

enough Americans must look past options, briefings, pros and cons, to see what is being done in their name, and to refuse to be accomplices. They must recognize, and force the Congress and President to act upon, the *moral* proposition that the U.S. must stop killing people in Indochina: that neither the lives we have lost, nor the lives we have taken, give the U.S. any right to determine by fire and airpower who shall govern or who shall die in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF OFFICIALS IN A CRIMINAL WAR

This is a somewhat expanded version of a lecture originally delivered at the Community Church, Boston, Massachusetts, on May 23, 1971; footnotes, some reflections, and, of course, all direct references to the Pentagon Papers, have been added. The audience was, as I had expected, considerably older than the college audiences I had been facing; it included, though I had not foreseen this, a number of refugees from Nazi Germany. Partly because I felt it would be my last speech for a while—the disclosure of the Pentagon Papers was expected shortly—I chose to talk about some personal aspects that I had not addressed before.

... not to have tried to see through the whole apparatus of mystification—was already criminal. At this initial stage my guilt was as grave as, at the end, my work for Hitler. For *being in a position to know and nevertheless shunning knowledge creates direct responsibility for the consequences—from the very beginning.*

... In the final analysis I myself determined the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasions, and the extent of my ignorance . . . Whether I knew or did not know, or how much or how little I knew, is totally unimportant when I consider what horrors I

ought to have known about and what conclusions would have been natural ones to draw from the little I did know. Those who ask me are fundamentally expecting me to offer justifications. But I have none. No apologies are possible.

The ordinary party member was being taught that grand policy was much too complex for him to judge it. Consequently, one felt one was being represented, never called upon to take personal responsibility. The whole structure of the system was aimed at preventing conflicts of conscience from even arising.

—Albert Speer, *Inside The Third Reich*¹

"What no one seemed to notice," said a colleague of mine, a philologist, "was the ever widening gap, after 1933, between the government and the people: just think how very wide this gap was to begin with, here in Germany. And it became always wider. You know, it doesn't make people close to their government to be told that this is a people's government, a true democracy, or to be enrolled in civilian defense, or even to vote. All this has little, really nothing, to do with *knowing* one is governing.

"What happened here was the gradual habituation of the people little by little to being governed by surprise; to receiving decisions deliberated in secret; to believing that the situation was so complicated that the Government has to act on information which the people could not understand or so dangerous that, even if the people could understand it, it could not be released because of national security. And their sense of identification with Hitler, their trust in him made it easier to widen this gap, and reassure those who would otherwise have worried about it.

"This separation of government from the people, this widening of the gap took place so gradually and so insensibly, each step disguised (perhaps not even intentionally) as a temporary emergency measure or associated with true patriotic allegiance or with real social purposes. And all the crises and reforms (real reforms too) so occupied the people they did not see the slow motion underneath, of the whole process of the Government growing remoter and remoter."

—Milton Mayer, *They Thought They Were Free*²

Most of you know what it means when 100 corpses lie there, or when 500 corpses lie there, or when 1000 corpses lie there. To have gone through this and—apart from a few exceptions caused by human weakness—to have remained decent, that has made us great. That is a

¹ New York, 1971, pages 19, 113, 33.

² Chicago, 1966, page 66.

page of glory in our history which has never been written, and which is never to be written.

—Heinrich Himmler

Address to S.S. commanders, October, 1943³

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*⁴

I find myself, in recent months, thinking a great deal about Germany in the 1930's and 1940's. I have felt compelled, increasingly, to try to define the responsibilities of the citizens and officials of our country in terms related to the German experience; and I find myself doing this not as a Jew but as an American.

One of the first times that I felt challenged in just this way was a little more than a year ago, when I was invited, in the spring of 1970, to a conference in Washington sponsored by ten Congressmen on the subject of "War Crimes and the American Conscience."⁵

On the second day of the conference, I looked around a very large seminar table of participants—about forty distinguished people, among them Hannah Arendt and Telford Taylor—and it came to me that I was the only person present who was a potential defendant in a war crimes trial. This gave me a peculiar perspective from which to listen to the proceedings, and one that has been very challenging to me ever since.

The reason that I felt that way should be obvious from my background—service in the Marines, the Defense Department, the State Department, service in Vietnam, the Rand Corporation. In the year since that conference, I've been involved in a great many teach-ins, especially since the invasion of Cambodia, and even more since the invasion of Laos. The audiences at these

³ Quoted in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1967), page 648.

⁴ New York, 1966, p. 89.

⁵ See *War Crimes and the American Conscience* (New York, 1970). For my own remarks at the conference, see "War Crimes and My Lai," pages 243-52.

various colleges were made up almost entirely of young people. Which is to say, people who view that list of jobs that I have held as extremely discreditable. They see the war that we are still carrying on as criminal, as well as brutal, inhumane, totally unjustifiable—as I do now—and they have never seen it any other way.

When I first began to face these audiences, and I would hear the person introducing me begin to run through the whole list of my past associations, one by one, my heart would sink with each sentence, while the atmosphere in the auditorium got colder and colder.

It may seem less difficult to answer the following questions for an audience of older people than for the typical college audience: *How could it be* that our country has for the last ten years—twenty years would be more accurate—remained engaged in the brutality of our policies in Indochina? How could our leaders—honored and respectable men—have involved us so long in this hopeless butchery? How could we have let them, with so little protest?

But even if these questions seem less puzzling to an older audience, to those who have lived through this war and even worse wars in their adult lives, I think they deserve close attention. We are too likely to dismiss them just because they are painful, not because the answers are really obvious.

The Germans face a somewhat different question: "How could we have allowed such an obvious gang of criminals to rule over us for so long and to do the things they did?" They can reply to their own young people: "Well, it was the Nazis' criminal willingness to use terror against us—on their own people—that's the answer. We could do nothing except at the risk of our lives, we were prevented from knowing any of the truth by a totally censored press, etcetera."

But as Americans, we don't have so easy an explanation. To begin with, as Townsend Hoopes has pointed out, "It is well to remember that the advisors [of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson] were widely regarded when they entered government as among the ablest, the best informed, the most humane and lib-

eral men who could be found for public trust. And that was a true assessment."⁶

I must say that I think it's necessary to do what Townsend Hoopes does not do: to reexamine his judgment of these individuals—and of the Eastern Establishment from which they largely were drawn, whose values and perspectives they truly represented—in the light of what we now know they have done over the last decade. But this reexamination will not give us the excuse that their values greatly differed from those of large parts of the population.

So the question remains: How could such respected, "humane, liberal" people—and through them, all of us—have been involved in the burning of villages; herbicides; defoliation; torture; the creation of millions of refugees; air and ground invasions; and the dropping of over six million tons—six megatons, they would say at the Rand Corporation—of explosives from the air, and another six million tons of artillery shells, on the people of Indochina since 1965?

This is not a question I addressed in earlier talks: neither in general nor in specific personal terms. In these speeches I concentrated on what lay ahead in the Vietnam War and what might be done to stop it. I happened to think, and still do, that a lot of war lies ahead; so there was enough to say about that. And I have not talked about personal experiences at all.

But this is the first time I've been invited to give a "sermon"—and it will probably be the last speech I'll be giving for some time—so I felt, as I was thinking about it this morning, that I do want to relate this to personal experiences.

As my background indicates, I cannot view the question of the responsibility of officials from the perspective of someone who has held himself aloof from what the government was doing, much less of one who can say that he had opposed this war or seen through it from the beginning. On the contrary. So, rather than address the question as an outsider, I think it is better for me to do what a few Germans after the war were led to do. That is to think very hard—as Albert Speer put it to himself as

⁶ "Legacy of the Cold War in Indochina," *Foreign Affairs*, July, 1970, page 611.

he began his memoirs back in 1945—about how it could have taken me so long to see the wrongness of what we were doing; and to make some guesses about my colleagues and superiors in office.

I know of very few Americans as yet who have really confronted that question closely. And I think it is not too early to do so, even though the war is not over—because some of the officials now in office are as “liberal,” as “humane,” as any we’ve had in the past, with assistants as conscientious as I was helping them, and they are still continuing the war. Still keeping secrets well, still lying and killing. And I think they and others like them are likely to continue this for a long time, for many of the same reasons as in the past, unless we develop new standards both for them and for ourselves in our relation to them. So I will not wait for the others to do it; let me begin and ask myself how these things looked to me.

To go back to the question: “How could we . . . ?” I think the answer goes back in part to an event we all remember, in August, 1945. This was the same month when, unknown to me and most Americans, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, with himself as leader: a status recognized by the former Emperor and by the French. We remember August, 1945, instead, because it was the month in which the United States ended a World War with an unprecedented act of genocide, unleashing the power of the sun on the people of Hiroshima.

I remember feeling, at fourteen, some uneasiness about one aspect of that event—the very evident lack of uneasiness in the announcement by our President, Harry Truman. I remember his voice on the radio as he announced in a euphoric tone the great technical achievement of the United States in using this power to save American lives and to end the war. Even then I had a feeling that this was a decision that would better have been made in anguish.

On the other hand, the background to that lack of anguish is known to all of us who lived through that war. Although the atom bomb did begin a new era in the technical capabilities of wiping out mankind, that event was not in itself totally un-

precedented by the usual quantitative standards which we used, then as now, to measure such achievements: the body count. As a matter of fact, the atom bomb did not kill as many people as the fire raids on Tokyo, during a period of a day or two earlier that year. Those raids created a firestorm: people who took refuge in the canals were boiled alive; the asphalt in the streets boiled, and the city of Tokyo was destroyed. And that holocaust had been preceded by similar ones: the firestorm in Dresden; the firestorm in Hamburg; and the raids which were comparably destructive on Cologne and Berlin.

These were things that we had been doing for several years. That period was an educational process for the United States: it taught us that there were simply no limits to what was permissible for a United States President to order and carry out—without consulting Congress or the public—once he determined that the stakes were sufficiently high. We emerged from that education potentially a very dangerous nation.

There is an idea that fascinated Dostoevski’s Ivan Karamazov: If God does not exist, then everything is permitted. In the four years after 1941, Americans learned: *Hitler exists, therefore everything is permitted.* There was no limit at all—we learned from our own actions—to what one could justifiably do against such an enemy: one who threatened our existence, who used deception and terror, who stopped at nothing—one who carried out actions each more terrible than the last. Even before we learned of the nearly complete destruction of the European Jews, we knew that twenty million Russians were dying in that war, and not in gas chambers. The Japanese, meanwhile, had attacked us directly. So it seemed very clear in fighting such enemies—in fighting for one’s life—that secrecy, deception of the public along with the adversary, concentration of power in the Executive, mobilization of all resources, and the use of absolutely unlimited violence were all justified, even required.

Albert Speer tells us he has no doubt that if Hitler had been given the atom bomb, he would have used it against England. But we have no doubt what *we* would have done with the atom bomb, since we did get it, and used it.

All of this created a supreme experience for many Americans, but particularly for officials close to the President. Their role had come to seem absolutely central in the world. Randolph Bourne said during the First World War, of which he was a lonely opponent: "War is the health of the state." But that is not true of all the branches and institutions of the State. The role of Congress, for example, is much diminished, and so is that of the courts and of the press. War is the health of the Presidency, and of the departments and agencies that serve it, the Executive branch. In no other circumstances can the President and his officials wield such unchallenged power, feel such responsibility and such awful freedom.

So what we learned—especially members of the Executive—in those four years from 1941 to 1945 was how exhilarating, in a certain sense, it was to have an opponent like Hitler, if one were to have an opponent at all. And we have not lacked for opponents, in the thirty years since 1941, as our officials took on what they perceived to be the challenge and responsibilities of leading half the world.

But in the last quarter of a century, Hitler has not existed, so it has been necessary to invent him. And we have invented Hitlers again and again. Stalin made a plausible one; Mao, somewhat less so. Even Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh, Nasser, and other nationalist leaders of obstreperous former colonies have taken on the guise of Hitler in the eyes of various Western powers seeking to maintain their rule, however exaggerated the image may have seemed to their own allies. Thus, Eisenhower, hoping to keep the French fighting in 1954 by united U.S./U.K. support, suggested to Churchill that the challenge posed by Ho Chi Minh at Dien Bien Phu—for example, to British interests in Malaya—was equivalent to that of Hitler in the Rhineland or at Munich.

If I may refer again to history, we failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini, and Hitler by not acting in unity and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson? . . . ?

⁷ President Eisenhower, letter to Prime Minister Churchill, April 4, 1954 (PP, I, 99).

Eden and Churchill—men of some authority on the dangers of "appeasement"—refused to rise to this rather blatant appeal to their own past. Eden deprecated Dulles' warnings of Ho's military and expansionist potential and rejected, almost curtly, both the analogy and linkage of the security of French interests in Indochina to those of the British in Malaya: "French cannot lose the war between now and the coming of the rainy season however badly they may conduct it"; Referring to the rest of Southeast Asia, [Eden] said the British were confident that they had the situation in Malaya in hand . . . He said there was no parallel between Indochina and Malaya. . . . Eden said there was obviously a difference in the United States and the United Kingdom estimates and thinking. . . ."⁸

John Foster Dulles was so offended by their skepticism that diplomatic relations were strained. But only two years later, Eden convinced himself that the destruction of Port Said from the air and the invasion of the Canal Zone were required and justified because he was fighting an Arab Hitler in Nasser. Surely, from the perspective of the Israelis threatened by Nasser, the analogy was not far-fetched at all. But that was scarcely the perspective of the British, concerned about the loss of imperial control of the Suez Canal, or of the French, concerned about imperial control of Algeria.

This happened to be an event that I watched closely, as a Marine in a Navy troopship that was evacuating Americans from Egypt. I had the opportunity to be bombed by the French—an unusual experience for an American—in the harbor of Alexandria. We were close enough to see the wave of bombers hitting Cairo as a large blob on the radar scope; another wave was hitting Port Said. Later I saw pictures of what had happened to the people and houses of Port Said. I told myself that was something I could not conceive of Americans doing in similar circumstances. At any rate, in that case it was Eisenhower, not Eden, who refused to act—or even to tolerate our allies' acting—on a specious

⁸ Eden to Ambassador Aldrich, April 6, 1954 (PP, I, 477); Eden to Dulles, April 25, 1954 (PP, I, 478).

analogy between a local challenger and the global threat posed by Hitler.

I do not want to imply that my own attitude was purely skeptical and critical of these official perceptions in the fifties. I was against the bombing of civilians—whether in World War II or later—or nuclear threats, or pushing around small countries. Still, between 1954 and 1957, I would have been glad to use my Marine training wherever the President directed; and in October of 1956, there was some uncertainty whether that might be against Israel or Egypt. (As our troopship steamed toward the southeastern corner of the Mediterranean at the outset of the crisis, I was assigned—as a battalion operations officer—to draw up an amphibious landing plan for Haifa, while my partner made one for Alexandria. It would have gone much worse for our battalion, we supposed, if we had had to use mine.)

Even earlier, I had come to believe substantially all the Cold War premises, which linked nearly every “crisis” ultimately to our confrontation with the Soviet Union, and identified that with the challenge we had faced before and during World War II. If I accepted then an official American interpretation of events that now seems, at best, ideological and misleading, it was not because I had grown up as a conservative. My ambition, from late high school through most of my college years, had been to be a labor organizer or union economist. Nor had my thinking been influenced by Senator McCarthy. But what McCarthy and his fellow thugs were exploiting, in fact, was in part a credibility gap that had opened on the Left in those same years.

Just as conservatives had lost both credit and confidence in the Depression, and “isolationists” likewise with Pearl Harbor—two developments that weakened Congress in its later relations with the Executive—much of the Left suffered similarly in the late forties from reflexes that led to an implausible and apologetic stand with respect to Stalin’s actions. My own political awareness did not begin much before the Truman Doctrine—when I was a junior in high school—and as I read the news in subsequent years of Czechoslovakia, the Berlin blockade, political trials, Korea, and uprisings in East Europe, official U.S. Government interpretations

simply came, increasingly, to seem more plausible and reliable than those of “radical” critics who defended Soviet foreign policy. (I wish now that the range of available interpretations in those days had been broader—allowing for great skepticism toward both sides—as it is for students today.)

In my first summer at Rand, as a consultant in 1958, I recall hearing a new colleague who later became a close friend say, in a discussion comparing Adlai Stevenson’s foreign policies to Eisenhower’s, “I’m more of a Truman man, myself.” It was a startling remark to hear at that time—Democrats didn’t talk much about Truman anymore—and I remember thinking to myself, in recognition: That’s what I am! It was, in fact, a common attitude among strategic analysts at Rand; we admired Dean Acheson greatly.

The following spring of 1959 was the occasion of my last public lectures in Boston before this one. These were the Lowell Lectures that I gave when I was a Junior Fellow at Harvard on the subject of *The Art of Coercion*. The first was called “The Theory and Practice of Blackmail.”⁹ I was an economic theorist, interested in the abstract analysis of bargaining and decision-making. But I happened to have chosen, for my concrete examples, Hitler’s blackmail of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and other countries in the 1930’s. This had led me to read almost all of the ten volumes or so of the Nuremberg Documents, which formed the basis of the trials of the major Nazi war criminals. They left me with a strong sense of what evidence looks like at a trial for crimes against the peace and crimes against humanity. And what the documentary record of decision-making in an aggressive war looks like. (It looks like the Pentagon Papers.)

But what I was mainly interested in at the time were the specific tactics and techniques that Hitler had used so effectively to take over territories such as the Rhineland, Austria, the Sudetenland, and the rest of Czechoslovakia without firing a shot. As it happened, it was just while I was giving these lectures that Khrushchey, who in many ways looked very different from Hitler,

⁹ Rand P-3883, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California, July, 1968. (Lowell Lecture, The Lowell Institute, delivered March 10, 1959.)

and who *was* different, was making threats about our access to Berlin that sounded uncannily similar to the threats I was analyzing that Hitler had made to President Hácha of Czechoslovakia.¹⁰

The previous summer I had learned at Rand about the supposed plans of the Russians to build up a huge missile force, which would have the capability of wiping out our retaliatory force. It looked very much—especially in the Air Force intelligence estimates supplied to Rand—like a crash effort to acquire a nuclear superiority, either to back up the kind of blackmail strategy that Hitler had used or even to launch a Pearl Harbor-like attack. Now we were hearing Khrushchev say, as on June 23, 1959: “Your generals talk of maintaining your position in Berlin with force. That is bluff. If you send in tanks, they will burn and make no mistake about it. If you want war, you can have it, but remember, it will be your war. Our rockets will fly automatically.”

At this point, I was ready to believe that Khrushchev, with all his differences, might eventually be led not only to sound like but to act like Hitler—particularly if he were encouraged by any weakness or irresolution on our part to believe that the United States was, in President Nixon’s recent phrase, a “pitiful, helpless giant.”¹¹ That same month, June, 1959, I went to the Rand Corporation as a permanent employee. From 1959 to 1961,¹² along with my colleagues at Rand, I threw myself into the effort to defend the United States against either threats or surprise attack by reducing the vulnerability of our retaliatory forces and of the Presidential command and control system.

Thus, although I had been only seven at the time it occurred, the example of Munich became as lively a symbol for me as it

¹⁰ My account of Hitler’s coercion of Hácha, from my Lowell Lecture entitled “The Political Uses of Madness,” is reproduced in Herman Kahn’s *On Thermonuclear War*, (Princeton, 1960), pages 403-407.

¹¹ I remember Khrushchev being quoted, on the morning of one of my lectures, to the effect: “Your Western officials keep speaking of Munich. But the difference now from Munich is that I am not Hitler.” I cited his remark that afternoon, commenting: “Of course, he’s correct. But it’s noteworthy that he didn’t feel called on to point out that he was not Chamberlain.”

¹² The “missile gap” predictions were disproven by intelligence in the fall of 1961—not earlier, as often supposed—and the Berlin threats subsided soon afterwards, to reappear briefly just before the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

was for older men like Dean Acheson or McGeorge Bundy or Dean Rusk. It was even a subject about which I knew a fair amount from my research. Likewise, the brilliant historical analysis of the U.S. decision process in late 1941 by my Rand colleague Roberta Wohlsteiner—which pointed me toward my own later work on crisis decision-making—made Pearl Harbor seem a vivid and relevant memory. Her study, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*,¹³ had great influence on our sense of what could happen without effective warning, as we read those Air Force intelligence estimates and studied the vulnerability of B-52’s in their bases.

The prospect that we might ever be in the position of the Germans or the Japanese—say in Norway or Manchuria—rather than that of their opponents, was far from my mind. But another memory from Harvard comes back to me these days. In 1953-54, as I waited in graduate school to become an officer-candidate in the Marines, I had a student who was somewhat older than I, a German who had fought in the German army when he was seventeen. One afternoon, I remember, we got into a discussion of the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, which he thought had been very unfair. I brought up, among other things, the Nazis’ policy of reprisals, the taking and killing of hostages—as at Lidice—and the practice of torture. I said that these were acts for which people were properly punished, in the eyes of most of the world; they were not justified by war; the United States had not resorted to them as a policy, nor would it ever do so. He immediately replied, “That’s because you’ve never fought guerrillas. That’s the way you have to fight guerrillas.” And I said, “Well, I don’t believe that’s a justification; there are other ways of fighting guerrillas, as a matter of fact, and I don’t believe we would do that.”

He came back to see me the next day. He was very serious, and his usual arrogance was gone. He said that he had discussed the subject with a group of other Europeans, and he wanted to

¹³ Stamford, 1962. This study took years, and high-level intervention, to be cleared for public release by the Defense Department—though it was based mainly on the public testimony of the Pearl Harbor hearings—but it was available earlier at Rand, in manuscript.

tell me that he now thought there was something in what I had said; he suspected there *was* a cultural aspect to military behavior that made it easier for the Germans to use brutal methods than it would be for Americans. And this troubled him very much: he was going to have to think about it.

At that time, the French were fighting in Indochina, using napalm (which we supplied, along with most of their funds for the war) and also torture. But I knew little about that. Later that same year, in May, 1954, I was on a Marine drill field at Quantico when our drill sergeant told us: "Your rifles had better be clean, because Dien Bien Phu just fell." We hadn't seen a newspaper for a month, so that didn't mean much to us; anyway, our rifles were always clean. Vice President Nixon had been calling for the use of American ground troops, if necessary to prevent a French defeat in Indochina; Marines may even have been waiting offshore. I would have been glad to go at that time. But thanks to President Eisenhower, and to Eden, and to Senators like Lyndon Johnson, we missed an invasion of Indochina which, I believe, would almost surely have led in time to the use of nuclear weapons, and to a much, much fiercer war in the North than we have yet experienced in fighting in South Vietnam.

Instead, as I have said, we left the East Coast later for the vicinity of Suez; and the French went on to Algeria. There again they used napalm and artillery, forced relocation, and tortured on a large scale; they even bombed a neighboring country in "retaliation" for infiltration (once: we condemned it sharply). I sympathized with French critics of their own country and its practice of torture. Like the attack on Suez, I was glad that I didn't have to read in the newspapers about my countrymen doing such things.

Like most Americans', my attention in the spring of 1954 was not focused on the fall of Tonkin, but rather on the fall of Joseph McCarthy in the Army-McCarthy hearings nearby in Washington. My more recent research [discussed in "The Quagnire Myth"], on the origins of our involvement in the Indochina war, has led me to see the crucial relevance of McCarthy's career to our present position. For the politics that McCarthy stood for did not die

with him. They included the potent charges not only that the Democrats had "lost China" in 1949 and 1950, but that their unwillingness to take such measures as sending advisors or troops, or bombers, to "save" China, or to use nuclear weapons or conventional bombs against Communist China during the Korean War, could only be explained by their willingness, if not desire, to see the Communists win at the peril of America's vital interests.

That inference, too, was in part a heritage of Hiroshima and what went before it. Once it had been established that an American President had the *right* to use American airpower against a civilian population, from then on important factions of the military, Congress, and the public were bound to expect any President to use it—indeed to tell him that he *must* use it—whenever our "vital interests" appeared to require it. And they could claim that a failure to bomb this way if necessary to avert "defeat" could only be understood as weakness or sentimentality, or possibly even as treason.

Vulnerability to this indictment is one of the risks, in fact, of defining a conflict as involving "vital interests"; and the Cold War ideology enormously widened the realm of such conflicts. For, after all, it has always served the purposes of the Executive to define the enemy we were facing as a Hitler. Or, if that were too implausible with respect to the immediate enemy, we pointed to the larger enemies behind him that made it more plausible; China behind Ho Chi Minh, for example, or Russia behind Castro.¹⁴ In those circumstances, every President has knowingly faced the threat of being charged with timidity, or incompetence, or treachery, if he allowed this country to "lose" in a confrontation without having done, as McGeorge Bundy once put it, "all that we could have done"; i.e., if he allowed a "Communist victory" to take place without his having used the weapons that World War II had placed—physically and morally—under his command.

¹⁴ Or, since Nixon's China visit, Russia behind General Giap. Thus, William F. Buckley, Jr., on April 13, 1972, referring to the current offensive: "The blitzkrieg from the North . . . might as well be the Wehrmacht, marching into Poland. . . . The enemy in this instance is quite clearly the Soviet Union, so identified quite explicitly by the Secretary of Defense. . . . Under such circumstances the meeting between Kosygin and Nixon might as well be a meeting between Hitler and Petain."

That apprehension has had a strong effect on Presidential decision-making ever since. And at the same time it has given each President a sense of unique responsibility, while it has tested his character and powers of restraint.

Indeed, it is not often remembered now that the most salient issue of the Presidential campaign of 1964 was not so much who should run the war in Indochina, with respect to the decisions about bombing in North Vietnam or using ground troops, but more crucially, who should have his finger on the nuclear button. Senator Goldwater openly believed in the use of nuclear weapons in a wide variety of situations, including the Indochina war. He also promised to give greater authority in international crisis to military advisers, many of whom shared his faith in nuclear weapons. Faced with this sort of opponent in an election campaign, many officials in the Johnson Administration tacitly believed, in effect, that a certain amount of deception and manipulation of the Congress, the press, and the public were justified in order to protect the nation from Goldwater's election and its consequences. And many Congressmen, among others, saw the situation the same way. Thus the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was rammed through Congress without real questioning of the specific testimony for it, and the Administration's own plans for escalating the war were concealed.

In describing some events and interpretations that were widely influential in the forties and fifties, I have suggested what I suspect were central considerations in the minds specifically of senior officials like Lyndon Johnson, Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, and Robert McNamara, which significantly conditioned their view of their role in history, of what they were permitted to do, and of what their responsibilities were. As Howard Zinn has put it, one of the historical legacies of Hitler has been that any deprecations much less awful than his have come to seem almost acceptable.¹⁵

¹⁵ "What Hitler did was to extend the already approved doctrine of indiscriminate mass murder (ten million dead on the battlefields of World War I) to its logical end, and thus stretch further than ever before the limits of the tolerable. By killing one third of the world's Jews, the Nazis diminished the horror of any atrocity that was separated by two degrees of friendliness from theirs." *The Politics of History* (Boston, 1971), page 209.

It's difficult to think of any American use of non-nuclear violence that U.S. leaders are likely to regard as unthinkable when they think of what Hitler did, or of what *we* did in World War II, or of what the future use of thermonuclear weapons would mean, whether by others or by ourselves.

The obvious fact that in any given situation we could annihilate an opponent with nuclear weapons, or even with conventional weapons, produces an almost inevitable feeling among what Richard Barnet calls our "national security managers" that we cannot be doing anything so very wrong as long as we refrain from that. As a former colleague at Rand, Konrad Kellen, has put it to me, this attitude among high officials can go even further: that an opponent like North Vietnam should feel gratitude to us, and at the very least should give us the small concessions that we are demanding at the moment, in simple appreciation of the fact that we have not yet unleashed the full weight of SAC B-52's or of nuclear weapons upon his cities and population. Such a belief may well underlie the persistent faith of our last three Presidents that the settlement terms they were offering Hanoi were "reasonable," and that someday, after enough of our discriminate bombing, the Hanoi leadership would come to recognize this. The moral doubts of the security managers during a war are also reduced by their knowledge that influential military and political members of the Establishment are anxious to use heavier bombing than is currently going on.¹⁶ Having to counter these opponents reinforces their own sense of moderation and restraint. They can even identify their own survival in office with the survival of the population of Indochina, or really, of most of the world.

Having arrived at this conclusion, there are no further moral issues that they can see. It is obviously for the good of everyone that they do what they feel must be done both to avoid defeat

¹⁶ In March, 1968, Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown proposed an escalation of the air war in which: "The present restrictions on bombing NVN would be lifted so as to permit bombing of military targets without the present scrupulous concern for collateral civilian damage and casualties. . . . The aims of this alternative campaign would be to erode the will of the population by exposing a wider area of NVN to casualties and destruction. . . ." *PP*, IV, 2611

in Indochina and defeat at the polls, short of employing "ultimate" measures. They do not have to, and they do not, regard themselves as perfect or infallible to be confident that they are better than the other people who would be making these decisions if they were not there.

We might notice that these invidious comparisons are domestic counterparts to the traditional *imperial* comparison, which has the same moral function: "What we want to do in your country is in any case better for you than what those others would do in your country," where "those others" are imperial rivals, or else local Communists, or native forces of "feudalism" or "chaos"—whoever looms as a practical alternative to the hegemony being fostered.

My purpose in listing these beliefs is not to mock the officials who acted on them. In the actual circumstances, such beliefs often led to conscientious and sometimes anguished dedication to their duties. Indeed, no other performance in government so impressed me or inspired so much loyalty in me as Secretary McNamara's tireless and shrewd efforts in the early sixties, largely hidden from the public to this day, gradually to control the forces within the military bureaucracy that pressed for the threat and use of nuclear weapons. It is no deprecation of the seriousness of or need for such efforts to say, with hindsight, that, in a number of ways they may have helped to influence many civilian officials to promote our policies in Vietnam, and to their spells of optimism about our methods there.

Regrettably, these efforts to reduce the chances of our own initiation of nuclear war were not accompanied by a questioning of the premises or aims of Cold War policy—in part because these high officials shared such premises and values themselves, and in part because President Kennedy communicated to them his sensitivity to his own narrow margin of victory and of support in Congress, and the political risks of challenging the accepted axioms of "security." Thus, in their struggle to escape from the near-total reliance on nuclear weapons in military arsenals, plans and psychology that had evolved under the Eisenhower "New Look" defense budgets, New Frontier officials did not challenge

the view of tasks and goals prevailing in the Pentagon but only the nuclear means pressed by the military. In the process, they often moved into the position of being advocates of the feasibility and effectiveness of non-nuclear approaches to the traditional Cold War "challenges," and salesmen of non-nuclear hardware, to skeptical and reluctant military planners.

Counterintensity and covert warfare, "crisis-management," helicopters and "air cavalry"—all of these have recently been viewed as romantic obsessions of the civilian planners; but they had another side. It is my guess that these and other similar projects of civilians and some military in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations—including much of our effort in Vietnam—must be understood, in large part, as tactics in an argument and indeed, struggle with much of the military and its conservative support in Congress, the media, corporations, and the public over the issue of basing our defense and our strategy in the Cold War primarily on nuclear weapons. This creditable motive for proposing alternatives to nuclear threats by no means greatly extends either the delusions that came to accompany these programs or the "conventional" violence to which they led. For in this hidden debate, there was strong incentive—indeed it seemed necessary—for the civilian leaders to demonstrate that success was possible in Indochina without the need either to compromise Cold War objectives or to threaten or use nuclear weapons. And in large military bureaucracies, necessity is the mother of illusion—and brutality.

Such concerns remained semi-covert (for it was seen as dangerous to lend substance to the active suspicions of military staffs and their Congressional allies that there were high Administration officials who didn't love the Bomb) and joined with those discussed earlier to provide a framework of attitudes that enabled "liberal, humane" individuals to carry out a war like the one in Vietnam. In stark terms: compared to the probable behavior, as they saw it, either of the Communist "enemy" or of their domestic rivals, civil and military, any evil they might be doing seemed surely to be a "lesser evil." Thus, for example, though they have unleashed twelve megatons of firepower on the people and ter-

rain of Indochina, they have done so in such a way as to kill far fewer civilians than those killed by a fraction of that firepower in recent wars, including the Korean War,¹⁷ and far below what would have resulted from the rejected bombing programs preferred and proposed by the Joint Chiefs—which, after all, defines restraint, does it not?

By focusing on this "restraint," it is unnecessary to face the questions: How many, in fact, *are* we killing? Who are they? How old are they? What had they done, for our officials and commanders and soldiers to sentence them to death? What are we doing to that country, to its society and its homes and its lands and its families? And by what right do we do it?

In sum, to look at a war as a fight ultimately for survival against an implacable and evil enemy—and to know, at the same time, that one is inhibiting the levels of violence urged by much of the public and by rivals for power—is to see that war through a dark glass that screens out the moral dimension. And that is how our officials have sought to view Vietnam, and to teach others to see it. But for increasing numbers of Americans, to watch the Vietnam War at home, up close on a TV screen, is to see ourselves in a mirror: to find us doing monstrous things.

We have come a long way since John Quincy Adams could truly say that America "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy."¹⁸ We have been in the process of fighting monsters without stop for a generation and a half, looking all that time into the nuclear abyss. And the abyss has looked back into us.

What that has meant for the consciousness of our officials is measured most starkly for me by the following memorandum,

¹⁷ In the language of Professor Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard:

In comparison to the Korean War the Vietnamese War has been a relatively limited and undestructive conflict. In one year of fighting almost every major city in North and South Korea was virtually leveled to the ground. Up to mid-1968 the only major Vietnamese city which has received anything like this treatment was Huế. In Korea somewhere between two and three million civilians were killed directly or indirectly by the war. The civilian suffering in Vietnam, however bad it may be, has been little by comparison. (No *More Vietnam!* [New York, 1968], page 39.)

¹⁸ Cited in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Crisis of Confidence* (Boston, 1965), page 118.

which I first read in the Pentagon Papers. It was written by an official who, from the time I first worked for him in 1964 until his death in 1967, privately hated this war and wanted us—totally, precipitately—out of Vietnam:

Strikes at population targets (per se) are likely not only to create a counterproductive wave of revulsion abroad and at home, but greatly to increase the risk of enlarging the war with China and the Soviet Union. Destruction of locks and dams, however—if handled right—might (perhaps after the *next* Pause) offer promise. It should be studied. Such destruction does not kill or drown people. By shallow-flooding the rice, it leads after time to widespread starvation (more than a million?) unless food is provided—which we could offer to do "at the conference table."¹⁹

I think that the attitudes that I have described can impel our President, even later Presidents, to carry on this war, or other wars like it or worse, for many more years. In fact, I think they will do so unless, somehow, we as citizens demand more of them and find a way to change these attitudes and ways of behaving. And that probably means first changing ourselves and our own sense of responsibility.

Let me turn to my own responsibility: not to be egocentric or pretentious, but simply to begin where each of us should begin. Not to be masochistic either. There is no need to search out my statements in old memos that seem to me now most foolish, the actions or attitudes hardest to face today; it is enough, for a start, to look hard at the incidents of my involvement that are among those least painful to recall—ones I like to remember as most extenuating.

By the spring of 1970, when the Congressional Conference on War Crimes took place, I had already given the information in the Pentagon Papers to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I did so out of a sense of responsibility to share with my countrymen and Government the special knowledge I had acquired as

¹⁹ John T. McNaughton, in a memo entitled "Some Observations About Bombing North Vietnam," January 8, 1966 (PP, IV, 43). Almost surely, McNaughton made these comments for tactical bureaucratic reasons (see the accompanying memo expressing his skepticism of the whole bombing strategy and the possible need to compromise our aims in the war [PP, IV, 46-48]). But that does not make this paragraph easier to read.

a former Executive official and a researcher. The policies and deceptions I was revealing to the Legislative branch did seem to me to be illegal and unconstitutional, as well as both practically and morally wrong. But to attribute "war crimes" to a participant like myself would have seemed to me exaggerated. During that conference, as I reflected on my own experience in Vietnam and in Washington, I did see that I might be answerable for it, even in a legal sense. Yet aside from the insignificance of my influence, so much of my participation had taken the form of reporting failures honestly, criticizing mistakes, protesting evils, that I felt little sense of responsibility, let alone guilt, for those failures or evils.

For example, one of the very few policy memoranda that the researchers of the McNamara Study found that criticized the practicality and the legitimacy of Walt Rostow's proposals of coercive bombing was largely drafted by me for the Defense Department when I was still formally a consultant. It included my following remarks cited in the Pentagon Papers:

Given present attitudes, applications of the Rostow approach risks domestic and international opposition ranging from anxiety and protest to condemnation, efforts to disassociate from U.S. policies or alliances, or even strong countermeasures. . . .

Currently, then, it is the Rostow approach, rather than the measures it counters that would be seen generally as an "unstabilizing" change in the rules of the game, an escalation of conflict, an increasing of shared, international risks, and quite possibly, as an open aggression demanding condemnation. . . . [PP, III, 201]

Strong words, for the Department of Defense; this may be the only passage by an official in the pages of the Pentagon Papers that suggests the word "aggression" in connection with a possible American policy. (Though I notice, on reading it now, how much its impact is attenuated by the traditional bureaucratic tactic of ascribing such a "condemnation" to "domestic and international opposition," rather than to objective judgment or to myself.)

And yet—it was *after* writing that critique that I came on as a full-time employee of the Defense Department—assigned to work on Vietnam policy! My motives, to be sure, were initially those of an observer, a Rand social scientist interested in under-

standing the internal processes of government. But my role was nevertheless that of a participant, even when I acted as an internal critic.

The situation that I entered in mid-1964,—as it looks to me now—amounted to a conspiracy: the officials who became my colleagues were concerting, in secrecy, to plan and ultimately to wage aggressive war against North Vietnam. The people who posed and were preparing this—foolishly and wrongly, it seemed to me—all cooperated in keeping secret the facts of their proposals and their plans as they awaited final Presidential approval, which they expected, during an election campaign in which the public was encouraged to believe that the only way to protect against such plans being carried out was to vote for the incumbent President. (The various reasons that may explain this *conspiratorial style* of policy-making—revealed by the Pentagon Papers as a persistent Executive pattern over much of the last quarter-century—have been a primary subject of speculation and analysis in this book.)

Nevertheless, like others who opposed some of these plans, I too cooperated in concealing them. Having expressed my objections, I stayed in place, observed, took part, criticized other policies, and helped those along too when told to do so. In short, I did the jobs assigned to me, including, for example, the one of collecting daily and weekly summaries of Vietcong assassinations and kidnappings for public release in the spring of 1965 to explain plain why our bombing of the North was justified.²⁰

²⁰ This followed McGeorge Bundy's Memo of February 7, 1965, recommending a "policy of sustained reprisal against North Vietnam".

. . . . Once a program of reprisals is clearly underway, it should not be necessary to connect each specific act against North Vietnam to a particular outrage in the South. It should be possible, for example, to publish weekly lists of outrages in the South and to have it clearly understood that these outrages are the cause of such action against the North as may be occurring in the current periods. [PP, II, 312]

By the time I went to Saigon, I probably had more details in my head of recent Vietcong "outrages" than any other person.

"Nowadays the Pentagon also collects statistics on our own terrorists. The "Phoenix" program that we instituted in 1967-68 to "neutralize VC infrastructure," using "counterterror teams" trained, equipped, and paid by the CIA, reports killing or kidnapping more Vietnamese in both 1969 and 1970 than the VC are charged with doing.

Meanwhile, during the year I spent in the Department of Defense, the Congress and the American people heard many lies from Executive officials: not only in the election campaign but long after it. The deception of Congress by McNamara concerning the "34A" covert operations against North Vietnam, preceding the incidents in the Tonkin Gulf of August 2 and 4, 1964, are well known by now.²¹ But the Pentagon Papers also give the lie to Rusk's statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the raids were not followed "from Washington in great detail"²²; they include some of the detailed schedules of raids which I was assigned to carry around regularly in the fall of 1964 to be approved by Llewellyn Thompson in State and McGeorge Bundy in the White House.²³

Of course, it was precisely the "sensitive" nature of the operations—i.e., their illegality and covertness, which required lying to the Senate if questions were raised—that called for a high-priced courier like myself, let alone such high-level involvement. Within six months, and for three years thereafter, the management of 34A operations was overshadowed by the Cabinet-level "Tuesday lunch" at the White House where President Johnson and his highest advisers picked the next week's bombing targets in North

²¹ See Anthony Austin, *The President's War*, passim.

²² *The Pentagon Papers*, Bantam-New York Times edition, page 266.

²³ For example:

- The proposed September 34A actions are as follows: . . . (3) *Maritime Operations*
- (a) 1-30 September—Demolition of Route 1 bridge by infiltrated team accompanied by fire support teams, place short-delay charges against spans and caissons, place antipersonnel mines on road approaches. (This bridge previously hit but now repaired.)
- (b) 1-30 September—Bombard Cape Mui Dao observation post with 81 mm mortars and 40 mm guns from two PTFs (patrol boats, supplied by CIA).
- (K) 1-30 September—Bombard Cape Mui Ron in conjunction with junk capture mission [the crew of a fishing junk in North Vietnamese waters, for interrogation] . . . [PP, III, 554]

For the procedures on handling these schedules, for which I was Mr. McNaughton's "designee," see Vance memo (PP, III, 571). Some of these operational details, of the placement of antipersonnel weapons and 81 mm mortar rounds, and the kidnapping of North Vietnamese fishermen, might seem petty to be occupying the attention of these officials—as well as being at odds with Rusk's account to the Senate—but at the time, this was the only war we had.

Vietnam (PP, IV, 209-10). Any war is the health of the Executive branch, but secret wars, major crises, and small "limited wars" with large potential are most invigorating of all for the influence of the group closest to the President.

Well, lies are to be expected in the conduct of covert operations—that is what makes them covert—though whether Congress should have been urged by the Executive to issue a "functional equivalent of a declaration of war" on the basis, in part, of an untrue cover story is now rather widely questioned. But what seems even more questionable—or to use a more precise word, involving hundreds of thousands of American soldiers, as if it too were a covert operation. Yet that is what was done in the spring and summer of 1965 [as described in "The Quagmire Myth"], when large and eventually open-ended force-level decisions by the President—along with decisive changes in the offensive mission of these forces—were deceptively presented to the public in much more limited terms. And U.S. operations in Laos, including the bombing ever since the spring of 1964, especially the heavy bombing campaign since the spring and fall of 1968, have always had this character of a "secret war."

I was skeptical of this policy of deception. I did not believe these decisions could be kept very long from the American public—in this, I appeared again and again to be mistaken—and I questioned the need or the desirability of taking such gambles with the trust of the public. And yet, it was not only "they" who had kept all these decisions quiet, hidden from the American public. I had kept them quiet. After all, to use phrases I have heard put to me a good deal in recent months, "who had appointed" me to announce these plans to the American public? "Who had elected" me to decide what should be kept secret and what should be openly revealed? No one could have been more responsive to such strictures, or excuses, than I. Indeed, my whole professional background prevented such questions from arising in my mind. Nor did I ask myself then whether I had the right to collaborate in these deceptions and illicit acts, and to conceal them from the public. By the same token I did not ask

whether lying to Congress and the public was among the functions for which Secretaries McNamara and Rusk had been appointed, and their appointments confirmed; nor "who had elected the President" to do or to order these things?

Moreover, I proceeded to deepen my own involvement in the war; I volunteered to go to Vietnam in 1965. This, indeed, partly reflected a sense of personal responsibility. In the limited ways open to a staff assistant, I had approved of and encouraged the view that our investment of prestige in Vietnam by the spring of 1965 should be safeguarded by a limited commitment of our troops. This involvement in sending Americans to live in harm's way made me uncomfortable about watching them do so from Washington. A preference to share their jeopardy, if we were to be at war, as well as the desire to understand the war at closer hand, took me to Vietnam—where I learned a number of things; and failed, perhaps too easily, to learn some others.

For example, a year after my arrival I took part in a far-ranging study of the "roles and missions" of all American personnel in Vietnam related to the pacification program.²⁴ The group was to make recommendations directly to Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland. We made eighty-one recommendations altogether, but at the end of the summary of the report we grouped a few of them, with brief discussions, as being especially important. One of these was the following:

Although we have not studied the matter in depth, we regard it as important for the USG and GVN to know more about the actual impact of the current pattern of bombing and artillery on rural attitudes relevant to RD. It is possible that the negative impact—particularly, of strikes not in immediate support of ground action—is considerable, sustaining villagers' tendencies to collaborate with the VC and limiting the prospects for progress in RD. At the same time, it is possible that additional constraints on these operations would have serious military penalties. Thus the issue is important; but adequate data is not now available, either on the objective consequences of these strikes in terms of VC and civilians killed and injured, or on the attitudinal conse-

²⁴ Part of this study appears under the title "Problems of Revolutionary Development," pages 156-70.

quences. (Rand reports on its prisoner and Chieu Hoi interrogations do not adequately fill this gap.)

RECOMMEND:

That on an urgent basis an adequate research effort be launched to determine the actual physical and attitudinal consequences of present policies and practices concerning air and artillery; by methods including comprehensive sampling of opinions, both in the affected areas and elsewhere, and operations to discover the objective results of sample air and artillery missions.

We made the recommendation in this cautious form although almost everyone in the study group—which included some of the most experienced Americans in Vietnam—believed he had enough evidence from his own personal observations to conclude that the greater proportion of our bombing and artillery—apart from close support of ground combat operations—*was* "counterproductive" in its human and political effects, even when weighed against alleged military benefits, which we believed to be negligible. But since no such survey had ever been made, and since strong military opposition was inevitable to any proposal to reduce the scale of bombing operations, it seemed fruitless to make any recommendations directly on those operations prior to a comprehensive investigation. (Let alone to mention mere "humane" considerations.)

Yet even this proposed investigation was considered too radical or risky by the Mission Council—the term used was "unnecessary." Even the civilian Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) rejected it, obviously fearing that any leak to the press about civilian damage would have had effects on public opinion at home. Thus the civilian officials agreed with the military that there was no "need to know"—no need to find out—such information.

This was a striking instance of a phenomenon I was to see often later, and not only in the Government: the "need not to know" certain unpleasant realities. In particular, a need not to gather data at all, if it might leak to the wrong audience: that is, to Congress, or to the American people.²⁵

²⁵ Robert S. McNamara's decision to launch his study of U.S. decision-making in Vietnam—giving the task force virtually free rein—was, of course, a spectacular exception.

Two and a half years later, at the outset of a new Administration, I spent some weeks in the Executive Office Building in Washington, reading and helping to summarize for the President more than a thousand pages of answers from various agencies involved in Vietnam policy to a set of questions I had drafted earlier, as described in my Introduction, which had been sent out as National Security Study Memorandum 1. One of these questions was: "How adequate is our information on the overall scale and incidence of damage to civilians by air and artillery, and looting and misbehavior by RVNAF?" Answers varied in honesty and specificity, but it was clear from the overall set of replies, as I had expected, that such information remained inadequate or nonexistent. As my last task on the project, I drafted a set of directives for additional studies on various subjects and some "Decision Memorandums" on others. One of the latter, addressed to the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence, was, once again, on the subject "Reporting and Compensation of Civilian Damage in South Vietnam":

(1) The President has directed that the Secretary of Defense, with the assistance of the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence, establish procedures assuring regular reporting on as comprehensive a basis as possible of damage to civilian lives and property caused by U.S., RVNAF, and other allied operations. As a base point for this reporting, a study should establish as realistically as possible the magnitude of past and current damage, using all available sources for this estimate, and establish the nature of current gaps in our knowledge and reporting.

(2) The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense will evaluate the adequacy in scale and promptness of current programs for compensating civilian victims, providing medical aid for civilian injured, and handling refugees, and recommend needed improvements, including U.S. support costs.

This draft memorandum, along with my others, went to Henry Kissinger for his approval on March 1, 1969, the day I left Washington. A week later, I was told that all the proposals looked worthwhile, but that the agencies "had been asked enough questions for the moment." That seemed reasonable . . . for the moment; but the list of studies now reaches well over a hundred,

and that particular one has never been included. There are some things Executive officials know better than to need to know.

I could, perhaps, reassure myself that I had at least used the major opportunities that had come my way to urge my superiors to inform themselves about the human consequences of their policies. The effort had, indeed, failed, but I had been on the right side of that issue. And yet, I'm forced to remember that the first episode was in the *middle* of my two years in Vietnam; and that it was followed by another year in which, though there were other occasions when I again made such recommendations, I did not by any means do everything I could have done to inform *myself* of the dimensions of the burden imposed upon the people of Indochina by U.S. firepower. Or to inform anyone else. And much the same is true of the second instance.

It is, in fact, my own long *persistence in ignorance*—of the full impact of the American way of war upon the people of Indochina and of the history of the conflict bearing on the nature and legitimacy of our involvement—that I find most to blame in myself. And my own need not to know required the usual amount of self-deception.

Reading plans and cables in the Pentagon in 1964-65 I had learned about some programs which I thought wrong or even criminal—including coercive bombing of the North, the use of "incapacitating gases" and B-52's in the South, the use of invasion of the Dominican Republic. Keeping silent in public about what I had read and heard made me an accomplice even in these programs; I knew that, and accepted it. Yet during my year in the Pentagon—along with my choices, after consideration, *not* to resign over any of the milestones of policy mentioned above—I did define for myself thresholds that I would never allow myself to cross as an official and at which I must resign. These would be signals that the process of wartime violence had corrupted human standards to a point that a man must resist with his whole weight. They included the threat or use of nuclear weapons, or the unrestricted targeting of cities and population, as we had done in World War II; or a deliberate policy of torture, as our enemies had used in World War II and the French in Algeria.

I left the Government in mid-1967 in large part in order to oppose our policy—though still as an insider—but not because I believed that those particular thresholds had been crossed. Not even the third; for although I was aware that our South Vietnamese “allies” did use torture, with the general knowledge of American advisors, I had not heard, despite my asking, of any but isolated instances of comparable behavior by U.S. units. Thus, even my own tour in Vietnam had not prepared me to expect that a day would come when an American officer like Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Herbert would testify about the routine torture and murder of Vietnamese by American officers.

But neither had my year in the Pentagon taught me to read the “contingency plans” and proposals that had passed through my own hands with the same eyes that my wife and children brought to them six years later. Here is some of the language they read in the Pentagon papers about our bombing policy:

“We all accept the will of the DRV as the real target”;

“Judging by experience during the last war, the resumption of bombing after a pause would be even more painful to the population of North Vietnam than a fairly steady rate of bombing”;

“... ‘water-drip’ technique . . .”;

“It is important not to ‘kill the hostage’ by destroying the North Vietnamese assets inside the ‘Hanoi donut’”;

“Fast/full squeeze . . . ” option versus “Progressive squeeze-and-talk”;

“ . . . the ‘hot-cold’ treatment . . . the objective of ‘persuading’ Hanoi, which would dictate a program of painful surgical strikes separated by fairly long gaps . . .”;

“ . . . our ‘salami-slice’ bombing program . . .”;

“ . . . ratchet . . .”;

“ . . . one more turn of the screw . . .”²⁶

These were phrases—written by senior officials I worked with and respected—that I had read and discussed in offices in the Pentagon and State, often in disapproval of their contents yet with-

²⁶ Respectively: William P. Bundy, (PP, IV, 649); (PP, IV, 35); (PP, III, 650); Robert S. McNamara, (PP, III, 706); John T. McNaughton, (PP, III, 599); (PP, IV, 45-46); (PP, IV, 44); (PP, IV, 33); Richard Helms, (PP, IV, 65).

out ever seeing or hearing them as my wife did when she characterized them, in horror, as “the language of torturers.”

When I came back from Vietnam in 1967 I did not yet have a sense that our involvement was outrageous or criminal, but I strongly believed that it must be ended. I began to look for allies among other officials who had left Vietnam or left office disillusioned with the war. And I came up against a phenomenon that has challenged me ever since, both to understand and to deal with: the apparent lack of any strong sense of personal responsibility on the part of many of these individuals to take effective steps to help end the war. Despite their own involvement, and any more active part in antiwar efforts than they had while they were still serving the Government.

Ought they—ought I—to feel such responsibility? How might it be defined, or weighed, for someone like myself and my former colleagues, who had both participated in events and “opposed” or the power to acquire it? A starting point, it seems to me, lies in some profound comments on these questions by a man who had had twenty years in prison to reflect upon them in relation to his own life. A German, a Nazi—Albert Speer.

I recommend his memoirs, *Inside the Third Reich*. I wish that all of our former high officials, and our present ones, would read it, as I wish they would read the 7,000 pages of the Pentagon Papers, so they could see their own decisions in context. But for anyone with experience as an official, even at lower levels, Speer’s is a very chilling book to read.

Speer was one of the most powerful men in the Nazi regime—in charge of war production. Alone among the defendants at the Nuremberg trial, he accepted full responsibility for his actions and for those of the regime—including those acts in which he had taken no part, even those he said he had been ignorant of at the time. This position amazed his fellow defendants, and his own lawyer urged him not to take it. Nevertheless, he did so for a number of reasons, which evidently he has not regretted. He was

sentenced to twenty years in Spandau Prison, which he served; he entered in 1945 and came out in 1966.

Inside the Third Reich is an amazing document, one that has no analogue, so far as I know, among the writings of any American associated with our current or past wars. What is most troubling about this book is to discover that the man who wrote it does not seem to be an unfamiliar type at all. The tone, the point of view, even much of the account of his life could be taken for that of any one of a number of our most respected officials.

Speer was, after all, regarded as the most liberal, humane, and intelligent of the Nazis. What is disconcerting is to find that this means that he would not at all have been the least creditable member of recent National Security Councils. Thus his own explanation of his sense of accountability—the standards that led him to take responsibility as broadly as I have described—would seem to be particularly pertinent.

Recently in an interview, Speer was asked, "How could a man of your intelligence and sensibility allow himself to remain part of so evil a system, however gradually it enveloped you?"²⁷ It is, in effect, the question Townsend Hoopes has addressed, rhetorically, to our recent officials. Hoopes found the answer in their good intentions and their reliance on a misguided sense of history. Speer's answer is: "There is, unfortunately, no necessary correlation between intelligence and decency; the genius and the moron are equally susceptible to corruption."

On his motives for returning to Hitler's intimate circle after he had left it once, Speer says:

... the desire to retain the position of power I had achieved was unquestionably a major factor. Even though I was only shining in the reflected light of Hitler's power—and I don't think I ever deceived myself on that score—I still found it worth striving for. I wanted, as part of his following, to gather some of his popularity, his glory, his greatness, around myself. Up to 1942, I still felt that my vocation as an architect allowed me a measure of pride that was independent of

²⁷ Playboy, June 18, 1971.

Hitler. But since then I had been bribed and intoxicated by the desire to wield pure power, to assign people to this and that, to say the final word on important questions, to deal with expenditures in the billions. I thought I was prepared to resign, but I would have sorely missed the heady stimulus that comes with leadership.²⁸

Pride, ambition, an attraction toward the center of power, unflinching loyalty to leaders who can assign them great projects to carry out: all human qualities, not lacking in any of the men chosen for high posts by recent American Presidents. Speer also speaks of the progression of little crimes that blunted conscience:

Things that would have shocked and horrified me in 1934, such as the assassination of opposition leaders, the persecution of the Jews, the incarceration and torture of innocent men in concentration camps, I tolerated as unfortunate excesses in 1935; and things I couldn't have stomachached in 1935 were palatable a few years later. This happened one way or another to all of us in Germany. As the Nazi environment enveloped us, its evils grew invisible—because we were part of them.²⁹

In one particular case, Speer relates, an old friend came to tell him, in a faltering voice:

... never to accept an invitation to inspect a concentration camp in Upper Silesia. Never, under any circumstances. He had seen something there which he was not permitted to describe and moreover could not describe. I did not query him, I did not query Himmler, I did not query Hitler, I did not speak with personal friends. I did not gate—for I did not want to know what was happening there. I did not invest—must have been speaking of Auschwitz. During those few seconds, while Hanke was warning me, the whole responsibility had become a reality again. Those seconds were uppermost in my mind when I stated to the International Court at the Nuremberg Trial that as an important member of the leadership of the Reich, I had to share the total responsibility for all that had happened. For from that moment on, I was inescapably contaminated morally; from that moment something which might have made me turn from my course, I had closed my eyes. This deliberate blindness outweighs whatever good I may have done or tried to do in the last period of the war. Those activities shrink to nothing in the face of it. Because I failed at that time,

²⁸ *Inside the Third Reich*, page 342.
²⁹ Playboy, page 72.

I still feel, to this day, responsible for Auschwitz in a wholly personal sense.³⁰

In his interview, Speer sums up the moral burden of the "need not to know" in a stunning image:

If I was isolated, I determined the degree of my own isolation. If I was ignorant, I ensured my own ignorance. If I did not see, it was because I did not want to see. . . .

In my own case, there is no way I can avoid responsibility for the extermination of the Jews. I was as much their executioner as Himmler, because they were carried past me to their deaths and I did not see. It is surprisingly easy to blind your moral eyes. I was like a man following a trail of bloodstained footprints through the snow without realizing someone has been injured.³¹

In the end, after twenty years, the "one unforgettable experience" that dominates Speer's impressions of the past remains . . . the Nuremberg trial itself, with its photographs and testimony presenting, inescapably, not "enemies" but individual human beings, victims, who had become, at last, real to the criminal defendants. In particular, Speer recalls:

. . . there was one photograph of a Jewish family going to its death, a husband with his wife and children being led to the gas chamber. I couldn't rid my mind of that photograph; I would see it in my cell at night. I see it still. It has made a desert of my life.³²

When I began to read these passages aloud to an audience at the Community Church in Boston in late May, 1971, my private mood as I began was, I thought, detached. I was, in fact, imagining that Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk, or the Presidents they served were listening—until I heard my own voice growing low and halting. I told my hearers, "I am finding this difficult to read." After a moment, I went on, but I brought the talk to an end. I knew that it was myself who was the listener, my eyes, my voice responding to these indictments.

I was there, too, however minor and "innocuous" my role. "My moral failure," Speer says, "is not a matter of this item and

³⁰ Inside the Third Reich, page 113.

³¹ Playboy, pages 72, 74.

³² Playboy, page 72.

that; it resides in my active association with the whole course of events." That accusation—and the more specific one of willful, irresponsible ignorance and neglect of human consequences—are truths that I must live with. As should any American official known to me who has been associated with Vietnam.