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'A Pattern Of Deceit'

Pacific Palisades

Melvin Gurtov, one of the authors of the secret Pentagon study on United States involvement in Vietnam, feels that it reveals a pattern of governmental deceit that is cotinuing in the Nixon administration.

Professor Gurtov, who recently left the Rand Corportaion to teach political science at the University of California at Riverside, is glad the study was leaked to the press.

"But I hope people don't simply regard the documents as an indication of faulty thinking that stopped in 1968," Gurtov said in an interview at his home here. "It's terribly important that the real significance for present policies not be lost sight of, and that it not become a political football. That would be a great tragedy."

The 29-year-old professor was one of about 40 authors who contributed to the study. Apart from Daniel Ellsberg, who has admitted giving the papers to the press, Gurtov is the only other author to comment publicly on them.

Books

Gurtov, who has written three books on Asia, was one of a sizable contingent of rand personnel recruited for the study. The largest group of authors, he said, came from withing the government, with Rand second and outside academicians third. Like most of the authors, he worked on only one section of the report during a three-month stint in Washington in 1967.

While admitting that the researchers did not partment papers, Gurtov still feels that the study was of high quality. "I genuinely felt," he said, "that by and large the effort was a scholarly one without outside pressure, without any efforts to skew questions to get the 'right' as opposed to the 'wrong' answers."

Asked the min lesson he drew from the study, Gurtov replied:

"It seems to me that the major import of the study lies in what it tells us about decision-making today. Of course the study stops with documentation through 1968, but I think that the public record of this administraition on Vietnam is sufficient to demonstrate that the same kinds and order of magnitude of error — lack of foresight, arrogance of power, and most importantly, deceit and manipulation of the American public and of the Congress — continues to this day."

Deceit

"The first and most basic deceit" is the administration's contention that we are winding down and getting out of the war." Vietnamization, he said was a "domestical political ploy" which really involves the "substitution of air power for ground power and under President Nixon "American air power has expanded in scope and intensified in application as our ground forces are being withdrawn."

The second deceit was that "we are truly interested in seeing the prisoners of war release," he said. "It seems to me quite clear that as far as this administration is concerned, the prisoners of war are a political device, a device for rationalizing escalation, by saying these are acts that are necessary to show our concern for the prisoners, and to try to liberate them."

"The third kind of deceit," he continued, "is that under the Nixon doctrine the United States is not interested in making new commitments in Asia." The administration had used the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia, in March 1970, as "an opportunity for creating for itself a new commitment in southeast Asia, namely the survival of a noncommunist regime in Pnom Penh."

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