

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-3

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# McNamara: I knew Viet war couldn't be won

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By Bruce Frankel  
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NEW YORK — Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara Thursday broke his 16-year public silence on the Vietnam War — saying he long doubted the USA's ability to win it.

"I reached the conclusion the war could not be won militarily. I believe I may have reached it as early as 1965," said McNamara, testifying as a character witness for retired Gen. William Westmoreland.

Westmoreland, who headed U.S. forces in Vietnam, is suing CBS for \$120 million over a 1982 documentary, *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*, that said he misled President Johnson with deflated figures of enemy strength.

McNamara, a principal architect of the American war strategy, was responding to accusations by CBS lawyer David Boies that he portrayed the USA's chances of winning the war differently to the president and the public.

He testified he doubted in 1967 that bombing North Vietnam would lead to the war's end or a negotiated peace.

McNamara, 68, said the war could only be won with a military-political approach. He said that the political track included negotiations between Henry Kissinger, then a private citizen, and North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh.

McNamara said he was skeptical of the enemy strength figures and often differed sharply with Westmoreland over the war but he endorsed Westmoreland's character: "My opinion then and today was that he is a person of tremendous integrity, with whom I had major policy disagreements, a person who served his country well, and whom I have the highest regard for."

McNamara declined to appear on the CBS documentary because, he said, "I didn't believe the data had been faked. I didn't believe that Gen. Westmoreland would try to conspire to deceive the president and me."