

The 'Tidiness' of History

Reviewed by
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The reviewer, cofounder and codirector of The Institute for Policy Studies, is the author of "Roots of War," a study of the men and institutions behind the making of U.S. foreign policy.

It recently came to light that the top Air Force general in Vietnam took it upon himself a few months ago to order the bombing of off-limit targets in Vietnam and in so doing to mislead his superiors. In his new book "The War Conspiracy," Peter Dale Scott finds a pattern of unauthorized provocative conduct by U.S. military officers and intelligence officials as far back as the Eisenhower administration.

What Scott means by a "war conspiracy" is the "sustained resort to . . . unauthorized provocations, and fraud by U.S. personnel, particularly intelligence personnel, in order to sustain or increase our military commitment in Asia."

He charges that on several crucial occasions in our recent history, commanders in the field have mislead the President or taken action on their own which effectively tied his hands.

Perhaps the most celebrated of these incidents

THE WAR CONSPIRACY: The Secret Road to the Second Indochina War. By Peter Dale Scott.

(Bobbs-Merrill, 238 pp., \$7.50)

have been the peculiarly timed escalations in the bombing of North Vietnam which seem so often to coincide with peace initiatives.

In April, 1966, a Polish diplomat arrived in Hanoi for a highly secret peace initiative known in the State Department code as "Marigold." The story of the crushing of "Marigold" in the bombing of Haiphong has been told by sophisticated journalists such as Kraslow and Loory in the book "The Search for Peace in Vietnam" and by insiders such as Chester Cooper in his "The Last Crusade."

Scott, however, brings many new facts together. He is a prodigious and careful reader who is able to juxtapose information in interesting ways. He points out, for example, that the Polish vessel Beniowski was attacked in Haiphong Harbor on April 19, 1966, while according to the official CINCPAC "Report on the War in Vietnam as of June 1968," these targets remained on the restricted list, despite increasing political pressure in Washington, until mid-June.

Scott has a long chapter

on the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, the Pueblo incident, the attack on the Soviet Ship Turkestan during the six-day Arab-Israeli War in 1967, and the circumstances surrounding the Nixon escalations into Cambodia in 1970 and into Laos in 1971.

Probably the most interesting chapter is a history of Air America and the Civil Air Transport, which he shows to be joint ventures of the CIA and the Chennault and Chiang families. He describes the role of Civil Air Transport in dropping supplies for the French at Dienbeinhphu. The planes were C-119s on "loan" from the U.S. Air Force and some of the "civilians" flying them were in fact U.S. military pilots. Five CAT mechanics declared missing on June 18, 1954, were according to Scott, "the first official casualties of the Vietnam War."

Scott is always looking for patterns. He believes that "history is not as untidy as we would wish." He is a connoisseur of conspiracy. The consequence is a series of hypotheses which vary

greatly in credibility. Some of the admirable efforts to make sense out of seemingly unrelated events are convincing but others are not. His effort to show a dramatic change of policy during the 72 hours following the Kennedy assassination is a fascinating historical brief, but I do not think he makes the case. By the end of the book he has enlarged the conspiracy to include not only the authors and editors of the Pentagon Papers but the judge in the New York Times case because he "was a wartime member of OSS." He sees the drama of the release of the Pentagon Papers as "one more manipulation of intelligence in order to influence public policy."

However, "The War Conspiracy" scores enough hits along with occasional wild shots to merit careful reading.

The important point that emerges is that a worldwide military and paramilitary establishment is impossible to control, that what was supposed to be an instrument to provide the top political leadership with "options" ends up restricting choices, often at crucial moments. Presidents and national security managers cannot make deception a routine instrument of policy, as they have done for a generation, without being deceived on occasion themselves.

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