

Thoughts Engendered by Robert McNamara's *In Retrospect*¹

Harold P. Ford

From the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives, and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces to the area would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities.

JCS Chairman
Adm. Arthur Radford, 1954²

To introduce white forces—U.S. forces—in large numbers there [Vietnam] today, while it might have an initial favorable military impact, it would almost certainly lead to adverse political and in the long run adverse military consequences.

Robert S. McNamara, 1962³

We were wrong, terribly wrong.

Robert S. McNamara, 1995⁴

Mr. McNamara's accounting of history is ambiguous, debatable, and, above all, selective. It does illuminate certain facets of policymaking and intelligence, but it does not dispel many of the frustrations that have long clouded our comprehension of the war. Mr. McNamara's troubled conscience tells us, repeat-

edly, that he and his colleagues were wrong, terribly wrong. They should not have tried to fight a guerrilla war with conventional military tactics against a foe willing to absorb enormous casualties ". . . in a country lacking the fundamental political stability necessary to conduct effective military and pacification operations. It could not be done, and it was not done." (p. 212). They did not adequately level with the public. There were many occasions in which they should have begun considering a withdrawal from Vietnam. And so on.

He lists many questions which US conduct of the war left unanswered. Would the loss of South Vietnam pose a threat to US security serious enough to warrant extreme action to prevent it? If so, what kind of action should we take? Should it include the introduction of US air and ground forces? Risking war with China? What would be the ultimate cost of such a program in economic, military, political, and human terms? Could it succeed? And if the chances of success were low and the costs high, were there other courses "such as neutralization or withdrawal" that deserved careful study and debate? In Mr. McNamara's view, these questions remained unanswered during Lyndon Johnson's presidency and "for many many years thereafter." (p. 101).

Most still remain unanswered despite *In Retrospect*. Nor will Mr. McNamara's confessions satisfy

either the war's veterans; or the families of the war's thousands of casualties; or those who still remain true believers that the war could have been won; or those who opposed the war; or, not least, the hundreds of CIA and other officers who in god-awful circumstances did their damndest to do what they were told was their duty. By the time this article reaches print there will have been gallons of public ink expended on the appropriateness and morality of Mr. McNamara's mea culpa. Those rights and wrongs will not be rehashed here.

In Retrospect is nonetheless worth absorbing for the contributions it makes concerning the Vietnam policymaking process and the role therein that US intelligence did and did not play. McNamara stresses many facets of policymaking; the ever-present divided counsels among his best and brightest colleagues, not so much over ends as over means; the highly constricted setting in which they found themselves; the manner in which they sought to solve their Vietnam dilemmas; and the journey by which, largely apart from the Congress and the public, they begot a tar baby and a deeply divided America.

Divided Opinions and Debates

In being reminded of the divided counsels among our top decisionmakers over how to prosecute the war, it is instructive to recall that controversy

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concerning Vietnam did not begin with Secretary McNamara and the Kennedy administration. Just as there are now divided reactions to McNamara's confessions, so there have always been deeply divided opinions over Vietnam. They began in the immediate post-World War II period: whether to help or hinder France's desire to reestablish its colonial position in Indochina. Then, after a near-decade and several billion dollars of US aid to the French, when the latter's forces got trapped in a place called Dien Binh Phu, our decisionmakers spent frantic days debating whether to try to rescue the French and, if so, how. In the end we did not intervene, but only after some senior officials had urged the use of nuclear weapons, while others had urged caution. The latter's cautions are worth recalling now,⁵ in view of McNamara's statement that we were wrong, terribly wrong, and his *In Retrospect* account of the hawkish arguments his JCS colleagues of the mid-1960s made.

To date there has not been a dispassionate study of why the JCS's views of the 1950s and 1960s were so opposite. At a minimum, two of the causes were almost certainly (1) the preponderant influence of Gen. Matthew Ridgway and other Army leaders in 1954, compared with the rising influence a decade later of the Air Force and Marine Corps enthusiasts about victory through air power; and, more important (2), the fact that whereas the United States had been an onlooker at the time the French were stuck in Indochina, we were ourselves good and stuck there a decade later.

Pressures To Intervene

We should also recall that our predicament did not start with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and their Secretary of Defense. The Kennedy administration had been dealt a bum Vietnam hand—the Lyndon Johnson administration an even worse one. JFK's election victory over Richard Nixon had been razor thin and controversial. The Democrats were vulnerable for having "lost China" and for having accepted a stalemate in Korea. The experience of massive Chinese Communist intervention in Korea nonetheless created a restraining upper limit on the risks later administrations were willing to run in Southeast Asia. The McCarthy years had decimated senior East Asian expertise in the USG; latter-day officials would not be eager to risk criticizing East Asian policies or the Asian allies Washington administrations embraced. And in Vietnam, after winning surprising victories against his South Vietnamese competitors, President Ngo Dinh Diem defied the Geneva accords' directive that Vietnam-wide elections be held; he and Washington had proceeded thereafter to construct a South Vietnam where none had been before—a Galatea-like creation with which successive US administrations fell in love. Then, the USSR's General Secretary Khrushchev, disdainful of the young and untested American president, set out in Berlin, Vienna, and elsewhere to push him around; Kennedy somehow had to prove his macho.

He chose Vietnam, stating that the United States had to make its power credible, and "Vietnam is the place." In this process he and his team created

still more constraints on their policy-making area of maneuver. Their manner of Vietnam decisionmaking repeated the too-secret style that had earlier bought them disaster at the Bay of Pigs. Nor was this small group of the best and the brightest short on hubris and arrogance: whatever the French experience in Indochina had been, American technology, arms, and management know-how would now do the trick. Also, these policymakers mistakenly deemed world Communism a monolith, the Vietnam war one of its facets; therefore, contrary to the intent of our containment policy's author, George Kennan, they felt we had to make a stand against Communism everywhere.

Thus, by the time the Johnson administration came along, we were really stuck in Indochina, as the French had been, with a ruthless and resourceful enemy and an ineffective Vietnamese ally. And in the crucial year of decision whether and how to try to win the war by substantially expanding the US commitment, 1964, LBJ had many other things on his plate. Among these other heavy demands on his attention were the fall of Khrushchev and the advent of new and untested Soviet leaders; Communist China's nuclear detonation; and, most important, a coming presidential election campaign in which Mr. Johnson's conduct of the war would have to be seen as neither too soft nor too reckless.

A Game of Dominoes

The bedrock constraint, however, on the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' area of Vietnam policy maneuver, and the concept that

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locked those decisionmakers into an incrementally expanding war effort, was their agreed conviction that, if Vietnam fell, the rest of Southeast Asia would inexorably succumb to Communist domination. Termed the domino effect by President Eisenhower in 1954, that concept had been around for some time. As far back as January 1951, for instance, the then Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs had defined the domino thesis in these terms:

It is generally acknowledged that if Indochina were to fall . . . Burma and Thailand would follow suit almost immediately. Thereafter, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for Indonesia, India, and the others to remain outside the Soviet-dominated Asian Bloc. Therefore, the Department's policy in Indochina takes on particular importance for, in a sense, it is the keystone of our policy in the rest of Southeast Asia.

That spokesman had been Dean Rusk,⁶ who, as Secretary of State under Kennedy and Johnson, remained a firm advocate of the domino thesis and to his death a staunch supporter of our Vietnam course. That domino thesis was thereafter repeatedly voiced by senior civilian and military officials, including one version in 1962 which held that Vietnam's fall was “a planned phase in the Communist timetable for world domination,” and that the adverse effects of Vietnam's fall would be felt as far away as Africa.⁷ In somewhat less heated rhetoric the domino thesis finally became engraved as part of formal US policy in 1964 (NSAM 288), its domino concept section

having been written the day before by Secretary McNamara:

We seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam . . . Unless we can achieve this objective . . . almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance (all of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), accommodate to Communism so as to remove effective U.S. and anti-Communist influence (Burma), or fall under the domination of forces not now explicitly Communist but likely then to become so (Indonesia taking over Malaysia). Thailand might hold for a period with our help, but would be under grave pressure. Even the Philippines would become shaky, and the threat to India to the west, Australia and New Zealand to the south, and Taiwan, Korea, and Japan to the north and east would be greatly increased.⁸

McNamara's Middle Course

Locked into this fear of losing Vietnam, yet deterred by fear of provoking war with China, McNamara came to champion an in-between course of military pressures, one that got us good and committed (enraging domestic dissenters), but one with weapons and target restrictions that precluded fully committing US military power (enraging critics on the right). That in-between war became known widely as McNamara's war—and in many respects was indeed his war.

In Retrospect illustrates how McNamara's responsibilities at times usurped those of the pliant Secretary of State Rusk, and how the conduct of the war became essentially McNamara's: neither retreat nor rashly escalate. His book of confessions pointedly describes how that course brought him personal abuse from the two sides: radical antiwar protesters, and superhawks.⁹

McNamara was not himself the superhawk imagined by many antiwar advocates. *In Retrospect* expands previously known public awareness of how, with the passage of time and with the war bogging down, McNamara progressively lost heart and in 1967 finally confessed his heresy to Lyndon Johnson. Long before 1967, however, McNamara had in fact begun to lose heart, confiding to some colleagues that the war was not going well, and on occasion privately exploding that some of the rosy reports being given him were “a bunch of crap.”¹⁰ In late 1965, McNamara pushed for a bombing halt—which came to naught and brought him little credit

with LBJ. By 1967 he had turned to CIA for independent, candid analyses of the war's progress and had commissioned the gathering of what became *The Pentagon Papers*. In the spring of 1967 he confessed his apostasy to LBJ.

Private Pessimism

In a private memorandum he gave to the President on 19 May 1967, McNamara painted a dark picture: in his view, corruption and rot were widespread in South Vietnam; the enemy was hurting but retained the military initiative; Hanoi was not about to meet our negotiating terms; and the war was extracting a heavy price within America. Hence, McNamara argued, we should limit further major increases in US troops in Vietnam. We should cease our commitment to the Saigon government if it ceased to help itself. And we should adopt a more flexible negotiating position while seeking a political settlement. McNamara now argues:

Today, it is clear to me that my memorandum pointed directly to the conclusion that, through either negotiation or direct action, we should have begun our withdrawal from South Vietnam. There was a high probability we could have done so on terms no less advantageous than those accepted nearly six years later—without any greater danger to U.S. national security and at much less human, political, and social cost to America and Vietnam. (p. 271).

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Despite that May 1967 defection, McNamara continued to support the war publicly for some time. But as the year wore on, it became clear to observers that he had lost heart. Late in November LBJ administered the coup de grace—to the official he had once asked to be his Vice Presidential running mate—by suddenly announcing that McNamara was leaving the Defense Department to head the World Bank.

Just as his military course in Vietnam had been a middle one, so, too, was McNamara's own personal position with respect to the war. Many of his colleagues in Defense, State, and the NSC mechanism had been more dovish earlier than he, some much more hawkish. Prominent among the latter, as *In Retrospect* repeats, was Walt W. Rostow, Director of State's Policy Planning Staff and later the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs,¹¹ who has remained perhaps the truest of the true believers: according to McNamara, at an LBJ Library conference in March 1991, Rostow “continued to assert that America's decision to intervene in Vietnam, and the way we prosecuted the war, had proved beneficial to our nation and the region.” (pp. 235-236).

The Impact of Intelligence

In addition to these illuminations *In Retrospect* makes of policymaking, McNamara's book is of particular interest to the degree that it discusses the role intelligence played—or did not play—in Vietnam decisionmaking. In short, as outlined below, Secretary McNamara largely ignored CIA's judgments for some years, but by 1966-67 had come to respect and draw heavily on them. Overall, the Agency's record of Vietnam judgments was a mixed one, but, as numerous historians testify, it was on balance far more acute, prescient, and candid than any other intelligence given McNamara and his policymaking colleagues—just as in the field CIA's pursuit of how to fight the Viet Cong was much more effective than the pacification effort became after the military took it over.

Of especial interest in reading McNamara's book is the attention he does and does not give to two periods where intelligence judgments had a chance to make a meaningful impact on decisionmaking. The first such period was 1964-65, the year of decision whether to go big in Vietnam by systematically bombing the North and committing US troops to combat in the South. During these months, the several cautions given him by CIA, State, and certain military intelligence officers made little if any apparent impact on him at the time, and he now briefly mentions only a couple of those cautions. Worse, as discussed below, McNamara now baldly distorts the record with respect to a key warning note CIA's Board of National Estimates gave the Johnson administration in

mid-1964, and misrepresents the cautions given a November 1964 NSC working group by its interagency intelligence panel.

The second period where CIA had a chance to make an impact on policy-making was 1967-68. This was a period marked especially by questions concerning the effectiveness of US bombings of North Vietnam (DRV), by the fight between CIA and MACV over how many troops the enemy had, and by the runup to the enemy's Tet offensive and its depressing effect on the Johnson administration's will to stay the course. Here, as discussed below, McNamara does admit he was definitely influenced by CIA judgments.

Skepticism Over Strategy

The first of several inquiries into the feasibility of going big in Vietnam began in January 1964. This was a high-level interagency, supersecret evaluation of a thesis championed by Walt Rostow, at the time head of State's Policy Planning Staff, that systematic US bombing of the DRV would "convince the North Vietnamese that it was in their economic self-interest to desist from aggression in South Vietnam."¹²

The interagency group of officers formed to evaluate that argument judged that the posited bombing strategy would probably not work. Their report held that, contrary to Rostow's central thesis, the greatest interest of the DRV did not lie in preserving such industrial development as it had achieved but in extending its control to all Vietnam. This being so, Hanoi would hang

tough and persevere, meeting US escalation with North Vietnamese escalation. Nor would US bombing of the North basically improve South Vietnamese morale or effectiveness, and it might cause Saigon to become even more dependent on the United States.

This group, headed by Robert Johnson of State's Policy Planning Staff, also held that, by going North à la Rostow, the United States might get caught up in a situation in which the South Vietnamese might crumble in the midst of US escalation and thereby destroy our political base for having gone big. The group warned that before going North, the United States should "consider in advance the upper limits of the costs and commitments it is prepared to bear. Potential political costs include costs of possible failure." Also, if the US action did not cause the DRV to back off and we were not prepared to escalate further, "we would face the problem of finding a graceful way out of the action which would not involve serious loss of US prestige or undermine further the US position in South Vietnam."¹³

However prescient these judgments, they went for naught. Rostow smothered this group's denial of his pet theses by blandly reporting to Secretary Rusk that the posited US actions against North Vietnam "could cause it to call off the war principally because of its fear that it would otherwise risk loss of its politically important industrial development, because of its fear of being driven into the arms of Communist China, and because of Moscow's, Peiping's and Hanoi's concern about escalation."¹⁴

Although the Robert Johnson team included military officers, it is not clear whether Secretary McNamara was aware at the time of that group's skeptical judgments. Whatever the case, a copy of its closely held report found its way to State's principal senior dissenter, Under Secretary George Ball, who specifically cited it when in October 1964 he prepared his own searing, across-the-board criticism of the Johnson administration's continuing confidence in light at the end of the tunnel.¹⁵ According to historian Stanley Karnow, when Mr. Ball's electrifying dissent was given to the Secretary of Defense, McNamara was "shocked by the document, less by Ball's apostasy than by his rashness in putting such heretical thoughts on paper, which might be leaked to the press."¹⁶ McNamara states that at the time he discussed Ball's memo with Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy only, and now admits, "We should have immediately discussed the memo with the President . . . [and should have submitted] it to experts from the State Department, the CIA, the Defense Department, and the NSC for evaluation and analysis." (p. 158).

The Sigma Wargames

Meanwhile, a few weeks after the Robert Johnson group's exercise, a second testing of the proposition to save the South by bombing the North had taken place in the form of a JCS wargame, Sigma I-64. Played by working-level CIA, State, and military officers, that game ended with the United States hung up. Here, too, as the Robert Johnson group had found, the bombing strategy did not work. In the wargame, the

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United States had progressively escalated but had then come to a dead-end dilemma. Its options had narrowed to either seeking a military decision by significantly expanding hostilities against the DRV, at a believed risk of war with China, or beginning the process of de-escalation at a believed cost of lowered US credibility and prestige. According to Amb. William Sullivan, by the wargame’s theoretical end, 1970, the US had 500,000 troops in Vietnam but was still faced with a stalemate and with draft riots at home.¹⁷

However prescient Sigma-I’s outcome, it had zero effect on senior policymakers. And even though Sigma-I had been a JCS endeavor and military officers had played key roles in the game, including a brigadier general as head of the Blue (good guys) Team, *In Retrospect* makes no mention of this warning-light war game.

McNamara does, however, briefly mention that game’s successor, Sigma-II-64, which was played in mid-September by command-rank officers. (p. 153). Like Sigma-I, Sigma-II came to a similarly doleful ending, concluding that the posited US bombing program would not cause North Vietnam to back off or lessen its support of the Viet Cong. According to David Halberstam, Sigma-II’s posited US course demonstrated “not how vulnerable the North was to US bombing, but rather how invulnerable it was.”¹⁸ A footnote to history: in Sigma-II, the officer playing the role of President theoretically committed a US Marine Corps expeditionary force to South Vietnam’s defense on 26 February 1965; combat Marines did

in fact land in Vietnam just 10 days later, no wargame this time, on 8 March 1965.

Upside-Down History

Meanwhile, 10 weeks after the domino thesis had been enshrined in formal US policy, as discussed above, the White House had finally asked the Board of National Estimates for its view of the domino concept. In a setting heavy with pressures to “get on the team,” those senior CIA officers had the audacity to question the thesis that the loss of South Vietnam would lead inexorably to the loss of the rest of the Southeast Asia, et al. McNamara does discuss this episode, but in so doing stands history on its head, claiming that the Board of National Estimates confirmed the domino thesis. He performs this feat of rewriting history by quoting only part of the Board’s findings. (pp. 124-125). What he does not quote is the following:

We do not believe that the loss of South Vietnam and Laos would be followed by the rapid, successive communization of the other states of the Far East. . . . With the possible exception of Cambodia, it is likely that no nation in the area would quickly succumb to Communism as a result of the

fall of Laos and South Vietnam. Furthermore, a continuation of the spread of Communism in the area would not be inexorable, and any spread which did occur would take time—time in which the total situation might change in any of a number of ways unfavorable to the Communist cause . . . [Moreover] the extent to which individual countries would move away from the US towards the Communists would be significantly affected by the substance and manner of US policy in the area following the loss of Laos and South Vietnam.¹⁹

Mr. McNamara owes us another “We were wrong, terribly wrong” for buttressing his then-believed domino thesis at the expense of CIA and historical accuracy. Whatever the case, the impact of the Board of National Estimate’s heresy was a dull thud. That no attention was apparently given this questioning of the keystone of US policy was almost certainly influenced by the fact that at the time the Board was out-gunned: its boss, DCI John McCone, remained a staunch supporter of the domino thesis. McNamara:

[At a September 1964 meeting with the President, Gen. Maxwell Taylor] flatly stated we could not afford to let Hanoi win. [General Earle Wheeler] emphatically agreed, emphasizing the chief’s unanimous belief that losing South Vietnam meant losing all Southeast Asia. Dean Rusk and John McCone forcefully concurred. (p. 155).²⁰

Widening the War

By November 1964 the name of the game was no longer whether to expand the war à la Rostow, but how to do so. By this time the plot had thickened in many respects. National Intelligence Estimates were telling McNamara and his colleagues that the South was in perilous shape: the outlook there one of “increasing defeatism, paralysis of leadership, friction with Americans, exploration of possible lines of political accommodation with the other side, and a general petering out of the war effort.”²¹ North Vietnamese gunboats had attacked US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin in early August (at least once, for certain), and Lyndon Johnson had received a blank check resolution from Congress to more or less prosecute the war as he wished. Then, on 1 November, the eve of our presidential election, Viet Cong guerrillas carried out their most successful raid of the war to that time: at Binh Hoa airfield (near Saigon) they destroyed or damaged more than a dozen aircraft and killed or wounded more than a hundred US and South Vietnamese troops. The JCS and presidential candidate Barry Goldwater called for immediate airstrikes against the DRV.

Instead, President Johnson appointed a special NSC interagency working group under William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, to draw up various political and military options for direct action against North Vietnam. That group held its first meeting on election day, 3 November, with representatives from the NSC Staff, State, Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and CIA.²² McNamara’s

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book discusses this Bundy group and its work, but does not mention its *interagency* intelligence panel (which included military officers) or the fact that it did not share the parent Bundy exercise’s basic assumption that if the Johnson administration could come just up with just the right kind of air offensive against North Vietnam, this would cause Hanoi to back off.

A Prescient Panel

The intelligence panel held (1) that Hanoi’s leaders appeared to believe that the difficulties facing the United States were so great that US will and ability to maintain resistance could be gradually eroded; (2) that because North Vietnam’s economy was overwhelmingly agricultural and to a large extent decentralized in a myriad of more or less economically self-sufficient villages, airstrikes would not have a crucial effect on the daily lives of the almost all of North Vietnam’s population; (3) that air attacks on industrial targets would not exacerbate existing economic difficulties to the point of creating unmanageable control problems; and, therefore, (4) that North Vietnam “would

probably be willing to suffer some damage to the country in the course of a test of wills with the US over the course of events in South Vietnam.”²³

As characterized by the authors of *The Pentagon Papers*, the intelligence panel’s members tended toward a pessimistic view: the panel pointed out that “the basic elements of Communist strength in South Vietnam remain indigenous,” and that “even if severely damaged the DRV could continue to support the insurrection at a lessened level.” Also, the intelligence panel “did not concede very strong chances for breaking the will of Hanoi.”²⁴ David Halberstam’s characterization is stronger: the intelligence panel “forcefully challenged the Rostow thesis that Hanoi would succumb to the bombing in order to protect its new and hard-won industrial base.”²⁵

In any event, this NSC working group intelligence panel’s cautions came to naught. The JCS members of the Bundy group sharply disagreed with the panel’s skepticism; and in the end, the Bundy group’s principals ended up recommending a moderate, graduated course of bombing, with no mention of their intelligence panel’s estimate that it probably would not work. The Bundy group’s final report did not include their intelligence panel’s judgments, nor was there any mention of those skeptical intelligence judgments when the Bundy group’s principals discussed their report with President Johnson on 19 November.²⁶ And, in the meantime, Rostow had once again ignored an intelligence panel’s disagreement with his basic thesis of going North, when three days before the principals’

presidential meeting he wrote Secretary McNamara that the central purpose of bombing the DRV should be the sending of a signal to Hanoi that the United States was "ready and able to meet any level of escalation" the North Vietnamese might mount in response to these airstrikes.²⁷

In his *In Retrospect*, McNamara misrepresents the fact that this NSC-commissioned panel of CIA, State, and Pentagon intelligence officers took a skeptical view of going North. McNamara makes no mention of such an interagency panel or of its lack of enthusiasm. He does devote one paragraph (p. 162) to stating that (just) the CIA submitted skeptical views such as the above, and on p. 367 cites as his source: "CIA Intelligence Assessment: The Situation in Vietnam, PP [Gravel ed.], vol. 3, pp. 651-656." In fact, as registered in fn. 23 above, that *Pentagon Papers* title, on page 651 of the Gravel edition's *Pentagon Papers*, Volume III, reads: "NSC Working Group on Vietnam . . . Intelligence Assessment." We will assume, charitably, that McNamara's faulty accountings are due simply to oversight and faulty scholarship.

Months of Decision

The next few months following November 1964 were the crucial ones of decision whether to expand the war and how to do so. The Bundy NSC exercise had solved nothing. President Johnson's advisers remained widely split. Those most confident that bombing the North would significantly assist the

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war effort included Dean Rusk, MACV chief Westmoreland, former President Eisenhower, Walt Rostow, and McGeorge Bundy. McNamara states that, although he and Bill Bundy favored bombing the North in some fashion, they stressed that the prime requirement of victory was stability in the South. (pp. 99-100).

Of those who disagreed with the solution of moderate, graduated bombing, one of the most forceful was DCI John McCone, who had for months been an especially close confidant of LBJ on many issues—not confined to intelligence matters alone. In McCone's view, for maximum shock effect we should hit the North extremely hard at the outset. Without this, he held, committing US ground forces in the South would end up becoming "mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty in extricating ourselves." Nonetheless, McCone recognized that shock-effect bombing alone would not do the trick; the war would have to be won in the

South.²⁸ This heresy cost McCone his job as Director: his access to and relations with the President had now become so distant that in late April McCone resigned and returned to civilian life.

Army Resistance

In those months of decision, various leaders of the Army were a principal source of resistance to the idea of victory through air power. As characterized by Gen. Bruce Palmer, Jr., later General Westmoreland's deputy in Vietnam and then Army Vice Chief of Staff, "Air Force and Marine Corps leaders firmly believed that an all-out air offensive would compel Hanoi to cease and desist in its efforts to take over South Vietnam . . . [but] the US Army did not share this view."²⁹ McNamara now cites certain of these Army cautions. In September 1964 Gen. Harold K. Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, argued that the rationale for airstrikes was gravely flawed, and that a growing body of evidence showed "the VC insurgency in the RVN could continue for a long time at its present or an increased intensity even if North Vietnam were completely destroyed." (p. 152).

In March 1965 General Johnson shocked President Johnson by telling him that it would probably take 500,000 US troops five years to win the war. (p. 177). And in January 1965 Gen. Maxwell Taylor, then Ambassador in Saigon, sent the President a personal cable in which he held that "I do not recall in history a successful antiguerrilla campaign with less than a 10 to 1 numerical superiority over the guerrillas and

without the elimination of assistance from outside the country.” (pp. 165-166).

McNamara does not mention an extraordinary caution Gen. Maxwell Taylor raised a month later, 22 February 1965:

As I analyze the pros and cons of placing any considerable number of Marines in Danang area beyond those presently assigned, I develop grave reservations as to wisdom and necessity of so doing . . . White-faced soldier, armed, equipped and trained as he is not suitable guerrilla fighter for Asia forests and jungles. French tried to adapt their forces to this mission and failed. I doubt that US forces could do much better . . . Finally, there would be the ever-present question of how foreign soldier could distinguish between a VC and friendly Vietnamese farmer. When I view this array of difficulties, I am convinced that we should adhere to our past policy of keeping our ground forces out of direct counterinsurgency role.³⁰

Alarming Doubts

Ambassador Taylor’s caution was not the only extraordinary warning signal raised during these weeks of early 1965. McNamara now confides that on 27 January, just a week after LBJ’s presidential inauguration, he and McGeorge Bundy gave President Johnson “a short but explosive memorandum.” They told LBJ that:

both of us are now pretty well convinced that our current policy

can lead only to disastrous defeat . . . We see two alternatives. The first is to use our military power in the Far East and to force a change in Communist policy. The second is to deploy all our resources along a track of negotiation, aimed at salvaging what little can be preserved with no major addition to our present military risks. Bob [McNamara] and I tend to favor the first course, but we believe that both should be carefully studied and that alternative programs should be argued out before you. (pp. 167-168).

These extraordinary cautions raised by three of our prime movers of Vietnam policy, Maxwell Taylor, Robert McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy, illustrate the gulf that existed between their inner doubts—as far back as January 1965—and the outer confidence they continued to voice for over two years more.

On the same day President Johnson received his “explosive” memorandum from McNamara and McGeorge Bundy, he sent the latter to Vietnam to appraise the prospects for stable government in Saigon and to advise whether to initiate US military action against North Vietnam. The particular circumstances surrounding this trip of Bundy’s provided the spark that at last detonated the US decision to go big in Vietnam.

The Fallout From Pleiku

On Christmas eve, 1964, the Viet Cong had bombed American barracks (the Brinks Hotel) in Saigon,

and, despite numerous recommendations from civilian and military advisers that the United States retaliate strongly, President Johnson had refrained from doing so. But six weeks later, on 7 February 1965, the atrocity occurred that at last started LBJ down the road to major escalation. That atrocity was a shattering Viet Cong raid on US installations at Pleiku in the central highlands of South Vietnam which killed eight Americans, wounded 109, and damaged numerous aircraft.

Its profound effect on US policymaking was magnified by coincidence: the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, Mac Bundy, happened to be visiting South Vietnam at the time; Soviet Premier Kosygin happened to be visiting Hanoi; and, just four days before the Pleiku raid, DCI John McCone had told President Johnson that Kosygin’s coming trip to the DRV signaled a more active Soviet policy in Southeast Asia which would probably result in greatly increased Soviet aid to North Vietnam and in encouragement to step up Hanoi’s subversion of the South.³¹

On this, his first trip to South Vietnam, Bundy had found the situation there “grim,” with the enemy holding the military initiative through much of the countryside. On the day before the Pleiku attack, he had prepared a draft memorandum for President Johnson recommending a forceful policy of “sustained reprisal.” The next day, learning of the destruction at Pleiku, he telephoned Washington that the Viet Cong, in collusion with Kosygin, had “thrown down the gauntlet,” and he recommended that the

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United States retaliate at once against the DRV.³² George Allen, at the time a senior CIA analyst in the Saigon station, is among those who have questioned Bundy's belief that the Pleiku attack was a coordinated Communist move: "I never met anyone who shared Bundy's view that the Pleiku incident was deliberately arranged to coincide with his visit and that of Kosygin to Hanoi."³³

As the granting of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution had had to wait, six months before, for an enemy provocation (the gunboat attacks) to provide justification for a new policy turn already decided upon, so, too, the Pleiku attack. The scope and the timing of that enemy atrocity not only justified the view of many Washington policymakers that in Vietnam we faced a challenge from world Communism, but also justified their decision at last to activate the idea of punishing the North—a concept they had been considering for over a year despite the skepticism of many intelligence officers.

In any event, within a month after Pleiku the die had been cast: US planes had begun systematically to bomb North Vietnam, and US ground forces had been committed to combat operations in the South. By the end of July, there were 175,000 US troops in Vietnam, with more on the way. And so, as McNamara now tells us, without adequate public disclosure or debate President Johnson had taken "the fateful choices that locked the United States onto a path of massive military intervention in Vietnam, an intervention that ultimately destroyed his presidency and

polarized America like nothing since the Civil War." (p. 169).

Receptivity To CIA Judgments

In Retrospect makes clearer the radical shift in McNamara's attitude toward CIA intelligence that took place between the above years and 1966-67, the months in which he ceased to be a true believer and fell from grace. Whereas in the earlier period of debate whether to go big in Vietnam, he had generally ignored CIA's views (and now distorts part of that record), by 1966 he had become so disheartened by the course of the war that he began to turn more to CIA for independent judgments about the war, and began to use its fairly stark appraisals in his own arguments with his policymaking colleagues.

One particular turning point in this process was apparently the impact on him of an August 1966 study he had quietly requested of CIA, "The Vietnamese Communists' Will to Persist." That study judged that North Vietnam had the resources to prosecute a prolonged and expanding war, and that the US air

offensive was not likely to diminish Hanoi's continued ability to support the Viet Cong. In the view of Gen. Bruce Palmer, Jr., that CIA study was "an extraordinary document that made a deep impression on McNamara and no doubt had much to do with changing his views about the war."³⁴

In any case, by October 1966 McNamara had become extremely pessimistic about the course of events in Vietnam. He cites in some detail a lengthy private report he sent President Johnson on 14 October which echoed certain judgments CIA officers had long been giving him. The key points of this assessment of McNamara's deserve note:

Enemy morale has not broken It appears that [the enemy] can more than replace his losses by infiltration from North Vietnam and recruitment in South Vietnam. . . . Pacification has if anything gone backward. As compared with two, or four, years ago, enemy full-time regional forces and part-time guerrilla forces are larger; attacks, terrorism and sabotage have increased in scope and intensity. . . . Nor has the Rolling Thunder program of bombing the North either significantly affected infiltration or cracked the morale of Hanoi. . . . In essence, we find ourselves—from the point of view of the important war (for the [hearts and minds] of the people)—no better, and if anything worse off. This important war must be fought and won by the Vietnamese themselves. We have known this from the beginning . . . (pp. 262-263).

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“Never before had a civilian intelligence organization challenged an army in the field about its orders of battle. . . . But here were a bunch of civilians telling not only the Pentagon but also the forces in the field that the number they were facing was higher.”

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We have seen that, by the spring of 1967, McNamara had clearly and candidly declared his heresy to the President and had commissioned the gathering of policymaking documents that ultimately became *The Pentagon Papers*. At that time he also took the extraordinary step of quietly asking CIA to prepare its own independent judgments for him on the efficacy of the US bombing programs and on the enemy's order of battle (OB) in South Vietnam.

Former Deputy Director for Intelligence R. Jack Smith has emphasized the emotional nature of this latter unique McNamara request of DCI Dick Helms: “Never before had a civilian intelligence organization challenged an army in the field about its orders of battle. . . . But here were a bunch of civilians telling not only the Pentagon but also the forces in the field that the number they were facing was higher.”³⁵

With respect to the OB dispute between CIA and MACV, McNamara now states that the Agency's estimates of much larger enemy forces were “correct.” (p. 239). He also points out that on several occasions in 1967 he used CIA judgments to buttress his disagreements with the Joint Chiefs over how effective US bombing programs were. For example, McNamara cites a sobering May 1967 CIA judgment on that question: “We do not believe that any of the programs . . . is capable of reducing the flow of military and other essential goods sufficiently to affect the war in the South or to decrease Hanoi's determination to persist in the war.” (p. 275).

McNamara also cites similar views CIA gave him in August 1967: “[Despite the escalation of US bombing programs and] despite the increasing hardships, economic losses and mounting problems in management and logistics caused by the war, Hanoi continues to meet its own needs and to support its aggression in South Vietnam. *Essential military and economic traffic continues to move.*” (pp. 291-292, McNamara's emphasis).³⁶

In addition, McNamara cites at some length what he calls a “political dynamite” report which DCI Dick Helms gave President Johnson (only) on 12 September 1967, and which LBJ held so closely that McNamara never saw that recently declassified memo “until I wrote this book.” (p. 293). That document was a think-piece prepared by a senior Office of National Estimates (ONE) officer, after consulting more than 30 officers in CIA, on the delicate question of “The Implications of an Unfavorable Outcome in Vietnam.” In sending this sensitive piece to the President, Helms emphasized that the paper “was not intended as an argument for ending or for not ending the war now. We are not

defeatist out here. It deals narrowly with the hypothetical question which the author put to himself, i.e., what would be the consequences of an unfavorable outcome for American policy and American interests as a whole.” (p. 292).

As *In Retrospect* cites them, the ONE officer's principal conclusions included the following. An unfavorable outcome in Vietnam would be a major setback to the reputation of US power that would limit US influence and prejudice its other interests in some degree that cannot be reliably foreseen. The destabilizing effects would be greatest in the immediate area of Southeast Asia. The “worst potential damage would be of the self-inflicted kind”: that is, internal dissension which would limit the future ability of the United States to use its power and resources wisely and to full effect, and would lead to a loss of confidence by others in America's capacity for leadership. The net effects of an unfavorable outcome in Vietnam, however, would probably not be damaging to America's capacity to play its part as a world power. In sum, said this think-piece, “If the analysis here advances the discussion at all, it is in the direction of suggesting that *the risks are probably more limited and controllable than most previous argument has indicated.*” (pp. 292-294, McNamara's emphasis).

High Marks and Hindsight

Even though McNamara ignores and at times distorts earlier CIA cautions, here and there throughout *In Retrospect* he does cite National Intelligence Estimates and other CIA reports on

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this and that issue. And, in addition to his admission that CIA was correct on the OB controversy, he also gives CIA and its people some other explicit high marks. He states, for example, “I relied heavily on SNIEs.” (p. 154). Calling CIA a rogue elephant is “a mischaracterization,” he says, because throughout his term as Secretary of Defense all the Agency’s covert operations were approved by higher authority. (pp. 129-130). He considers Sherman Kent, Chairman of the Board of National Estimates, to have “possessed one of the sharpest and toughest geopolitical minds I ever encountered. Even when I disagreed with him, which was not often, I held him in the highest regard.” (pp. 154-155). “The CIA felt that the North Vietnamese had much greater staying power than the administration (and Westy [Westmoreland]) believed. It turned out the CIA was correct.” (p. 239). And, in May 1967, the CIA’s intelligence concerning imminent Arab attacks on Israel was “superb.” (pp. 277-278).

McNamara does not give CIA judgments specific credit for helping him change his basic attitude toward the war, but the inference is clear that he is saying that, as stark evidence piled up that the war had bogged down, and as many reports he was receiving through other channels continued to speak unrealistically of victory just around the corner, he came increasingly to respect CIA reporting’s candor and good track record. It seems clear, as well, that, in citing somber CIA judgments of the 1966-67 period, he is now in effect calling up expert witness to support and justify doubts about the war he had developed by that time.

McNamara's Lessons

McNamara’s greatest tribute to CIA, if indirectly, are the lessons of Vietnam he draws at the end of *In Retrospect*. Many of the 11 lessons he enumerates echo certain cautions that for a long time CIA (and other US intelligence) officers tried unsuccessfully to get through to him and his colleagues. In abbreviated form here, the lessons for the United States he lists are:

1. We misjudged the geopolitical intentions of the Viet Cong, the DRV, China, and the USSR, and exaggerated the dangers to the US of their actions.
2. We viewed the people and leaders of South Vietnam in our own experience.
3. We underestimated the power of nationalism to motivate a people to fight and die for their beliefs and values.
4. We were profoundly ignorant of the history, culture, and politics of the people in the area.
5. We failed to recognize the limitations of modern, high-tech military equipment, forces, and doctrine.
6. We failed to draw Congress and the American people into a full and frank discussion and debate

of the pros and cons of becoming involved in large-scale military engagement in Southeast Asia.

7. We did not explain fully what was happening and why we were doing what we did. We failed to maintain national unity.
8. We failed to recognize that neither our people nor our leaders are omniscient. We do not have the God-given right to shape every nation in our own image or as we choose.
9. We erred in taking unilateral military action not supported by multinational forces and the international community.
10. We failed to recognize that in international affairs there may be problems for which there are no immediate solutions.
11. We failed to organize the top echelons of the executive branch to deal effectively with the extraordinarily complex range of issues at hand. (pp. 321-323).

Intelligence Officers' Lessons

We intelligence officers also learned some lessons from our experience of making Vietnam judgments three decades ago:

1. A tough occupational hazard is the eternal problem of trying to get policymakers to absorb one’s intelligence reports, analyses, and cautions. The best and the brightest, as Bill Bundy later admitted, were simply too

- busy much of the time to absorb the judgments of relatively junior, unknown intelligence officers.³⁷
2. It is sometimes tough trying to get even higher intelligence authority to pass on one's views, untrammled, to the policymakers. Vietnam analyses over the years were at times substantially rosied up by the views or intercessions of DCIs McCone and Helms and the Director's Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs (SAVA), George Carver.³⁸
 3. Over the years some CIA estimates and judgments on Vietnam were incorrect or overly wishy-washy, but overall the record was a good one, much better than that of any other entity in town—and some of CIA's officers registered outstanding records for foresight. *In Retrospect* laments the fact that there were no Vietnam experts on hand to guide and caution top policymakers. Too bad.
 4. Yet CIA officers had an easy time of it compared to the policymakers. The latter were faced with a constantly deteriorating situation in South Vietnam, as well as with other pressing problems elsewhere in the world. They could not just kibitz; they had to act.
 5. There was no substitute for being immersed in the history, politics, and society of a region, in this case Indochina. The best analytic records were generally registered by those officers who had had considerable such exposure.
 6. The ideal combination of such exposure was to have had experience both in the field and in Washington.
 7. Those officers who best served CIA's purpose were those who went where the evidence on Vietnam took them, tried to tell it like it is, and did not precensor their judgments in order to sell them to higher authority known or believed to have strong contrary views of the question at hand.
 8. Perhaps *the* central lesson for CIA officers which *In Retrospect* provides is the differing regard McNamara did or did not pay Agency judgments at different times. In short, his record and his book demonstrate the unhappy, eternal truth that intelligence is of use to decisionmakers primarily when it accords with their own views, or when they can use that intelligence to help sell their own particular policy arguments.
 9. In sum, at least in the view of this author, the essence of Mr. McNamara's Vietnam policymaking and of America's fate in that war was captured years ago by a former West Pointer and former CIA Vietnam chief of station, Peer DeSilva: "[McNamara] simply had no comprehension of how the war should be handled. . . . Fundamentally we lost because we were arrogant, prideful, and dumb."³⁹

NOTES

1. McNamara (with Brian VanDeMark), *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995).
2. Radford, Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, 20 May 1954. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-54, Volume XIII, Indochina, Part 2*, p. 1591. (Hereafter cited as *FRUS*).
3. McNamara testimony to Congress, March 1962, as cited in U.S. Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967 (The Pentagon Papers)*, Book 3, "Phased Withdrawal of U.S. Forces," p. 2. (Hereafter cited as *Pentagon Papers* (Govt. ed.)).
4. *In Retrospect*, p. xvi. The page numbers of subsequent citations from this source will be indicated in the body of the text, in parentheses.
5. In addition to the JCS's lack of enthusiasm for intervening in 1954, quoted above, one of the other cautions raised at the time was by Vice Adm. A.C. Davis, then Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense: "Involvement of U.S. forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then, National Policy determines no other alternative, the U.S. should not be self-duped into believing the possibility of partial involvement—such as 'Naval and Air units only.' One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly." As quoted in Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (New York: UNCA, 1982), p. 428. Patti was chief of the OSS unit that operated in Indochina in World War II.
6. Rusk, Memorandum to the Deputy Undersecretary of State (Freeman Matthews), 31 January 1951. *FRUS*,

- 1951, *Volume VI, Asia and the Pacific, Part 1*, p. 20.
7. Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the JCS, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, 13 January 1962. *Pentagon Papers* (Govt. ed.), Book 12, "U.S. Involvement in the War, Internal Documents, The Kennedy Administration: January 1961-November 1963," Book II, pp. 449, 450.
 8. National Security Action Memorandum 288, of 17 March 1964, *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam/New York Times, 1971), pp. 283-285; and McNamara, Memorandum to the President, 16 March 1964. *FRUS, 1964-68, Vol. I, Vietnam 1964*, p. 154.
 9. Of the latter, none was more severe than Strom Thurmond, then a member of the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who on 25 August 1967 told McNamara: "Mr. Secretary, I am terribly disappointed with your statement. I think it is a statement of placating the Communists. It is a statement of appeasing the Communists." *In Retrospect*, p. 290.
 10. Remark to the author by a former Pentagon official, who later became a senior CIA officer.
 11. Discussed below is Rostow's role in smothering some key intelligence judgments with which he strongly disagreed.
 12. As described in footnote to a Memorandum for the President by McGeorge Bundy (at the time the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs), 7 January 1964, *FRUS, 1964-68, Vol. I*, p. 4.
 13. "Alternatives for Imposition of Measured Pressures Against North Vietnam." Report, Robert H. Johnson, S/P State, to William Sullivan, S/VN State, 19 March 1964, Summary of Key Problems, pp. i, ii. See also *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam*, Gravel ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), Vol. III, pp. 154-157.
 14. Rostow, Memorandum for the Secretary of State, "Contingency Planning for Southeast Asia," 14 February 1964, *FRUS, 1964-68, Volume I*, pp. 75-76.
 15. George W. Ball, "Top Secret: The Prophecy the President Rejected," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1972, pp. 36-49. See also David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 491-500; and Clark Clifford and Richard Holbrooke, "Annals of Government, The Vietnam Years," Part I, *The New Yorker*, 6 May 1991, p. 58. The author of this *Studies* article was a CIA member of the Robert Johnson group.
 16. Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), p. 405.
 17. Sullivan to interviewer William C. Gibbons, 31 July 1980. Gibbons, *The U. S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships* (Prepared for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations by the Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress), Part II, 1961-64, p. 354. Two CIA officers who had participated in Sigma-I, one from DDP and the other from ONE, jointly sent DCI McCone a scathing critique of the game, pointing out that the posited US course had ignored the fact that "the principal sources of Viet Cong strength are indigenous." Also, that the US should go North "only if it looks if there is enough military-political potential in South Vietnam to make the whole Vietnam effort worthwhile. Otherwise, the US would only be exercising its great, but irrelevant, armed strength." Harold P. Ford, "The U.S. Decision to Go Big in Vietnam," *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (spring 1985), pp. 7-8. (Declassified 27 August 1986).
 18. Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, p. 152. See also Thomas B. Allen, "Twilight Zone at the Pentagon," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, Volume II, No. 2 (winter 1990), p. 52; and Stanley Karnow, who characterizes Sigma-II's outcome as "depressing: no amount of American pressure could stop the Communists." *Vietnam: A History*, pp. 399-400. Having participated in Sigma-II, the same DDP officer who had sent DCI McCone a sharp critique of Sigma-I sent him another scorcher about this repeat wargame.
 19. Memorandum from the Board of National Estimates to Director John McCone, 9 June 1964, *FRUS, 1964-68, Volume I.*, p. 485.
 20. Also, Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 120. The text of that conference is given in McGeorge Bundy, "Memorandum of a Meeting, White House, Washington, September 9, 1964, 11 a.m.," *FRUS, 1964-68, Volume I*, pp. 750-753.
 21. SNIE 53-2-64, 1 October 1964. *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume I*, p. 806.
 22. Bill Bundy, McGeorge Bundy's older brother, had previously been an Assistant Secretary of Defense, and before that a senior officer of CIA's Office of National Estimates. The author of this article was CIA's representative on this Bundy working group.
 23. 24 November 1964, NSC Working Group on Vietnam, Section I: Intelligence Assessment: The Situation in Vietnam, *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), Volume III, pp. 654, 655.

24. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), Volume III, p. 213.
25. *The Best and the Brightest*, p. 502. Halberstam is also of the belief that the panel's dissent would have been stronger had there not been Defense Intelligence Agency members on the panel. (p. 502). According to historian Stanley Karnow, "The Bundy group's intelligence expert . . . pointed out that the Viet Cong 'could carry on the insurgency even if North Vietnam were severely damaged' by U.S. bombing. He saw no early end to the war." *Vietnam: A History*, p. 403.
26. James Thomson, Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting, White House, Washington, 19 November 1964, 12:30 p.m., "Vietnam Item, Meeting with the President." *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume I*, pp. 914-916; and William Bundy and John McNaughton, Paper Presented by the National Security Working Group, "Courses of Action in South-east Asia," 21 November 1964. *FRUS, 1964-68, Volume I*, pp. 916-929.
27. Rostow, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, "Military Dispositions and Political Signals," *FRUS, 1964-68, Volume I*, pp. 906-907.
28. McCone, Memorandum for Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Ambassador Taylor, and McGeorge Bundy, 2 April 1965. *The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), Volume III, pp. 100-101.; and Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, p. 140. McCone repeated these views a few days later in an NSC meeting, and later personally gave President Johnson a copy of his 2 April dissent.
29. Palmer, "US Intelligence and Vietnam," *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 28, No. 5 (Special Issue, 1984), p. 33. (Later declassified). As of 1964, General Palmer was the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. After retiring from the Army, he became a member of the DCI's Senior Review Panel.
30. Taylor, Saigon Embtel 2699, as cited in Gibbons (Library of Congress study), Part III, p. 122.
31. Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, pp. 123-124.
32. Gibbons (Library of Congress study), Part III, pp. 60-62; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, pp. 411-413; Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, pp. 520-521; and Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1970), pp. 257-259. Cooper, an NSC staff officer at the time, accompanied Bundy on this trip to Vietnam. A former ONE officer, Cooper supported the war effort for some time but then soured on the war and left his White House position.
33. Allen, "The Indochina Wars" (manuscript), pp. 232-233. Allen had been following the Vietnam war in detail since the early 1950s, as an Army, then a DIA, and finally a CIA intelligence officer. Over the years his batting average on Vietnam judgments has been outstanding.
34. Palmer, "US Intelligence and Vietnam," p. 47.
35. Smith, to interviewer John Ranelagh, as cited in the latter's *CIA: A History* (London: BBC Books, 1992), p. 127.
36. CIA later published periodic assessments, jointly with DIA, of US bombing programs. In those reports DIA agreed with sober judgments similar to the above.
37. Bundy: "[Our problem] reflects one of the most basic elements in this whole story—how much of planning and policy review came in the middle of days already full, and without the chance to stop and reflect." Bundy, as cited in Gibbons (Library of Congress study), Part II, p. 354.
38. The gifted Carver enjoyed extraordinary access to the best and the brightest. McNamara describes him as CIA's "specialist and continuing optimist about the war." (p. 306). Numerous observers share the view, that, until late March 1968, following the enemy's Tet offensive, Carver was markedly more optimistic than most of the Vietnam reports and analyses being prepared at the time in CIA. These observers include Gen. Bruce Palmer, Jr., Clark Clifford, William Gibbons, George Allen, David Halberstam, Stanley Karnow, and Chester Cooper.
39. DeSilva, *Sub Rosa: The CIA and the Uses of Intelligence* (New York: Times Books, 1978), pp. 230, 277.