government: but they are afraid to identify themselves to the cadre. They are afraid to say anything good about the government. And that is still true, after ten weeks' work."

After a pause, I asked the interpreter to thank the leader for being so frank with us. We saw that he was sincere, and that he had done what he could.

"Ten weeks is not enough to do anything, in an area like this," the leader repeated. "But it doesn't make any difference; ten months would not have been enough, either. We worked hard, and we did the best we could; but the people do not really want to talk to us because the VC are all around and they are afraid. Maybe somewhere else we can do more. Or here, when things are better."

We offered the group a lift into town, and they all piled into the jeep. As we moved out toward Cần Giuộc, and dry socks, I asked the interpreter to ask the cadre if they knew what the firing had been about. Could they hear it?

One answered, and the interpreter said: "He heard some firing. He thinks perhaps it was some other cadre."

I looked at the captain. He shrugged. "Could be. I doubt it, that far off the road. But who knows?"

"Ask them what the cadre would have been firing about," I said to the interpreter. Another cadre, hanging on behind me, gave an answer.

"He says they may have been shooting to celebrate, because they had finished their work here, and the hamlets were pacified."

U.S. POLICY AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE POLITICS[1]

On April 15, 1970, I left the Rand Corporation to join the Center for International Studies at M.I.T. as a Senior Research Associate. My need to speak out publicly in the spring of 1970 on the role of the U.S. Government, in particular, that of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, in connection with Thieu's repression of my friend, Assemblyman Tran Ngoc Chau,[2] had convinced me that I should separate myself entirely from association with the Government before some new crisis arose calling again for comment or action and posing new dilemmas for Rand and for me.

Rand's top management had won my increasing respect for their willingness to bear the strains and risks imposed by my insistence on speaking—they supported my right to speak, I am afraid, too well for their own good—but it did not seem fair to continue putting them and my colleagues at Rand to this test. Everett Hagen, Acting Director

[1] Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, May 13, 1970. Published in *Impact of the War in Southeast Asia on the U.S. Economy*, Transcript of hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, Part II, pages 257-346 (hereafter cited as *Hearings*). The following text has deleted the testimony of the other two witnesses, Charles Cooper and David Schoenbrun, and most of the responses to it by Senators Fulbright, Gore, Pell, Case, and Javits, who attended. This text has also been lightly edited to improve readability.

[2] See "The Statement of Tran Ngoc Chau," translated, annotated, and with an introduction by Tran Van Dinh and Daniel Grady, *The Antioch Review*, Fall/Winter 1970-71, pages 299-310. Also see my two memoranda on Chau, *Hearings*, pages 342-46.

of the Center at M.I.T., had assured me that I could write anything that I wanted there—I was thinking at that moment of an article on Chau—without clearing it with anyone and without getting anyone else in trouble. On this basis, I accepted his offer.

Another specific reason for leaving Rand immediately, once I had decided to go, was that I had been invited to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 13, 1970. I had no intention of clearing my testimony with the Defense Department beforehand—or of testifying in a way that could have been cleared—so it was desirable to put as long an interval as possible between my resignation from Rand and my appearance there.

My session of the hearings, in Senator Fulbright's opening words, called for "testimony concerning the historical, political, and economic impact of U.S. policy on Vietnam and Southeast Asia" by, respectively, David Schoenbrun, myself, and my former colleague from Rand, Charles Cooper. The hearings were planned to be educational and uncontroversial, reflecting the mood of the Senate and public in the early spring of 1970, but within these limits I had decided to comment frankly on the nature of the U.S.-supported Saigon regime, and on the specific case of Tran Ngoc Chau, whose illegal trial had taken place in March (I entered two long memos on Chau into the record of the hearings as part of my testimony, which are omitted from the following version of the testimony).

But shortly before I was to testify, President Nixon launched the Cambodian invasion. On Friday, May 8th, I flew to St. Louis to speak at a teach-in at Washington University: it was my first public speech against the war, as well as my first teach-in since I had represented the other side, the Department of Defense, in several of the early ones five years before.

I flew back to Washington to find it taken over by more than two hundred thousand students protesting the invasion. That evening my wife and I walked through clouds of tear gas on Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House, which was protected by a line of buses end to end; groups of students were beginning to sit in the main intersections, improvising masks against the gas. (Marshals from the New Mobe finally dissuaded them from trying to shut down traffic and normal business; in retrospect, considering the highly unusual mood of Congress and the country that week, the chance was missed

for a more promising occasion for mass civil disobedience than might ever come again.)

In this atmosphere I took part in *The Advocates* TV show Sunday night on the Cambodian invasion, associating myself with Senator Goodell, and against Senator Dole and William Sullivan, my former colleague at the State Department, who defended the invasion, and then prepared my statement for the hearings on Wednesday. With the Senators focused on the Church-Cooper bill, and besieged by delegations of professionals and short-haired, clean-cut college students from campuses that had never marched or protested before Kent State, Jackson State, and Cambodia, no one proposed to compete for attention by changing the relatively innocuous character of the hearings. Instead, the staff of the Committee looked forward to important hearings on the whole Vietnam decision-making process—dramatically exemplified by the new invasion—using the Pentagon Papers as a major resource. These hearings would be held as soon as the deliberations on the Church-Cooper amendment were ended. I had by this time given all of the Pentagon Papers—including the volumes on negotiations—to the Chairman and Committee staff; the Committee had been so far rebuffed by Secretary Laird in its request for an official copy.

Since I wanted to preserve my availability as consultant and possible witness for these more comprehensive hearings, I did not rise fully to Senator Fulbright's invitation to add some comments on the 1964 history at the end of my testimony here on U.S. intervention in Vietnamese politics. But, by the time the Church-Cooper bill was passed, U.S. troops had been withdrawn from Cambodia, and the furor of the public and Senate receded so abruptly that the prospect of hearings on the Pentagon Papers again disappeared. The Church-Cooper amendment exhausted the energies mobilized by the invasion and Kent State and by the Administration's deception and callousness; it prevented the reentry of U.S. troops into Cambodia, but not the reentry of U.S. bombers or of U.S.-supported Vietnamese troops into Cambodia or Laos. Thus it failed to prevent the invasion of Laos in the spring of 1971, or ground and air operations that made refugees of 2 million Cambodians out of a population of 6.7 million in the next year and a half. (Only some 150,000 tons of U.S. bombs were expended in Cambodia in the course of turning one third of the

population into refugees, in contrast to South Vietnam, where it took 4 million tons and more than twice as long to create 6 million refugees, one third of the population of 18 million.)

Needless to say, the South Vietnamese politics fostered by our involvement over the past twenty-five years have not changed perceptibly in the two years since I predicted in these hearings the return of "Diemism without Diem." Tran Ngoc Chau remains in prison, held there without any pretense of legality, or of regret by our government, although the Vietnamese Supreme Court subsequently found that his arrest, his trial, and his imprisonment were each unconstitutional: a decision which Ambassador Bunker had earlier described as "the crunch," prior to which official U.S. criticism was inappropriate. His cell is near that of Truong Dinh Dzu, runner-up to Thieu in the 1967 election. (Dzu's son, David Truong, has informed me that they share a copy of the Bantam edition of *The Pentagon Papers.*) Don Luce estimates that there are 100,000 political prisoners in South Vietnam; the U.S. has allocated money for the construction of new "tiger cages" on Con Son island since the time Luce and Representative Anderson exposed the old ones.

I suggested before the Committee that Thieu's policy toward Chau had revealed his decision to discard constitutional legitimacy: "the emperor in full public view had taken off his clothes, and the question was, will we notice?" It took another year and a half, until the single-candidate "election" of 1971, before the Administration gave signs of noticing, and then it was with sadness rather than shock or reproach. Of local governors in hot, savage regions of the empire, it seems, not much is expected in the way of clothes.

This attitude was not exactly news to me. Five years earlier, while I was in the Embassy in Saigon, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge had commented to Washington:

> It is obviously true that the Vietnamese are not today ready for self-government, and that the French actively tried to unfit them for self-government. One of the implications of the phrase "internal squabbling" is this unfitness. But if we are going to adopt the policy of turning every country that is unfit for self-government over to the Communists, there won't be much of a world left.
>
> . . . The idea that we are here simply because the Vietnamese want us to be here . . . that we have no national interest in being here ourselves; and that if some of them don't want us to stay, we ought to get out is to me fallacious. . . . Some day we may have to decide how much it is worth to us to deny Vietnam to Hanoi and Peking—regardless of what the Vietnamese might think. [May 23, 1964; *PP*, IV, 99–100]

Two months after this cable, I sat in for my boss, General Lansdale, at a meeting of the Mission Council at the Embassy, Saigon. The first topic discussed was preparations for the elections in the fall to the constituent assembly which was to draft a constitution (the one later to be violated, with impunity, by Thieu's arrest and trial of Chau). Lansdale was greatly concerned about these preparations, so I took careful notes; my memo to him began:

> Ambassador Porter began the meeting with the comment that General Thang had made some very interesting remarks to General Lansdale the other day. "He [Thang] is concerned with making the elections as well-run and honest as possible. I recommend that Lansdale be requested to ask Thang just how we can be most helpful to him. That might mean helping Thang move about the country or helping other people move. If anyone has any suggestions as to how we might help, they should tell Lansdale. It is good luck for us that Thang has the Ministry of Interior at this particular moment and that he is the kind of man he is.
>
> "Lansdale should, of course, keep in close touch with the political section on this. We are going to come in for a good deal of criticism on these elections—the newspapermen are watching very closely and they are quite critical already—and we want to come out as well as we can."
>
> Lodge responded to this opening with a good deal of reserve, launching into a rather long commentary that put him on distinctively different ground from Thang, Porter, and you. He began: "When you talk about honest elections, you can mean two things: (1) lack of intimidation—this we must have; (2) the fear in some quarters—not, I think, in the highest quarters—that we won't be nice enough to the people who would like to tear the whole thing down. When I see some of the cables coming in just now . . . I'm reminded of a song that they had during World War II, 'Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans.'" Porter nodded and interjected, "Don't let's be beastly to Tri Quang." (This was clearly a reference to the Limdis cable in that morning from State expressing concern about exclusion of ex-Struggle Force candidates [Buddhists, led by Thich Tri Quang] from the lists, among other things.)
>
> Lodge continued, "You've got a gentleman in the White House right now who has spent most of his life rigging elections. *I've* spent most of my life rigging elections. I spent nine whole months once rigging a Republican Convention to choose Ike as a candidate rather than Bob Taft. If that was bad . . .
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> "The issue here is whether you can have open primaries. The fact is that in Southeast Asia in wartime you simply cannot have open primaries. The next question is then, who decides who can run? What worries me about

the newspapermen is that they set higher standards for these people than we set for ourselves at home. Nixon and I would have taken Chicago in 1960 if there had been an honest count. The Republican machine there was simply lazy; they didn't get out the vote, and they didn't have anyone watching the polls. But I don't blame the Democrats for that, I blame the Republicans. There is just a limit to how naïve or hypocritical we can afford to be out here." Lodge turned to Porter and said, "Is that responsive to your question?"

Porter, looking slightly taken aback, said, "I just thought General Lansdale should stay close to General Thang on the issue of elections."

Lodge replied, "Well, I want General Lansdale to stay close to Thang on the subject of elections; and I want General Lansdale to stay close to Thang on the subject of pacification, which I think is a great deal more important."

Later Lodge reiterated, "Get it across to the press that they shouldn't apply higher standards here in Vietnam than they do in the U.S. They talk about corruption in Vietnam but not about expense accounts in New York. . . ." (This morning in Saigon 1895 Lodge puts it slightly differently: "The first steps for us in Saigon and in Washington are to make it clear to the press and to Congress that Vietnam should *not* be judged by American standards.")

This report was not encouraging to the Lansdale team; but when we gathered soon after at Lansdale's house to meet Richard Nixon, who was passing through Saigon on a visit, our hopes revived. Nixon had known Lansdale in the fifties when Lansdale had worked for the Dulles brothers, before he worked for the Bundy brothers. If Lansdale could persuade Nixon of the importance of free elections, this would carry weight, we hoped, with Nixon's former running-mate.

The opening moments of that visit have often come back to me. After shaking hands with each of us, Nixon asked: "Well, Ed, what are you up to?"

Lansdale replied: "We want to help General Thang make this the most honest election that's ever been held in Vietnam."

"Oh sure, honest, yes, honest, that's right"—Nixon was sitting himself in an armchair next to Lansdale's—"*so long as you win!*" With the last words he winked, drove his elbow hard into Lansdale's arm, and, in a return motion, slapped his own knee. My teammates turned to stone.

Not that any of this really mattered.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Committee will come to order. The Committee is meeting today to hear testimony concerning the historical, political, and economic impact of U.S. policy on Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

Mr. Ellsberg, will you proceed, please.

MR. ELLSBERG: Senator Fulbright, I heard you ask the first witness [Charles Cooper] if we have a vital interest in Southeast Asia. I would like to begin by giving you the thought that came to my mind.

I found that my answer after the events of the last ten days or so is that the United States of America has a vital interest in getting out of Southeast Asia, getting out of Indochina.

I have participated, in the Government and outside the Government, in a lot of discussions over the last ten years as to what constitutes our "vital interests" and what that phrase might mean. I believe that this morning it has come to me with greater clarity than ever in my life what it means for us to have a vital interest—which is an interest that concerns the survival of this nation—in circumstances other than invasion or nuclear war.

Personally, I have thought during the last couple of years of protest in this country that it was still possible to exaggerate the threat to our society that this conflict posed for us. I feared that we might come to a pass in which there would be a major threat to our society but that we were not there yet. I am assured now that we do still survive as an American nation by the protest to the recent Presidential decisions on Cambodia. But I am afraid that we cannot go on like this—as it seems likely we will, unless Congress soon commits us to total withdrawal—and survive as Americans. There would still be a country here and it might have the same name, but it would not be the same country.

I think that what might be at stake if this involvement goes on is a change in our society as radical and ominous as could be brought about by our occupation by a foreign power. I would hate to see that, and I hope very much that deliberations such as the Senate is undertaking right now will prevent that.

THE CHAIRMAN: If I understand your reply to the question I asked Mr. Cooper, it is that our vital interest is in disengaging. There is no vital interest in remaining and controlling Vietnam.

MR. ELLSBERG: Absolutely. I am saying that earlier I felt we had no vital interest one way or the other, although a considerable interest in getting out. I now think it is vital that we get out, and fast.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. ELLSBERG: The subject I was asked to speak about some months ago was the impact of our policy upon politics in South Vietnam.

This might seem undramatic and less relevant than some other topics as of this week.

But I think that is not true. I think, in fact, that the question of politics in South Vietnam and the question of self-determination in Vietnam are crucial to the question of our ability to withdraw from South Vietnam even sooner than the year, or eighteen months, or whatever, that people are discussing right now. Specifically, I believe that moves toward self-determination in South Vietnam would mean allowing a greater voice and greater role of leadership to those Vietnamese who speak for the mass, I believe, of Vietnamese, who want this war over and who believe that American involvement is prolonging the war. That development may be the key to achieving a cease-fire and the prompt, orderly American disengagement that the health of this nation demands. (It can also greatly improve the political prospects of non-Communist elements after our departure.)

I will proceed with a brief statement; it is the first time in my life, I think, that I have obeyed orders to write a brief statement, so I will elaborate on it a little and I will be glad to have questions.

It concerns mainly what I take to be a central untruth at the heart of American explanations of our involvement in this war, and that applies over a generation of Presidents, five Presidents, going back to 1950.

This Administration, like previous ones, has stated repeatedly that the primary purpose of U.S. involvement in Vietnam is to support and promote self-determination by the Vietnamese people, their right and ability to "choose freely their own form of government, without outside interference." That statement has never been true in the past. It is not true today.

Obviously, "self-determination" has never been the *effect* of our involvement. Not one of the regimes we have supported, from the Bao Dai regime controlled by the French, through Ngo Dinh Diem, to the military junta that rules today behind a constitutional facade, could have resulted from a process of public choice that was truly free, or free of our own outside influence.

Not one of them has "represented" even a majority of the non-Communist Vietnamese it ruled, either in terms of composition, of political origins, or of responsiveness to values with respect to social justice or the issues of war and peace. Nor has our Government in its private estimates ever imagined otherwise for any of the regimes it has supported with money, advice, and, increasingly, with our armed forces.

This last is the perspective which I would like to add to the comments of Mr. Schoenbrun, which I thought were very accurate, extremely pertinent, and regrettably unknown to almost all officials in the Government. I think I can add some knowledge of how these matters were seen in the Government at various times, from my own participation in it and from studying these matters with official access.

One of the startling things, I think, to someone coming from the outside and studying the official estimates and documents, is to realize how clearly one particular fact has been seen at virtually every phase of our involvement; namely, that the Saigon government we were supporting at that time was one that did not command the loyalty or support of the majority of its own citizens, even of its non-Communist citizens, and that it almost surely could not survive even against non-Communist challenges without our strong support in a variety of forms.

Few American officials, I think, have asked themselves whether we had a right to support such governments and thus to impose them on the majority of their citizens. They felt we had a ne-

cessity to do so, and hence the question of our "right" did not arise. Yet, as I say, I have increasingly felt that necessity to point in the other direction.

But the evident lack of self-determination in South Vietnam has not meant the failure of our policy. "Freedom of choice" has not been the effect of that policy, but neither has it ever been our intent. On the contrary, in certain specific senses, it has always been our determined purpose, on which we have acted effectively, to prevent certain forms or outcomes of self-determination by important segments of Vietnamese society. I do not speak here only of the Communists.

Our actual intent has been expressed both in our actions and inaction, words and silences, and in our internal policy statements. It is expressed most clearly in the internal statement of U.S. objectives in South Vietnam adopted as official Presidential policy in March, 1964. That statement said: The United States "seeks an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam." A further provision is that the South Vietnamese Government, while it need not be formally allied to the United States, must be "free to accept outside assistance."[3]

SENATOR GORE: What was the date of this?

MR. ELLSBERG: March 17, 1964, sir. It could as well have been written in 1954. It was our policy in 1954, it was our policy in 1950, '58, '60, and I believe it is our policy today. (Although the formal wording in the internal documents has been changed by the present Administration to omit the requirement "non-Communist," many aspects of Administration behavior convince me that it is still there in spirit.) I would like to make clear that this was by no means a policy that was first adopted in 1964. On the contrary, that statement merely put into words American objectives that had often been reflected in our policies before but not always explicitly in internal documents.[4]

[3] NSAM 288, March 17, 1964 (*PP*, III, 50). (All footnotes have been prepared for this text and did not appear in the original testimony.)

[4] See, for example, Statement of Policy by the National Security Council, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," June 25, 1952 (*PP*, I, 384-90).

SENATOR GORE: Whenever stated it is in contravention of the Geneva Accords.

MR. ELLSBERG: That is correct, sir, and that is one reason that it has involved, as I mentioned, one of the central untruths of our policy. The policy has, in fact, been far more knowing, and one would have to say cynical, to insiders, in its contravention of the Accords and of our announced goals of self-determination, than an outsider would easily imagine. Again I would have to say this of the Administrations of five Presidents, three Democratic and two Republican. At each time they have been aware we were undertaking actions in contradiction to past policies of the United States, in this case our anti-colonial policy, but more importantly in contradiction to treaty commitments and public declarations of various kinds.

This is one of the moral burdens which our leaders feel they are called upon to accept from time to time: the responsibility for such choices and deceptions.

In the fifties it was often spelled out in internal policy statements quite sharply that it would be gravely against the interests of the United States, if there should be a Communist takeover in South Vietnam after 1954 (or anywhere in Vietnam, before 1954) "by whatever means." That was a very significant clause, as you will recognize.

The policy statements made it quite clear they were not referring only to a breach of the principles against invasion or armed aggression across borders. They felt that a Communist-dominated South Vietnam after 1954—no matter how it occurred—would jeopardize our interests in terms of influence and prestige; it would lead to Communist takeovers in other countries, in other parts of Southeast Asia and ultimately elsewhere, and thus would jeopardize our national interest. And that specifically meant whether it occurred by means of infiltration, subversion, or, as it was delicately put, by political activity, which is to say by "free choice." Another way to put it, if that is too nice a phrase—and people have questioned whether we should use it about our own elections, I have found—at any rate, by some sort of representative process.

Our officials, civilian and military, have typically interpreted this requirement for a non-Communist regime as inconsistent not only with acceptance by us, or by a regime we supported, of immediate Communist domination or even participation in a Saigon regime, but as inconsistent with an attitude of tolerance toward political activity by Communists or others that could possibly lead to an increasing Communist role.

I might say that those words, those particular words emphasizing our aim of a "non-Communist" regime, do not merely lie dusty in safes but have been brought out quite regularly since 1964, particularly by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as a specific refutation of any proposal of political processes that could possibly lead eventually to a Communist Vietnam, or to any proposals of neutrality, or of negotiations with the other side that could lead to a coalition.

The JCS, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in particular, missed no opportunity to point out that such proposals were in direct contradiction, as they read it, of the policy statement—which was NSAM, National Security Action Memorandum 288 in March, 1964—that we wanted an independent non-Communist South Vietnam.

Thus, we have supported only regimes whose policy has been to exclude totally the Communist element of Vietnamese society from any organized or even individual participation in political activity, and if possible to destroy it as an organization.

There have always been arguments as to exactly how large the organization of Communists is in Vietnam and how many people maintain loyalty to it. I have never seen any estimates below about 10 percent, and have seen arguments as to whether it is 15, 25, or 30 percent, and possibly higher at such times as 1964. But if we consider it even as 10 percent and consider it as a minority as well organized as the Communists are and with the prestige accruing from the victorious liberation struggle against the French, and then consider that we were backing policies to exclude totally that organization and destroy it, one sees, I think, the questions that must be raised of both the legitimacy and feasibility of such policies. In fact, both in terms of legitimacy and feasibility, this project has been comparable to an attempt

to exclude totally and destroy the Communist parties in France or Italy. It has required, eventually, an enormous investment of foreign—that is, American—money, arms, troops, and lives.

But the effect of our intervention has by no means been limited to excluding this one minority element from representation. We have also thrown our weight against the emergence of any governments, although non-Communist and representative of a majority of the population, that would not be, in our opinion, sufficiently reliable in safeguarding our own dominant interest, preventing eventual Communist domination.[5]

Our main support went, instead, to those most reliably "anti-Communist": as distinct from the mass of "non-Communists" that may indeed make up the majority of the population of South Vietnam today. I might mention that the distinction between anti-Communist and non-Communist is one that is very often made by almost any Vietnamese you get into a political discussion. But it is one that is not really familiar to Americans, including officials, who tend to translate the assertion that "the people do not want Communism" immediately into the phrase that they are "anti-Communists," and read into that that they are dedicated to the support of the GVN, at least as a lesser evil, and are willing to risk their lives or make sacrifices for that regime.

That last is not true, and I think the truth is captured better by this distinction between anti-Communist and non-Communist, with the strongly dedicated "anti-" being a very small minority, scarcely larger, if at all larger, than the Communists.

These "anti-Communists" have comprised parts (not all) of

[5] Compare Jerome Slater's conclusion concerning U.S. motives in 1965 for opposing the victory of forces in the Dominican Republic that proposed to restore President Juan Bosch, who had been elected in 1963 and deposed by a military coup later that year. Although neither Bosch nor the groups supporting him were believed to be controlled by Communists, Slater points out, "There is not the slightest doubt that the primary, indeed the overwhelming factor in the U.S. decision to intervene was the belief in both the Embassy and the State Department that the apparently imminent constitutionalist victory would pose an unacceptable risk of a Communist takeover. . . . As both the Embassy and the State Department saw it, even if Bosch should be reinstalled in the Presidency, he would *soon be discarded* by the better organized and more determined extremists, and there would be a Communist takeover within six months" (*Intervention and Negotiation*, page 31; italics added). Similar dynamic models, and similar caution, in the minds of American officials, have worked against the prospects of "Third Force" politicians in Vietnam for twenty-five years.

the French- and U.S.-trained army, the civil service, the Catholics and especially the northern refugee Catholics, and all of the landlords and businessmen: in general, those who feel they have most to lose from a Communist takeover, or whose families have already suffered from Communists.

SENATOR CASE: Excuse me. Since you made that distinction, does this mean that the people whom you describe as this third group, the non-Communists, want to be under Communist rule or are indifferent to whether they were under a Communist regime or just that they are rather apathetic? They are not activists.

MR. ELLSBERG: That is a very crucial question, which, I believe, has been wrongly answered by many analysts within our Government over the last decade.

SENATOR CASE: I think it is rather important.

MR. ELLSBERG: I think it is terribly important.

SENATOR CASE: Because if it is just a matter of their not caring who governs them and not having any views about ideology, let them go. But if they are anti-Communists and even though they are not activists, that is a different situation, it seems to me.

MR. ELLSBERG: Sir, I have found within the Government great assurance that what we were doing in Vietnam, basically in pursuit of our own interests, was legitimate because it did, after all, accord with the interests and desires of the majority of those people, even if they did not have the opportunity to express those desires democratically.

We have been convinced that the people "do not want Communism" and, as I say, that comes into official policy statements very frequently, and always in terms of justifying our involvement.[6]

[6] See McGeorge Bundy—on his first visit to Vietnam—in his memo recommending sustained bombing of the North after the Pleiku attack, February 7, 1965: "The energy and persistence of the Viet Cong are *astonishing*. They can appear anywhere—and at almost any time. They have accepted extraordinary losses and they come back for more. They show skill in their sneak attacks and ferocity when cornered. *Yet the weary country does not want them to win*" (*PP*, III, 311; italics added).

I think when there is evidence that that does not mean or seem to translate immediately into dedicated support to the Saigon Government, we then go to the second model that you suggested, which was, they do not want Communism but then they do not want very much of anything very intensely. To put it less politely, what lies between the lines is that they are dumb peasants. They are illiterate and apathetic. If we look at a book by John Mecklin, who was the U.S.I.S. Director in Saigon at a certain period, we have the extraordinary statement, and I think very revealing one, that for the half of the adult rural population that are illiterate, their "power of reason . . . develops only slightly beyond the level of an American six-year-old."[7] In other words, one takes reassurance that even if they are not strongly with us, they are indifferent, they are childish and apathetic and probably malleable, and if our policies can be rearranged slightly and publicized properly, perhaps we will get their ardent support.

The actual model, to answer your question as directly and as accurately as I can, is I think, that the mass of the Vietnamese people have a considerable antipathy, not indifference, both to the Communists and to the GVN. That has been described by a former Ambassador of South Vietnam to this country, Vu Van Thai, as a "double allergy," growing more and more intense. That can lead to behavior similar to that of apathy, of course, or to a sort of self-seeking opportunism, but on other occasions it can beget other sorts of explosive phenomena.

The fact is, I believe, that even those who back the GVN regard it at best as a lesser evil. And one of the most significant statements I have ever seen on the problems of the Vietnam War is by a Vietnamese nationalist, now in the Senate, named Dang Van Sung, who said in 1963: "Man is so constituted that he will not willingly make great sacrifices or risk his life merely for a lesser evil, although he will gladly die for an illusion."

I think it is because we have offered, with our backing, the mass of the Vietnamese at best a lesser evil that we have not ever found them wholeheartedly backing—

SENATOR CASE: But you would not want to offer them an illusion, either, that they would die for.

[7] *Mission in Torment* (New York, 1965), page 76.

MR. ELLSBERG: Sir?

SENATOR CASE: You would not offer them an illusion that you just spoke for, the man you quoted.

MR. ELLSBERG: The striking difference between the two sides is that those who back the Communist side do not on the whole regard it as a lesser evil, but as a cause worth dying for.

SENATOR CASE: I am not really trying to take a position here at all. I am just trying to find out exactly what we are talking about. It seems to me it is quite conceivable that people who are completely apathetic about the outside world, who want to be left alone to till their few acres and worship as they please and to honor their ancestors in the same place that they believe they have been for a long time, may be entirely much more aware than we are of the destruction of their environment.

MR. ELLSBERG: I certainly agree with that. I am just taking exception to the phrase "they only want to be left alone," because I believe that has lulled our officials considerably.

I take two points of exception to it. One, I think they are not at all indifferent to the nature of the officials who rule their districts and their provinces, and the battalion commanders and the regimental commanders who control firepower within that province. They know very well that the control of armed forces, police, allied units like our own, and GVN units depends very much on those officials. They hold bad troop behavior, extortion, and indiscriminate firepower very much against the officials, and they are not at all indifferent about such matters. I say this because people ask, "Do they care about elections; do they care about officialdom at all?" As my friend Tran Ngoc Chau, now in prison in Vietnam, used to say, "Peasants would appreciate very much the chance to throw out an oppressive, rotten, or inhumane official if they could. Elections are not the only way to do that, but if elections gave them that chance, they would take to elections very quickly."

The other thing that they are not at all indifferent about is

the continuation of this war. And they know very well that is beyond the control of village or province officials. . . .

The phrase "the people in between" is a phrase that has often struck me in Vietnam. The model, the description I have given of attitudes with, say, very roughly, 20 percent perhaps on one side and 20 percent on the other, leaving a great mass of people not committed to either of these parties and not indifferent at all to the carrying on of the war, supports an understanding of the plight of "the people in between." Again, if I may quote Vu Van Thai, who said to me recently: "The problem in Vietnam is that of a people ground down between two competing authoritarian regimes."

On the other hand, if you ask, "Is there anything we can do about this?" the answer is yes; we have been doing something about it for a very long time. We have shown the ability to *preserve* that situation, essentially, to prolong it, and we are seen as doing so by the Vietnamese people. We can keep on doing that if we really want to pay the price. It is not a very idealistic program.

SENATOR CASE: Do you not think it is really true, despite the concentration on the situation in Vietnam that we have given verbally over all these years, that our real concerns have been geopolitics on a larger scale?

MR. ELLSBERG: This has led to what I described as untruth actually. We have felt compelled—and perhaps one should be glad in some sense that our leaders did feel compelled, although we paid a price for it in the frankness of public discussion—to say we were not pursuing our own interests entirely at the expense of the Vietnamese people. But that in fact would have been the accurate thing to say. . . .

Senator Case, I would like to mention something else that your question suggested to me. Even in years when I felt that our policies there were unsound and unwise and should be stopped, I did not have the strong feeling that what we were doing was wrong and intolerable until I began to become aware of much of the history and the background that Mr. Schoenbrun has made

a great effort to bring to the American people over some time. My reading of that history, after my return from Vietnam, influenced me a great deal. And I might mention I do not think I have ever met an American official of the Deputy Assistant Secretary level or higher connected with the problems of Southeast Asia who could have really passed a simple college seminar quiz, or I should say a high school quiz, on any of the dates or facts on which Mr. Schoenbrun has properly put such emphasis. . . .

Your question suggests to me one that I asked a Vietnamese in this country named Hoang Van Chi, the author of a book called *From Colonialism to Communism,* which is a classic study of the Communist takeover in North Vietnam. He had been an official in the Viet Minh in the war against the French and then gone to work for the Diem government and ultimately over here.

I asked him if North Vietnam, his native region, would be better off today if Ho Chi Minh had not headed the revolution, and he said, "Oh, yes" right away, which did not surprise me because he is known as an anti-Communist. When I asked him to go into more detail, how it would be better, he said, "My country would not have been destroyed or divided." He said, "If Ho Chi Minh had not headed the liberation someone else would, not a Communist. If one other than a Communist had headed the liberation movement against the French, the United States would never have supported the French with money, weapons, planes, and napalm, and many of my countrymen would not have died.

"Moreover, the liberation would have applied to the entire country."

Frankly, when I heard him say that, it made the hair on my neck stand on end, to realize as an American that the greatest reproach that a Vietnamese could make against Ho Chi Minh would be that he had been responsible for triggering a more or less reflex destructive action over twenty years, by the United States. . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, I would. I would like to make this observation. This question, of course, arose in the early days of the

hearings before this committee, particularly with Secretary Rusk. If my memory serves me correctly, it was quite clear then that the decisive question was not the balance of power other than the ideological obsession we then had. Much of it grew out of our domestic situation. That is the influence that Senator McCarthy had developed here. It had great domestic political implications, which, as you have already described, caused Secretary Dulles to decline to even participate personally in the Geneva Accords.

In the many questions at that time, I think we reduced it to the point of asking if Ho Chi Minh had not been a Communist, do you think we would ever have intervened? I think it is quite clear we would not have. It was the ideological aspect that triggered our intervention, and this was true of situations not only in Southeast Asia, especially, but in Europe. I mean, in the fear of Stalin and his effect.

I always thought our departure from our traditional role, in supporting the French colonial power, was because of our fear of French weakness in Europe.

MR. SCHOENBRUN: Yes, sir, and the French have played upon that, as you know.

THE CHAIRMAN: . . . I never followed the idea that it is all history and it is not important. What do we do now? I think what you do now is based fundamentally upon your understanding of how we got there.

MR. ELLSBERG: Mr. Chairman, having studied the documents of a number of administrations and found the internal rationales in terms of strategic interests palpably inadequate, I have more and more come to look at the domestic political contexts in which those decisions were made year after year This is something that rarely gets into the internal documentation, and if it is even talked about in the Executive branch, it is done very privately, one or two people at a time. I am speaking of the relation of these strategic moves to domestic politics.

THE CHAIRMAN: By strategic you mean in the interest of the security of our country?

MR. ELLSBERG: That is right. As a friend of mine, Morton Halperin, said recently, people other than the President, bureaucrats in fact, make their decisions on the basis of bureaucratic and agency considerations, and Presidents typically make their own choices in terms of domestic political considerations, far more than the public realizes; but in describing their motives and reasoning to each other and to the public, both talk a language of national security and strategy, which creates certain confusions.

In this particular case, I would say that since 1949 no American President has been willing to see the fall of Indochina added to the fall of China during his Administration. And that, I think, has warped very much his perception and weighing of priorities with respect to short-run and long-run interests of this country.

I believe that each President really has been willing to invest major resources to take considerable risks in order simply to postpone the fall of Saigon. He has not wanted to be in office, in effect, when the red flag went up over Saigon.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is, for political reasons here at home and not strategic reasons?

MR. ELLSBERG: Essentially political reasons. And this has led us to take strategies that were risky and costly but did promise that they would postpone this event, even if they offered little hope of averting it indefinitely, that is, of "winning" at acceptable cost.

SENATOR CASE: Can I throw out a suggestion? This unwillingness to be in office at a time when Saigon fell might be based upon a consideration that the people of the country don't believe it is a wise thing to let happen—

MR. ELLSBERG: That is right.

SENATOR CASE (*continuing*): And not for unworthy reasons, but from some deep instinctive feeling about what is in the national interest. Presidents, in following this feeling, haven't therefore been unworthy of the move. That is not the least worthy, I suppose, of motives: To an important degree to follow what I think is our basic guide here, and that is the instinctive movement of the people of this country in one direction or another. And that doesn't mean that everybody hasn't got the obligation to do his own thinking. But the people of this country, when they have been sufficiently informed—and they have an amazing way of getting information, including, I think, osmosis as well as watching television or listening to people on the radio and reading newspapers or listening to political speeches or whatnot—the people, I think, probably are our best reliance when it comes to great policy.

MR. ELLSBERG: I agree completely. I think that is one of the premises that goes into the President's mind, and I am talking now, as I keep repeating, of five Presidents. I should say I know of the premises of the most recent, Nixon, only from newspapers; the others from considerable documentation.

But I think the problem, as the President sees it, is a little more complex than that in this area. He sees, in the first instance, as you say, that the people may well punish him politically if he lets Indochina fall, and, to that extent, acting to prevent that is doing the people's will, which is his democratic responsibility. But at the same time he reads his intelligence analyses and his operational estimates, which tell him what will be required to prevent that from happening, and he compares those calculated requirements with what he thinks the public and the Congress will let him do. And there always has been a great gap between these sets of considerations.

Each President has seen, I think, that although he will lose prestige and power—that is, lose votes—if Indochina falls, he probably cannot get Congress or the people to let him do what his advisers tell him is needed to keep it from falling, reliably and indefinitely. That has meant various things. First, it meant backing a colonial regime, which we did with some distaste. We accepted that. Later it meant backing an authoritarian police state, which we did, though we didn't want to publicize it. Third—

when that began to fail in 1963 and 1964 (I came into the Department of Defense in August, 1964)—the President's military and civilian advisers believed strongly that unless we were prepared to bring direct military pressure on North Vietnam, the situation was irretrievable. Finally, ground troops appeared necessary.

Now during that whole period bombing and ground troops looked perhaps ultimately necessary but were ruled out. Thus, up to 1965, each President was led to take steps short of those measures, steps which he believed to be probably inadequate to the situation. He hoped these lesser steps might work and believed they would at least postpone the dilemma of using troops or bombing or of losing.

This put one further pressure on him to mislead the public as to how these lesser measures were working. We were under great pressure to imply, since advisors were all we could afford to put over there, that advisors were doing the job; or Diem was doing the job; or earlier the French were doing the job. And this meant consciously distorting what our reports were conveying to the President.

SENATOR CASE: We have had direct experience with this again and again, for what, fifteen, twenty years.

MR. ELLSBERG: Yes. When the President starts lying he begins to need evidence to back up his lies because in this democracy he is questioned on his statements. It then percolates down through the bureaucracy that you are helping the Boss if you come up with evidence that is supportive of our public position and you are distinctly unhelpful if you commit to paper statements that might leak to the wrong people.

The effect of that is to poison the flow of information to the President himself and to create a situation where a President can be almost, to use a metaphor, psychotically divorced from the realities in which he is acting. . . .

MR. ELLSBERG (*resuming his statement*): Most Vietnamese on both sides of the struggle see the hegemony of this particular

minority grouping, which I described earlier—the Diem coalition of army, Catholics, civil servants, landlords, and businessmen—as the result of American policy and decisions. They are basically right. They do not thank us for it. As Tran Ngoc Chau said to me in Vietnam a few years ago, "The United States gets very angry and disappointed when it finds that the leaders it has selected for Vietnam do not command the loyalty of the Vietnamese people." I believe Vietnamese feelings go beyond that now. Any group of leaders who had won the support of the majority of the people right now, I believe would have done so by appealing to end the war.

Has anything in this matter changed lately?

President Thieu's successful campaign from November, 1969, to March, 1970, to imprison the oppositionist Assemblyman Tran Ngoc Chau, in disregard of the 1967 constitution, indicates strongly an open return to the familiar form of politics, described above and known to Vietnamese as "Diemism."

THE CHAIRMAN: As what?

MR. ELLSBERG: Diemism. Diemism without Diem. And perhaps I should describe Diemism more fully. It implies a narrow political base for the regime; exclusion of all other groups such as the Buddhists, the students, unions, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, from any participation in power and the use of divide-and-rule tactics on them, an authoritarian police state regime; suppression of free speech; suppression of political activity; total unwillingness to negotiate with or tolerate the existence or activity of the Communists; and extreme reliance on the Americans. This constitutes the context which is "Diemism."

Watching President Thieu pursue Chau despite the obstacles of the constitution, which made Chau supposedly immune from the particular tactics Thieu was using, all Vietnamese that I spoke to and of whom I heard in Vietnam, immediately said, "We are back to Diemism." Shortly after Chau's imprisonment in March, I spelled out at some length what seem to me the implications of such a conclusion in a memorandum I shall submit for the record of these hearings.

More recent repressive actions by Thieu against students, veterans, political rivals, and newspapers all point strongly in the same direction.

If self-determination were truly our aim. Thieu's policies would be directly thwarting it. But, as we have agreed, we have really other interests that we are pursuing.

How does Diemism without Diem serve these other interests? Well, it does not serve our announced interests in a negotiated settlement—that is certain.

Thieu's policies show a clear intent to monopolize governmental power in the hands of a narrow group which coincides with those least willing to see any reduction in U.S. presence or aid or, indeed, an end of the war that would bring about such a reduction.

Again to quote Vu Van Thai, who represented essentially the same group as Ambassador to Washington, a period that he is not proud of at this point: they are precisely those who could not survive politically an end to the war and American presence; so their status and prestige and power depends entirely upon a prolongation of the war. Even winning the war, even victory would end this power. Prolongation is precisely what they want, with American presence.

This same grouping of forces will accept no compromise of a rigid anti-Communist policy that precludes the concessions required for negotiated settlement. United States policy, in turn, that predicates any agreement with North Vietnam or the NLF upon its acceptance by this Saigon regime, cannot lead to successful negotiations, and one can say that to choose continued support of this regime is knowingly to choose against negotiations as a way out of the Vietnam War for the United States.

Does Diemism without Diem serve our policy of Vietnamization? That depends on what Vietnamization means. Not if it means the aim, for Americans, of leaving Vietnam altogether, leaving it with a government worthy of United States and Vietnamese sacrifices and one that can survive to fight or negotiate or coexist with Communists without us. Even with President Diem, a far more authoritative national leader than Thieu, Diemism failed to achieve this or to survive at all, even against

non-Communist opposition. I should say I believe that in continuing there with U.S. troops to support the Thieu government, there is increasing likelihood we will be called upon, unless we change that policy, to support the survival of the Thieu government against non-Communist opposition devoted to ending the war. We will be called on to support it by use of our own military forces, just as we lent transport planes to Ky to suppress the Buddhist uprising in 1966.

Thieu would be even less likely than Diem to successfully build an anti-Communist authoritarian regime that would be strong and stable without either popular support or an American presence.

But the signs are that the Nixon Administration privately knows this quite well and that Vietnamization means something else to it. Since the political component of that policy is clearly predicated on support of Thieu, including his repressive measures of the last six months, it almost surely presumes a large American presence as well. I believe that Vietnamization, as shown more clearly by support of Thieu, is not a policy of withdrawal at all but of reduction of forces to 100,000 or 200,000 troops expected to stay there indefinitely. A slogan that paraphrases views I have heard from officials in the last few months would be: "There is nothing wrong with Diemism that a hundred thousand U.S. troops can't cure."

That in turn, I might say, reflects another attitude, a very nostalgic attitude, for the earlier days of Diem, which could be similarly paraphrased: "Diem would have won if only we had assassinated David Halberstam instead." Again, this imagines that events in that country depend entirely on events and decisions in this country, that they are swung by them and that the realities were leading to victory over there, when in fact that was very far from the case.

The recent U.S. adventure in Cambodia, with the U.S. Administration imitating in Presidential style Thieu's "loose construction" of his own constitution, warns clearly that this Administration is no more ready to contemplate the "loss" of Indochina to Communism, during its term of office, than any of its predecessors.

It is in the full tradition of earlier Administrations, hopeful of victory in the long run but obsessed with avoiding defeat in the short run. They have their eye on the ball, and avoiding short-run defeat is an objective that is worthy of a great many American and Vietnamese lives in their opinion, I am sorry to say.

This Administration is no less ready than earlier ones to incur escalating risks and domestic dissent to avoid or postpone such "humiliation." The rhetoric has changed, and I refer here to the fact that we talk more about self-determination than we did in some recent years, but the policy has not. It is one that condemns Vietnam to endless war and Americans to endless participation in it in support of a corrupt and unpopular military dictatorship.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Ellsberg.

That is a very dismal conclusion, but I have no quarrel with it. I think if the policy persists and if the Congress is unable or unwilling to change it, I would predict that it will go on as you say. . . .

[There follows a discussion of the view that the war in Vietnam principally serves the interests of the Soviet Union.]

MR. ELLSBERG: Important people who are supposed to have been concentrating on American interests, in successive Administrations, have been oddly blind, I think, to the question of when conflicts of interest on the one hand or harmony of interests on the other were showing up.

There are indications, for example, that President Nixon, even before he took office, was counting on the secret plan of acting upon a supposed harmony of interests with Russia. Now what this analysis is pointing to is that that may be a very unreliable basis. There have been other supposed harmonies of interest in our actions that again we failed to notice were actually in conflict. I think we have never been sensitive to the conflict of interest between this country, ever since it became interested in

getting out of this war, and the interest of the Saigon government. On the other hand, we have never noticed the harmony of interest in a certain peculiar sense of the Saigon government with the Communists who almost surely see their own long-run interests served by having power among the non-Communists monopolized, prior to their takeover, by Saigon regimes of the precise character of those we have supported or, in effect, we have chosen to impose.

Several Vietnamese said to me during the elections of 1967 in Vietnam, before Thieu replaced Ky as our candidate: "There are only two people here who agree they want to see Ky as the President of South Vietnam, Westmoreland and Ho Chi Minh." And in fact I think there was a harmony of perception of interests between those two gentlemen, and some other Americans, and it was not based, in my opinion, on a very clear knowledge of where our own interests lay. . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ellsberg, were you stationed in Vietnam, and while you were there did you ever become acquainted with Tran Ngoc Chau?

MR. ELLSBERG: He was a very close friend of mine.

THE CHAIRMAN: You know him. Do you know anything about his relationship with the CIA, which has been in the press? This is not related to what I asked you to discuss, but since you are here I thought I might ask you to comment on it.

MR. ELLSBERG: Well, I had anticipated that questions about Chau might come up. I have a file of various background papers on Chau, some of them memos of conversations that I had with him at the time. If you would like I could enter into the record a memo bearing on that particular subject. I wrote it in 1966 when I was assigned to liaison with Chau, who was then head of the Revolutionary Development (called Rural Construction by the Vietnamese) cadre program. It does not present a comprehensive picture of Chau's relations with the CIA, but it does

throw important light, I think, on the origins of friction between them.[8]

THE CHAIRMAN: I think it would be interesting because we have had some difficulty in getting information from the Administration on this subject. They always plead some kind of security. We asked Ambassador Bunker to come before the Committee in open session, but he declined. He has agreed to come in executive session. I don't know whether or not he knows Mr. Chau, but being in Saigon and responsible for our representation, he at least came to him secondhand. He should know about it, but I think it would be well to put in the record the memorandum about Mr. Chau. As I understand it, the Supreme Court in Saigon has declared his conviction unconstitutional or illegal.

MR. ELLSBERG: That is right. The Supreme Court, in what would be in normal terms an encouraging move, almost unprecedented for them in terms of challenge to their Executive, has declared that the manner of his arrest was unconstitutional, that he was tried in the wrong court and that his imprisonment was unconstitutional. They did not, however, order him to be released.

THE CHAIRMAN: He is still in prison?

MR. ELLSBERG: He is still in prison.[9] It has been reported in our newspapers that the U.S. Embassy in Saigon had taken the position that our Government should not be critical publicly of Thieu's behavior in this case until the full constitutional workings of their system had run out. It said, after all the Supreme Court may rule on this, and if they rule, presumably the Execu-

[8] See *Hearings*, pages 342-46. The original grounds of this conflict involved Chau's concern that the Office of Special Assistant (CIA) was exercising an undue influence on the policies and administration of this program, particularly in the eyes of the Vietnamese.

[9] As this goes to press, April, 1972, Chau remains in prison, over a year and a half after the Vietnamese Supreme Court removed any shred of legality from his arrest, trial, or imprisonment—with no known protest from the U.S. Embassy.

tive will obey its guidance. As I read the account of our Embassy views, which sounds very plausible to me,[10] it was put to our State Department that our judgment should be reserved until that time. Well, the time is now. I believe that the attitude of our Government toward obedience or nonobedience by President Thieu to the clear legal implications of this Supreme Court ruling is a test not just of Thieu but of us and our attitude. At the time I felt that Thieu's behavior showed that he had clearly decided to discard constitutional legitimacy, simply to rule without it. I felt the emperor in full public view had taken off his clothes and the question was, will we notice? If our purposes there do not call for any such legitimacy, any pretense of legal restraints or self-determination, then I would call on the President to discard that particular vein of rationalizing our intentions and our presence there.

THE CHAIRMAN: I have seen no indication that our Government is going to respond to that finding.

MR. ELLSBERG: Perhaps you will learn the plans when you see Ambassador Bunker.

THE CHAIRMAN: I doubt that very seriously. Mr. Ellsberg, were you working at the Pentagon at the time the bombing of North Vietnam began?

MR. ELLSBERG: Referring to the Tonkin Gulf reprisal?

THE CHAIRMAN: Either at the time of the Tonkin Gulf incident or the succeeding February. Were you there during that period?

MR. ELLSBERG: I was very closely involved in that decision-making, leading up to the bombing campaign from February, 1965, on, as a staff assistant.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would you tell us a bit about the first one. Perhaps that is the way to start.

[10] This account of the Embassy's position was correct.

MR. ELLSBERG: Well, after—

THE CHAIRMAN: What were your responsibilities? Were you Assistant Secretary of Defense to John McNaughton at the time of the Gulf of Tonkin incident?

MR. ELLSBERG: I was the Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense.

THE CHAIRMAN: What were your responsibilities at that time?

MR. ELLSBERG: Really to help him as a staff assistant on particularly sensitive issues of various kinds which were not handled in the normal staff work.

THE CHAIRMAN: The reason I think it is appropriate and timely to ask you this now is that the Committee on Monday voted to repeal the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. The Majority Leader has scheduled it for consideration after the arms sales, so it will be coming up right away. It is history, but I don't believe we have ever had your testimony. I think it is very appropriate since you were one of the people involved. Were you personally aware of the decision-making in connection with the retaliation after the second incident?

MR. ELLSBERG: I was, but almost by chance. I might say, this is a long story.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would you make it as brief as you can? I don't know of any other opportunity I will have to put it in the record. It isn't all-important, but I personally am very interested and I am sure that certain scholars and others will be interested. It is a matter of interest, so if you don't mind I would like any memoranda you have relating to it. Could you give us a very brief summary?

MR. ELLSBERG: I don't have memoranda, but I would be glad

to comment on it in particular because I have been sensing very strong similarities in the last few weeks to the mood of the Government and perhaps to the behavior and planning of the Government in that period, 1964-65 period, very ominous similarities. And I feel that, without knowing in fact precisely what has been planned or proposed lately, or really anything beyond what has been in the newspapers. But some of the terms used and the nature of the process as it has been described just seem to me awfully familiar.

I entered the Government with the intent in fact of learning about the decision process by participating in the workings of the Government; I had previously been studying Presidential decision-making and crisis decision-making. When I entered the Government in August, 1964, I found myself with some surprise surrounded by a mood almost of conspiracy, a situation where the people on the inside felt a great tension and discrepancy between what they thought was necessary for the nation and perhaps for their Administration, and what the public would allow them to do. They felt this tension very greatly.

They felt that the policies that they had been pursuing some years in Vietnam were failing and were about to fail drastically, although they had been protecting the public from full knowledge of that through the spring of 1964.

THE CHAIRMAN: This is the spring of 1964 you are talking about?

MR. ELLSBERG: Yes. I am talking about the period just before I was directly involved.

By coincidence, it was one, however, which I had to go back to while I was working for John McNaughton, to a closer look at the documents, just to understand how we got to where we were, at the point where I found myself.

I came in in August of 1965, and actually one of my first memories—

THE CHAIRMAN: August of 1965?

MR. ELLSBERG: August of 1964. One of my first memories in my participation on Vietnam was the night of the Tonkin Gulf reprisal, when we stayed in the Pentagon most of the night waiting for the raids to take place and then for the reports to come in.

THE CHAIRMAN: That was 1964, the 4th of August?

MR. ELLSBERG: The 4th.

THE CHAIRMAN: There were two incidents.

MR. ELLSBERG: I am talking about the one when we retaliated.

THE CHAIRMAN: That was the 4th. That was the second incident when we sent the sixty missions over Vietnam. Would you summarize it for us?

MR. ELLSBERG: Yes. There have been questions raised whether there was an attack or not, and they still persist.

My predecessor as special assistant to Mr. McNaughton had been due to become Deputy Assistant Secretary at some time later, but they decided they needed an investigation for public relations purposes, in effect, of what had actually happened so quickly, that they swore him in as Deputy Assistant Secretary a little prematurely and rushed him over to the Tonkin Gulf area to interview the people who claimed that they had evidence of an attack and so forth.

THE CHAIRMAN: Who was that?

MR. ELLSBERG: Alvin Friedman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. ELLSBERG: The investigations proceeded and I think mainly concluded that there *probably* was an attack, or as sometimes put, there almost surely was an attack of some sort, or a pass at any rate. There were boats out there and they made threatening passes, at least at the ships, and may have fired 50 caliber, possibly even a torpedo.[11]

One thing I do remember very vividly, though, from the day which has been reported already to your Committee. I was reading the cables, which had a very dramatic quality, "five torpedoes have just gone by," then "the count is now 11, 14," I think it got up to over 20 torpedoes which had been fired. One imagined a sea full of torpedoes, and finally this famous cable came back which has been made public, I believe, that said in effect, "Hold everything. Apparently we have been getting sonar echoes of our own wake, and radar echoes, and it is possible that there have been no torpedoes or perhaps not more than one."

The commander on the spot—

THE CHAIRMAN: Was that Commander Herrick?

MR. ELLSBERG: I have forgotten his name, sir. You can well imagine that I remember this incident very vividly, but not all the details, the names.

That did slow them up a bit at Washington for the moment. They looked for a bit more reassurance and thought they had found it.

What emerges very clearly in retrospect is not, I think, that the decision was taken upon information that was in fact totally false, but that it was taken upon information about which enormous doubts were present, or should have been recognized, at

[11] So I believed myself, from August, 1964, until 1971, when I read the closing chapter of Anthony Austin's *tour de force* of investigative reporting and induction, *The President's War* (New York, 1971). Clinching a tightly reasoned analysis with new evidence he had turned up, Austin totally reversed the odds in my own mind: I am now persuaded that the alleged second North Vietnamese attack—to which we "retaliated"—almost surely did not occur. (I still believe that Secretary McNamara mistakenly concluded that it had, having arrived at this conclusion by evidence whose inadequacy and contradictions he concealed in his testimony to Congress, along with his own earlier doubts.)

The passage on this episode in the Pentagon Papers (*PP*, II, 183-90) is one of the weakest in the entire study. It happened to have been drafted in the spring of 1968, during the very period that McNamara was testifying about the Tonkin Bay incident for the second time before the Fulbright Committee. The author was an officer on active duty, who demonstrated independence and perceptiveness elsewhere in his account of the 1964 decisions; but he prudently followed the Secretary's misleading testimony in discussing the Tonkin Bay incident.

the time. In fact the degree of certainty which the decision-makers later attained reflected to a large degree evidence that came in later, after the reprisal had actually been made. So there can be no question, I think, that the incident revealed more than a readiness, a strong eagerness, to take that particular move. And I think that was related really to two things. One was this feeling that had been growing ever since the start of 1964, or before I became involved, that nothing would really achieve our objectives in Vietnam unless North Vietnam could be induced to turn off the war.

That was often put in terms of supplies, but that was a euphemism. That last word itself is a euphemism. It was a deception because it was known that the supplies were not critical. What was really wanted was for North Vietnam to exercise its degree of coercive power, its control, its authority, over the branch of the Lao Dong Party in South Vietnam to *call off* the war and that was believed feasible—by our military and civilian policy advisers, though not by civilian intelligence analysts—if we brought military pressure to bear directly on Vietnam.[12] This is a long story and I won't go into it now.

[12] This significant point has not, I believe, been brought out elsewhere. It was much more present in the minds and discussions of officials in Washington in 1964-65 than is evident from the Pentagon Papers. But note the following statements (italics added):

Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton, November 6, 1964—"Action against North Vietnam is to some extent a substitute for strengthening the government in South Vietnam. That is, a less active VC (*on orders from DRV*) can be matched by a less efficient GVN. We therefore should consider squeezing North Vietnam" (*PP*, III, 599; also see page 603).

William Bundy/McNaughton, November 26, 1964: "Increased U.S. pressures on North Vietnam would be effective only if they persuaded Hanoi that the price of maintaining the insurrection in the South would be too great and that it would be preferable to reduce its aid to the Viet Cong and *direct* at least a temporary reduction of Viet Cong activity" (*PP*, III, 657).

Most significantly of all, General Taylor, November 27, 1964: "To change the situation, it is quite clear that we need to do three things: first, establish an adequate government in SVN; second, improve the conduct of the counterinsurgency campaign; and, finally, persuade or force the DRV to stop its aid to the Viet Cong and *to use its directive powers to make the Viet Cong desist* from their efforts to overthrow the government of South Vietnam. . . . In any case, we feel sure that even after establishing some reasonably satisfactory government and effecting some improvement in the counterinsurgency program, we will not succeed in the end unless we drive the DRV out of its reinforcing role and *obtain its cooperation in bringing an end to the Viet Cong insurgency*" (*PP*, III, 668-69).

THE CHAIRMAN: That was not the official story they gave us in presenting the Tonkin Gulf resolution. The excuse was that this is the way to avoid a war. It wasn't to enlarge it. The whole purpose as they presented it was to do this and then North Vietnam would be induced to call off the war. That was the official line in our own record.

MR. ELLSBERG: I am making a small technical distinction. I think that our officials believed that Hanoi controlled the war.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is right.

MR. ELLSBERG: They did not, however, have conclusive evidence that that was the case. They believed it; they believed the evidence they did have. Moreover some of the evidence which they felt was very critical was of an intelligence nature that they could not reveal to the public. Therefore, they had to talk about a kind of physical support rather than control and to describe it as being quite critical, knowing in fact from our own intelligence estimates that it could not honestly be regarded as critical. In other words, they could talk about supplies, which one could photograph, and infiltrators, which one could capture and interview, small as that might be in terms of the war, rather than talk about the intangible problem which they thought was really critical, the messages from Hanoi that actually controlled the war, and the messages that could call the VC off.

I mention this because it did involve the Administration later in considerably exaggerating the importance of the physical process of sending men and matériel down, and I might say that exaggeration was one I was later involved in.

One part that I played in the onset of the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign was to help prepare the White Paper that the State Department officially put out talking about this matter. . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: [Concluding a discussion of a classified study of the Tonkin Gulf incident] This classification of historical incidents is a dubious classification. Anything that might be em-

barrassing to a political leader is classified. He doesn't have the right to classify. I think there should be some reasonable limits to the right of classification. It should have some relation to the security of our country and the immediate security of our forces or even to the security of an intelligence-gathering agency. We all recognize that. But here is a study made at Government expense, paid for by the taxpayers, and withheld from the Committee. I don't see any justification for such classification.

MR. ELLSBERG: It is important that such few attempts at learning from our experiences should be exploited, be understood by those people who are involved in decision-making.

I would wish, first of all, that President Nixon could have access to the information in that study and in other studies that were done directly for Mr. McNamara of our involvement. I would doubt very much whether anyone on the National Security Council staff has taken advantage of those.

You asked earlier, how could we ignore this evidence of the past? The sad thing that we are seeing now, I think, is that Republicans are not able to learn from Democrats any more than Democrats learned from the French.

THE CHAIRMAN: In reiteration of what was said in the beginning, it seems to me the function of the Committee to a great extent is the giving of information to the public. This study would be valuable in judging how responsible are the decisions now made to go into Cambodia, for example, which are very current. How the decision was made in that instance has a relationship to how they are made today or maybe made tomorrow to go into Laos. Who knows?

I think if we are to have any real function in giving the public information on which they can make up their minds as to the wisdom of our public policies that involve the lives of our people, we ought to know it.

I can't subscribe to this extension of the concept of classification to prevent our knowing about the past. It is difficult enough to make a judgment on it with information. Without it, it is impossible. It doesn't give democracy an opportunity to function at all. If you don't have the information, that is what it comes down to.

You were talking about these torpedoes. This is a sidelight. Subsequently we captured a commander in the patrol navy of North Vietnam. His evidence disclosed that those particular boats called Swatows didn't even carry torpedoes, but were simply little patrol boats carrying 50-caliber machine guns. They were not capable of carrying torpedoes in the first place.

The first attack was by other boats, many of which were destroyed. In this second case the commander who was captured sometime later said there had been no attack at all. He testified clearly and consistently to what we alleged happened on the 2nd of August, but he said there wasn't any attack on August 4th.[13] This came out much later and is of historical interest. It didn't have any impact then, but it is a very curious incident in a very tragic involvement that perhaps we could learn something from for the future.

In any case, I am very interested in it.

Did you have anything to do in your capacity there with what was called the 34A operation, covert operations? Is that within your knowledge or was that entirely intelligence?

MR. ELLSBERG: That was within my knowledge although I didn't —I didn't play a real role in it.[14]

THE CHAIRMAN: It wasn't too important, but it was one of the incidents. The question arose whether the ships were manned by South Vietnamese and whether we were involved in the operation.

MR. ELLSBERG: I'm sorry . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Did you know about that? Were the ships that carried on the 34A operations the ones harassing the shoreline of North Vietnam, which in the context of the whole operation

[13] See Austin, *The President's War*, pages 339-40.

[14] One of my regular tasks in the fall of 1964 was to carry—accompanied by a JCS briefing officer—the schedule of planned covert operations against the North (34A operations), to be approved by Llewellyn Thompson in State and McGeorge Bundy in the White House. (See *PP*, III, 571; also, pages 106-81.)

clearly had made the North Vietnamese apprehensive about our objectives?

I think that may be too involved. Rather than go into it now, I would like to ask you to supply for us at your leisure, if you would, your comments upon that which we could make a part of the record. Have you seen the report of the Committee on the whole incident?

MR. ELLSBERG: Yes, some time ago; yes, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: You could perhaps fill in some gaps in it for the purpose of studying how our Government operates in crises such as this.

MR. ELLSBERG: There was an interesting contrast between that situation and the present one. For some months [in 1964] they had been thinking of trying to get a resolution out of Congress—I suppose you are aware of this part of it as it bears on your own role—and in fact had really given up at a certain point trying to get one. In fact, a matter of days or weeks before the incident they had decided not to press the draft resolution upon Congress, that it just wouldn't go down, particularly in the middle of the election campaign.

The Tonkin Gulf incident then presented itself as an occasion for getting quick passage of such a resolution. The effect was that the Administration then at least paid Congress the respect, in effect, of manipulating, or tricking, or misleading Congress in such a way as to get a blank check which it felt it needed from Congress in order later to escalate. The disturbing difference in this situation is that the Cambodian action seems to have been taken without even bothering to get a blank check. Whether they would have had as much success if they had tried, I would like to think not—

THE CHAIRMAN: They don't even deign to deceive us now. (*Laughter.*)

In a sense I think we were [deceived]. We had an executive hearing purportedly to discuss a request by the Cambodian Government for assistance. The decision to invade was already under consideration and preparation had been made. Not having known of that decision, we didn't ask specific questions, but I think under the circumstances if the Administration had any respect for the Congress' views or its participation, they would have volunteered the information that they were considering it or had made the decision. While it wasn't an overt and obvious deception such as the testimony of the Secretary of Defense on the Tonkin Gulf incident, it was a failure to say what they had in mind and their intentions under circumstances, where if there were any respect for the Committee and the Senate they would have volunteered the information. I think it is fair to say that because the hearing on the Cambodian request for aid took place only two days before the first move into Cambodia. It is inconceivable that that kind of an operation can be made without at least two days of preparation.

This is an endlessly interesting subject. All I can say is that you gentlemen have made a great contribution to the enlightenment of the Committee and to some extent, I hope, the people. We all have a great interest in how our Government operates. We all have a great interest in seeing it play a proper role and a role of which we can be proud.

I wanted to recommend to you one passage in testimony that we had a few days ago, about the moral problem of justifying the deaths of 40,000 Americans in this war. I think Rabbi Greenberg offered one of the most succinct and persuasive justifications, if I may use that word, that I have seen. He dealt with it in a way that it seemed to me would appeal to all of the mothers and fathers of the men who had been lost or been wounded. Dependent upon the policies of this Government from here on, we could make it very justifiable if we could learn the lesson of this war. The parents of these people and the people as a whole could consider this to have been a very worthwhile contribution if it results in a more humane and a more understanding role on the part of this country. It is possible; it is hopeful; we still hope for it.

I think that was the principal objective of many of my colleagues who were pressing for these various methods to try to bring the war to a close. They are quite varied now. . . .

I thank you both. I know it is a great effort to come and answer questions over a long period and rake these things over. It is a very unpleasant duty to ever raise questions about the wisdom of one's own Government, but I don't know how a democracy is supposed to operate if we don't. It seems to me it is an essential element in trying to make a democratic system function.

Do you wish to say anything further, Mr. Ellsberg?

MR. ELLSBERG: I do think of one thing. You have brought up the Tonkin Gulf incident. I was very startled in reading the record of your last hearings, when you were questioning someone or other and you made the remark, Senator Fulbright, that you felt "shame" for your part in that operation of getting the Congressional resolution.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. ELLSBERG: That word leaped out at me because I had not remembered seeing an American official use such a word or in any way imply a sense of personal responsibility to that degree. It is almost un-American to do so, it would seem. There were many people involved in that incident, but you are the only one I have heard admit responsibility and regret. I think your word seems appropriate for you in your position, and I think you have done a service for the Senate in the eyes of the college students and of the older people of this country, as they look at people who like to think of themselves as the Establishment or the power-holders, the decision-makers, in having the courage and the character to acknowledge that publicly. I think that helps.

I regret, on the other hand, that the people who were involved at that same point in misleading you and getting us deeper into the war have unfortunately not been heard from, not even to say "I was wrong" let alone to say that they feel any degree of shame for their role in this. I think the reason that is vitally needed if we are to get ourselves out of this crisis of national self-confidence is that the voters of the country and the youth of this country, everyone, must hear statements from their leadership that imply that those leaders have a sense of personal values and of personal responsibility and are capable of acknowledging it.

The political consequences of refraining from that, of refraining from the indignities of "mea culpas" and post mortems and so forth, are that the lessons of history remain clouded, remain unreadable, and that the current President is put ever more in the position of bearing the whole responsibility for terminating the involvement.

Now he chose to do that, unfortunately, by not even trying to share the responsibilities with Congress on this occasion, but the less he shares it and the more he feels himself that all humiliation and shame for what happens in Vietnam after we leave will accrue only to him, the more we are condemned to this war so long as he is in office. So I feel that it is really important that other people who shared in that decision-making, as I did in a very minor way, but especially the people like McNamara and Rusk and Bundy and the others, be prepared to say, as I hoped they would say before the President took up the standard of Nixon's war last November: "It is not your war. Don't make it your war. It is our war. We made the decisions and the lies and fatal mistakes that got us into this war and kept us in and made it larger. Don't make the same mistakes. Get us out."

I am afraid it is because they have not yet been willing to say that that we find our President and our Executive branch in fact repeating those mistakes today.

THE CHAIRMAN: Since you mentioned it, I have felt very badly about that. I should have had much greater skepticism, of course, but at the time I had no reason whatever to believe that it wasn't just as they represented it.

The study that the Committee made was long after the fact. What I should have done was delayed and held hearings on the Tonkin Gulf resolution and done what we are trying to do now, which is to examine these actions before the fact if we can. I am bound to say, however, that even now in the hearings two days before the Cambodian invasion, we did not receive any

reasonable notice of it. Therefore, we were prevented from having any reasonable opportunity to express an opinion prior to the fact.

As a matter of fact, only incidentally but not because they knew it was impending, a number of Senators, specifically people like Senators Cooper and Church and some of those who had been involved in the previous effort to put a restriction on enlarging the war into Laos, had this very much on their minds. But not having any notice whatever that we were going into Cambodia, they had no opportunity to express themselves. This is what I meant by subverting the democratic process.

I should have been more skeptical simply because, well, I always wish I were wiser than I am and that I could have foreseen that it hadn't happened that way. As I look back I had no reason to do it, but still I think as chairman I should have said, "Well, wait a minute." The Gulf of Tonkin resolution passed the House unanimously and it came over, and their greatest plea was that it must be done immediately in order to deter the North Vietnamese from any further actions. To get the full effect we must show unity of purpose and determination, and it would look unpatriotic not to follow the President's recommendation as conveyed in that resolution. At the time it looked that way.

All I say is that I should have been wiser. I should have said, "No, I will have the hearing; I will not allow it to be voted." It is possible that it would have happened, although there were only two dissenting votes in the Senate. Anyway that is history.

I hope we are doing better. At least we are not falling in line like sitting ducks as we did then and we are trying to make an effort to inform the Senate and the public before we get deeper and deeper into greater difficulties. Whether we have any success or not remains for history to prove, but you gentlemen have made a great contribution in my opinion.

I can't emphasize more the importance of understanding how we became involved. It does relate to the conviction on the part of my colleagues and members of the public as to what we should do now. I think it is very important. If we don't have any feel about the justification of the war, how can we have any feel about ending it? If you accept the rhetoric that this is a holy

war, why then there is no excuse for urging the President to end it. We ought to go through with it: If you accept some of the basic assumptions, it ought to be pursued to the end. But I don't know any responsible people who wish it.

The most difficult thing, as Senator Javits said, is that rhetoric is one way and the action is the other, and it is always difficult to come to grips with the essential question. You are always in a position of appearing to think the leaders are not telling the truth. This is a rather objectionable position to be in before the American public.

They resent the suggestion that they are being hornswoggled, as they say in the country. Therefore, it destroys your own credibility when you question it.

It is extremely difficult to come to grips with the essential elements involved in this war.