

Excerpts From Latest Editorial Reaction

Following are excerpts from the continuing editorial reaction in this country and abroad to the publication by The New York Times of secret documents dealing with the origins of the United States' involvement in the Indochina war:

NATIONAL

LEWISTON [ME.] SUN—

The Times acted in the best tradition of free American journalism in publishing this special series of articles. The stories are revealing, to an alarming extent. But since they deal with matters and decisions reached three and four years ago, it is difficult to accept the angry claims of the Administration that national security is being jeopardized. The Times also demonstrated its good citizenship by suspending publication of the series in accordance with a court order.

HARTFORD COURANT— The merits of the case are still to be spelled out in court. But it is fair to say that the constitutional issue is a grave one. Whether it is being raised for the first time in this form, as attorneys for The Times and the Department of Justice allege, or not, the Government has assumed a tremendous responsibility to prove the "irreparable harm" that could have resulted had publication of The Times articles not been suppressed. There is ample precedent to the effect that the national interest may supersede even constitutional rights. But the proof of the need must be overwhelming.

AMSTERDAM NEWS (Harlem)—We agree with The New York Times. . . . The right of a newspaper to publish without governmental interference is a cornerstone of a free press and free speech in a democracy. It seems to us that the message from the Attorney General is very clear: No news publication—white or black—is secure or safe from governmental censorship. Several years ago, Sinclair Lewis described the fictional forecast of the rise of fascism in the United States in his book entitled, "It Can't Happen Here." Today, we are not so sure.

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER—The damage that the substance of the Pentagon pa-

pers has done to the confidence the American people can place in their own Government is compounded by the attempt to suppress their publication. . . . The real danger in this situation is that the truth to which the American people are entitled can be suppressed in the name of national security. It is that danger The Times is courageously resisting in what has now become a historic chapter in the fight for a free American press.

VIRGINIA PILOT (Norfolk)—The disclosure of the Pentagon study raises many serious questions. But the public's right to know is a compelling reason to publish the stories, and an additional motive is surely to be found in the failure of The New York Times to print what it knew of the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1962. In any event, the cat is now out of the bag, and the efforts of the Nixon administration to halt the publication of the series won't add to the credibility of the Government.

RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH—Whatever the ultimate effect of publication of the Pentagon's Vietnam War Study, its unauthorized release to The New York Times raises some profoundly disturbing questions about the security of all highly sensitive Government information. Events may validate the newspaper's argument that publication of the report will not endanger "the life of a single American soldier" or threaten "the security of our country or the peace of the world." But this is irrelevant here. The point is that a report bearing a "top secret" label has been clandestinely and illegally transmitted to The Times for release, in effect, to the whole wide world.

CHARLOTTE [N. C.] OBSERVER—The 7,000-page report, for all its gaps due to the unavailability of private Presidential papers, shows that, in the last years especially, the Executive branch did not level with either the people or their elected representatives. For that reason, if for no other, we are gratified that the classified document . . . has been brought to light. The law says that anyone will be prosecuted who divulges classified material "prejudicial to the safe-

ty of interest of the United States." This information, in our judgment, does the opposite. We, the people, needed to know its contents—and we needed to know them a long time ago.

CHATTANOOGA TIMES—

The absence of prior restraint—that is a governmental order for a newspaper not to publish certain material in the future—has always been at the heart and soul of America's boasted freedom of the press. No longer can this be said. . . . Two important issues are at stake. The first is a better understanding of the origins of the war, which has proved so divisive in America. The second is the cherished right of the people to know what a free press can learn in print. Both can be served by the judge's dismissal of his temporary injunction.

ARKANSAS GAZETTE—

The constitutional right to a free press has been challenged frontally by the Nixon Administration. . . . The scandal revealed in the Pentagon studies belongs on the doorstep of the Lyndon Johnson Administration. But the Nixon Administration has become accessory after the fact in attempting to squelch publication of the scandal. If the Nixon Administration, which is to say the U.S. Government, can impose in peacetime its own will on the publication of material which is (or once was) reported to be "top secret," then there arise the instant question of how much suppression of vital news about war and peace lies in store for all of us in the future.

TULSA WORLD—It can be argued, with some merit, that the American people should have all pertinent facts that led to this bloody and protracted war. But isn't it equally true that the secret processes of government—if they are sensitive enough to be classified—can be released only at the risk of embarrassing the nation and possibly harming its foreign relations?

ST. LOUIS GLOBE DEMOCRAT—No newspaper should be sued or threatened with prosecution for publishing stories involving the government's action. . . . Freedom of the press is the fundamental cornerstone of our democracy. If that freedom van-

in U.S. and Abroad to Publication of

ishes with fear of a Government crackdown on reporters and editors, democracy itself will die. . . . The Government would appear to be on very shaky ground indeed in trying to prove the American people do not have the right to know the contents of a Pentagon report on what went on in Vietnam prior to 1967.

CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER—Faith in the word of the executive has been badly shaken. First, the documents and Pentagon analyses so far printed by The New York Times this week show that the American people were deceived, misled, lied to and slickly sold on the war in Indochina. Second, the present Administration, not itself touched by the documents—which end in mid-1968—now goes to unprecedented lengths to stop the printing of a U.S. Government study done under former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara. By its drastic action the Government shows that it feels the winds of opinion are running against it.

DETROIT FREE PRESS — No matter how legitimate official concern may be . . . it is overridden in our opinion by the necessity of protecting the people's right to know the people's business. Certainly publication now does not endanger the life of a single American soldier, threaten the security of the United States or world peace. The documents, The Times pointed out, belong to history. . . . The Pentagon study reveals the decision-making process at its highest levels, and how that process is used and abused.

INDIANAPOLIS NEWS — The exact legal status of the document we shall leave to the specialists, and would of course insist that the relevant law be obeyed until, if it is bad law, it be changed through orderly procedure. But on the general principle at stake we come down firmly on the side of the right to know.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES—The court case, it seems to us, comes down to a determination whether the national security would be truly endangered by printing the rest of the document. The Government must do more than merely make the assertion

that this is the case. The press cannot be muzzled by executive fiat. Certainly the documents are embarrassing, at home as well as abroad. But this is a political consequence. The nation is entitled to the truth about its own affairs, which it is a responsibility of the press to give them.

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL—The normal and proper procedure is to punish an illegal expression rather than to suppress it in advance. If the Government obtains the right to determine what may or may not be printed before the fact, then it obtains the power of full censorship. At stake here is the public's right to know and the duty of the press to inform. That what is being disclosed is shameful and stigmatic is unfortunate—but disclosure is vital as a curb on future wrongdoing and duplicity.

MINNEAPOLIS TRIBUNE —One answer stands out boldly in the part of the Pentagon study published until now. Those who made U.S. policy in Vietnam had great faith in their own judgment and little in the judgment of Congress and the public. Perhaps little would be different had they been more forthright. Certainly they would have caused less damage to American political institutions than has resulted from the practice of official deception. The New York Times has performed an important public service by publishing part of the undisclosed history of U.S. policy-making. We can only hope that the Nixon Administration is being more honest about Vietnam than were its predecessors.

DES MONIES REGISTER — The Nixon Administration was foolish to keep the 47 volume Defense Department study secret after it came to office. It is still more foolish to try to enforce secrecy now. . . . The Administration should drop the "top secret" classification from the study and drop its efforts to block publication.

ARIZONA REPUBLIC—There isn't much doubt that The New York Times decided to publish its series about the Pentagon study on the origins of the Vietnam war because the study sat-

isfies The Times's ideological passions. . . . But motives aside, we disagree with Government contentions that publication of the documents will cause irreparable injury to the defense interest of the United States. . . . The Times's revelations are in the public interest. Why shouldn't the American public, whose sons are fighting and dying in Vietnam, be allowed to know the origins of the war? Why should Congress be denied legitimate documents? Why should the Nixon Administration cover up for the Johnson Administration by perpetuating a cloak of secrecy?

INTERNATIONAL

ASAHI SHIMBUN (Japan) —There probably are no denials anywhere of the fact that the policies of the government can only be communicated accurately to the people through freedom of the press, and of the fact that 'national prestige' and 'national interests' are really safeguarded for the first time only when a true consensus of the people is obtained through this freedom of the press. . . . If it is a mistaken war, it must be ended as speedily as possible. Although the material clarified was only a part, we believe that . . . it has proved that it was not a correct war. We want the Nixon Administration rather to make this the starting point for a decision to end the war.'

MORNINGER EPOCA (Portugal)—'We do not challenge the right of access to information on the part of the public, but we do have to recognize that this right cannot be limitless, especially when it concerns times of war and affairs which involve danger to the security of countries. Press freedom, much as we may like it, cannot overshadow the demands of the common good. . . . It is obvious that governments alone can correctly judge abuses that are committed and recognize to what extent information is likely to affect the security of the state.'

RAND DAILY MAIL (South Africa)—'Two major principles were in conflict: public interest, and defense interests in a country at war. This kind of issue arises in modern societies. The test is how it is resolved. In America, the Government exerted pressure,

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The New York Times refused to budge and the courts were called in to adjudicate. That is how it should be. We know that civilized governments subscribe to the idea of a press publishing without favor. What is abundantly clear is that some subscribe rather less than others.

MONTREAL GAZETTE—If, indeed, the Administration had no part in the publication, its innocence is now academic. The damage has been done and attempts at suppressing publication at this stage only tend to exacerbate the consequences.

TELEVISION COMMENT

ABC News (Howard K. Smith) — A couple of questions of the day—one, is The Times right to publish the secret Pentagon report on how we got into Vietnam. My bias is—yes. I see nothing harmful to present U.S. security in it. It may make other nations more hesitant about talking with us if they think their secret thoughts may appear in headlines, but that is the drawback of freedom and an aggressive press—both of which give us compensating strengths. Question two. Does the Times report give us an accurate view of the Vietnam war. My answer

is — no. It is like writing "Hamlet" and leaving out the key figure, Prince Hamlet himself.

NBC News (Sander Vanocur)—If a government can say what is harmful, what is not, then it can just about silence any voice it chooses to. And governments invariably fall back on the issue of national security to silence embarrassing voices. That may be justified in war time. But there is no state of war which now exists. There is nothing more than the usual guerrilla war which governments wage against the media, now going into a new round of escalation.

WCBS-TV News — These documents, as far as we know, do not appear to reveal military secrets or threaten diplomatic relations with other countries or the lives of our fighting men. Instead, they do reveal a sorry history of duplicity and deception by the Johnson Administration in bringing this nation into war. One can, of course, properly question The Times's judgment in publishing materials classified as secret, but no one, we think, can question the value of the knowledge they bring the public about our tragic entanglement in Vietnam.