

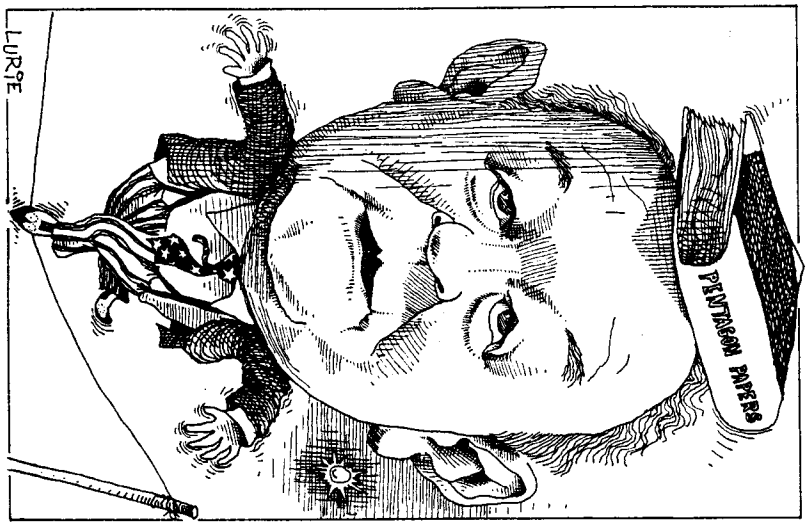
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THE PRESIDENCY BY HUGH SIDNEY

New respect for 'the old Dino'

I keep coming out wrong on the Pentagon papers. My regard for one of the chief "villains" keeps going up. I think that former Secretary of State Dean Rusk emerges from those innumerable pages—and from the ongoing tide of electronic comment—as a man of singular personal honor and devotion. That may not be what Daniel Ellsberg and the *New York Times* had in mind, but more than one person in this word-weary city has reached the same conclusion. "The old Dino," said one perennial skeptic (using the private, after-hours sobriquet for the Honorable Secretary), "may not have been right, but he was a man. He towers over the rest of these pygmies."

There is something in that, despite the Vietnam mess in which Rusk must share. ("There's plenty of blame for everyone," former Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford always insisted.) The papers show that Rusk was warning back in 1961 that the United States would start down a long, tough road if troops were committed to South Vietnam. Nevertheless, that was the road he considered right for the nation when the issue was forced a few years later. It was not by any means a lonely position at the time. A lot of other important people were



marching that way too. But as success eluded the American troops, Rusk lost his comrades-in-arms. He did not, however, stuff the archives with memos casting doubt on others, or air his bitterness, or have the nighttime quivers about the policy he had recommended. Some people insist that this was a weakness. Maybe it was. But in this age of moral anguish, when brilliance is often taken as a license to make up new rules of social responsibility, there is something very appealing in Rusk's plain, old-fashioned sense of decency and loyalty. He still believes he was right, though he readily confesses to making errors along the way. History will be the judge, he says, and we must all wait for that.

A little more history about Rusk is on the way, though not from him. According to those who have scanned the proofs, Lyndon Johnson's forthcoming book, *The Vantage Point*, makes a pretty convincing case (with documents equal to any) that Rusk played a major part in leveling off the South Vietnam commitment and beginning to wind things down, starting with Johnson's curtailment of the bombing.

The thing that is so intriguing about Rusk is that he, more than any other living man except for L.B.J., was there when it really happened. He sat with John Kennedy in the critical hours. When the stories came up after J.F.K.'s death that the President had planned to replace Rusk because he had not measured up to expectations, the secretary said simply that he and Kennedy were the only two who knew their true relationship. It was an unsailable rebuttal.

He displayed the same granite self-control through the brutal assaults on him for being Lyndon Johnson's man. He was a participant in Johnson's small Tuesday lunches at the White House, where policy at the highest level was set. He was at the President's elbow early and late—in the bedroom, the bathroom, the office, on the phone, at the end of the cable and in a bunk in Air Force One. Rusk knew what the President believed and what orders were finally given.

Rusk has said that he doesn't intend to write his own version of our Vietnam involvement. He will, from time to time, defend himself and the administrations he served—as he did recently on TV—when he feels the accusations on specific points have become excessive. But that is all. The passions, the moods, the man-

ners of the men who shaped events as Rusk saw and heard them will go with him to the grave.

He was influenced in this belief by his old boss, Gen. George C. Marshall, former chief of staff and former secretary of state. Marshall didn't believe that a man could write honestly about himself. So when Rusk's time was up, he said that he "buttoned my coat, put on my hat and walked out." He took with him his appointment books, which he promptly shipped off to the L.B.J. Library in Texas. Every other scrap of paper he considered government property—and left them in the State Department files.

Down there in Georgia, where he teaches international law at the University, he laughed over some of the ironies of the present controversy. He was on his way to a family reunion when he picked up a *New York Times* and noted the first story about the secret Pentagon study. A day or so later he got around to reading it. That was the first he knew about the study, and he wondered why nobody had called him when the study was made to ask if the thoughts ascribed to him were actually true. No facts in the report were that new to Rusk. He resented and rejected its conclusion that his administration had practiced wholesale deception while moving toward war. Did those "anonymous analysts," asked Rusk of a friend, have access to the notes from the Tuesday luncheons? "That's where it all came together in the President's mind. . . . There was never a leak from there." The handful of participants would scribble a few notes to themselves as Johnson talked, then go back to their offices and phone each other to make sure they were in agreement as to what the decisions had been. "People down the line had very little idea what went on in those meetings." And the idea that Johnson ever saw or seriously considered some assistant secretary's memorandum outlining what the President ought to do about domestic politics brought on another Rusk snort. "It's like Harry Truman used to tell us in the State Department," Rusk said. "'Good policy is good politics. Besides, you fellows don't know anything about politics, so stay out of it and leave it to me.'"

There is a little of Harry Truman in what Rusk believes about decision-making in foreign policy: "The difference between the world of decision and the world of opinion is a vast difference. . . . Let's make them [the decisions] honestly and simply and take the consequences."