

# NYTimes JUL 13 1971 The Future Could Not Be Seen

By THEODORE C. SORENSEN

The average reader of The New York Times, equipped with hindsight, is smarter than any President.

The basic truth must be kept in mind as the Pentagon Papers are examined. While attention has focused on what our leaders knew and did not tell, we should also remember what they did not know and could not tell because they were not present. Congressmen who voted for the Tonkin Resolution often state that they never would have so chosen had they foreseen a commitment of 542,000 troops and 40,000 fatalities in a few years. But neither would the resolution's sponsors, in my opinion, have chosen their course had they been endowed with that gift of prophecy. Despite pessimistic intelligence warnings, almost no one knew then what almost everyone knows now about the futility of conventional American military intervention in that kind of situation.

Thus, can it really be argued that less secrecy and more Congressional participation—while both desirable and democratic—would actually have prevented any mistakes? Both Congress and the public in the war's early stages were largely willing to let the executive branch carry the burdens and blame of Indochina policy. Dissatisfied doves were outnumbered by dissatisfied hawks who wanted Hanoi eradicated, Haiphong harbor mined and the "gloves taken off," regardless of the prospects of Chinese intervention.

To be sure, neither the Congress nor the electorate was told all they

deserved to be told in 1964. Nevertheless, any Congressman who read the sweeping language of the Tonkin Resolution knew he was signing away blank-check authority; and any peace-minded voter who preferred Johnson to Goldwater will find ample confirmation in the Pentagon Papers of his perception at the time that they sharply disagreed on the limits to be placed on American military power.

I doubt that the Congress and public would have directed our forces to save the corrupt Diem-Nhu regime from an indigenous coup once their brutal and irrational repression of Buddhists, students and other dissidents had isolated them from their own people; or directed Eisenhower

and Dulles to support the elections called for by the Geneva Accords, once it was clear that Ho Chi Minh was a certain winner; or directed John Kennedy to abandon Saigon to the Vietcong assaults that mounted in 1961, however clear all these courses may now seem to a nation that is older and wiser.

No, the value of the McNamara history does not lie in merely reinforcing our hindsight judgments or in learning "what might have been" had only the Congress and country been consulted. Its real value is as a useful guide to what might still be. A nation which could not foresee the future can be forgiven its mistakes. But a nation which does not read the past cannot. Only a nation that has not read (or

## A General Looks at 'Media Reporting'

Following is Gen. Bruce K. Holloway's testimony to a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee of March 23:

One of the things that has bugged me is the vast amount of information over television and other instant news media that, one way or another, in my judgment, is a disservice to the security of the country. One is accurate. Two is slanting. Three is outright efforts perhaps to give an erroneous picture.

I think one thing that would be as valuable as anything I can think of right now today for the American people and the security of the country is a national information program, such as maybe every week a half-hour program that would treat of some critical problem of the country, starting out with defense issues. It would have to have three things.

First, it would have to have authenticity. You would have to have the President starting it off with a 30-second introduction.

The next thing you would have to have is impact. That is where some of this kind of material, if it could be declassified, would serve tremendously. Some of the material that is classified might be declassified.

understood) these papers will continue to tie its military effort in Vietnam to the survival of a shaky and unrepresentative Saigon regime and to the reliability of that regime's politicized army; or continue to place a higher priority on our possible loss of face around the world than on our actual loss of limbs and life on the battlefield; or continue to cling to the illusion that by force of arms we can favorably alter the prospects for negotiations. One of the great virtues of The New York Times melodrama was in calling these papers for the first time to the attention of Richard Nixon while we are still at war.

While Germany was still at war over half a century ago, there was an oft-quoted exchange between German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg and the former Chancellor, Prince Bismarck:

"How did it all begin?"

"Ah, if only one knew!"

No American ever knew or could know the whole story of Vietnam. Nor can any report fully separate opinions from fact, place motivations in context, or avoid bias in their analyses. Nevertheless, thanks to this demonstration of devotion to the truth on the part of Robert McNamara, The New York Times and others, we are substantially closer to knowing "how it all happened" in Vietnam. We should use that knowledge to rearrange future policies with wisdom, not to revile past performers with hindsight.

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