

## 1968: Rusk and McNamara on national television



By NOAM CHOMSKY

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—The Pentagon study on Vietnam reveals how a small group of technocrats and crisis managers, acting in secret and relying on the espionage provisions of the Federal code to conceal their deception, conspired to engage the United States in an ever-widening war of aggression in Indochina.

If the Justice Department were devoted to the rule of law, it would proceed to investigate and prosecute these acts of “planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements, or assurances,” in the words of the Nuremberg Charter.

Among the treaties violated are the U.N. Charter, which requires that the parties to a dispute seek a solution by negotiations and other pacific means, refraining from the threat or use of force. In contrast, the conspirators of 1964 (the crucial year to which most of the published documents relate) were determined to avoid “premature negotiations” until they had achieved their war aims by force. In a parody of the supreme law of the land, William Bundy explains (Aug. 11, 1964) that the U.S. can enter into negotiations only after the use of force has “dispelled suspicions of our motives” and compelled Hanoi (and “Peiping”) to agree to order the indigenous insurgent forces in Laos and South Vietnam to surrender.

As the documents reveal, the conspirators understood that the “enemy” consisted very largely of the rural population of South Vietnam, where

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the insurgents had established a deep-rooted "political infrastructure." It was the American failure to control South Vietnam, despite the commitment of substantial military force, that led to the covert escalation of 1964 and the outright invasion and air war of 1965. To the public, this was represented as the defense of the freedom and well-being of the people of South Vietnam. But the internal documents of the cabal give this consideration the weight of 10 per cent among U.S. aims, as compared with the 70 per cent interest of avoiding the "humiliation" of a negotiated solution reflecting existing political forces. The perceived 20 per cent interest in keeping South Vietnam and its neighbors "from Chinese hands" demonstrates a level of political understanding matched only by the concern of the crisis managers for law and elementary decency.

The published documents largely confirm the conclusions reached in much of the analytic work of the past five years on the basis of the indirect evidence that has been available. Nevertheless, this documentation fills certain gaps in our knowledge and reveals dramatically how far we have moved toward the "elective despotism" of which Thomas Jefferson warned.

The efforts of the current Adminis-

tration to conceal the historical record from citizens and Congress are in no way surprising, given its continuing deceit and apparent commitment to military victory. The record of the past, no matter how shocking, must not blind us to the fact that under the Nixon Administration vast areas of Laos have been devastated in secret, while much of rural Cambodia has also been subjected to the terror of the air war. Forced population removal has reportedly accelerated. Of the total ordnance used by American forces in Indochina, almost half has been expended since January 1969, with no let-up in sight.

The director of the Pentagon study, Leslie Gelb, points out that Indochina policy has persisted with little change through four Administrations because "the system worked" ("Foreign Policy," summer, 1971). It now continues through a fifth, with only tactical modifications. One component of the system that has enmeshed us in executive wars is the secrecy that the Government is now fighting in the courts to preserve.

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