluded to Baldwin's article, saying that his statement had been provoked by "certain articles in the press recently that . . . had given 'the erroneous impression that we are dangerously overextended' because of the war in Vietnam."<sup>17</sup> McNamara stated that these charges were untrue, and that the United States was fully prepared to meet all of its obligations, a statement that was necessary and understandable from a Cold War context. Still, the normally unemotional Secretary of Defense seemed "edgy and angry" at times during the press conference, provoking an altercation with a news reporter and responding angrily to a question from a German reporter regarding U.S. readiness in Europe by saying, "I am sick and tired of hearing the implication that we've drawn down the readiness of forces in Europe."<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, McNamara concluded the press conference by claiming that the Joint Chiefs of Staff shared his optimistic views on the state of readiness of the U.S. military, another of his claims that would be cast into doubt with the results of an October study. In

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<sup>17</sup> Jack Raymond, "M'Namara Adding 30,000 In Vietnam; Denies U.S. Strain," *The New York Times*, 3 Mar. 1966, p. 1, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Raymond, "M'Namara Adding 30,000 In Vietnam," p. 17.

the meantime, the Senate's Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee (SPIS) contested his readiness claims.

### *Not Combat Ready*

On 25 March 1966, the SPIS completed a report to Senator Richard B. Russell, Chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, on the combat readiness of four of the five army divisions stationed in the United States. These were the STRAF divisions that were to be used for the purpose of responding to the outbreak of war anywhere in the world. The only division not included in the report was the 82nd Airborne Division, as it still had a number of subordinate units deployed to the Dominican Republic. The report concluded that none of the four divisions examined was combat-ready, illuminating “the impact of the military demands and requirements of the operations in Vietnam and the rapid buildup of our forces in southeast Asia, and the resultant effect on the readiness of the active army divisions which remain in the continental United States.” Senator Stennis, the subcommittee's chairman, closed his letter of transmittal to Senator Russell with a request to “take a new and sober look at the extent of our worldwide commitments and make a hard and realistic appraisal of what level of effort and response would be required of us if two, three, or more contingencies or outbreaks should occur simultaneously.”<sup>19</sup>

The report concluded that the four divisions were not combat ready primarily “because . . . Reserve components have not been called to active duty” and therefore the

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<sup>19</sup> SPIS, *Investigation of the Preparedness Program*, Report on the Combat Readiness of the I. 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.; II. 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Carson, Colo.; III. 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, Fort Hood, Tex.; IV. 2d Armored Division, Fort Hood, Tex., 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1966, iii-iv.

active army “has been used, contrary to its intended purpose, as a personnel and equipment pool for units deploying to Vietnam and as an expansion of the training base.”<sup>20</sup>

The subcommittee’s report detailed the extent of these personnel, equipment, and training issues for each of the four divisions. The problems were extensive and fairly consistent among the different units. Personnel problems arose as a result of the army asking the STRAF divisions to provide soldiers for units preparing to deploy to Vietnam, as well as to units already in Vietnam. In addition, the army told these divisions to redistribute personnel to units overseas and to training units within the United States. The subcommittee found similar issues with regard to shortages of equipment. Because many of the units preparing to deploy to Vietnam did not have all of the equipment they needed, the STRAF divisions provided that equipment, leaving them without their full load of authorized materiel.<sup>21</sup>

The training deficiencies were twofold. First, the STRAF divisions essentially became training units. Therefore, entire divisions were “either engaged in basic training, advanced individual training, or in support of such training.” This type of training was geared toward individual proficiency rather than unit cohesion and effectiveness, a factor that led to the second deficiency. While being forced to produce individual soldiers for the war effort, the STRAF divisions conducted very few unit-level training exercises.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the change in mission from Strategic Reserve to training units greatly affected the STRAF’s readiness to respond to global contingencies.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 8, 13, 16.

The investigative report concluded with a somber reminder to the Armed Services Committee that these significant deficiencies were brought about not by a large conventional war on the scale of World War II, but rather by a limited commitment in Southeast Asia. As the report noted, these personnel, equipment, and training issues showed “the struggle and strain which the army has undergone in deploying less than 4 of its 16 combat divisions in support of but 1 overseas contingency.”<sup>23</sup>

Following this report, McNamara and the Pentagon had little choice but to admit to the accuracy of the subcommittee’s findings. They did so by acknowledging that the army’s divisions in the United States had indeed been affected by the demands of Vietnam, and that they had been engaged in training recruits and draftees. A Pentagon spokesman attributed the decline in readiness to the decision not to call the reserves, and noted that while these divisions were currently at low states of readiness, they would “begin to regain greater readiness for combat in June.”<sup>24</sup> In truth, it was not until July that the Pentagon reported the beginnings of a transition in these units from a training mission to a combat mission. Essentially, the army relieved the STRAF divisions of their mission to train new recruits and directed them to begin, once again, training for war. As of July 21, the army reported that the number of trainees in STRAF units had dropped from around 50 percent to less than 30 percent, and they were building toward a state of combat readiness.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>24</sup> John G. Norris, “Pentagon Admits 4 Divisions in U.S. Weakened,” *The Washington Post*, 30 Mar. 1966, p. A14.

<sup>25</sup> Fred S. Hoffman, “All Army Units Building For Combat Readiness,” *The Washington Post*, 21 Jul. 1966, p. F7.

### *Readiness Revisited*

In addition to filing this report, Stennis's subcommittee once again addressed the issue of army readiness in a set of hearings. While the previous year's questioning focused on the state of the army prior to escalation in Vietnam, the 1966 hearings looked at the effects of escalation in the absence of a reserve call-up. On 3 and 4 May, the subcommittee examined the "ability of the U.S. Army and the Continental Army Command to supply both replacements and added forces for our requirements in Vietnam and, at the same time, to retain an adequate reserve to meet possible contingencies elsewhere." Stennis himself was skeptical of McNamara's proclamation that failing to call up the reserves had made the nation stronger because the reserves were still available in the event of another emergency. If that were the case, he argued, "it would follow that when you have another emergency you will strengthen the situation even more by failing to call the Reserves."<sup>26</sup>

General Johnson testified that he had in fact supported a reserve call-up because "it would decrease substantially the turbulence within the active army." However, following the decision not to mobilize, he had decided to use the STRAF forces for two purposes. First, they "could provide some trained manpower to be shifted to the Vietnam task. Second, a portion of the Strategic Reserve could be used for training a greatly augmented input into an expansion of the active army." He noted that although this was not their intended purpose, the army had used its resources "to meet actual conditions in contrast to assumed conditions."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> SPIS, *U.S. Army Combat Readiness*, 89th Cong., 2nd sess., 1966, 1, 57.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 4.

However, such a use of army manpower was in direct contradiction to the proposed use of the reserves under McNamara's realignment proposal. Ultimately, his plan would have provided combat-ready reserve units in line with the nation's contingency war plans as opposed to the inefficiency of providing only a pool of trained manpower. In fact, McNamara's testimony during the 1965 realignment hearings cited the call-up of reserve forces during the Berlin crisis of 1961. For that event, McNamara said, "We had both too much and not enough. We had too many men and not enough ready units."<sup>28</sup> Yet as a result of President Johnson's failure to mobilize the reserves, the active army was being used to provide a pool of trained manpower in precisely the way McNamara had described as inefficient. While it was true that the army had no choice but to act in such a manner, as fulfilling the personnel demands of the war in Southeast Asia was the army's first priority, the result of this policy was the same as in 1961: too many men, not enough ready units.

The use of the STRAF as a training base was also antithetical to McNamara's contingency planning. Instead of possessing a force of nine-and-one-third combat-ready STRAF divisions as it had in April 1965, the army had available only four divisions with which to respond to an emergency situation, the same divisions that Stennis's report declared were not combat ready. As Chief Counsel James T. Kendall noted, "this method of meeting our Vietnamese commitments in personnel requirements has temporarily degraded the combat effectiveness of the active army in CONUS as a cohesive fighting force."<sup>29</sup> General Johnson replied that this was correct, as these units had been used as a source of trained

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<sup>28</sup> SPIS, *Proposal to Realign the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve Forces*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> SPIS, *U.S. Army Combat Readiness*, 25.

personnel rather than as trained units for future contingencies. The ultimate effect of this policy was that, in the event of another outbreak of war, rather than having the option of deploying the STRAF divisions or mobilizing the nation's reserve forces, the latter would be mandated, as the former would be unable to effectively perform its reserve purpose in a combat situation.

General Johnson was himself concerned about the state of the STRAF forces, and expressed these concerns in a memorandum to Secretary Resor in November. Even if these units were fully ready for combat operations, General Johnson still believed that the reduced number of five divisions simply was not enough. Three of the five divisions were committed to reinforcing NATO should a conflict arise in Europe and one was committed to the Western Hemisphere. This left only one division in reserve for the rest of the world. General Johnson speculated that the war in Vietnam had left the United States with "a limited capability to respond on short notice" to another contingency outside Southeast Asia, and he believed that the nation's enemies understood this limitation. He pointed to the deteriorating situation along the DMZ in Korea, and stated that the "North Koreans are convinced that we are so tied down in South Vietnam that we cannot respond anywhere."<sup>30</sup> General Johnson was correct in this assessment, and the situation would get much worse on the Korean peninsula in the following year.

The final matter discussed during the hearings was the detrimental effect of removing army troops from units stationed in Europe to assist in providing training to soldiers

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<sup>30</sup> Memorandum from General Johnson to Secretary Resor, 16 Nov. 1966, "Army End Strength, Fiscal Year 1968," Box 427 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 79-91, RG 319, NARA.

preparing to deploy to Vietnam. General Johnson noted this troop redistribution as contributing to the army's ability to establish and train the new units resulting from the increase in the size of the army. Senators Symington and Thurmond, however, saw this as a potentially dangerous reduction in the army's force projection capability. Both McNamara and General Johnson had claimed that at no point in the reduction would army troop levels in Europe fall below 15,000 short of their assigned strengths. Yet Thurmond pressed General Johnson on this point, stating that even with a reduction of not more than 15,000, "your deterrent in Europe has been weakened, has it not?"<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the army in Europe had already begun to feel the effects of Vietnam. In a June 26 Special Report to *The New York Times*, Philip Shabecoff detailed the results of his study of the U.S. Seventh Army in West Germany. After conducting interviews with a wide range of army personnel, Shabecoff concluded that personnel reductions and equipment removals had greatly affected the Seventh Army's ability to maintain a combat-ready status. Though most soldiers remained confident of their units' ability to perform well in combat should they be asked to do so, many described their situation as "modified full strength."<sup>32</sup>

This "modification" was due primarily to the removal of personnel, either voluntarily or involuntarily, from Europe to Vietnam. Though the official data reported in testimony stated the aforementioned reduction of no more than 15,000 soldiers at any one time, many "Seventh Army professionals" interviewed by Shabecoff believed that the actual number was much higher than that. This skepticism was grounded in the fact that many company-level

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<sup>31</sup> SPIS, *U.S. Army Combat Readiness*, 58.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Shabecoff, "U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Army in West Germany Is Feeling Impact of the War in Vietnam," *The New York Times*, 26 Jun. 1966, p. L2.



units had been reduced to “50 per cent of paper strength at some point during the last year,” and that not a single unit visited by Shabecoff “was near full strength.”<sup>33</sup>

Although these “professionals” may have exaggerated slightly, the army’s official numbers did indeed show significant shortages. A U.S. Army Europe personnel status report from June 1966 showed an assigned strength of 203,676 against an authorized strength of 231,149, indicating that it possessed approximately 88 percent of its authorized manpower.<sup>34</sup> Included in the assigned strength number, however, were soldiers considered “transient.” This category could encompass soldiers who had left Europe for another assignment but had not yet signed in to their gaining unit, soldiers attending temporary duty, or soldiers in any other form of transition between assignments. In short, “transients” were counted as a part of a unit’s assigned strength, but for all intents and purposes, they were (temporarily, at least) unavailable. During fiscal year 1966, the monthly average of transients counted against the army’s numbers in Europe was just over 6,000.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, its number of available soldiers was actually closer to 197,000, or 85 percent of what it was authorized.

Worse than these quantitative shortages, however, was a shortage of quality, experienced soldiers. Because most of the soldiers who volunteered for or were reassigned to Vietnam from Europe were highly trained and experienced technical specialists, and because most of the soldiers sent to replace them were recruits with little experience, the degradation of the Seventh Army’s quality was more worrisome than were its manpower

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Memorandum from DCSPER to General Johnson, 21 Jul. 1966, “USAREUR Personnel Status,” Inclosure 1, Box 426 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 23-33, RG 319, NARA.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum from General Johnson to Undersecretary of the Army (Manpower) Arthur W. Allen, 10 Jun. 1966, “Oversea Transients,” Chart C, Box 426 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 34-46, RG 319, NARA.

shortages. As a field-grade officer commented, “Vietnam unquestionably has skimmed the cream off the Seventh Army.”<sup>36</sup>

### ***Rusk, McNamara, and The World’s Policemen***

In August 1966, Senator Stennis followed through on his earlier recommendation to Senator Russell to study the nation’s worldwide commitments in light of the growing war in Vietnam. Stennis believed that “we cannot afford to become overly preoccupied with one area of the world or one set of problems.” In light of U.S. agreements with over forty countries around the world, many relied on America to act as “the world’s policemen” and expected protection. Therefore, the SPIS attempted to “measure and evaluate our military preparedness, our military potential against our existing military commitments and other phases of our vital defenses.”<sup>37</sup>

The primary witness of these hearings was Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Rusk was somewhat divided over the issue of Vietnam. Initially opposed to an expansion of U.S. combat involvement in Southeast Asia, he became (publicly at least) a staunch supporter of the American effort and impatient with those who were not. This turnabout came from his personal preference to “avoid questionable foreign commitments and to minimize international conflict by exploring all the alternatives and pitfalls before any initiative was undertaken.” Yet once such an initiative had begun, even in spite of his disagreement, he

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<sup>36</sup> Shabecoff, “U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Army in West Germany Is Feeling Impact of the War in Vietnam,” p. L2.

<sup>37</sup> SPIS, *Worldwide Military Commitments*, 89th Cong., 2nd sess., 1966, 2, 30, 65.

was supremely committed to showing loyalty to the President and to keeping dissension from the public view.<sup>38</sup>

Rusk had served in World War II and fully understood the importance of ready forces, both in the United States and abroad. Prior to the Korean War, he had opposed the removal of U.S. combat forces from the peninsula, believing that such a move, along with Dean Acheson's speech that left Korea outside of the American defensive perimeter, helped provoke the conflict. Because the United States had given the impression that it would not defend Korea, the communist powers miscalculated American motives and initiated aggression.<sup>39</sup> Rusk learned to avoid any possibility of such miscalculations. Part of doing so was to ensure that army units stationed around the world were prepared for combat.

Thus, Rusk defended U.S. global commitments to the SPIS by arguing that a large overseas presence was intended to prevent, rather than provoke war. He believed that "our defense commitments are fundamentally efforts to avoid the eventuality of armed conflict in which this country might become involved." Rusk flatly denied Stennis's assessment that the United States had become the world's policemen and noted that "out of the last 70 or so such crises of one sort or another, we were directly involved in only about 6 of them." As for the readiness of the army in Germany, Rusk stated that "we have maintained the Seventh Army in Europe at full strength and effectiveness during this period of major involvement in southeast Asia," though he later admitted "We have had some drawdown, temporary

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<sup>38</sup> John B. Henry II and William Espinosa, "The Tragedy of Dean Rusk," *Foreign Policy* 8 (Autumn, 1972): 166.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

drawdown, of certain types of specialists from the NATO forces, and there has been some rotation of service, as you know, with southeast Asia.”<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the hearings, Rusk nuanced his testimony in an interesting and telling way. Instead of defending the nation’s worldwide commitments with recognition of the country’s *actual* ability to fight if called upon, Rusk spoke in terms of America’s *potential* ability to respond to contingencies.<sup>41</sup> In this way, Rusk was alluding to the nation’s mobilization potential, rather than its readiness potential, a view contradictory to McNamara’s vision of reserve forces able to respond rapidly to any contingency anywhere in the world.

Such a contradiction was not indicative of a strained relationship between the two men. For his part, Rusk took pains to maintain a good working relationship with McNamara. He believed that such a relationship was of supreme importance to the success of any administration, and remembered the disastrous effects of the State-Defense feud during the Truman years. In light of this fact, the two scheduled regular meetings in order to discuss issues, resolve differences, and present a common viewpoint to President Johnson. Although Rusk maintained that he and McNamara got along rather well and were committed to working together to find the best solutions to the nation’s policy issues, the area of mobilization and the correct use of the reserves seemed to be one about which they disagreed.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> SPIS, *Worldwide Military Commitments*, 8, 9, 30, 50, 53.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas J. Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 285.

This disagreement may have stemmed from a methodological difference between the two men: “McNamara looked at everything in terms of numbers, charts, and graphs; Rusk tended to rely on instinct and judgment, picking out the key factor from among many confusing considerations.”<sup>43</sup> At times, Rusk stated that McNamara “tried to reduce to numbers certain factors and values that I believed could not be quantified.”<sup>44</sup> Given Rusk’s statements to the SPIS, a reduced and optimized reserve force seems to have been one of those numbers.

Perhaps the difference was also due to the fact that Rusk viewed Vietnam through his personal experiences in World War II and Korea. In 1940, Rusk was called to active duty from the reserves and given command of A Company, 30th Infantry. It just recently had been mobilized, and was designated as “ready for combat” despite possessing only 100 of the required 225 soldiers and significant shortages of essential equipment.<sup>45</sup> If a national mobilization could result in a positive outcome in the war from this lowly starting point, the same could surely be done in either Vietnam or any other region of conflict.

Rusk was also keenly aware of the fact that a deliberate decision had been made by the President to “keep the war as limited as possible and not build up a war fever in the United States.” For this reason, he had again disagreed with McNamara and opposed any call-up of reserves. Rusk contended that the limited information given to the public was never intended to deceive the American people; rather, the administration was vigorously attempting to avoid a larger war. This effort made sense to Rusk, for in “a nuclear world it

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Dean Rusk, as told by Richard Rusk, ed. Daniel S. Papp, *As I Saw It* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 522.

<sup>45</sup> Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War*, 73-74.

was too dangerous for an entire people to grow too angry.” From his perspective then, there was no actual need at this point for reserve units to be actively trained and ready to fight, for that may have been seen as too provocative. If a situation arose that required larger forces for the conflict in Vietnam or a conflict elsewhere, the United States possessed an enormous pool of potential manpower that would be available just as it had been in the past. Although in retrospect he admitted that this strategy might have been a mistake, he noted that however “badly it otherwise may have served us, gradual response helped limit the war in Vietnam,” and the alternative of nuclear war would have been much worse.<sup>46</sup>

In this, Rusk was certainly correct. However, the unintended consequence of a gradual response strategy in Vietnam, without mobilization of any reserve forces, was an army increasingly unready for war outside of Southeast Asia. The fact that the nation’s enemies seemed to understand this fact, as evident in General Johnson’s comments on North Korean intentions, made the possibility of war outside of Southeast Asia that much more likely. And if the United States did not have the required manpower, equipment, or training to defend itself by conventional means, the nuclear option may have become more likely as well.

### ***Worldwide Military Posture***

On 7 October 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a report to McNamara outlining in great detail the detrimental effects on the military of continued increases in deployments to Southeast Asia. Given the assumption that there would be no reserve call-up

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<sup>46</sup> Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 456; On Rusk’s opposition to a reserve call-up, see Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War*, 443.

and that the military would be forced to use its current resources to meet these increasing requirements, each military service provided a summary of where these resources would come from and how they would affect the nation's worldwide military posture.

The army's conclusions were grim. Its portion of the memorandum stated that the greatest impact of meeting continued troop requirements in Vietnam would occur in its STRAF units. In fact, in "order to reinforce Europe or other areas from the STRAF rapidly, the army [would] have available only two airborne brigade forces throughout 1967 and for the first half of 1968." As for the effects on overseas deployments, the army's study found that "command effectiveness" in its units in Europe and Korea would be greatly reduced due to "qualitative personnel withdrawals" in support of the Vietnam buildup. Finally, with respect to the army's reserve forces, the memorandum stated that their readiness was at a low level "at the very time greater dependence needed to be placed on them as a result of the degradation of the capability of the active army." This low level of readiness came as a result of severe equipment shortages on the order of the reserve components possessing "zero assets in approximately 30 percent of the authorized equipment line items."<sup>47</sup>

The army's findings further explained the dire situation in its reserves in a section of the memorandum discussing the merits of a mobilization. Due to the fact that "significant withdrawals of equipment" had been made from reserve units to augment newly activated and deploying units, the reserves' "training capability" as well as their "mobilization potential" to support army deployments was rather limited. However, the army was greatly

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<sup>47</sup> Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to the Secretary of Defense, "World-Wide U.S. Military Posture," 7 Oct. 1966, DNSA item number VI01854, p. 2-3.

in favor of mobilizing the reserves for the purposes of rebuilding, “personnel-wise,” its depleted STRAF units, accelerating the “restoration of army forces” in Europe and Korea, and improving the “quality of the training and sustaining base,” which had been affected by the large increase in the army’s size.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to this study, General Johnson’s office conducted a study of its own in an attempt to determine the impact of unprogrammed requirements on the army’s personnel and training. Its conclusions for both were clear and succinct. With regard to personnel, the study found that the “build-up of army forces in RVN [Republic of Vietnam] created a shortage of trained personnel, officers and EM [enlisted men], throughout the remainder of the army.” This was due primarily to the fact that the build-up had not been accounted for in personnel planning, as the army’s plans depended on the use of reserve forces. Because no reserves were activated, the army diverted soldiers from “units with lower priority” to units preparing to deploy to Vietnam, and also drew “personnel from other commands” like those in Europe. And while the increases in the army’s size allowed for some replenishment of these ranks, “much of the fill was of a lower quality.”<sup>49</sup>

The study found that the Vietnam build-up had affected army training in a similar way. Because trained and experienced soldiers were diverted to the war effort, and because their replacements were young and inexperienced, army units focused on individual and small unit training rather than their larger, broader “operational readiness objectives.”

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<sup>48</sup> JCS, “World-Wide U.S. Military Posture,” p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Office Memorandum from LTC Cavanaugh to General Johnson, 22 Oct. 1966, “Impact of Unprogrammed Requirements on Personnel,” Inclosure 8, Box 427 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 72-78, RG 319, NARA.



Though this was a necessary measure given the shortages of quality personnel, a focus on the individual rather than the unit's combat readiness decreased such readiness dramatically.<sup>50</sup>

### *A 'Shocking' Decrease*

In light of all of these findings and investigations, it seems the United States was fortunate to have only one major region of conflict in 1966. In just over a year since President Johnson's decision to escalate American involvement in Vietnam without mobilization, the army's ability to maintain its global combat readiness had plummeted rapidly. As Secretary Ailes remembered, with an examination of the army's readiness reporting system "we could see graphically what the Vietnam deployments were doing to our forces. We had 93-94 percent readiness, and then 30 percent—shocking!"<sup>51</sup>

In fact, this rapid decrease was not so shocking given the circumstances surrounding it. In spite of McNamara's assertions to the contrary, it was clear that Vietnam was stretching an army that was already overextended. With no help from reserve forces, the army was faced with three significant tasks to accomplish. First, it designated units and individuals for deployment to Vietnam. Second, it drew from its personnel in STRAF units and units around the world to assist in training the large number of new recruits and draftees resulting from the army's rapid expansion. Third, it attempted to replace the worldwide shortages resulting from this drawdown with newly trained individuals. In short, the army scrambled to plug holes in units in Southeast Asia and everywhere around the world.

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<sup>50</sup> Office Memorandum from LTC Cavanaugh to General Johnson, 22 Oct. 1966, "Impact of Unprogrammed Requirements on Training," Inclosure 8, Box 427 Entry A1-1689, CS 320.2 Cases 72-78, RG 319, NARA.

<sup>51</sup> Sorley, *Honorable Warrior*, 260.

Though this scrambling had only notional significance in 1966, it would become very important in 1967. Clashes along the DMZ in Korea would become so frequent as to cause fears of another war on that peninsula. War in the Middle East invoked the possibility that the United States could still become involved in a large-scale, non-nuclear war. And all the while, the American war in Southeast Asia continued to drain the army's combat power, leaving it globally unready for war elsewhere.

### **Chapter 3 - A 'Year of Adjustment'**

At 2:50 A.M. on June 5, 1967, National Security Advisor Walt Whitman Rostow received a report from the Situation Room about the opening of hostilities in the Middle East. Though it was not immediately clear whether Israel or Egypt had initiated the conflict, there was no doubt that America's ally was now at war with its Arab neighbors. The Six Day War had begun. Rostow promptly called Secretary of State Dean Rusk and, after gathering additional information, phoned President Lyndon Johnson at 4:35 A.M. with the news.<sup>1</sup>

Though the United States did not send its soldiers to fight in the Six Day War, the conflict served as a sober reminder of the potential for large scale, non-nuclear general war. This contrasted sharply with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's belief that future wars would be relatively limited in scope and could therefore be conducted with minimal military forces built around contingency plans; according to McNamara, large forces to be used as a mobilization pool in the event of a lengthy conflict were unnecessary.<sup>2</sup> However, the Six Day War proved that the potential for a conventional superpower fight requiring manpower resources on a massive scale still existed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Walt Rostow's Recollections of June 5, 1967," Document 149, "Memorandum for the Record," 17 Nov. 1968, Volume 19: Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xix/28058.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> In testimony before the Senate's Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, McNamara stated that he did not foresee the possibility of the need for a large-scale mobilization. See SPIS, *Proposal to Realign the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve Forces*, 86.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the Six Day War see "Summary of Arab-Israeli Crisis and War," Volume 19: Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967, *FRUS 1964-1968*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xix/28165.htm>; and Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Against this backdrop, the United States Army entered its third year of major troop involvement in Vietnam. As it did, it continued to confront significant challenges in balancing its resource requirements in Southeast Asia with its combat readiness around the world. Increasing violence and bellicose rhetoric on the Korean peninsula, begun late in 1966, reached unprecedented heights in 1967, with firefights and deaths (both American and Korean) occurring almost on a daily basis. Reports from every major army command around the globe indicated that readiness levels were following a downward trend. This was especially true with regard to the STRAF, which included those units stationed in the United States with the mission of responding to worldwide contingencies. However, these trends also applied for the first time ever to the Seventh Army, the American deterrent ground force in Europe, as well as the Eighth Army, stationed in the increasingly dangerous region of South Korea.

The army faced challenges on the home front as well. Federal army troops assisted in quelling riots in Detroit in July and helped Washington, D.C. law enforcement officials maintain order during a massive anti-war protest at the Pentagon in October. These domestic deployments called into question the readiness of the Army National Guard in particular, as the units involved lacked basic soldiering skills. Nevertheless, McNamara continued to press for reforms in the army's reserve structure. The Congressional hearings and public discourse surrounding McNamara's proposals implied a subtle altering of the fundamental purpose of the reserves: while they were to have been an augmentation to the STRAF and to serve as a quick reaction contingency force under McNamara's plans of 1965 and 1966, by 1967 they were seen as an almost equal partner.

In part, this functional change was a near necessity given the condition of the STRAF and the continued escalation in Vietnam. As the American commitment in Southeast Asia increased, the army diverted manpower and equipment from STRAF units to fill shortages in divisions that were scheduled to deploy. Hence, the study of these STRAF units conducted by the Senate's Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee in 1966 found that none was combat ready.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, McNamara's plan sought to view the reserves as an augmentation of the STRAF, and to count these reserves as a part of the nation's combat power.

Throughout, the army continued to have a difficult time fulfilling the manpower demands of the Vietnam effort. By September 1967, there were 294,962 army troops committed in Southeast Asia, accounting for approximately one-third of its active duty combat forces, and nearly half of the 47 percent of its total strength deployed outside the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, McNamara and Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor attempted to place the army's condition in 1967 in a positive light, and as an improvement on 1966. In the Department of Defense's Annual Report, Resor described 1967 as a "year of adjustment" and "general recuperation" from the turbulence caused by the previous years' large increase in the army's size as well as its escalating requirements in Vietnam. Yet neither Resor nor McNamara was clear about just how the army had adjusted to these difficulties. In fact, though Resor reported that the "drawing down" process had stopped and the "building up" process had begun, he noted that units "in all major commands except Vietnam continued to

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<sup>4</sup> SPIS, *Investigation of the Preparedness Program*, iii.

<sup>5</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1967); DoD, *Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1967* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1969), 22, 43.

be short of officers,” that training “readiness dropped in the first half of the fiscal year because of high personnel turnover,” and that logistics “readiness, too, was adversely affected by the heavy demand for equipment and parts in Southeast Asia.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, 1967 was certainly not a period of adjustment and recuperation from the turbulence of the previous years’ buildups and resultant readiness issues. Instead, because of its focus on Vietnam, the Defense Department failed to prevent deterioration in army readiness, and in fact left the army’s forces dangerously unready for combat around the world. Increasing responsibilities in Southeast Asia paired with the need for continued global readiness, without mobilization of the reserves, left the army ill prepared for the challenges it would face both at home and abroad. While President Johnson continued to resist a reserve call up, McNamara continued to try to trim these same reserves. Meanwhile, an increase of over 150,000 soldiers in the army’s size placed a strain on units in Europe and Korea that were tasked with providing cadre to train these recruits and draftees. All of these decisions were made as war raged in the Middle East, and as conditions in Korea escalated to war’s brink.

### *The Reserves’ Changing Mission*

On 8 February 1967, the House Armed Services Committee, chaired by Congressman L. Mendel Rivers (D-SC), met to consider a “Reserve Bill of Rights,” which would establish a minimum force structure for both the Reserve and the National Guard. Under this bill, a Selected Reserve would consist of 260,000 Army Reserve soldiers and 380,000 National Guard soldiers. Though nominally similar to McNamara’s previous proposal for a Selected

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<sup>6</sup> DoD, *Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1967*, 264, 145.

Reserve Force (SRF) of 150,000 Reserve and Guard soldiers designed for quick reaction to contingencies, this Selected Reserve would encompass the entire body of the nation's reserve structure. As introduced by Congressman F. Edward Hébert (D-LA), the objective of such a compromise was to "enable these components to more fully and effectively meet their mobilization readiness requirements as established in the contingency and war plans approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense."<sup>7</sup>

Because this proposal did not entail a merger of any sort between Reserve and Guard units as had McNamara's previous proposals, political opposition to this compromise was minimal. The Committee approved the bill by a vote of 28-1, but included in it a blockage of any attempt to merge the Reserves and the Guard. The one dissenting vote came from Congressman Lucien N. Nedzi (D-MI), who voiced concern over the Committee's establishment of arbitrary force levels prior to the completion of a study of the reserve structure by the Joint Chiefs.<sup>8</sup> In fact, this concern came from McNamara's request to the Committee to await the conclusion of the Pentagon's manpower study prior to passing any new reserve legislation.<sup>9</sup>

The Committee believed it had waited long enough. It decided to take the lead by passing legislation that would prevent McNamara defying Congressional requests, as he had done the year before. In fact, it accused McNamara's Defense Department of creating "chaos

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<sup>7</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, *Full Committee Consideration of H.R. 2, To Amend Titles 10, 14, 32, and 37, United States Code, To Strengthen the Reserve Components of the Armed Forces, and Clarify the Status of National Guard Technicians, and for Other Purposes* (hereafter *Reserve Hearings*), 1967, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 34.

<sup>9</sup> United Press International, "House Acts to Block Reserve Merger," *The Washington Post*, 21 Feb. 1967, p. A5.

and instability” in the nation’s reserve forces. It also reported that the “morale of dedicated Reservists has steadily eroded to the point where the very future of the Reserve component structure has become questionable.”<sup>10</sup>

A number of National Guard generals, apparently frustrated with attempts to reduce their numbers, echoed these sentiments. Major General James F. Cantwell, the Guard Association president, asked General Harold K. Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, “The big question is—is this for real?” This question underscored a common complaint among the Guard leaders—that they experienced significant difficulty in planning for personnel cuts or reorganizations if those moves were not certain to be permanent.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, although not until November, the Defense Department implemented McNamara’s reduction plan, with the revised figure of 400,000 as the established force structure for the National Guard.<sup>12</sup> This brought the sum total of the United States reserve forces to an authorized 660,000, a decrease of 90,000 from the authorized levels of 1965. Yet this decrease in manpower came with an increase in responsibility: rather than being seen in its conventional role as a mobilization augmentation to the STRAF, the Defense Department considered this Selected Reserve an almost equal partner, and expected it to perform the same functions. Due to the army’s growing commitment in Southeast Asia and the resultant effects on the STRAF, another conflict elsewhere in the world would all but mandate the mobilization of the reserve forces. As General Johnson testified before the

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<sup>10</sup> “McNamara Notes Less Infiltration,” *The Washington Post*, 16 Feb. 1967, p. A11.

<sup>11</sup> John Maffre, “Guard Generals Yielding on Army Plan,” *The Washington Post*, 6 Sep. 1967, p. A4.

<sup>12</sup> Abbott A. Brayton, “American Reserve Policies Since WWII,” *Military Affairs*, 36, 4 (Dec., 1972): 142.



SPIS, “I consider it logical to count on the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve to provide these supporting forces.”<sup>13</sup>

Though this was a ringing endorsement of the importance and the readiness of the reserve forces, it was also an indictment on the status of the STRAF. Given the increasingly volatile situation in Korea, and the potential for an outbreak of war there, the status and readiness of both the STRAF and the reserves was especially important.

### *An Active DMZ*

Throughout 1967, tensions along the DMZ in Korea reached dangerous levels. According to the records of the United States Army’s Pacific Command, the total number of DMZ violations charged against the North Koreans that year was 494. These violations ranged in scale from agent sightings to firefights. In typical Cold War fashion, the North Koreans admitted none of these infractions. In fact, during the same period, they charged the United Nations Command with committing 7,677 violations, of which the UN admitted only one.<sup>14</sup> More important than these conflicting allegations, however, was the fact that the North Koreans’ rhetoric became increasingly brazen and confrontational, as they accused the United States of “frenziedly speeding up preparations in South Korea to unleash a new war.”<sup>15</sup>

The number of DMZ violations alone was not shocking. It actually represented a significant decline from the peak number of North Korean violations of 1,295 in 1964, and

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<sup>13</sup> SPIS, *Worldwide Military Commitments*, 160; Brayton, “American Reserve Policies Since WWII,” 142.

<sup>14</sup> UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1969, “Armistice Violations: UNC Charges Against KPA/CPV,” Item 9-1, 31 Dec. 1968, Box 107, RG 550, Records of United States Army, Pacific, NARA.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Halloran, “N. Korea Says U.S. Preparing for War,” *The Washington Post*, 21 Oct. 1967, p. A23.

even a slight decrease from the 711 reported in 1966.<sup>16</sup> What was disturbing, however, was the nature of these incidents. Where previous infractions had been somewhat benign, the intrusions of 1967 were aggressive, provocative, and dangerous. As an example, 284 of the reported incidents involved the firing of weapons, a substantial increase from the 13 in 1966.<sup>17</sup>

These North Korean incursions and violations of the 1953 armistice agreement were not necessarily seen as threatening all-out war. Yet Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates nonetheless predicted the potential for a dangerous and long-term conflict. In response to State Department requests to study the increase in North Korean infiltration, William Colby, the Chief of the CIA's Far East Division, reported that "their purpose was the establishment of cells which might eventually be used not only for the collection of intelligence but for the support of guerilla warfare."<sup>18</sup>

The lethality of North Korean aggression gave credence to such a finding. Throughout 1967, 16 American soldiers were killed and 65 were wounded; the South Koreans suffered 123 killed and 257 wounded.<sup>19</sup> Such figures were exceedingly high for a designated non-combat zone, yet the army sent no reinforcements to the region to help subdue this violence and increase security. Instead, the army's "commitment in Korea

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<sup>16</sup> "Armistice Violations," 9-1.

<sup>17</sup> UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1969, "Incidents By Zone, 1966-1968," Item 2-5, 31 Dec. 1968, Box 107, RG 550, NARA.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Mr. Bundy's Meeting with Mr. Colby," Document 119, "Memorandum of Conversation," 22 Jun. 1967, Volume 29: Korea, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xxix/l.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/l.html).

<sup>19</sup> UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1969, "All-Korea Casualties," Item 2-6, 31 Dec. 1968, Box 107, RG 550, NARA.

continued at approximately the same level,” a level which already left it under strength by over 4,000 soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, the United States Eighth Army in Korea experienced an overwhelming reduction in both personnel and equipment readiness at a time when combat readiness seemed more important than ever. The percentage of units meeting their minimum authorized personnel levels fell from 81 percent in March to 37 percent in December, while the percentage of units meeting minimum equipment levels fell from 27 percent to 18 percent. The Eighth Army attributed its personnel shortages to “a continuing shortage of personnel in the proper grades and skills,” and its equipment shortages on an increase in authorized items.<sup>21</sup> Yet these explanations were indicative only of the fluctuations within the year itself, and said nothing of the strikingly low numbers as a whole.

General Charles H. Bonesteel III, the American in charge of the UN Command, admitted that the decline was due at least in part to a “drain” caused by Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> It seemed, according to historian and army general Daniel P. Bolger, that the “United States had made its allocations of forces, and Korea played second fiddle” to Southeast Asia.<sup>23</sup> In addition, “the need for competent men in training centers in the United States” as a result of

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<sup>20</sup> DoD, *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1968* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 152; UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1968, “United Nations Command Strength As Of 31 December 1967,” Item 1-1, 31 Jan. 1968, Box 107, RG 550, NARA.

<sup>21</sup> Memorandum from LTG Doleman to Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, 15 Feb. 1968, “USARPAC Personnel Readiness Trends,” Tab A to Inclosure 1, Box 110, USARPAC Command Summary Evaluation of Unit Readiness, 21 Dec. 1967, RG 550, NARA; Memorandum from LTG Doleman to Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, 15 Feb. 1968, “Trends and Analysis of Logistics Areas,” Inclosure 2, Page 1, Box 110, RG 550, NARA.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Halloran, “Korea DMZ: 2d Troubled Asia Border,” *The Washington Post*, 19 Apr. 1967, p. A8.

<sup>23</sup> Bolger, *Scenes from an Unfinished War*, 12.

the expansion in the army's size had stripped qualified soldiers from General Bonesteel's command.<sup>24</sup>

The realities of this impact of Vietnam on the Eighth Army were not lost on the North Koreans. In a report to the Commander in Chief Pacific Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, General Bonesteel exposed the North Korean view regarding the readiness of American forces on the peninsula. Information obtained from the interrogation of captured North Korean infiltrators noted that they considered the United States "as so overextended in support [of] Vietnam that we [the U.S.] would be unable adequately to reinforce Korea in case of war."<sup>25</sup> A Special National Intelligence Estimate published later in the year would reaffirm this notion, and add to it the additional factor of the Republic of Korea's deployments to Vietnam in assistance of the American effort. It stated that the timing of the increase in North Korean violence "has been strongly influenced by the Vietnamese War, for example by such factors as the absence of 50,000 ROK troops in South Vietnam."<sup>26</sup> A final memorandum from the Director of Defense Research and Engineering to McNamara stated that North Korean Prime Minister Kim Il Sung's aggression was based "on the theory that the United States cannot support more than one 'Vietnam' at a time."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Halloran, "Viet War Cut Troops in Korea," *The Washington Post*, 11 Jan. 1967, p. A19.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of State, Attachment 3, "Telegram From the Commander in Chief, United Nations Command, Korea and the Commander of United States Forces, Korea (Bonesteel) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Sharp)," to Document 123, "Memorandum From Alfred Jenkins of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant (Rostow)," 26 Jul. 1967, Volume 29: Korea, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xxix/m.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/m.html).

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of State, Document 130, "Special National Intelligence Estimate," 21 Sep. 1967, Volume 29: Korea, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xxix/n.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/n.html).

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Korea," Document 138, "Memorandum From the Director of Defense Research and Engineering (Foster) to Secretary of Defense McNamara," 7 Dec. 1967, Volume 29: Korea, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xxix/n.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/n.html).

The Johnson administration must not have believed that the situation was as dire as any of the above reports indicated. Instead of bolstering U.S. and ROK troop levels in order to reduce the potential for North Korean infiltration, the State Department was in fact attempting to persuade ROK President Chung-Hee Park to contribute more troops to Vietnam, a move that would have further reduced the UN Command's defensive capabilities on the Korean peninsula. Though the South Koreans already had committed over 50,000 troops to the American effort in Southeast Asia, and increasing commitments would have hurt President Park domestically, Johnson's advisors would seemingly accept nothing less. An August 3 telegram from the South Korean Embassy to the State Department, nearly two weeks after Bonesteel's memorandum, reported the progress of special envoys Clark Clifford and Maxwell Taylor in obtaining Park's concession to increased troop deployments to Vietnam. Though Park outlined the increasingly dangerous conditions in his country and the fact that his people were greatly concerned over their own security, Clifford and Taylor urged him to adhere to President Johnson's view that "the problems of the war in Vietnam are transcendent" and Park's assistance was desperately needed.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, the administration was so focused on Vietnam that it failed to respond to Bonesteel's multiple requests for additional troops, or perhaps didn't think they were warranted. Though these requests received the approval of the Bonesteel's commander, they were repeatedly denied. Indeed, even the State Department's Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, William J. Porter, could not convince his superiors that more troops were needed. In

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<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Clifford/Taylor Visit," Document 124, "Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State," 3 Aug. 1967, Volume 29: Korea, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xxix/m.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/m.html).

a telegram to Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, Porter noted that “General Bonesteel has submitted a restatement of his urgent needs for US and ROK forces” and that Porter fully supported this request and considered “its fulfillment a vital part of the total effort if it is to succeed.”<sup>29</sup>

Still, the Eighth Army received no help. Bonesteel and his soldiers were forced to make due with what they had. They fought with M-14 rifles rather than the new M-16s. They had only a handful of UH-1 helicopters, and instead had to rely on the outdated OH-23 models. An individual rotation policy similar to that used in Vietnam caused difficulties in cohesion. And because the best officers and non-commissioned officers were either pulled to duty in Vietnam or volunteered for it, “veteran officers and sergeants simply were not” available.<sup>30</sup>

Yet Bonesteel and his soldiers continued to fight, while the administration continued to maintain its focus on Southeast Asia. In spite of the fact that tension in Korea had reached unprecedented levels, the administration made no military response. Although the North Koreans clearly were taking advantage of U.S. and ROK involvement in Vietnam to be more provocative along the DMZ, President Johnson continued to push for even more ROK troop deployments, thereby further reducing South Korea’s defensive posture. Even as the Eighth Army’s readiness numbers were exceedingly low given its involvement in low-level guerilla warfare, Bonesteel’s troop requests went unfulfilled. And while U.S. and ROK soldiers were dying in increasingly high numbers, no one in Washington seemed to notice.

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of State, “ROK Internal Security,” Document 125, “Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State,” 23 Aug. 1967, Volume 29: Korea, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xxix/m.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/m.html).

<sup>30</sup> Bolger, *Scenes from an Unfinished War*, 27-28.

### *A Downward Trend in Europe*

On 23 August 1967, the United States Commander in Chief Europe, General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, sent a message to the office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding operational readiness. After noting the difficulties of measuring readiness accurately, he indicated that significant degradations were occurring in his command. In particular, he noted that “while it is difficult to put a specific index or percentage factor on this degradation, the overall trend in fighting potential is down from a year ago.” As was the case in Korea, Lemnitzer noted both significant deficiencies in equipment on hand, as well as shortages in experienced officers and non-commissioned officers. He wrote that “while the majority of young officers have splendid potential, their lack of background and experience has a direct and serious degrading effect on operational readiness.” This effect had enough of an impact that it resulted in the United States Seventh Army, Lemnitzer’s chief ground fighting component, reporting a rating of C-2 for the first time in its history, and its projected forecasts of personnel and equipment were “not likely to improve significantly during the next year.”<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the army that was to have been the primary defense against a Soviet attack on Western Europe did not possess the requisite levels of combat readiness. In comparison with the worldwide army, the Seventh Army was drastically short within the key officer ranks of Lieutenant Colonel, Major, and Captain. As a percentage of authorized strength in the combat arms branches, their numbers in these three ranks were 59.4, 51.3, and 30.5, respectively. Throughout the rest of the army, these percentages were 95.7, 89.8, and 65.6.

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<sup>31</sup> Memorandum from USCINCEUR to JCS, 23 Aug. 1967, “EUCOM Operational Readiness,” Box 619 Entry A1-1689, Tab A to Office Memorandum from LTC Corcoran to Chief of Staff, 28 Aug. 1967, CS 322, Readiness E, RG 319, NARA. As explained in footnote 10 on p. 4 of this paper, a C-2 condition indicates that a unit needs 15 days before being ready for combat.

The Seventh Army attributed these discrepancies to two factors: first, the rapid expansion of the army required experienced leaders to train new soldiers in the United States, and second, the need to fill shortages in units preparing to deploy to Vietnam, as well as volunteers for duty there, depleted its ranks.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, in 1967, the number of army troops fighting in Vietnam eclipsed the number of army troops stationed in Europe. General Johnson clearly understood the magnitude of the ensuing problems, but without at least a partial mobilization of the nation's reserve forces, and given the deteriorated state of the active forces in the United States, he was left with little choice but to take soldiers from Europe.

In June 1967, two months prior to General Lemnitzer's report, General Johnson visited Europe to examine the extent of the damage the Vietnam War had done to the army there. It soon became clear that the most obvious effect was, as General Lemnitzer had stated, a significant lack of experience in key positions. As General Johnson would later say, "I cannot recall having seen so many Second Lieutenants in all of my service." Indeed, the visit had such an impact on him that he sent a letter to General James H. Polk, Commander of United States Army Europe upon his return to Washington. In the letter, General Johnson described his mixed emotions "because the condition in which you find yourself with regard to noncommissioned officers and company grade officers differs so markedly from the Seventh Army that I knew in the late 1950's."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Office Memorandum from LTC C Corcoran to Chief of Staff, 28 Aug. 1967, "USAREUR Readiness Posture and Significant Trends," Tab D, Page 13-14, CS 322, Readiness E, RG 319, NARA; Fred S. Hoffman, "7<sup>th</sup> Army Short on Captains," *The Washington Post*, 5 Nov. 1967, p. A8.

<sup>33</sup> Sorley, *Honorable Warrior*, 273.



With hindsight, one might say that the readiness of the army in Europe was not critical to the United States' posture in the Cold War. An outbreak of general war on the European continent would have been too costly for both the Americans and the Soviets and would likely have involved the use of nuclear weapons. Indeed, much of the diplomatic dialogue between the United States and Germany in 1967 included discussions of troop withdrawals rather than increases.<sup>34</sup>

Yet this retrospective confidence belies the views of both policymakers and military leaders at the time. In fact, both groups placed a great emphasis on the need for strong and ready deterrent ground forces. The Joint Chiefs' military strategy of 1967 noted that the Warsaw Pact countries had "significant general purpose forces which pose major threats to Western Europe" and that the "likelihood of conflicts involving US interests . . . will depend upon the degree to which the United States and its allies maintain a military capability that provides a credible deterrence and effective flexible response throughout the spectrum of potential conflicts."<sup>35</sup> A letter from Secretary of State Dean Rusk to McNamara added the dimension of foreign policy implications to the need for strong and ready forces. His letter stated that an imbalance in the "US-Soviet relationship may cause our allies to be more

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<sup>34</sup> See for example U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation," Document 212, 24 Apr. 1967, Volume 15: Germany and Berlin, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xv/i.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xv/i.html).

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Military Strategy For FY 1970 Through FY 1977," Document 188, "Paper Prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff," 27 Jul. 1967, Volume 10: National Security Policy, *FRUS 1964-1968*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/x/9099.htm>.

deferential to Soviet political pressures, leading to a further European questioning of the reliability of US commitments.”<sup>36</sup>

Though these concerns were hypothetical in December 1967, they would become a dangerous reality with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia less than a year later.

### ***Reinforcements***

In the U.S.-based Continental Army Command’s (CONARC) readiness presentation of September 1967, General James K. Woolnough revealed some disturbing information. Some, such as the C-4 status of every combat division stationed in the United States with the exception of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions (the latter would be deployed to Vietnam in December), had been known for some time.<sup>37</sup> Other information, however, such as the shortage of troops to reinforce major theaters in the event of general war, was new.

Included in CONARC’s readiness briefing was a chart depicting the total number of troops needed to reinforce the European theater in war, as well as the total number of troops that were currently available to the CONARC commander with which to do so. Of the 628,328 troops required, only 272,638 would be available, resulting in a shortage of 355,690 soldiers.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Letter From Secretary of State Rusk to Secretary of Defense McNamara,” Document 198, 18 Dec. 1967, Volume 10: National Security Policy, *FRUS 1964-1968*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/x/9100.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> Secretary of the Army’s Program for Command Supervision of Readiness – CONARC Presentation, 26 Sep. 1967, “Overall Readiness Status of Divisions,” Chart 4, Page 100, CS 322 Inclosures – Readiness, Box 618, Entry A1-1689, RG 319, NARA.

<sup>38</sup> Secretary of the Army’s Program for Command Supervision of Readiness – CONARC Presentation, 26 Sep. 1967, “Operation Plan Package Review Phase II – General War,” Chart 13, Page 109, CS 322 Inclosures – Readiness, Box 618, Entry A1-1689, RG 319, NARA.

To be sure, an outbreak of war in Europe would necessitate a full mobilization of the nation's reserve forces, and thus these figures may appear more dramatic than they actually might have been. Yet as McNamara repeatedly asserted, mobilization takes time, and the United States needed to have an optimum number of units ready to meet contingencies in a timely manner. However, there were two points of irony embedded in this assertion. First, McNamara's own continued efforts to reduce the overall mobilization capacity of the army's reserve forces in favor of quick reaction units would have forced the reserves to commit more than half of their total strength at once if they were asked to make up the shortage noted above. Second, the total number of army troops in Vietnam would nearly have made up such a shortage by themselves.

In any event, the debilitated state of CONARC's forces had very real effects in addition to these hypothetical ones. Among the 768 units of varying size, from division to company, that reported their readiness status as a part of the STRAF, 318 reported a status of C-4.<sup>39</sup> Yet some of these very units, with significant shortages in manpower and training, would deploy to Vietnam in a few short months.

In December 1967, the army deployed the 101st Airborne Division, the 11th Infantry Brigade, and a number of other miscellaneous units to Vietnam, bringing its total number of troops there to around 324,000. A memorandum sent from Lieutenant General Harry Lemley, Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations, to General Johnson, outlined the readiness status of these units upon deployment. Because of the last-minute need to fill these

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<sup>39</sup> Secretary of the Army's Program for Command Supervision of Readiness – CONARC Presentation, "STRAF Personnel Readiness," Chart 41, Page 137, 26 Sep. 1967, CS 322 Inclosures – Readiness, Box 618, Entry A1-1689, RG 319, NARA.

units with additional personnel to meet minimum deployment requirements, they required at least thirty days of collective training upon arrival in Vietnam prior to commitment to combat. Even with these newly acquired soldiers, both units were significantly short on personnel due to their own contributions to previously deployed divisions. The 11th Infantry Brigade was short 351 soldiers, while the 101st Airborne Division was short 389, a “considerable number” of whom were combat riflemen. General Johnson replied to this memorandum with a short but poignant note: “DCSOPS [LTG Lemley]: To provide an audit trail, I’d like a final report when units depart. It is obvious that we are now berift [sic] of flexibility.”<sup>40</sup>

### *Domestic Deployment*

Supplying troops to the ever-expanding war in Southeast Asia was no longer the sole pressing issue facing the Continental Army Command. Twice during the year, the Defense Department called upon the active army to assist local National Guard and law enforcement officials in quelling civil disturbances. The more peaceful of the two occurred in October, when federal soldiers bolstered security for an anti-war protest sponsored by the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. According to McNamara’s yearly report, “approximately 10,350 army troops were moved to installations near Washington, D.C., to assist civil authorities during the course of a not always peaceful” demonstration.<sup>41</sup> The army’s responsibilities in this event were essentially constabulary, and there were no significant acts of violence. The deployment had a minimal effect on these troops, aside

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<sup>40</sup> Memorandum from LTG Harry Lemley, DCSOPS, to GEN Harold Johnson, 1 Dec. 1967, “Deployments to SVN During December 1967,” CS 322 Cases 159-169, Box 616, Entry A1-1689, RG 319, NARA.

<sup>41</sup> DoD, *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1968*, 27.

from the distraction of performing a function with which they were unfamiliar, and taking the focus off of their training for war. The second instance of federal assistance however, which occurred earlier in the year, was much more dangerous and highlighted significant flaws in the nation's concept of reserve forces.

In the early morning hours of July 23, a police encounter with a group of individuals at a speakeasy in Detroit, Michigan, sparked one of the largest riots in American history. At the request of Michigan Governor George Romney, President Johnson dispatched approximately 4,700 federal troops to help the 8,262 soldiers of the Michigan National Guard's 46th Infantry Division quell the violence. Included among the reinforcements were troops from the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, the only two army divisions rated as combat ready. These paratroopers comprised the first response of federal troops to a state request for assistance in suppressing domestic violence since the 1943 Detroit riot.<sup>42</sup>

Much of the public discourse with respect to this use of federal troops was a political argument over when Governor Romney made his request, how long it took for President Johnson to fulfill it, and the consequences of both on the disastrous escalation of the riots.<sup>43</sup> Because Romney intended to run as the Republican contender against President Johnson in the election of 1968, such politics can be understood. They do not, however, advance the discussion over the root problems involved in the need for federal assistance or the consequences of such a decision.

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<sup>42</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, *Report of Special Subcommittee to Inquire Into the Capability of the National Guard to Cope With Civil Disturbances* (hereafter *Capability of National Guard*), 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 5648, 5672; D.J.R. Bruckner, "New Riot Havoc: U.S. Paratroopers Enter Detroit," *The Los Angeles Times*, 25 Jul. 1967, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> See for example William V. Shannon, "Politics and '68," *The New York Times*, 6 Aug. 1967, p. 145.

Senator James William Fulbright (D-AR), a staunch opponent of the American effort in Southeast Asia, identified the significance of the riots. He believed that the failing effort of the United States in Vietnam was fueling civil unrest at home, saying that “each war feeds on the other and, although the President assures us that we have the resources to win both wars, in fact we are not winning either one of them.”<sup>44</sup> Though his comments were clearly aimed at promoting a withdrawal from Vietnam, they were nonetheless an important starting point for a connection between the war and the riots.

From a military perspective, the Detroit riots demonstrated that active STRAF forces could be required to assist in domestic disturbances. This added yet another layer of responsibility to the army’s U.S.-based forces on top of their existing requirements to meet increased demands for manpower in Vietnam and maintain their readiness for conflict around the world.

Almost immediately after the conclusion of the Detroit violence, the press began to circulate reports detailing the National Guard’s inability to deal with such instances of violence. In Washington, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Senator Richard B. Russell (D-GA) “expressed surprise that the Michigan National Guard was unable to cope with the Detroit riot” and joined the call for an inquiry into the Guard and Federal troop response.<sup>45</sup>

As a result, from August 10 through October 3, a Special Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee investigated the capabilities of the National Guard to deal with

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<sup>44</sup> Fred P. Graham, “Fulbright Links Vietnam to Riots,” *The New York Times*, 9 Aug. 1967, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> “Congressional Inquiry and Speech By President Urged in Wake of Riots,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 25 Jul. 1967, p. A5.

civil disturbances, and on December 18 issued its report. The Subcommittee found that the National Guard had a “limited but generally adequate capability” for dealing with such instances of violence and that the primary limitations stemmed from a “lack of equipment and a lack of essential training in riot-control techniques,” but surprisingly “not numbers of personnel.” It seemed that even in a situation as large as the Detroit riots, the Michigan National Guard had committed only 85 percent of its total available forces. Though this percentage was more than 20 percent higher than any commitment by any state since 1957, it was a sign that, at least domestically, personnel was not a major issue, even in light of McNamara’s recent cuts.<sup>46</sup>

Neither was the issue of a lack of equipment particularly troubling, given the fact that much of the equipment shortage discussed in the report was specific to items needed in riot control situations. Though there were certain items (such as rifles, bayonets, barbed wire, and communication equipment) that were basic items required by any army unit, the majority were additional pieces of equipment that most outfits would not normally be authorized.<sup>47</sup>

The most disturbing finding dealt with the Guard’s lack of adequate training. Though the Subcommittee described this lack of training as being specific to riot control, testimony before the Congressmen indicated that the problem was more universal. As the report indicated, “Every witness who appeared before the subcommittee agreed that the most useful resource in a riot control situation is a well-trained individual soldier.” It went on to say that simple training in the most basic soldier skills directly applied to techniques used in riot

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<sup>46</sup> House Committee, *Capability of National Guard*, 5672, 5648-5649.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 5673.

situations. Skills “such as individual weapons qualification, patrolling, small unit tactics, bayonet training, and guard duty develop skills useful to the soldier who is called upon to control a civil disturbance.”<sup>48</sup> Yet it was these basic skills that the Subcommittee believed the Guard units were lacking.

In light of this finding, the Subcommittee recommended that “National Guard and Federal forces [be] appropriately and adequately trained in the most advanced techniques of civil disturbance control.”<sup>49</sup> This recommendation missed the point. If the Guard’s soldiers did not possess the most basic skills, how were they to be expected to master any advanced techniques? In addition, the subcommittee attempted to require active army troops to add a third form of readiness to their training. Aside from preparing soldiers to fight in the jungles of Vietnam, as well as preparing units to deploy and fight in a conventional contingency around the world (as the Six Day War made a distinct possibility), this recommendation mandated that the army increase its readiness for domestic riot control.

In theory, and as both McNamara and General Johnson’s previous testimonies had indicated, the reserves were also to be ready for those same contingencies. Because they were no longer to be thought of as simply a mobilization base from which to draw manpower, and were to be equipped, trained, and employed in virtually the same way as the active army, they should be just as ready for any of the above situations. Yet the Subcommittee’s report cast doubt upon the ability and readiness of the National Guard’s soldiers to accomplish such a task.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 5655.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 5674.



As the report indicated, incidents of civil disturbance were completely different than any form of warfare, and because the violence of the Detroit riots rivaled that of any in the nation's recent history, it may be unfair to judge the Guard's performance too harshly. Ineffectiveness in quelling riots does not necessarily translate to ineffectiveness in waging war. At the very least, however, the performance of the Guard in the Detroit riots should have alerted policymakers to the fact that a simple substitution of the Selected Reserve for the STRAF was problematic. It seemed that this Selected Reserve was not ready, though it was being given increasing responsibility and importance as active forces in both the United States and Europe were forced to support the effort in Vietnam.

### *Toward the Brink*

As 1967 came to a close, the United States Army found itself involved in escalating violence in Korea and in civil disputes at home. Its reserve forces faced an identity crisis, along with increasing responsibilities and decreasing manpower. Its primary deterrent force in Europe reported significant deficiencies in its ability to maintain adequate levels of combat readiness. In short, the army had neither adjusted to, nor recuperated from, the turbulence of 1966. On the contrary, the nation asked it to adjust to additional responsibilities without recuperation.

In spite of the many significant events of the year that indicated a decline in the army's worldwide combat readiness, President Johnson continued to avoid any form of a reserve mobilization. Yet a mobilization could have assisted the active army in any number of ways besides filling Vietnam troop requirements. From providing General Bonesteel with additional soldiers, to filling dire shortages in General Lemnitzer's command, to aiding

General Woolnough in his attempt to provide manpower and training to the continued effort in Vietnam, the army required trained soldiers around the world.

Instead, the administration opted for an increase in the overall size of the army. While this was intended to be a replacement for a reserve mobilization and to provide the army with the appropriate level of manpower, it in fact made the army's readiness for combat worse. New soldiers required training, and training required experienced instructors. Because Vietnam had taken most of these experienced soldiers from units based in the United States, the army redistributed officers and non-commissioned officers from units in Korea and Europe to training bases under CONARC's command. These losses were in addition to the key leaders they had already sent to Vietnam. In Korea, this meant fighting communist insurgents with under strength units and outdated equipment. In Europe, it meant holding a tenuous defense with significant deficiencies and inexperienced leadership.

In short, 1967 gave President Johnson's administration an opportunity to see the potential dangers to the United States' global readiness that existed in expanding limited war in Southeast Asia. Increasing troop requirements there drew down the army's readiness around the world, and limited its ability to respond to events such as DMZ attacks in Korea or war in the Middle East. Yet the administration did not heed these warnings. As a result, the United States would face both political and military consequences in the early days of the following year.

#### **Chapter 4 - 'A Concerted, World-Wide Communist Effort'**

“I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.”  
--President Lyndon B. Johnson, 31 March 1968

When President Johnson made this announcement on national television, the previous three months had been perhaps the most turbulent of his career. Events in Korea rang in the new year with a North Korean assassination attempt on Republic of Korea's President Chung-Hee Park. Less than a week later, North Korean gunboats seized an American surveillance ship, the *USS Pueblo*, taking eighty-two U.S. sailors prisoner, holding them for nearly a year, and giving the United States a political black eye. Then, on 30 January, the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive against American locations throughout South Vietnam.

Domestically, Johnson was faring no better. The previous two years had taken their toll on the president. Democratic losses during the 1966 elections, attacks on his character and mental fitness, concerns about his health, and the possibility that Robert Kennedy (D-NY) might take the party's nomination from him all weighed on his mind. Then, on 12 March 1968, Eugene McCarthy (D-MN) won 42 percent of the votes in the New Hampshire Democratic primary. Although Johnson received 49 percent, his margin of victory was much smaller than most analysts had predicted. Seeing an opportunity, Kennedy entered the race on 16 March, and quickly took the lead in the polls over Johnson by a count of 54 to 41 percent.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 519-528.

Given the significance of both international and domestic events, and the pressure under which Johnson constantly operated, one can understand his decision not to run for a second term. These events forced him to make some choices with which he was uncomfortable. Although he was staunchly opposed to reserve mobilization, Johnson twice ordered reserve forces to active duty to respond to situations in both Korea and Vietnam. Although he intended to reduce the U.S. commitment in Vietnam, he in fact escalated it. All the while, Johnson received criticism from political opponents as well as members of his own party.

His announcement would not end the difficulties of the year, however. In fact, things would get much worse. On August 20, the USSR invaded Czechoslovakia after the “Prague Spring” had introduced a level of liberalization the Soviets found intolerable. The invasion came as a shock to U.S. leaders, and they hurriedly discussed diplomatic and military options. As for the latter, in an emergency meeting of the National Security Council, General Wheeler stated, “There is no military action we can take. We do not have the forces to do it.”<sup>2</sup>

In truth, military action was never a viable option. There would be no way of limiting such action only to Czechoslovakia, and the potential for a large-scale nuclear war was too great a risk for the United States to take. Still, Soviet perception of American weakness and

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Notes of Emergency Meeting of the National Security Council,” Document 81, 20 Aug. 1968, Volume 17, Eastern Europe, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xvii/j.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xvii/j.html). For more on the Czech invasion, see Jiri Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); and Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

preoccupation in Vietnam may have emboldened the USSR and allowed them to make provocations they otherwise would not have made.

Indeed, Wheeler's statement aptly summarized the army's deteriorated global posture as a result of three years of escalation in Vietnam. At the time of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the army numbered just under 187,000 in all of Western Europe. In comparison, the number of army troops in Vietnam climbed to over 354,000, meaning its force in Vietnam nearly doubled its force in Europe. Perhaps Wheeler should have amended his statement, and instead said that the United States had the forces to take military action, but that these forces were committed to the war in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup>

The same could be said in response to any request for troop assistance from General Bonesteel in Korea. Though his men continued to fight an increasingly violent low-level guerilla conflict with North Korean insurgents, the reserves that were ultimately sent to his aid were Navy and Air Force troops instead of the army soldiers he needed.

Meanwhile, the army continued to grow in size, numbering over 1.5 million soldiers in September 1968. These increases prolonged the drain on the army's forces, as all efforts were directed at training new recruits for duty in Vietnam. All of these factors meant that, by the third year of the war in Southeast Asia, virtually the entire army (including those fighting in Korea) was involved and affected by a war that accounted for "only" 23 percent of its total force. And it seemed that America's enemies around the world understood this perhaps better than the United States itself.

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<sup>3</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1968).

### *Flashpoint in Korea*

The increasing frequency and intensity of North Korean violence during 1967 continued virtually unchecked into 1968, while U.S. and ROK forces continued to fight with under-strength units. General Bonesteel began the year with an assigned strength of 45,478 U.S. troops, more than 4,000 short of his authorized strength.<sup>4</sup> Although the United Nations Command was predominantly manned by ROK troops, numbering almost 500,000, the shortages in American troops clearly indicated that the administration's priority for manpower was, somewhat understandably, directed to the hot war in Vietnam rather than the colder one in Korea.

Yet as events of the previous year had indicated, the situation on the Korean peninsula was far from cold. In fact, in 1968 the number of North Korean armistice violations rose dramatically from 494 to 780. Accompanying this figure in a UN Command document was an explanatory note regarding the deteriorating situation along the DMZ: "An analysis of these [UN Command] charges during 1968 indicate that approximately 67% were major Armistice violations such as armed intrusions and armed attacks across the Military Demarcation line."<sup>5</sup> A second document further explained the significance of this note and delineated the types of incidents and their frequency. Although incidents vaguely described as those in which weapons were fired declined slightly from 280 in 1967 to 223 in 1968, this number was still surprisingly large. In addition, violent incidents of other types greatly increased from the previous year. 'Assaults' more than doubled, from 43 to 89, as did

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<sup>4</sup> UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1968, "United Nations Command Strength As Of 31 December 1967," Item 1-1, 31 Jan. 1968, Box 107, RG 550, NARA.

<sup>5</sup> UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1969, "Armistice Violations: UNC Charges Against KPA/CPV," Item 9-1, 31 Dec. 1968, Box 107, RG 550, NARA.

‘Aggressive encounters,’ from 38 to 80, while incidents of ‘Harassing fire’ jumped from 5 to 19.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this violence, both American and ROK casualties remained high, with U.S. forces suffering 15 soldiers killed and 53 wounded, while the ROK suffered 147 killed and 241 wounded.<sup>7</sup>

While these numbers paled in comparison to the hundreds of daily casualties the army was taking in Vietnam, they were, as Bonesteel himself noted, far from inconsequential, and were more like guerilla warfare than simple police actions. Worse, these incidents were on the rise: “Firefights were the indicator of what was happening. These could be two or three men on a side shooting with intent to kill, or fairly sizable skirmishes which were damned lethal. In ’66 we had about 30 firefights all on our side of the DMZ or in the interior area. In ’67 we had about 250; In ’68, 350.”<sup>8</sup>

In the midst of this increasing violence, President Johnson’s administration asked Bonesteel to perform a difficult and somewhat paradoxical mission. On the one hand, his objective was to defend the Republic of Korea against North Korean aggression, both conventional and unconventional. On the other, it was to avoid an outbreak of another major war in Asia.<sup>9</sup> But Bonesteel had a level of manpower that made the accomplishment of the former extremely difficult, thereby making the possibility of the latter more likely. As late as 1967, his “7th Division was really nothing more than a holding outfit. We had concentrated

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<sup>6</sup> UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1969, “Incidents By Zone, 1966-1968,” Item 2-5, 31 Dec. 1968, Box 107, RG 550, NARA.

<sup>7</sup> UN Command US Forces Korea, Command Summary, 1 Feb. 1969, “All-Korea Casualties,” Item 2-6, 31 Dec. 1968, Box 107, RG 550, NARA.

<sup>8</sup> General Charles H. Bonesteel III, United States Army (ret.), interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert St. Louis, 9 Nov. 1972, *Senior Officers Oral History Program Project 73-2*, United States Army Military History Institute (MHI), Carlisle Barracks, PA, p. 334.

<sup>9</sup> Bolger, *Scenes From an Unfinished War*, 71.

the personnel so that we had the bare bones of one reasonably combat capable, effective, brigade out of the whole division.”<sup>10</sup> This was certainly not an optimal baseline force for any conflict, conventional or unconventional, high-intensity or low-intensity. And while it was true that ROK troops provided the bulk of the UN Command’s manpower, it was also true that increases in North Korean boldness and provocative actions were directly proportional to decreases in U.S. manpower on the peninsula as a result of the American effort in Vietnam.<sup>11</sup>

Bonesteel was faced with a diplomatic quandary as well. ROK President Chung-Hee Park pressed for a strong response to the North’s actions. As the man responsible for the security of his country, Park virtually demanded retaliation. Yet any such action on the part of the UN Command would have provoked the war that Johnson so desperately wanted to avoid. Thus, Bonesteel essentially walked a tightrope between the requests of “his country’s president—who wanted to do whatever he could to avoid midintensity war in Korea—and his ally’s president—who appeared to be itching to start that same war.”<sup>12</sup>

From Bonesteel’s perspective, even a short and limited war in Korea would have been severely detrimental to the United States. The scenario he described would have first involved the North’s destruction of the U.S. Air Force. Following that, “if they had made a local attack to seize say the land north of the ImJin there, just a little bit of something, and then get the UN to call it quits with a cease-fire in place, they would have totally destroyed

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<sup>10</sup> General Bonesteel Interview, p. 367.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, Attachment 3, “Telegram From the Commander in Chief, United Nations Command, Korea and the Commander of United States Forces, Korea (Bonesteel) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Sharp),” to Document 123, “Memorandum From Alfred Jenkins of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow),” 26 Jul. 1967, Volume 29: Korea, *FRUS 1964-1968*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xxix/m.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/m.html).

<sup>12</sup> Bolger, *Scenes From an Unfinished War*, 69-70.



the prestige of the American Armed Forces in the region and have given us a horrible black eye.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, while his diplomatic concern was to avoid war, his military concern was to be ready for the worst.

Until early 1968, it seemed that the army would force Bonesteel to make these preparations with only the troops currently at his disposal. Despite increasing violence and casualty rates, the administration failed to approve any significant U.S. military response throughout 1967, and likely would have failed to do so in 1968 had it not been for two highly publicized events. As Secretary McNamara reported, “On January 18 a group of North Korean agents attempted to assassinate the President of the Republic of Korea and were nearly successful. Five days later, on January 23, North Korean gunboats seized the *USS Pueblo*, an electronic surveillance ship, in international waters off the coast of North Korea.”<sup>14</sup> These incidents, coupled with the war in the Middle East the previous year and the Tet Offensive, which began a week later on January 30, created a fear among the Joint Chiefs of “a concerted, world-wide Communist effort,”<sup>15</sup> and made the President and his chief military advisors wonder if there was in fact a “relationship between activities in South Vietnam and those in Korea.”<sup>16</sup>

As a result of these incidents and this perception of a global communist movement, President Johnson finally made the decision to send reinforcements to the peninsula. A large contingent of naval and air forces was immediately dispatched to the area as a show of force

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<sup>13</sup> General Bonesteel Interview, p. 348.

<sup>14</sup> DoD, *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1968*, 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> John B. Henry II, “February, 1968,” *Foreign Policy* 4 (Autumn, 1971): 9. Quoting General William Westmoreland, Commander of United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) in an interview with John Henry.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Cable from National Security Advisor Walt Rostow to General Westmoreland.

in response to the *Pueblo's* seizure. Notably absent, however, were ground forces. Although Johnson authorized the movement of “as much military power into South Korea as we could without diverting units from Southeast Asia,” he excluded ground troops because he “assumed that the South Korean army could look after itself.”<sup>17</sup>

Though this assumption was perhaps sincere, Johnson had little choice given the global readiness posture of the United States Army and its continuing commitment in Vietnam. As outlined in *The Wall Street Journal*, the army was so strained by the war in Southeast Asia that it was unable to effectively deal with conflict elsewhere, particularly in Korea. Reporters Frederick Taylor and Richard F. Janssen detailed the army’s “lack of full readiness for the second-conflict contingency,” citing presidential candidate Richard Nixon’s belief “that the U.S. can’t afford major troop commitments elsewhere than Vietnam,” and believed that for these reasons, President Johnson’s administration was being deterred “from seeking any military solution to the [*Pueblo*] ship-seizure crisis.”<sup>18</sup>

In truth, Johnson saw the large air and naval deployment as something of a military solution. Indeed, this deployment was all he was willing to risk given his staunch opposition to any additional conflict outside of Vietnam. In the end, however, it was American diplomacy rather than military force that returned the eighty-two *Pueblo* prisoners back to UN Command control on 23 December 1968.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 536.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick Taylor and Richard F. Janssen, “Second-Front Strain,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 Jan. 1968, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the *USS Pueblo* crisis, see Richard A. Mobley, *Flash Point North Korea: The Pueblo and EC-121 Crises* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003); and House Subcommittee on Investigations, *USS Pueblo*, 101st Cong., 1st sess., 1989.

While this event did not formally end the fierce fighting along the DMZ, 1969 saw a dramatic decrease in violence and casualties. The United States had narrowly avoided what could have been a disastrous second-front war. As outlined by Taylor and Janssen, the American force needed for that war was simply unavailable. They believed that the 50,000 U.S. troops then deployed in South Korea were a woefully ineffective defense against the North Koreans, even with the support of the 500,000-man ROK army. In order to reach the 350,000 U.S. troop level of the Korean War, the army needed the reinforcement of its strategic reserve divisions. Yet there were two significant issues complicating the deployment of these forces, which numbered approximately 250,000. The first was that two of the four strategic reserve divisions were earmarked for use in Europe should an incident occur there.<sup>20</sup> The second was that, as discovered by the SPIS, these divisions were dangerously unready for combat operations.

### *Too Little, Too Late*

Prior to the SPIS's submission of this report on the army's readiness, however, President Johnson ordered two separate, partial mobilizations of a number of National Guard and Reserve units. The first, on January 25, was in response to the *Pueblo* seizure, and included only Navy and Air National Guard units and soldiers. The second, on April 11, activated approximately seventy-six Army Reserve and Guard units with a strength of just

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<sup>20</sup> Taylor and Janssen, "Second-Front Strain," p. 1.

over 20,000 soldiers. The purpose of this call-up was to provide additional troops for Vietnam, as well as to build up the strategic reserves in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

General William Westmoreland, commander of United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam, requested the Vietnam portion of these reinforcements on February 12. He believed he needed more troops to quell the violence brought on by the Tet Offensive. In addition, due to the recent dangers on the Korean peninsula, ROK leadership was understandably concerned with its own security, and therefore threatened to withdraw its forces (now numbering over 52,000) from Vietnam and cancel the deployment of additional forces to Southeast Asia.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, this placed Westmoreland in the same position that Bonesteel and others around the world had been accustomed to over the previous three years of escalation in Vietnam: his forces were faced with the prospect of being reduced in number at exactly the time when he believed that troops were most needed in response to the Tet Offensive.

Certainly troops were also needed to bolster the strategic reserve, and Westmoreland understood this fact as well. As a result of the policies associated with the Vietnam buildup, and the lack of any mobilization prior to 1968, the army had drawn down its strategic reserve to the point that it was essentially not a reserve force capable of much at all. General Earle Wheeler remembered, “Our strategic reserve here in the United States was completely depleted. We had not a single unit that, under the criteria that we had established, that is, one

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<sup>21</sup> John D. Stuckey and Joseph H. Pistorius, “Mobilization for the Vietnam War: A Political and Military Catastrophe,” *Parameters* 15, 1 (Spring, 1985): 32, 34; DoD, *Department of Defense Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1968*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Dell, 1976), 462.

year in country, two to two and a half years back here in the United States, was deployable.”<sup>23</sup>

In fact, not only was the strategic reserve unready to deploy, but Vietnam had reduced it in number from an available nine divisions in 1964 to a total of five by 1968. In a memorandum, Wheeler’s staff noted that “general worldwide military posture has been seriously degraded by the continued drain of both personnel and equipment to support our Southeast Asian operations.”<sup>24</sup> With regard to these divisions’ ability to deploy rapidly, as McNamara believed was essential, the situation was just as dire. Aside from the 82nd Airborne Division, which could be deployed within one week, no other division from the strategic reserve could be deployed in less than three months, and the 6th Infantry Division would not be ready for half a year. As for the National Guard and Reserve forces, for all the changes in manning levels and readiness it had undertaken over the last three years, not a single division could be deployed in less than three months.<sup>25</sup>

Even these projections of deployment times may have been generous. Although the 82nd Airborne Division claimed to be deployable within one week, reality seemed to indicate a different story. With the deployment of one of its brigades to Vietnam in early 1968, Lieutenant General York, commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps (of which the 82nd was a part) sent a memorandum to Westmoreland dated 20 February 1968. In order to deploy the brigade on time, York noted that “the rest of the division had to be stripped down to cadre

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<sup>23</sup> General Earle Wheeler, Interview by Dorothy Pierce McSweeney, 21 Aug. 1969, *Lyndon B. Johnson Oral History Collection*, Miller Center for Public Affairs, University of Virginia, Part II, 5-6.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum For the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1 Mar. 1968, “Pre-Vietnam CONUS Strategic Reserve,” item number VI02038, DNSA.

<sup>25</sup> “Memorandum for General Taylor,” 23 Feb. 1968, item number VI02007, DNSA.

strength.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, even if the bulk of the 82nd that remained in the United States was in fact ready to deploy within one week, it certainly would be less than fully combat capable given its makeup.

Though the Joint Chiefs outlined these issues in its recommendations, President Johnson continued to resist a mobilization. Even in light of the recent events in Korea and the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, he continued to seek ways to avoid a reserve call-up. One of these alternatives was a further reduction in the army’s global posture: he wondered if he “could reduce the numbers [of a reserve call-up] by drawing on forces stationed in Europe or South Korea.”<sup>27</sup> Such a suggestion may have been understandable and perhaps even feasible in 1965 or even 1966, but given the violence in Korea in 1968, it was puzzling and dangerous.

While Johnson continued to question the prudence of mobilization, the Joint Chiefs made plans and recommendations for a large call-up. In order to accomplish the goals of reinforcing Vietnam while rebuilding the strategic reserve, they believed that 32,000 army troops would be needed immediately, and that an additional 90,000 should be brought to a high state of readiness.<sup>28</sup> Instead, the total number of activated troops under Johnson’s order of 11 April was only 24,500 across all services.

Aside from being significantly smaller than recommendations of the Joint Chiefs, the Reserve and Guard unit activations were puzzling for another reason. For the previous three years, McNamara had vigorously attempted to reorganize the reserve structure with the goal

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<sup>26</sup> Memorandum from LTG York, CG 18th Airborne Corps to GEN Westmoreland, Commander USMACV, 20 Feb. 1968, item number VI02003, DNSA.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 387.

<sup>28</sup> National Security Council Memorandum to Mr. Rostow, 23 Feb. 1968, item number VI02009, DNSA.

of increasing its readiness to cope with a situation such as this. The establishment of the Selected Reserve Force (SRF) in 1965 tagged certain units as being high-priority, and McNamara mandated that they be resourced at the same levels as active units. Although the SRF continued to exist at the time of the 1968 call-up, it was not used as McNamara had proposed it would be. Of the 76 Army Reserve and Guard units that were activated, only 59 came from the SRF, even though it contained 74 of the required 76 units. Readiness, it seems, was not the primary factor involved in the mobilization. Instead, political factors such as the units' geographic distribution, Guard and Reserve balance, and civil disturbance threat were just as influential.<sup>29</sup>

Even if readiness had been the primary factor, it would have been a difficult task to have found enough units that were adequately prepared for activation. Despite McNamara's readiness goals for the SRF, these units were not nearly as ready as they were supposed to have been, with the primary cause being a significant lack of equipment. Every one of the 76 activated units, including the 59 SRF units, reported a C-4 equipment status, indicating that they possessed less than 77 percent of their authorized equipment.<sup>30</sup> McNamara's pre-mobilization plans, therefore, had not come to fruition.

Neither would his post-mobilization hopes. Following Johnson's call-up, the implementation and use of activated soldiers and units continued to defy McNamara's intentions. He had been strongly opposed to the use of reserve soldiers as simply a base of manpower from which to fill active units. Instead, he advocated the use of reserve units as

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<sup>29</sup> Stuckey and Pistorius, "Mobilization for the Vietnam War," 34, 35; United States Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, *After Action Report, Mobilization of Reserve Forces, 1968* (Washington: Government Publishing Office, 1971), 1-7, 1-8, 3-15.

<sup>30</sup> Stuckey and Pistorius, "Mobilization for the Vietnam War," 35.

cohesive groups, a position that enhanced his belief in the need for increased readiness in these units. However, the 1968 mobilization did not result in this type of use of the reserve forces. Rather than maintaining the integrity of these units and deploying them as one, the army detached many of the reserve soldiers from their parent units and used them instead as individual replacements. Guard soldiers belonging to units scheduled to deploy to Vietnam were subsequently transferred to other units upon their arrival, while soldiers assigned to units remaining in the United States were often sent to Vietnam as fillers.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Johnson's mobilization order did not accomplish any of its prescribed goals. It did little to alter the course of the war in Vietnam, bolster Bonesteel's troops in Korea, or rebuild the strategic reserve in the United States. Although any mobilization at any point during escalation may not have helped the first of these goals, a more effective mobilization would likely have aided the second, and an earlier mobilization would surely have assisted the third.

### *A Final Report*

For the third time in four years, the SPIS, chaired by Senator Stennis, submitted reports to the Senate Armed Services Committee detailing the alarmingly low rates of combat readiness in the nation's STRAF and their National Guard counterparts. Once again disputing Secretary Resor's claim that the strain of Vietnam had abated, the investigations by the SPIS showed the depths to which the army's forces had fallen. The first study detailed glaring deficiencies in the combat readiness of the four remaining active duty divisions stationed in the United States. The second exposed similar problems in three National Guard

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 35-36.



divisions, units that were part of the SRF, and therefore should have been maintained at a high state of readiness.

Though the Pentagon heavily redacted these investigative reports, the conclusions of the SPIS were nonetheless clear and damning. The subcommittee conducted its study intent on determining the readiness of the four strategic reserve divisions “to meet and successfully resist other contingencies that may arise in other troubled spots throughout the world.”<sup>32</sup> The four divisions studied included the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Divisions, the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, and the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

Each division had significant personnel, equipment, and training deficiencies. The 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division had “been heavily involved in providing personnel and equipment for the U.S. Army buildup in Vietnam,” with a resultant “adverse effect upon the operational readiness of the division.” The 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division and the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had similar shortfalls, and any attempted remedies would “require levies for personnel and equipment on other army units and, thus, would create further turbulence.” The 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, a historically combat-ready unit, had been stripped of men and equipment by the deployment to Vietnam of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Of the soldiers it received in return, “the vast majority . . . were non-deployable under existing criteria. Thus, the 82d Airborne Division not only lost . . . men but received . . . nondeployables under normal army policy.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> SPIS, *Investigation of the Preparedness Program*, Report on the Combat Readiness of Army and Marine Corps Divisions in the United States 90th Cong., 2nd sess., 1.

<sup>33</sup> SPIS, *Investigation of the Preparedness Program*, 4, 3, 11.

Such deficiencies were certainly no surprise to General Paul L. Freeman, the Continental Army Commander, and the man responsible for the STRAF. In fact, he believed these problems were an inevitable outgrowth of a gradual escalation plan that excluded the Reserve and National Guard forces. As early as 1965, he “realized that sooner or later the army would suffer” and he “tried to foresee and prevent these things happening but under the limitations that were put upon us for the build-up in Vietnam there just wasn’t anyway to avoid it.”<sup>34</sup>

The SPIS report on the readiness of three National Guard SRF brigades was substantially more optimistic, although there was still cause for concern. Senator Stennis’s letter of transmittal to Senator Richard B. Russell, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, noted that the “subcommittee was pleased to note the high degree of readiness pertaining to personnel,” but was “keenly concerned about the substantial and significant shortages of equipment existing in these units.”<sup>35</sup>

### ***The Impact of Vietnam***

As the SPIS investigated the impact of the Vietnam War on the strategic reserve in the United States, the House of Representatives’ Special Subcommittee on National Defense Posture was studying its impact on U.S. military readiness abroad. Its report of 24 August

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<sup>34</sup> General Paul L. Freeman, interview by Colonel James N. Ellis, 16-18 Apr. 1974, *U.S. Army Military History Research Collection: Senior Officers Debriefing Program*, United States Army Military History Institute (MHI), Carlisle Barracks, PA, Section 2, p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> SPIS, *Investigation of the Preparedness Program*, iii.

1968 was undertaken with “a view to determining our ability to respond militarily to any contingency.”<sup>36</sup>

Though the report encompassed the entire range of military commitments around the world, its conclusions about Korea and Europe were the most striking. Again, the report was heavily redacted, but its inferences are clear. With regard to Korea, the subcommittee’s report closely mirrored Taylor and Janssen’s *Wall Street Journal* article. While noting that “North Korean hostile actions reached their highest peak in 1967 since the armistice fifteen years ago,” the subcommittee believed that the “nature and degree of our reaction to these incidents suggest that the Vietnam war has placed a severe strain on our assets in Korea.” Indeed, having interviewed U.S. commanders there, they noted that military leaders “fully recognize that the existing priorities for both personnel and weaponry are in Vietnam. In the event of a contingency in Korea, their only solution lies in U.S. mobilization.”<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, with respect to the military situation in Europe, the subcommittee found that “our forces in Europe and in the Mediterranean have suffered as a result of the high priority requirements in Vietnam for both men and equipment.” This fact, paired with “our own weakened force redeployments and drawdowns to support our forces in Vietnam,” magnified U.S. force problems in Europe to a dangerous level.<sup>38</sup>

The House Subcommittee took specific aim at a recently released comparison of Warsaw Pact and NATO conventional forces produced by the Defense Department’s Office of Systems Analysis. This office, headed by Alain C. Enthoven, used mathematical analyses

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<sup>36</sup> Special House Subcommittee on National Defense Posture of the Committee on Armed Services, *Review of the Vietnam Conflict and its Impact on U.S. Military Commitments Abroad*, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., 1968, 35.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

of Warsaw Pact and NATO divisions to conclude that “NATO and the Warsaw Pact were roughly equal in terms of soldiers, guns, vehicles, infantrymen, and the like. In many respects, we were ‘superior’; in some respects, they were.”<sup>39</sup>

A multitude of factors and assumptions used to arrive at this conclusion were simply misleading or incorrect, and the House Subcommittee outlined a few. The first was the ill-conceived assumption that NATO countries would provide their share of the troop requirements, for as the report noted, “outside of the United States none of the alliance nations has at any time met its troop commitments.” The second was a misuse of numbers. Far from being a comparison of Europe-based forces, “the U.S. forces included in the analysis are widely spread over the globe.” In fact, the subcommittee accused the Defense Department of including U.S. forces then deployed in Vietnam, as well as forces stationed in the United States. The final rebuttal of the report’s findings was its assumption that all forces were equal. As the House Subcommittee had determined, however, a significant portion of the American military was “in a marginal state of readiness,” and could therefore not be relied on to fight as a combat-ready outfit.<sup>40</sup>

In fact, the House Subcommittee was so taken with the potentially devastating political and military consequences of adhering to a misguided belief of equality between Warsaw Pact and NATO conventional forces that it commissioned a report responding in detail to the findings. This report contended that the use of systems analysis in such a “highly complex problem of force planning . . . can be extremely dangerous if used as a

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<sup>39</sup> Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much Is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961-1969* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2005), 142.

<sup>40</sup> Special House Subcommittee, *Review of the Vietnam Conflict*, 56.

substitute for subjective analyses and informed reasoning.” It went on to state that “the most pertinent factors that bear on the effectiveness of military strategy and planning cannot readily be reduced to statistical abstractions.”<sup>41</sup>

The report took specific issue with the analysts’ estimate of the numbers of NATO troops available in a European conflict. Quoting the British Defense Minister as saying, “With great respect, I do not think you can really count on the British forces in Hong Kong as being available in case of war in Europe,” the report compared this statement with American troops’ availability. Because of U.S. participation in Vietnam, the subcommittee found, the same could be said “for a significant number of American personnel who represent the dominant weight on the NATO side as portrayed” by the systems analysts.<sup>42</sup>

In either case, mathematic or pragmatic, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on 20 August ended the need for hypothetical analysis and placed the spotlight squarely on the readiness of American forces in Europe.

### ***Czech Invasion***

Since World War II, Europe had remained the primary theater of operations for all military planning. Yet conflicts in Korea and Vietnam had successively shifted manpower and resources away from the European region to the detriment of the readiness of the army’s deterrent force stationed there. During the Korean War, however, Soviet-backed forces did not take any aggressive action. During the Vietnam War, they did.

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<sup>41</sup> Special House Subcommittee on National Defense Posture of the Committee on Armed Services, *Review of a Systems Analysis Evaluation of NATO vs. Warsaw Pact Conventional Forces*, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., 1968, 1, 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Since 1966, President Johnson and his administration had been attempting to ease tensions and “build bridges” between NATO and Warsaw countries. These efforts were mainly economic and political, but there was also talk of military compromise as well. The absence of any openly hostile East-West conflict since the Berlin crisis of 1961 led many political and military leaders to believe that the size of the American deterrent force in Europe was in excess of what was required by its NATO commitment. Even a former Seventh Army commander, Lieutenant General James M. Gavin, believed that the time had come to reduce “the U.S. NATO ground commitment from five divisions to two.” As a result, Johnson’s administration had been involved in a series of talks with its allied partners regarding the reduction of U.S. troop levels.<sup>43</sup>

The election of Alexander Dubcek in Czechoslovakia on 5 January 1968 and his subsequent liberal, democratic reforms seemed to indicate that Johnson’s bridge-building efforts were succeeding, and gave more fodder to proponents of force reductions. This so-called “Prague Spring” strengthened the position of those in the Senate who wanted significant troop withdrawals. The strongest advocate for such a plan was Senator Symington (D-MO), who crafted an amendment to the 1968 military appropriation bill that would reduce the number of U.S. forces in Europe from almost 300,000 to only 50,000. Johnson, however, preferred to have U.S. withdrawals balanced by mutual Soviet

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Harvard University Press, 2003), 210-211; John Maffre, “Gen. Gavin Calls for Cut In U.S. Force in Europe,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 22 Feb. 1967, p. A2.

withdrawals, and he resisted the Senate's requests vowing in early 1968 that there would be "no cutting of forces in Europe by even *one* man during his administration."<sup>44</sup>

This debate subsided, at least temporarily, with the surprise military invasion of Czechoslovakia. Almost no one in the administration believed the Russians would use military force to quell Dubcek's "challenge" to the Communist Party and to the Brezhnev Doctrine. Secretary Rusk believed the Soviets would not use military action, as the Czechs had continuously informed Moscow that their internal changes did not indicate an intention to break from the Warsaw Pact. Rusk also thought that the political consequences of an invasion would be too high a cost for the Russians to risk.<sup>45</sup>

Yet Soviet troops and tanks swept into Czechoslovakia and quickly suppressed all military resistance. Politically, the Soviet invasion was a failure, but militarily it was overwhelmingly successful. As a result, President Johnson implored the Europeans, and the Germans in particular, to strengthen their conventional forces. He believed it was time that these NATO countries took responsibility for their own defense, and saw the Soviet invasion as a stern warning of the consequences of not doing so.<sup>46</sup>

On the home front, the U.S. Army pointed to the invasion as an example of the need for its own global readiness and rapid deployment capability. Its 1969 historical summary stated that "the rapidity and secrecy with which the Warsaw Pact forces deployed brings into challenge the premise that there would be sufficient time to mobilize and deploy large ground

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<sup>44</sup> Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, 215-216.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-218.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 219-221.

forces; the advantages of having forces in being and deployed according to plan are obvious.”<sup>47</sup>

General Lemnitzer, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, viewed the Soviet intervention as a “complete tactical surprise” and in an October 1968 statement said that such a move “tipped the European power balance in favor of the Communist countries.” He stated that the Warsaw Pact countries had “the most formidable conventional armed forces in the world today” and that, while no one knew Russia’s intentions, they had “the capability to strike at the heart of Europe with little or no warning.”<sup>48</sup>

### ***Resignation***

The Russians never did attempt a large-scale military action against a NATO ally. And while the conflict in Korea was violent and dangerous, it never escalated to the point of guerilla warfare or limited war. While the latter was due in large part to the heroically creative tactics of Bonesteel’s troops, the former cannot be attributed to any significant American action. Instead, it must have been an acceptance of the status quo or an aversion to the potential for nuclear war that restrained the Soviets in Europe.

In May 1968, three months prior to the Czech invasion, Irving Kristol published a lengthy article in *The New York Times* entitled “We Can’t Resign As ‘Policeman of the World.’” He firmly believed that the world relied on, indeed required, American power, and that a move toward isolationism in the wake of the Vietnam War would have disastrous consequences around the world. Particularly striking was his statement that if “the nations of

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<sup>47</sup> William Gardner Bell, ed., *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1973), 11.

<sup>48</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, “Lemnitzer Urges Stronger Forces for NATO,” *The New York Times*, 29 Oct. 1968, p. 16.



the world become persuaded that we cannot be counted upon to do the kind of ‘policeman’s’ work the world’s foremost power has hitherto performed, throughout most of history, we shall unquestionably witness an alarming upsurge in national delinquency and international disorder everywhere.” He went on to say that “if this [American] power is all symbol and no substance,” the mutual U.S.-Soviet policy of containment would collapse.<sup>49</sup>

It is difficult to determine the motivation behind North Korean and Soviet aggression in 1968. It is quite possible that they would have taken the same action regardless of the state of U.S. Army forces around the world. It is also possible that they viewed the American involvement in Vietnam, and resultant weakening of its global forces, as an opportunity to assert themselves on the world stage. Because these incidents were relatively limited and never escalated to war between East and West, the consequences of the army’s reduced readiness were never fully revealed.

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<sup>49</sup> Irving Kristol, “We Can’t Resign As ‘Policeman of the World’,” *The New York Times*, 12 May 1968, p. SM25-27, 105-109.

## **Conclusion – From Containment to the Global War On Terror**

On 14 February 2008, Sharon L. Pickup, the United States Government Accountability Office's Director of Defense Capabilities and Management, testified before the House Armed Services Committee on the subject of military readiness. Her statement began with the assertion that operations in Iraq and Afghanistan had presented significant challenges to the Defense Department's ability to sustain the readiness of its non-deployed ground forces. Pickup gave three primary reasons for these readiness challenges. The first was that the personnel needs of specific ranks and specialties to support the Global War on Terror had thinned these ranks and specialties across the rest of the army. The second was that the diversion of equipment from non-deploying units to deploying ones had left the losing units with significant resource shortages that affected their ability to train for war. The third was that the shift in focus from training for a broad range of missions to training solely for duty in Iraq and Afghanistan had narrowed the army's capabilities.<sup>1</sup>

Given the vast amount of literature on the lessons learned from Vietnam, it seems this is one area where the lessons are having to be re-learned, for all of these issues were encountered during escalation in Southeast Asia some forty years ago. This is not meant to imply that today's policymakers did not heed the lessons of the past. Instead, it may be that these problems are merely symptoms of conducting limited war while maintaining a globally deployed force. And there may in fact be no way to prevent them. This paper has not

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<sup>1</sup> United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), Testimony of Sharon L. Pickup Before the Armed Services Committee, House of Representatives, "Military Readiness: Impact of Current Operations and Actions Needed to Rebuild Readiness of U.S. Ground Forces," 14 Feb. 2008, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08497t.pdf>.

attempted to argue that the United States should not fight limited wars because of the resultant effects on its non-deployed forces. It acknowledges the fact that, during a time of war, the priority of resources should rightly go to the soldiers and units directly involved in the fighting. What this paper does imply is that policymakers and military force planners need to see and understand the larger picture and do everything they can to minimize the effect of limited wars on the army's combat readiness around the world.

Although the current international climate is very different from that of the Cold War, the United States Army continues to maintain a globally deployed force required to respond rapidly to a crisis anywhere in the world. And while the strategy of flexible response was replaced many years ago, the nation continues to expect to have combat-ready forces to support its strategic objectives. According to the 2008 National Defense Strategy, those objectives were as follows: defend the homeland, win the long war (the war on terror), promote security, deter conflict, and win our nation's wars. The underlying theme of this strategy is that while Iraq and Afghanistan remain the central front in the conflict, the United States "face[s] a global struggle." As such, the primary goal of the country's military is to deter future wars, and this deterrence depends in large part on the credibility of that military: its "ability to prevent attack, respond decisively to any attack...and strike accurately when necessary."<sup>2</sup> All three of these aspects of a credible military require the highest levels of combat readiness.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, June 2008, 6, 8, 11, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/2008%20national%20defense%20strategy.pdf>.

One can extract a few similarities between today's strategy and the flexible response strategy during Vietnam. Although that conflict was the central front in the struggle against communism at the time, it was fought within the larger context of the Cold War. During that period, deterrence was also the primary goal of the nation's military, and thus the military's readiness and credibility were of the utmost importance. Unfortunately, the escalation of the war in Vietnam led to a drastic decrease in the army's combat readiness and a substantial weakening of its deterrent capabilities.

Similar threats face the nation today. Beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has seen a slew of bold and provocative actions on the part of a number of countries. Iran has made clear its intentions of becoming a nuclear power. China has undertaken a massive expansion of its military. North Korea remains a difficult challenge, both diplomatically and militarily. A resurgent Russia recently invaded the neighboring country of Georgia. Now, as during Vietnam, there is no question regarding the need for credible, ready U.S. forces around the world.

One must be very careful with historical analogies, however, and aside from these few similarities, today's situation is vastly different. Most obviously, there is no draft to supplement the all-volunteer army. Consequently, today's military has only a finite number of soldiers with which to fight two wars and maintain global readiness. During Vietnam, the draft provided an almost limitless pool of personnel. Although the consequences of relying on the draft to increase the army's numbers had significant effects on readiness, such was the path chosen by political and military leaders. That option is simply not available to the leaders of today's military.

Perhaps as a result, the Reserve and National Guard have played a substantial role in the army's current deployment cycle. As of July 2007, about 312,000 of the 931,000 U.S. Army and Marine Corps service members who had deployed overseas were reserve soldiers.<sup>3</sup> In addition to contributing to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, these reserve forces have contributed on the home front as well, assisting in the training of U.S. Military Transition Teams preparing to deploy and assist local authorities and militaries as they take control of their nations' security.

Another significant difference is the size of today's army relative to the size of the army during Vietnam. As of 2003, when deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom began, the army totaled a mere 490,000 active duty soldiers. In 1965, when deployments to Vietnam began, the army was nearly twice that size. In terms of percentages, 100,000 soldiers deployed to Southeast Asia in 1965 accounted for approximately ten percent of the army's force. The same number of soldiers deployed to Iraq in 2003 accounted for over twenty percent of its total.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, a number of civilian and military authorities have proposed large-scale increases in the army's aggregate size. They believe such a move would relieve some of the personal hardships on the army's soldiers caused by multiple deployments to combat. And because a reimplementing of the draft seems unlikely, raising the ceiling on troop authorizations is the only way to remedy this issue. While this may be true, the army's experience in Vietnam showed that a side effect of rapid expansion was the prioritization of

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<sup>3</sup> GAO, "Military Readiness," 1.

<sup>4</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics*, 1965, 2003.

individual training over training for combat. Thus a large influx of recruits could quite possibly result in a degradation of the army's global readiness as it did from 1965-1968.

The army has increased in size since 2003, but this increase has occurred at a very manageable pace. In the five years from September 2003 to September 2008, the active army grew from about 490,000 soldiers to about 532,000.<sup>5</sup> Thus far, the army's training establishment has been able to keep pace with this expansion. Those who advocate a much larger and more rapid growth should understand the lessons of the Vietnam-era expansion and the potential effects on the global army's readiness should that growth exceed its capacity to train new soldiers.

The balance between fighting a war and maintaining a level of readiness to deal with other conflicts outside that war is an exceedingly difficult one to strike. During Vietnam, political and military leaders prioritized the war effort to the detriment of army units around the world. Perhaps they made the right decisions. Perhaps they could have done better.

In truth, no one knows if Seventh Army in Europe and Eighth Army in Korea were successful in deterring a large-scale war in their respective territories. The absence of war does not necessarily mean that deterrence succeeded. The enemy, as the saying goes, always has a vote. Perhaps the North Koreans and Soviets made their decisions based on an evaluation of the United States' readiness (or lack thereof) for war. Perhaps they were less aggressive and expansionist than they were perceived to be, and had no stomach for a large-

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<sup>5</sup> DoD, *Military Manpower Statistics*, 2003; Department of the Army, *2008 Posture Statement*, 26 Feb. 2008, 10, <http://www.army.mil/aps/08/APS2008.pdf>.

scale war. Or perhaps they did, and the United States was very lucky to have avoided such a circumstance.

This lack of clarity will always exist when attempting to determine the motivations of the nation's enemies. Will terrorist organizations and/or countries like Iran and North Korea become more aggressive if they perceive the United States as being overwhelmed by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Or will they be content with the status quo and make smaller provocations that will not result in a massive American military response?

The answers to these questions are impossible to fully know. Yet it would be a dangerous gamble to hope that the United States is as lucky now as it was during escalation in Vietnam. Every effort should be made to maintain the army's combat readiness everywhere, not just in Iraq and Afghanistan. Returning once again to the words of the first president of this country, "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

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