

~~The War Conspiracy~~ BY PETER DALE SCOTT.
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place is being filled by a billion-dollar "pacification" program, including an expansion of the CIA's controversial assassination project, Operation Phoenix.² Generally speaking, the responsibility for Indochina is being taken from the regular military and given back to the various US intelligence agencies, particularly the CIA. The political success of the anti-war movement at this point is thus being harnessed to a further strengthening of the agency which, perhaps more than any other, helped bring about the war in the first place.

This amazing capacity of the intelligence apparatus to gather strength from its defeats was illustrated earlier after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Then as now the response of the government to the fiasco (an inter-agency fiasco, involving not only CIA but also Air America, Air Force, and Special Forces personnel) was to strengthen, consolidate, and rationalize the "Special Group" or "303 Committee" apparatus which had produced it.³ In 1971 there are similar signs that the Vietnam fiasco is being used to strengthen the case for relying on the "expertise" of the intelligence professionals.

The elaborate drama of the Pentagon Papers must be assessed in the light of this bureaucratic retrenchment and consolidation. One feels about their publication as one does about Mr. Nixon's Peking visit (which was announced just fifteen days after the courtroom drama of the Pentagon Papers had brought public support for the Vietnam military adventure to an all-time low). It is possible to approve of both events, while fearing that they will help to perpetuate the imperialist intervention which superficially they appear to challenge. Daniel Ellsberg is undoubtedly a powerful and moving critic of conventional warfare in Vietnam, and one does not wish to sound ungrateful for his courageous revelations. When, however, he tells the American nation on television that "for the first time we are hearing the truth" about the war, he is proclaiming a false millennium.

& Co. . . . in Hong Kong . . . through an individual name[d] Frank Furci." Frank's father, Dominic Furci, was a lieutenant in the Florida Mafia family of Santos Trafficante, allegedly a major narcotics trafficker. Trafficante and Dominic Furci visited Frank Furci in Hong Kong in 1968 (p. 279; cf. US, Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, *Organized Crime and Illicit Traffic in Narcotics, Hearings*, 88th Cong. 1st Session, Washington: GPO, 1964, pp. 522-23, 928).

² *New York Times*, 7 April 1971, pp. 1, 15; *supra*, p. 182.

³ Ralph Stavins, "Kennedy's Private War," *New York Review of Books*, 22 July 1971, p. 26. While Mr. Stavins' account is useful, he is wrong in asserting that the "303 Committee . . . came into being as a direct consequence of the egregious blundering at the Bay of Pigs." In fact this committee of deputy secretaries, known earlier as the "54-12 Committee" had been established in December 1954; Kennedy's innovation was to bureaucratize and expand its activities, particularly by establishing a Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) to insure the development of programs for it (NSAM 124, 18 January 1962). Cf. Harry Howe Ransom, *The Intelligence Establishment* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1970), p. 89.

The Pentagon Papers are of value, but more for what they reveal inadvertently than for what they reveal by design. It would be foolish to expect candor from any government documents, whether written for internal or external consumption: at least one disaffected veteran from the White House staff has commented that he would have had a less biased picture of the war if he had confined his reading to the newspapers. As an example of outright dishonesty among the published Pentagon documents, we have already noted General Lansdale's memorandum of 1961 on "Unconventional Warfare," whose information "was compiled within Defense and CIA" for the use of General Maxwell Taylor. That memorandum describes CAT as "a CIA proprietary," suppressing the important fact of its being 60 percent owned and controlled by Chinese Nationalist capital (to say nothing of its long involvement with the KMT narcotics traffickers in opposition to public US policy).⁴

More serious than such particular instances of self-serving disinformation is the overall inherent bias in a record of Defense Department papers. Though the true history of our escalating involvement in Indochina is a history of covert and intelligence operations, most of the recent ones are barely recorded (two striking exceptions, the anti-Diem coup of 1963 and the 34-A Operations Plan of 1964, had already been amply publicized). Needless to say, there is even less documentation of those key escalation decisions (such as Johnson's decision of 12 November 1966 to bomb Hanoi, *supra*, p. 106), which the President arrived at privately—either alone, or after consulting with his political intimates, such as Ed Weisl, Tommy Corcoran, and James Rowe, who represented the highest financial interests in the nation.

The inherent bias in the documents themselves, furthermore, is surpassed by that of the Pentagon study which carefully edits and selects them. The dubious and possibly conspiratorial escalations of September 1959 and December 1960 are passed over in total silence, the chronicle being resumed with the officially authorized escalations of early 1961. Two separate volumes of the original Pentagon study, in chronicling the escalations of 1964, skip from 25 July 1964 to the Tonkin Gulf reprisals of 5 August, thus minimizing discussion of the Tonkin Gulf incidents themselves. (The discussion was so inadequate that the *New York Times*, in its summary of the Pentagon study made up the deficiency from another source.)

Having recently examined some of the original Xerox volumes, I

⁴ *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam, 1971), pp. 131, 137; *supra*, pp. 194-97.

The War Conspiracy

must report that the Pentagon study's discriminatory bias is occasionally reinforced by outright falsehoods. Two separate portions of the original Pentagon study (I, "US Programs in South Vietnam, November 1963–April 1965," and VII, "The Advisory Build-up") are carefully edited so as to create a false illusion of continuity between the last days of President Kennedy's presidency and the first days of President Johnson's:

. . . National Security Action Memorandum 273, approved 26 November 1963. The immediate cause for NSAM 273 was the assassination of President Kennedy four days earlier; newly-installed President Johnson needed to reaffirm or modify the policy lines pursued by his predecessor. President Johnson quickly chose to reaffirm the Kennedy policies. . . . Military operations should be initiated, under close political control, up to within fifty kilometers inside of Laos. *U.S. assistance programs should be maintained at levels at least equal to those under the Diem government so that the new GVN would not be tempted to regard the U.S. as seeking to disengage.*

The same document also revalidated the planned phased withdrawal of U.S. forces announced publicly in broad terms by President Kennedy shortly before his death: "The *objective* of the United States with respect to the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel remains as stated in the White House statement of October 2, 1963." No new programs were proposed or endorsed, no increases in the level or nature of U.S. assistance suggested or foreseen.⁵

The Pentagon study thus implies that Kennedy's implementation of a 1,000-man withdrawal from Vietnam had not proceeded beyond the *objective* (of withdrawing 1,000 US advisers by the end of 1963 and the bulk of them by 1965) announced from the White House on 2 October. But this carefully laid impression is false, as is the claim that NSAM 273 reaffirmed Kennedy's policies. A specific *plan* for withdrawing 1,000 men had been authorized by Kennedy's NSAM 263 of 11 October 1963, and then worked out and announced by a high-level Honolulu conference on 20 November 1963, two days before the President's assassination.⁶

⁵ Pentagon ms., "The Advisory Build-up, 1961–1967," p. 70, emphasis added; cf. "US Programs in South Vietnam, November 1963–April 1965," Summary, p. 2: "President Johnson's first policy announcement on the Vietnamese war, contained in NSAM 273 (26 November 1963), . . . was intended primarily to endorse the policies pursued by President Kennedy and to ratify provisional decisions reached in Honolulu just before the assassination."

⁶ Richard P. Stebbins, *The United States in World Affairs, 1963* (New York: Harper & Row, for the Council on Foreign Relations, 1964), p. 193: "In a meeting at Honolulu on November 20, the principal US authorities concerned with the war could still detect enough evidence of improvement to justify the repatriation of a certain number of specialized troops."

This symbolic reduction of US support had more political than military importance; it might indeed have encouraged the Saigon junta to explore General de Gaulle's disengagement and neutralization proposals. Kennedy's authorized plan was quietly annulled by the deliberately misleading language of NSAM 273, which "emphasized that the level of effort, economic and military, would be maintained at least as high as to Diem."⁷ This tacit reversal of the 20 November decisions was approved only four days later, on Sunday, 24 November, by an informal meeting of many of the same personnel.⁸ But three new officials were present, including Lyndon Johnson, holding his first business meeting with his advisers as President.⁹

The full text of NSAM 273 of 26 November 1963 remains unknown. In both the Bantam and the Beacon editions of the Pentagon Papers there are no complete documents between the five cables of 30 October 1963 and McNamara's memorandum of 21 December. This in itself is a striking lacuna. We know, however, that it was "in keeping with the guidance in NSAM 273" that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 22 January 1964, proposed an escalation of intelligence operations, an abandonment of "self-imposed restrictions," and preparations "for whatever level of activity may be required."¹⁰ This corroborates Tom Wicker's judgment that the subsequent expansion of the Vietnam war "had been determined in that hour of political decision" on 24 November 1963.¹¹

NSAM 273 appears to be an important document in the history of the 1964 escalations, as well as in the reversal of President Kennedy's late and ill-fated program of "Vietnamization" by 1965. The systematic censorship and distortion of NSAM 273, first by the Pen-

Jim Bishop (*The Day Kennedy Was Shot*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968, p. 107) goes further: "They may also have discussed how best to extricate the US from Saigon; in fact it was a probable topic and the President may have asked the military for a timetable of withdrawal."

⁷ Pentagon ms., "US Programs in South Vietnam, November 1963–April 1965," Chronology, p. 1. There is no trace of this language in the Bantam (*New York Times*) edition of *The Pentagon Papers*, which reprints only the misleading reiteration of "the objectives of the United States with respect to the withdrawal . . . of October 2, 1963 . . ." (p. 233). Such censorship, which must be deliberate, creates an impression the opposite of the truth.

⁸ *New York Times*, 25 November 1963, p. 1. Chester Cooper reports that President Johnson did not hold an official meeting of the National Security Council before 5 December 1963 (*The Lost Crusade*, p. 222; cf. p. 216). Taking part in both the 20 and 24 November meetings were Rusk, McNamara, Lodge, and McGeorge Bundy.

⁹ Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Johnson's Boy* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 761. The other new faces were Averell Harriman, whose deputy represented State in the "303 Committee," and George Ball.

¹⁰ *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 274–77.

¹¹ Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ: The Influence of Personality Upon Politics* (New York: William Morrow, 1968), p. 206; cf. I. F. Stone, *New York Review of Books*, 28 March 1968, p. 11.

tagon study and later by the *New York Times*, suggests that the Kennedy assassination was itself an important, perhaps a crucial, event in the history of the Indochina war conspiracy.¹²

Assuredly there is much truth in the Pentagon Papers. Nevertheless, their editing, if not the drama of their release, represents one more manipulation of "intelligence" in order to influence public policy. Someone is being carefully protected by the censorship of NSAM 273, and by the concealment of the way in which the assassination of President Kennedy affected the escalation of the Indochina war. It is almost certain that McCone, the leading hawk in the Kennedy entourage, played a role in this secret policy reversal.¹³

Elsewhere in the *New York Times* version of the Pentagon Papers one finds the intelligence community, and the CIA in particular, depicted as a group of lonely men who challenged the bureaucratic beliefs of their time, but whose percipient warnings were not listened to. In June 1964, we are told, the CIA "challenged the domino theory, widely believed in one form or another within the Administration," but the President unfortunately was "not inclined to adjust policy along the lines of this analysis challenging the domino theory."¹⁴ In late 1964 the "intelligence community," with George Ball and almost no one else, "tended toward a pessimistic view" of the effect of bombing on the Hanoi leaders. . . . As in the case of earlier intelligence findings that contradicted policy intentions, the study

12 Another such event may have been the court drama preceding the release of the Pentagon Papers, which has been compared to the drama of William Manchester's trivial book, *The Death of a President*. Three of the principals in the *New York Times* trial had clear connections with the CIA/intelligence community. Daniel Ellsberg, the sometime fugitive who for six weeks advised Henry Kissinger in the Nixon White House, was also a former member of General Lansdale's "pacification" staff in Vietnam. Whitney North Seymour, the prosecutor for the US government, a long-time member of Ed Weis's law firm, Simpson, Thacher and Bartlett, was also a one-time vice-president of the CIA's Fund for Free Jurists. And Judge Murray Gurfein, hearing his first case during his first week on the bench as a Nixon-appointed judge, was a wartime member of OSS; in 1942 he helped negotiate with Meyer Lansky the "Operation Underworld" which led to the postwar release of Lucky Luciano. (US, Congress, Senate, Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce, *Hearings*, 81st Cong., 2nd Sess. [Washington: GPO, 1950-51], Part 7, pp. 607-08, 1188-91.) After the war, as Lucky Luciano went on to become the acknowledged overlord of the international narcotics traffic, so Murray Gurfein became associated in business ventures with directors of the Bank of America (perhaps the leading institutional backer of the China Lobby) and with Seymour Weiss, recently named as one of the two men (the other being Carlos Marcello) left by Meyer Lansky "to run New Orleans" (Hank Messick, *Lansky*, 1971, p. 87; Dun and Bradstreet, *Million Dollar Directory*, 1964, s.vv. "Goldring, Inc.," p. 504; "Seymour Weiss," p. 5024).

13 One of the unanswered questions about the 24 November meeting, by most accounts an important if not a crucial one, is why it was called so quickly. If Kennedy had lived, he would have had lunch that Sunday alone with Lodge at his Virginia country estate (Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ*, p. 183). Dean Rusk, another important participant, would have been in Japan.

14 *Pentagon Papers*, p. 254 (Summary by Neil Sheehan), emphasis added.

indicates no effort on the part of the President or his most trusted advisers to reshape their policy along the lines of this analysis."¹⁵

In part, no doubt, this is true. The intelligence community did include within it some of the administration's more informed and objective advisers. But once again the impression created by such partial truth is wholly misleading, for throughout this period McCone used his authority as CIA director to recommend a sharp escalation of the war. In March 1964 he recommended "that North Vietnam be bombed immediately and that the Nationalist Chinese Army be invited to enter the war."¹⁶ A year later he criticized McNamara's draft guidelines for the war by saying we must hit North Vietnam "harder, more frequently, and inflict greater damage."¹⁷ Meanwhile, at the very time that some CIA intelligence personnel discreetly revived the possibility of a Vietnam disengagement, other CIA operations personnel proceeded with the planning which led to the Tonkin Gulf incidents.

As presented by the *New York Times*, the Pentagon Papers suggest the model that we rejected at the beginning of this book—that the Indochina war was the result of a series of mistakes. According to this model, the war is to be analyzed as a sequence of official decisions reached by public officials through constitutional procedures, and these officials (now almost all departed from office) erred in their determination of the national interest. The Pentagon Papers suggest further that good intelligence was in fact available at the time, but was unfortunately ignored in a sequence of bad decisions. One is invited to conclude that the intelligence community should have greater influence in the future.

In this book I have reached almost precisely the opposite conclusion. The public apparatus of government with respect to Indochina has been manipulated for the furtherance of private advantage, whether bureaucratic or financial, or both simultaneously. The policies that led to escalation after escalation, though disastrous when evaluated publicly, served the private purposes of the individuals who consciously pursued them. And the collective influence of the so-called intelligence community (no community, in fact, but a cockpit of competing and overlapping cabals) has been, not to oppose these disasters, but to make them possible.

¹⁵ *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 331-32. A similar story of good intelligence neglected is told by General Lansdale's friend and admirer, Robert Shaplen, in *The Lost Revolution* (New York: Harper, 1966, e.g. pp. 393-94), a work frequently cited by the Pentagon study.

¹⁶ Edward Weintal and Charles Bartlett, *Facing the Brink: An Intimate Study of Crisis Diplomacy* (New York: Scribner's, 1967), p. 72.

¹⁷ *Pentagon Papers*, p. 441.