

The Pentagon Papers

A Public Domain Reminder

**You can fool some of the people all of the time,
and all of the people some of the time,
but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.**

**So Abraham Lincoln thought
Modern Presidents Disagree!**

This paper consists of three separate articles on the Pentagon Papers of various lengths, put together from shortest to longest. It allows the reader to become familiar with the deception of US administrations in the period of the war in Vietnam. Recent events do not suggest that attitudes are any different among the cynical and greedy Washington Mandarins.

Because the articles were original separate, there is slight overlap, and if that seems sloppy, this is the reason.

The Pentagon Secret Papers

We are expected to believe that President Bush—who would not be President at all if he had been honest and he, his family, and his party had not gerrymandered the results in Florida—has suddenly found a streak of evangelical messiahship and wants to save the world from nasty gangsters whom previous administrations of the US had put into power and kept there for many years. There have been stages of war and duplicity earlier in recent history that have been exposed and which should be a warning to us not to believe warmongers, however credible they might sometimes sound. US leaders have not shunned lying, falsification, fact-juggling and double-dealing to escalate wars to their own nefarious ends. They have habitually trampled on international laws and agreements, the Charter of the United Nations, the US Constitution and elementary standards of human ethics. That sounds quite typical of the present US regime.

In early August 1964, the world was shocked by developments in Indo-china. The US Air Force began bombing civilians in the towns and villages of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. At the time, US spokesmen declared it had been done in “self-defence,” in “response” to an attack by some patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin on US warships. From then on that continued to be the accepted version, although US citizens and world public opinion were being monstrously deceived.

A metaphorical bombshell exploded in the US, in June 1971. What Washington had so carefully kept secret for years, about its conduct of US foreign affairs in SE Asia, came to light. Articles in the press, based on secret papers from the Pentagon archives, contained indisputable facts showing how, in utter secrecy, the US war against the people of Indo-china was contrived, launched and deliberately carried out, step by step.

Does Anyone Remember This?

The public does not often get to see behind Washington propaganda to glimpse the dirty methods used by the US leadership, an unelected oligarchy that remains in power irrespective of the electorate. What should have been clear in a proper democracy was kept hidden from the public in the USA and other Western countries behind a smoke screen of lies and falsifications conceived by the Washington ruling caste and its propaganda machine.

It all happened, though, 30 years ago, and a new generation has forgotten about the Pentagon Papers and the astonishing things they revealed that exposed US democracy as a charade. George Santayana, the Spanish-American philosopher, said:

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Now we see his dictum proving itself as clearly as possible. US citizens have forgotten that their leaders and the perpetual Washington oligarchs are habitual liars, and now the US is led into another war against an independent state to satisfy the frustration and greed of the alien leaders of the US. The world is more aware that Americans are being deceived than they are themselves, but the revelations of the Pentagon Papers should have alerted US citizens to the duplicity of their leaders. But Americans have it drummed into them from childhood that, in the Great Society, the government acts constitutionally, and the press, radio and television give an honest account of what is going on. So, even when the clearest evidence comes straight from the horse's mouth, too many ordinary Yankees refuse to believe it. They think they could not be so grossly and shamelessly deceived. They can be, and are, and will be again, as long as they bury their heads in the sand.

In the context of illegal and ignoble war, these pages offer reminders of past Yankee crimes. Perhaps, eventually, even the US people will learn to remember.

US Lies and Deception

The Pentagon Papers was an extensive Defense Department study commissioned by Secretary of Defense Robert S McNamara on 17 June 1967, and completed on 15 January 1969. The account was about 3,000 pages long, but it was supported by about 4,000 pages of documents, totalling 47 volumes.

Government Censorship

The New York Times, having secretly received a copy of the Pentagon study, began printing a series of nine sets of articles and supporting documents. The next day Attorney General John Mitchell requested that the New York Times voluntarily stop publishing and return the materials. The New York Times declined. The series was completed on 5 July 1971, after Mitchell's court restraining order had been resisted. The government had challenged publication of the entire set of narratives and documents on the grounds that they were designated top secret. Other newspapers, principally the Washington Post, but also the Boston Globe, the Chicago Sun-Times, the SL Louis Post-Dispatch and the Christian Science Monitor, also published articles on the Papers.

On 29 June, US Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska attempted to read portions of the Pentagon study into the Congressional Record from the Senate floor but was prevented from doing it by political maneuvering. So, he tried the Senate Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds, of which he was chair, and succeeded.

On Tuesday 15 June, the New York Times, at the behest of the government, was ordered by Federal District Court Judge, Murray I Gurfein, to halt publication for four days. The third set of articles had appeared that day. The hearing on the government's civil suit to permanently enjoin the New York Times from further publication was set for Friday, 18 June. On the succeeding day, Judge Gurfein refused to order the New York Times to return the report immediately. He indicated that temporary harm to the New York Times "far outweighed" the "irreparable harm that could be done to the interests of the United States". The New York Times had argued that the release of the documents would cause their source to be identifiable, because the copying machine could be traced, as could some handwriting. Instead, on 17 June, a list of descriptive headings was submitted to the Justice Department.

At this stage, the gist of the government's argument was that the New York Times had violated a statute that made it a crime for persons who had unauthorized possession of government documents to disclose their contents when such disclosure "could be used to the injury to the United States or to the advantage of any foreign nation". The New York Times claimed that this anti-espionage law was not intended by Congress to be used against newspapers, and that this was a classic case of censorship of the press, forbidden by the First Amendment.

On Friday, 18 June, the Justice Department requested a restraining order against the Washington Post, which had initiated its series of articles on sections of the Pentagon Papers on the previous day. Judge Gerhard Gesell of the Federal District Court of the District of Columbia refused to grant even a temporary restraining order, claiming there was no evidence of a threat to national security, but his decision was reversed on 19 June by a 2-1 circuit court of appeals vote that ordered Judge Gesell to hold a hearing on the government's request.

The two judges supporting the government indicated that they had acted on the belief that “freedom of the press, important as it is, is not boundless”. The third judge objected to the decision as a “suppression of one of our most important freedoms”.

In the New York Times case, on 18 June, Judge Gurfein extended the restraining order another day, so he could come to a decision. At the hearing, the government argued that the New York Times had violated the law and presidential orders. By publishing secret documents the New York Times had declassified them, and thus had “compromised our current military and defense plans and intelligence operations and had jeopardized our international relations”. The New York Times’s position was that the government overclassified documents to hide embarrassing information and that the First Amendment forbids the executive and judicial branches of the government to use “national security” as a reason for censoring articles, except as they might reveal troop movements.

On 19 June, Judge Gurfein announced his decision. He refused to enjoin the New York Times from publishing further articles based on the Pentagon study. His finding was that the government had failed to show harm to the national security to justify prior restraint. He noted:

“The security of the nation is not on the ramparts alone. Security also lies in the value of our free institutions.”

Judge Irving Kaufman of the Court of Appeals of the Second Circuit extended the injunction against further publication, pending the government’s appeal of the decision.

The Washington Post case also moved to the Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia after Judge Gesell’s ruling on Monday, 21 June, that the Post could resume publication. As had Judge Gurfein, he also found that the government had failed to show...

“an immediate grave threat to national security, which in close and narrowly defined circumstances would justify prior restraint on publication... It should be obvious that the interests of the Government are inseparable from the interests of the public, and the public interest makes an insistent plea for publication.”

On 22 June, the Justice Department requested and received a restraining order from Federal District Judge Anthony Julian against the Boston Globe, which had published materials from the Pentagon study on this date.

Wednesday, 23 June was a day of conflicting decisions. Having first on 21 June decided in New York that the cases were too significant to be heard by the usual three judge team, the full complement of court of appeals judges—eight in New York, nine in Washington—held hearings. While the District of Columbia Court of Appeals ruled on a 7-2 vote that the Washington Post had the “Constitutional right to publish”, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals on a 5-3 decision permitted the New York Times to

publish, but only those materials cleared by the government as not being dangerous to national security. The three dissenting judges voted to approve the decision of the district court. In this case, Judge Gurfein was instructed to hold hearings to determine which documents would “pose such grave and immediate danger to the security of the United States as to warrant their publication being enjoined”.

The Chicago Sun-Times started publishing articles on 23 June based on the Pentagon study. However, the Justice Department did not take action to enjoin this newspaper, claiming the materials used had been declassified.

President Richard M Nixon announced on 23 June that all 47 volumes of the Pentagon study would be made available to Congress, but that the secret classification must be maintained, pending review of the documents by the executive branch. When delivered, the documents were placed in a vault.

After the New York Times and the Justice Department appealed their respective negative decisions on June 24, the Supreme Court agreed on June 25 to hear arguments. Four justices—Hugo L Black, William O Douglas, William J Brennan Jr, and Thurgood Marshall—dissented from this decision, voting instead to allow publication without a hearing.

The New York Times indicated it would not resume publishing under the authorized circumstances because its case was pending. To print articles defined as acceptable by the government would in effect be submitting to censorship. The Washington Post also indicated it would not resume publishing until the case was adjudicated. Chief Justice Warren F Burger placed both papers on equal publication restraint, using the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruling as the basis.

Though eight of 11 newspapers in the Knight Newspapers group, a newspaper chain mainly in the eastern third of the country, along with the Los Angeles Times began publishing features of the Pentagon study on 24 June, the Justice Department did not attempt to enjoin them. The St Louis Post-Dispatch was restrained by court order on 26 June after it initiated an article series. The Christian Science Monitor series, initiated on June 29, was not enjoined.

On Wednesday, 30 June, the Supreme Court issued its 6-3 decision, upholding the right of the two newspapers to publish materials from the Pentagon study. The restraining orders against the Boston Globe and the St Louis Post-Dispatch were immediately dissolved.

Nicholas J Karolides in *100 Banned Books*, explained that within the broad assertion that any attempt to ban news articles prior to publication bears a heavy presumption “against its constitutionality... the Government has not met that burden”. The justices’ opinions fell into three groups:

“ • The absolutists (Hugo L Black, William O Douglas and Thurgood Marshall)—The

First Amendment forbids any judicial restraint. Justice Black indicated that a paramount responsibility of the free press “is the duty to prevent any part of the Government from deceiving the people and sending them off to distant lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shot and shell... far from condemnation [the newspapers] should be commended for serving the purpose that the Founding Fathers saw so clearly”. Beyond this, Marshall argued that Congress had twice (1917 and 1957) considered and rejected such power for the courts. The Supreme Court would be “enacting law” if it had imposed restraint.

- The middle position (William J Brennan Jr, Potter Stewart and Byron White)—The press could not be blocked except to prevent direct, immediate and irreparable harm. This material did not pose such a threat. White added, however, that he “would not have any difficulty in sustaining convictions” under the law even if the security threats did not justify prior restraint.

- The dissenters (Warren E Burger John M Harlan and Harry E Blackmun)—The courts should not refuse to enforce the executive branch’s decision that the materials were confidential, affecting foreign policy. They also agreed with Justice White’s position regarding convictions.”

This case was significant beyond the immediate decision related to these documents and these newspapers. It was the first time in the nation’s history that a newspaper had been restrained by a court from publishing an article. It was, further, the first time the Supreme Court had ruled on a case of prior restraint of a newspaper by the government.

Why The Truth Came Out

How, then, did such secret papers come to be published? Why did the editors of America's most influential paper—the New York Times—which represents powerful interests, and the publishers of other US papers and magazines that normally covered up political deception, take a step that brought them into open conflict with the Republican Administration? It was proof positive, these same media claimed, of freedom of the press in the US. Yet, where was this freedom previously, when the war against the Indo-chinese people was being contrived and escalated, and the same journalists and editors kept quiet? The same periodicals that subsequently published the Pentagon Secret Papers, had steadfastly supported those they now censured. Two years before the adoption of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, one of the Sulzberger family which owned The New York Times, was proposing the violation of the neutrality of Laos.

James Reston, one of the New York Times policy makers, who was indignant over the conspiracy against democracy, sang a different tune earlier on the pages of The New York Times, (14 February 1962). In an article, *The Undeclared War in South Vietnam*, he fully endorsed the US military intervention in South Vietnam “to prevent a communist takeover.” American commentators agree with the political elite that people are not allowed to be independent. Independent people too often chose a politics that US leaders do not like. They are not permitted to be free enough to do that!

The US press zealously supported US actions in Indo-china, until the administration found itself up against a dead end and began to consider withdrawing its commitment there. The escalation of the war had been publicised by absurdly militaristic and patriotic propaganda in the press. The people who determine press policy then had to change themselves from shameless jingos into champions of the truth. Freedom of the press is relative. In the US, it depends on the Washington consensus, a consensus that is normally solid on the basic issues and how they are to be delivered to the public. Only when the consensus is split do the media show any real signs of its freedom, because some media bosses go one way and others the other, and the US general public, used to only a single viewpoint, suddenly get a shock.

The Pentagon Papers exposed the war in Vietnam as a black period of US history. The US militarists stopped at nothing—genocide, exterminating civilians in the Indo-chinese Peninsula, crimes against humanity, violations of international treaties and conventions governing the conduct of war, using chemical and bacteriological weapons, deceiving the world public—these are only some of the instances of the “honesty” of US administrations. Despite all the shenanigans the mighty US military machine got bogged down. Perhaps that is why the US choses to forget. Or perhaps the search is on for some easier victory worth remembering.

With the revelations of the Pentagon Papers, influential Washington leaders, senators and publishers, professors and columnists denounced the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which previously they had all cheered. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution in the House of Representatives was hypocritically called, *A Resolution in Support of International*

Peace and Security in South-East Asia, and was passed unanimously. Congress and in the big press almost unanimously supported the original resolution. In the Senate, there were 88 votes for it and only two against. Voting on it had the solid support of both parties and was typically peppered with fervent patriotic speeches.

Were the Congressmen and Senators, who passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution by such a solid majority, so naïve they did not know what it meant? Were they fooled by the Washington oligarchs too? Wayne Morse, one of the two Senators who voted against the Resolution, made it clear to anyone listening (*The New York Times*, 29 February 1968) that he had sound evidence that the United States had played “a provocative role” in the incident. No one listened. Why were deaf ears turned to the truth? Why do US administrations and US legislators refuse to accept facts and abide by international laws and treaties signed by the USA, including the UN Charter?

The answer lies in the vast increases in appropriations made by Pentagon contractors, billion-dollar corporations. From 1964 to 1968, contracts went up over 50 per cent (*The New Republic*, February 7, 1970). *The US News and World Report*, (12 September 1966) seemed delighted that:

“The nation’s factories are already operating at practically full capacity—and at a rate even higher than during the first year of the Korean War. Heavy new demands on industry may force some companies to use obsolete, high cost facilities to meet war demand.”

The biggest share of war profits go to the corporations closest to Washington politicians most active in progressing war. Richard Barnet, a co-director of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, wrote:

“Freshman Congressman Lyndon B Johnson obtained a major defence contract for his principal financial backers, the Brown and Root construction firm. The same firm thirty years later was called upon to turn South Vietnam into a succession of military bases at considerable profit. In the Johnson years, Texas moved ahead to become the third-ranking state in military contracts. Between 1962 and 1967, the value of prime contracts awarded to Texas firms increased by 350 per cent.” (R Barnet, *The Economy of Death*, 1969)

A section of US business benefited from the colossal military appropriations, and expected these benefits to keep on and to increase, but after some time what had looked like a political and economic bonanza became a defeat for the United States and a disgrace. Senator M Mansfield, Democratic majority leader in the Senate, pointed out that over 350,000 US casualties and \$115 billion spent on the Vietnam war had failed to bring victory in a war that had utterly eradicated US world prestige and respect. Averell Harriman, well-known political and financial figure declared: “This war cannot be won”.

Many prominent army and navy men also came to realise that nothing could be gained by continuing war. Brigadier-General William Wallace Ford said he hoped:

“We will act quickly to leave South-East Asia, serene in the knowledge that there is no greater courage than the courage to admit a mistake.” (The New York Times, March 2 1971)

In May 1971, General David Shoup, one-time Commandant of the US Marine Corps, urged the early withdrawal of all US forces from South Vietnam. In the spring of 1971, Vice-Admiral Elmor Zumwalt, Chief of Naval Operations, admitted that the war in Vietnam did not have the American people’s support, adding that the nature of the war and the way it was being fought was the reason for it.

Business Divisions

For the US economy, the war in Vietnam was unfavourable. Whereas the Pentagon's favourite military-industrial corporations, took in record profits, the US economy as a whole ran into many difficulties stemming from unbridled inflation and increasing disproportions in production.

In the spring of 1966, one of the most influential organs of the US establishment, *Fortune*, (April, 1966) sounded the alarm when it said:

“The Vietnam war would bring on economic strains beyond what most economic experts appear to foresee, and beyond what makers of public policy appear to be anticipating.”

George F Kennan, for many years closely connected with Wall Street bankers, wrote in one article:

“Of course, it is little short of fantastic that a country facing such domestic problems as we now face, and one that stands virtually on the brink of a major international financial humiliation, should be continuing to pour its substance, to the tune of a full fourth of its budget and more than half a million of its young men, into a military adventure on the other side of the world, in an area to which its vital interests are only remotely related.” (US News and World Report, June, 1968)

Four years earlier, Kennan had apparently taken a different view of things. He had not objected to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution nor against the subsequent dispatch of “half a million of its young men, into a military adventure on the other side of the world.”

In the spring of 1967, an organisation called Business Executives Move for Vietnam Peace was set up in the USA. Among its leaders was Sinclair Armstrong, one-time prominent member of the Eisenhower Administration and then Vice-President of the US Trust Company. Thousands of businessmen across the country joined. If anyone had proposed setting up such an organisation in 1964, at the time the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was passed, it would have seemed absurd, but by 1967 it no longer surprised anyone. US business was disenchanted with Washington's policy in Indo-china, and denoted their frustrated hopes and growing apprehension over the adverse effects of the Vietnam war on the economy.

Prominent corporate spokesmen demanded an end to the war in Vietnam, among them billionaire Marriner Eccles, Chairman of the Board of the First Security Corporation. In early 1971, a monthly Morgan's bank report noted that the war was a drain on the budget and a drag on research. The Morgan banking house statement might have been connected with the New York Times stance since the two had long-standing, close connexions.

Thomas J Watson, Chairman of the Board of IBM, said at a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

“The war in Vietnam is the major factor which has turned our healthy economy into an unhealthy one... The longer we continue, the more chaotic the nation will become. The damage we have already seen will take decades to repair.” (Congressional Record, June, 1970)

All these statements are a reflexion of the disappointment among those who had hoped to quaff the benefits of war, and then had to face the realities of it. As military impotence and economic disruption made themselves felt in many spheres of business, the war in Indo-china led to a deep split in US high society and its intellectual servants in Washington. The spokesmen of the military-industrial complex refused to forgo their war-profits, whereas those who had no cut of them, and had suffered from inflation and the economic imbalance of a war economy, wanted the party to end and society to sober up.

Some corporations and cartels with a stake in the US occupation of South-East Asia had urged continued war in Indo-china for selfish reasons. Other groups with capital invested mainly in Western Europe, the Middle East or even at home had displayed growing apprehension over their interests in these areas being jeopardized.

General Earle G Wheeler, one-time Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared that the Middle East presented a much greater danger than the Far East! Various other reasons for a change in Washington's policy were frankly spelled out by the New York Times shortly before its publication of the Pentagon Papers (11 March 1971):

“There can be little hope of rapprochement with China as long as Peking perceives an expanding American threat on its borders. An essential first step toward removing this obstacle would be a firm disavowal by Washington of any intention to invade the Chinese border state of North Vietnam, or to give military support to such an invasion by the South Vietnamese.”

Protest Movement

A final factor influencing the alignment of political forces in the USA over the war in Indo-china was the massive anti-war movement in the country, which even included some of the people normally beguiled by patriotic propaganda. In scale and scope the anti-Vietnam war protest movement went beyond anything that had happened in the postwar history of the USA. All sections of US society were deeply divided. The conflict even split families and alienated parents and children.

The massive demonstrations, in which millions of Americans participated, the flood of letters and wires received by legislators, influenced the outcome of federal elections. President Johnson timed his order terminating US air-raids on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam for the 1968 Presidential elections. President Nixon's time-table for the partial withdrawal of US troops from the theatre of war operations in Indo-china had been drawn up to match the stages of the 1972 electoral campaign. Each of the rival groupings, the pro- and anti-war parties, were forced to consider the electorate.

Nixon used to refer to the "burdensome legacy he had inherited from his predecessor", the Democrat, Johnson. Actually, the military-industrial complex, the wealthiest of all lobbies, had continued the old pro-war line, and influenced the new Administration, and Nixon, after promising to pull out in 1968, did not, but instead extended the war by invading Cambodia and Laos. The Nixon Republican Administration thereby underscored the bipartisan policy of the war in Indo-china.

Yet, the anti-war faction of business, and the political lobbies, periodicals and politicians representing their quite different interests from the war party, took a more realistic view. They sought ways to heave the nation from the bog of war, and the problems it engendered. It was not some sudden craving for peace or justice among the party politicians, publishers and businessmen that explained the growing opposition to the policy of successive Administrations, but a deep split over the war among those who run the USA.

The Senate is not normally inclined to oppose an incumbent president. Since the Second World War, no US Administration faced such strong opposition in the Senate as the Nixon Administration. The Republican Party tried to explain this opposition as coming from the Democratic majority in both Houses of Congress. During the Congressional elections in November 1970, the Nixon-Agnew leadership sought to change the balance of forces in Congress. After the elections, the President said that the Administration had an "ideological majority" in the Senate.

In fact, far from being reduced, the opposition had increased. In June 1971, after the publication of the Pentagon Papers, the Mansfield Resolution, setting a nine-month deadline for the pull-out of US forces from Vietnam, under certain conditions, was passed by a majority. Nixon's opponents were not only Democrats, but prominent members of President Nixon's own party like Senators Cooper, Hatfield, Percy and Goodell. Senator Birch Bayh wrote in the New York Times:

“Each day means a further diversion of our energy, attention and resources from our own pressing needs here at home. Each day means \$27 million that could otherwise help to provide better health care, better education, better housing, better transportation, and a better environment. Each day means continuation of the divisions within our own society, divisions that threaten to tear us apart.” (New York Times 23 April 1971)

An outcome of this split was the stand taken by a number of influential US periodicals which, with the support of their economic backers, had to challenge the Administration by publishing the Pentagon Papers. If the editors of The New York Times, the Washington Post and other newspapers had not been backed by powerful men, and if they were not motivated by compelling reasons for taking such a step, the Pentagon Papers would have emerged in to public scrutiny.

Bipartisan Responsibility

Different theories were aired in the press about why the Pentagon Papers had emerged. Some circulated the idea that men close to the Republican Administration had a hand in publishing the papers, to create difficulties for the Democratic Candidate—by highlighting Johnson's perfidy—on the eve of the Presidential elections. Thus, Republican Senate leader, H Scott, and Chairman of the Party's National Committee, R Dole tried to absolve the incumbent Administration from any responsibility regarding the published papers, since the events referred to took place under the Johnson Administration. The invasion of Laos and Cambodia, which was ordered by the Republican Nixon, was not an escalation of the war!

However, the Republican Administration's stand over the publication of the Pentagon Secret Papers showed that the Administration has been alarmed by the snowballing exposures. Despite public indignation, the Nixon Cabinet applied vigorous pressure to stop the publication, including direct action by Secretary of Defence, Melvyn K Laird and Attorney-General J N Mitchell.

The papers showed clearly that the top-ranking leaders of the USA had not hesitated to stoop to outright hypocrisy and lies to cover up their actions against the interests of the nation. The credibility gap between American voters and the country's leaders yawned like a chasm. Every American wondered, "If we have been cheated before, what stops us from being cheated again?" US democracy, that all Americans were proud of had been found wanting. One wonders now, thirty years later, with the same things plainly happening again, why all this has been forgotten?

Extensive material among the published papers showed that the same policy was continued by all the successive postwar Administrations, both Democratic and Republican. President Richard Nixon, president when the revelations were made, said when he was Vice-President in the Eisenhower Administration:

"If the French withdraw Indo-china would become communist-dominated within a month. The United States, as a leader of the free world cannot afford further retreat in Asia... the Administration must face up to the situation and dispatch forces." (New York Times, 18 April 1954)

What President Eisenhower himself thought on the subject, even after the action taken by President Johnson, is evident from statements like this one:

"I would do anything that would bring the war to an honourable and successful conclusion as rapidly as I could... we should use whatever is necessary, not excluding nuclear weapon to end the fighting in Vietnam." (Congressional Record, 7 October 1966)

A year later the ex-President declared (Congressional Record, 29 November 1967) that the US Armed Forces should carry out raids on the territory of North Vietnam and pursue the enemy into the territory of Laos and Cambodia.

The stand taken by the Republican Party candidate, Barry Goldwater, during the 1964 Presidential elections, is well known. Goldwater said “Johnson should order air strikes against Hanoi itself if that were necessary” for a victory in South Vietnam (the New York Times, 22 February 1965).

Could it be that the later Republican leaders did not share Goldwater’s stand, and did not support him? No chance! Speaking in Chicago in January 1965, Richard Nixon stressed his solidarity with Goldwater, adding that he had more devotees in the Republican Party than any other Republican since the time of Theodore Roosevelt (the New York Times, 22 January 1965). Those who claimed they were in no way responsible for the Johnson Administration’s acts and pretended an outraged innocence, hoped that the US public had a short memory. Indeed, they have, but not that short!

In April 1964, Nixon declared (The Japan Times, 15 April 1964):

“Vietnam is the cork in the bottle. If it is lost the battle of South-East Asia is lost.”

A month later, the future President insisted that the US aim should be to “liberate” the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Now equivalent party hacks are saying they want to liberate Iraq. “Liberating” Vietnam then did not mean it would be independent, and so the Vietnamese would be free to do as they liked. Nixon had added that if the USA pulled out of the area, South Vietnam and Laos were bound to be taken over by the communists. In other words, they were not to be free and independent. “Liberation” in Washington-propaganda-speak means doing as Uncle Sam says. Will Iraq be any different?

The lack of basic differences during the 1968 election campaign between President Johnson’s line and that of his Republican rivals is borne out by the World Journal Tribune, which wrote:

“The four Republicans who are the major contenders for President Johnson’s job have now completely surrounded him on the issue of Vietnam. Gov Ronald Reagan is far to his right, Richard Nixon somewhat to his right, Sen Charles Persy to his left, and Gov George Romney has just plopped into his lap.” (World Journal Tribune, 11 April 1967)

In late June 1971, The New York Times said:

“What the White House had feared might happen, did. The accounts began to include secrets of the Nixon Administration as well as those of its predecessors... But it soon became evident that the story of the Pentagon Papers was going to change many things in Washington...” (New York Times, 27 June 1971)

Is there need to say more? Only those who are prepared completely to ignore the historical facts can pretend that the Republicans did not bear any responsibility for contriving, launching and carrying out the war against the people of Indo-china. The blame for these foul deeds, deceit and hypocrisy, falls on successive administrations, not some particular political leader or Washington administration—the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford administrations, the Washington elite, the US Congress, the leadership of the Democratic and the Republican Parties—and the news media using its “freedom” to do as the war parties told them.

A Bombshell in the White House!

An article, the effect of which the Paris Le Figaro likened to a “bombshell in the White House,” appeared on 13 June 1971. It appeared in the New York Times and was the first of a series on, and excerpts from, a top secret Pentagon document entitled, History of US Decision-Making Process on Vietnam Policy. Two items on the front page of the newspaper introduced the series. One described the Vietnam Archive, and summarized the conclusions of the study, from the initial involvement of the Truman administration, through the build-up of American involvement, to open warfare in 1965. The second gave the origin of the report.

A Damning Indictment

On 18 June, the New York Times was joined by the Washington Post, syndicating its materials to over 300 local newspapers as well as Newsweek magazine and several TV stations. One after the other, the Boston Globe, the Chicago Sun-Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Baltimore Sun, and the St Louis Post-Dispatch joined the campaign to expose the secret machinery behind the Vietnamese war. These are not radical, or left publications but belong to the “respectable” press.

The New York Times described the Pentagon documents it first brought into the light of day, as:

“An almost incredible record of subterfuge, deception, shortsightedness, mistakes, wrong assumptions and arrogant disregard of truth.”

But this description falls far short of the ugly picture of official Washington standards of honesty revealed by its disclosures of government lying on the Vietnam war, 30 years ago. The lying then has startling parallels with today.

Fearing further exposure of its criminal deception of the American people as well as world opinion, US Attorney General, John Mitchell, on instructions from the White House, took extraordinary measures to gag the press and stop publication of the exposé. In an article, aptly called, in the light of today, *The Endless Tragedy*, journalist James Reston commented:

“For the first time in the history of the republic the Attorney General of the United States has tried to suppress documents he hasn’t read about a war that hasn’t been declared.”

Reston said that “the security argument was being used to cover up the blunders and deceptions of the past.” The published documents lifted the curtain on how US policy is made. The Washington Court of Appeals would not prohibit the Washington Post from publishing the papers.

There is no doubt Washington’s Indo-China policy had been throughout a policy of deliberate provocation, readiness to risk a big war, sabotage of a political settlement, and considered deception of the public. Abundant proof of this was provided by the published documents, though, as many American observers rightly noted, they revealed only the tip of the iceberg of US crimes in Vietnam.

The evidence is more than sufficient. The documents showed that US actions in Indo-China were not a pragmatic reaction to a fast-changing situation, but a considered step-by-step programme, the chief elements of which from the beginning were direct US intervention, escalation to the point of possible use of nuclear weapons, bombing of Vietnamese territory, extension of the hostilities to neighbouring Cambodia and Laos, and Vietnamization of the war.

When the forces of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam marched into Saigon on 29 April, 1975, the most bitterly-fought war of national independence in human history ended. It had started in August 1945 with the foundation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and was a connected struggle for the national independence of Indo-China, including Cambodia and Laos. A just war of incredible suffering, but noble courage, it was truly of world-shaking significance.

Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese leader, never saw the victory he inspired, but never faltered in his conviction of final victory. In August 1945, a party only 15 years old rose up against the Japanese and evicted them from Vietnam. Ho had led a revolution against the Japs, the enemy of the US in the S Pacific. You could have been excused for thinking the Vietnamese would have been seen as US allies. Nope! Though the challenge was not from the US, it was immediate. On 21 September, 1945, French troops were landed in Saigon from a British warship. Britain had been given allied responsibility for the whole of South-East Asia. In fact, they assisted the French colonists, as they assisted the Dutch in Indonesia.

Two days after the French forces landed, they opened fire in Saigon and occupied the premises of the government of the Republic in that city. Then a temporary agreement was signed between the DRV and the French, which lasted roughly a year. Ho Chi Minh had this year to build up the state apparatus in the Republic, consolidate its political forces and develop a rudimentary economy before the French struck. In January 1946, elections were held throughout the country, and Ho's supporters, including the trade unions, women's and youth organisations, and the Buddhist, Catholic and Cao Dai associations, won 80 per cent of the votes. This unity of the people for independence was to prove decisive. It was further consolidated by the land reform which gave the peasants the land.

But on 17 December, 1946, the French opened fire in Hanoi and went over to a general offensive on 19 December. Ho and the Vietnamese had to fight and negotiate to preserve the independence of the infant republic. The next day Ho issued his appeal for nationwide resistance. The French had started a war to destroy the Republic and re-colonise Vietnam.

By design and necessity, the war placed an enormously high premium on the individual and group initiative of the Vietnamese resistance, and their self-sufficiency. The economy had to be dispersed, and had to develop in the course of the war, to feed the people and develop a war economy. At this stage the main weapons were captured French supplies.

The Vietnamese General Giap expounded the approach of the resistance in 1969. The spirit of the sustained, resolute and all-out offensive against the enemy, the capability to strike a big force with a small force, always to hold the initiative. As he put it:

“To wipe out the enemy so as to defend ourselves, to preserve our forces so as to wipe out the enemy.”

Its heroic application shattered the French conventional war doctrine, the doctrine of an alien force in a hostile country, lacking any popular support. This broad strategy of people's war, with variations, was eventually to be applied to the American war in the south, and with the same outcome.

Heavy fighting continued throughout 1948, and in March of the following year the "State" of Vietnam, headed by Emperor Bao Dai, who had abdicated under Ho, was set up by the French. Militarily and politically weak, French colonialism could only conduct its attempted reconquest with US aid and foreign help. In the later stages of the war 60 per cent of the French Expeditionary Corps were German and Austrian mercenaries, former members of Hitler's armies.

Washington's "direct involvement" in Vietnam, the Pentagon study revealed, began with Truman's decision to support France in her efforts to suppress anti-colonial struggles in Indo-China, part of the Truman Doctrine. As early as 12 February 1950, the New York Times described Indo-China as "a prize worth a gamble". It listed the area's strategic military raw materials, tungsten, tin, manganese, and its military importance "an 800-mile long bridge between Communist China and British Malaya with a common frontier with both Burma and Thailand".

America's first military aid agreement with the French was signed in May 1950. In the same year the DRV won big victories in the south and cleared the French from the Chinese border. In the following year an agreement was reached between the national independence forces of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in the common struggle against the French, underlining the related though separate national struggles of the three peoples and countries.

Robert Lovatt, US Secretary of Defence at that time, on 13 March 1952, highlighted the geographical and strategic importance of the area as the main reason for supporting the French. A year later, on 4 August, President Eisenhower explained:

"Indo-China and the whole of South-East Asia are essential to the US, both for strategic and political reasons."

Now, a succession of administrations, under the pretext of "saving" Asia from a "communist takeover," increasingly involved the US in the French colonial war there. One can judge of the scale of US participation if only from the fact that, in 1950-54, Washington covered more than four-fifths of the cost of the French war. It was this decision of Truman's that set the course of American policy.

At the end of 1953, French General Navarre announced the "final offensive" to finish off the national independence forces. It was the end of the French. In devastating battles, the DRV forces took Kontum and the Central Highlands in the south in January 1954. On 13 March they opened up their assault on the encircled French troops in Dien Bien Phu. It fell on 7 May.

Dien Bien Phu was the culmination of the resistance strategic, fought with a combination of all forces against a single target, with a huge concentration of artillery, a battle timed to the internal French political crisis which the war created when Vietnam had been made a world issue and a centre of the diplomatic scene.

The French were defeated. Pierre Mendes-France returned to the premiership with a mandate to end the war. The first phase of the war of national independence had been won.

The Geneva Conference (June-July 1954) was attended by representatives of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the “State of Vietnam,” Laos, Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China, the Soviet Union, France, Great Britain and the United States of America.

The agreements (HMSO White Paper Cmd 9239, August 1954) which resulted from the conference were vital for the entire future of Vietnam. In the Final Declaration, the members of the Geneva Conference undertook to “respect the sovereignty, the independence, the unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam”, and “to refrain from any interference in its internal affairs”—Ho Chi Minh’s main aim of a single, united Vietnam. This won international recognition. The independence of Laos and Cambodia was also recognised.

In the Agreement on the Cessations of Hostilities the signatories and “their successors” were responsible for enforcing the agreement.

“Article 27 obliged the Saigon regime to carry it out.

Article 1 established a provisional demarcation line at the 17th Parallel for the withdrawal of foreign forces and the regrouping of the Vietnamese forces.

Article 16 prohibited any troop reinforcements and additional military personnel.

Article 17 prohibited war material.

Article 18 prohibited the establishment of new military bases.

Article 19 prohibited military alliances.”

The demarcation of the 17th Parallel was temporary pending a general election to elect a single government for the whole of Vietnam. The Declaration, in paragraph 7, provided for “general elections in July 1956, under the supervision of an international Commission”, on which Poland, India and Canada were asked to serve. It added that consultations for this should be held “between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July, 1955, onwards”.

The US refused to sign the Geneva Agreements. It would have meant its plans for Indo-China would have been illegal in international law. At the same time its representative declared that the US would not use force to upset them. It was a cynical, hollow pledge.

Truman's successor in the presidency, Dwight Eisenhower, was a highly successful general in World War II, and doubtless thought he could scotch liberation movements in Asia, particularly that in Vietnam, which was looking more and more likely to succeed. On 4 January 1954, the year of the Geneva Agreements, John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's Secretary of State, spelled out the matter in detail:

“US interests in the Far East, from the strategic point of view, are closely connected with what is called “the chain of littoral islands”. This chain comprises two continental bases, Korea in the north and if possible Indo-China in the south. Between these two bases lie the following islands: Japan, Ryukyu, Okinawa, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand.”

Eisenhower's administration decided to prevent the implementation of the 1954 Geneva accords on Indo-China, for, as the Pentagon study said, these accords interfered with Washington's plans. Sounds familiar even though it was half a century ago. The reason for the refusal to sign the Geneva Agreements was that the US was prepared for massive intervention to prevent the defeat of the French. Before Dien Bien Phu, US General, James M Gavin, recalled:

“The Chief of Staff, General Mathew B Ridgway, directed that we should go into the situation quite thoroughly in case a decision should be made to send US forces into the Hanoi delta. As I recall, we were talking about the possibility of sending eight divisions plus 35 engineer battalions and other auxiliary units.” (US News and World Report, 7 February, 1966)

This confession showed the deception of the US ruling caste, who sought all along to persuade the world that the American forces were in Indo-China because of an alleged “communist invasion,” of South Vietnam from the North in violation of the Geneva agreements. They sought to replicate the cause of the Korean War in Vietnam.

The use of the atom bomb was also considered. World outrage prevented both moves. So, the Americans had to systematically violate the Geneva Agreements, and render them null and void in the south. The stipulated general elections had to be avoided at all costs. South Vietnam would be transformed into a separate US puppet state, violating the Geneva agreement.

Even during the Geneva Conference the Americans took their first step. On 15 June 1954, Ngo Dinh Diem was hurriedly brought from cold storage in the US and installed as head of South Vietnam. Bao Dai, France's puppet emperor, was unceremoniously cast aside.

From the start the new “state” was an American puppet. John F Kennedy, while still a Senator, in a speech to the American Friends of Vietnam Association, said on 1 June 1956, said:

“If we are not the parents of little Vietnam, then surely we are the god-parents. We presided at its birth, we have given assistance to its life, we have helped to shape its future.”

Diem, Catholic son of a Minister at the Vietnamese Imperial Court, was Bao Dai's Minister of the Interior in 1933. He retired in 1940. With the arrival of the Japanese he worked in secret with the Japanese Intelligence and in public ran a pro-Japanese party. Arrested in the August Revolution, he was released by Ho after six months in jail. In 1951, he went to the US and became private secretary to the crooked Cardinal Spellman.

His first job back in Vietnam was to torpedo the elections Geneva had guaranteed. On 6 June 1955, the north proposed opening the consultative talks on elections. On 16 July, Saigon radio turned this down, and broadcast an official statement repudiating the Geneva Agreements. On 19 July 1955, the North Vietnamese authorities again proposed consultations, only to have them rejected on 9 August.

The Soviet Union and the United Kingdom were joint co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference. In an official note on 30 March 1956, the Soviet Union raised the matter with Britain. In reply, the British government admitted the justice of North Vietnam's complaint that “Saigon was avoiding elections” and stated it was desirable that the elections be held. (White Paper Cmd 9763, May 1956.)

In May 1956, the Soviet Union and Britain requested both north and south to meet to discuss preparations for the elections. The north was willing, Saigon refused. The elections were never held. Why? Simply because Ho would win, and Diem would lose, in which case American dreams in Indo-China would again be over. As Time Magazine put it (4 April 1955), South Vietnam was “neither mathematically nor politically remotely ready for the contest”.

Eisenhower himself wrote:

“I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indo-China affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh.” (Mandate For Change: The White House Years 1953-56, 1963)

With the US forces thin on the ground the US used Diem to suppress all national independence figures and supporters of Geneva in the south. The CIA was extensively used. Air Force Colonel Edward Lansdale was assigned to boost Diem and organise sabotage and guerrilla groups in the north. In the south, Marchetti and Marks (The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence) say “he initiated various psychological warfare programmes and helped Diem in eliminating his political rivals”. Marchetti was 14 years in the CIA. Lansdale armed and controlled tens of thousands of Diem troops in interrogation and intelligence units.

Diem attacked practically everyone. As early as 1955, he launched a military attack against the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen politico-religious sects. He repressed the Buddhists. But his special ferocity was reserved for those who had fought the French and remained in the south and supported the Geneva Agreements. Clashes increased. He decreed it a crime to advocate a neutral Vietnam. In his January 1956 Decree, he set up concentration camps. He set up his secret police run by his brother with the aid and direction of the CIA. A reign of terror was complete. In nine years, 160,000 were executed, 700,000 tortured and 370,000 imprisoned.

Phillipe Devillers, a French historian and a Roman Catholic who spent much of his life in Indo-China, originally supported Diem. His observation of Diem's totalitarianism, corruption and repression changed his mind. In an article in P J Honey's book *North Vietnam Today*, he wrote:

"This repression was in theory aimed at the communists. In fact, it affected all those—and they were many—democrats, socialists, liberals, adherents of the sects, who were bold enough to express their disagreement [with Diem]."

Those oppressed took to the countryside and started to fight back. Devillers added:

"In December (1958) and the following January, armed bands sprang into being almost everywhere."

New York Times correspondent Robert Trumbull described the guerrilla uprising on 28 May, 1961:

"The Vietcong movement... is thought to be capable of developing into the same kind of broadly based popular uprising that the French were unable to defeat in nine years of bitter fighting. In many distressing aspects the Vietcong rebellion appears to be really a continuation of the colonial war against the French."

In April 1959, Diem declared a state of war in the South. On 6 May, special military tribunals for summary executions were introduced. By 1960, the war was beyond Diem's control. It became America's "special war". In November 1961, the first US regular troops were landed.

During this period, too, the US, through the CIA, were conducting the "secret war" in Laos, the largest and most expensive in the agency's history. Marchetti and Marks tell us:

"More than 35,000 opium growing Meo and other Laos mountain tribesmen were recruited into the CIA's private army, l'armée clandestine. CIA-hired pilots flew bombing and supply missions in the agency's own planes."

The CIA army was directed by General Vang Pao, who was only removed by the Pathet Lao in May 1975. After ceaseless violation of Cambodian neutrality and bombing of its territory, a CIA-instigated coup overthrew Prince Sihanouk in 1970, who was replaced by General Lon Nol.

On 20 December, 1960, the National Liberation Front (NLF) was formed of the progressive political, social and religious forces of the south. Its ten-point programme became the battle programme for the resistance.

Throughout 1961, as the struggle reached nation-wide proportions, all Diem's reserves were called up. On 13 May, Lyndon Johnson, then Vice-President to Kennedy, and Diem signed an eight-point declaration on the US special war. On 2 August, President Kennedy pledged all assistance, and the British Permanent Military Mission under Brigadier-General Thompson was established in Saigon.

In his brief period in office, John F Kennedy transformed a policy of "limited-risk gamble" into a "broad commitment" that left President Lyndon B Johnson with a "choice between more war and withdrawal," as New York Times writer, Neil Sheehan put it. Johnson's choice was never a secret, but the details of the conspiracy against the American people, the Vietnamese and world peace hatched in the Washington corridors of power had been kept quiet. Now they are forgotten again.

The Boston Globe, showed from the documents that the use of US troops in Indo-China was urged as early as 1961 by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor. The general recommended to President Kennedy that these troops "act as an advance party of such additional forces as may be introduced" in South Vietnam if Washington's "contingency plans are invoked."

A State of Emergency was declared in 1962. That year there were 27,000 actions by the US and Diem troops. The US Air Force flew 50,000 sorties. Although President Kennedy took no formal decision on the matter then, by the time Lyndon Johnson took over the reins, in the autumn of 1963, there already were in South Vietnam 16,000 American "advisers" whose presence paved the way to the gradual build-up of strength until there was a half-million strong US army in Indo-China. Whoever was in the White House did not alter the policy—the Democrats' Truman and Johnson, or the Republicans' Eisenhower and Nixon.

The year 1963 was a decisive one, with huge Buddhist demonstrations against Diem in Hue, and 700,000 demonstrated in the streets of Saigon in June. On 1 November, there was a US-instigated coup against Diem, who was assassinated. After a swift succession of further coups—15 in all—Ngyuen Van Thieu seized power on 20 February, 1965.

With Thieu, America merely exchanged one puppet dictator for another. His, too, was a regime of terror ably assisted by the CIA. By that time, William Colby directed the CIA Counter Terror Programme. Later the name of Colby's units was changed to Provisional Reconnaissance Units. This was a unilateral American programme, according to Marchetti and Marks, of "assassination, abuses, kidnappings and intimidation". Colby had interrogation units which used torture in each of South Vietnam's 42 provinces. In 1967, Colby's office organised the notorious programme Phoenix. He testified in 1971, before a Congressional Committee, that 20,587 suspected Vietcong were killed under Phoenix in the first two and a half years. The Saigon government put the figure at 40,994. In 1968, Colby became the head of the "pacification" programme in Saigon.

The terror was matched by large scale corruption, prostitution and drug peddling, with a debased American sub-culture killing the centuries old indigenous Vietnam culture, literature and art. From then on, the war reached all out proportions, the number of troops increasing from 200,000 in that year to over 400,000 in 1967, and ultimately to half a million.

After nine years of fierce, intermittent fighting, two-thirds of the south had been liberated by the NLF forces, and the way was opened up for the formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. It was founded at a Congress of the Liberation Front in June 1969. Its programme spelled out in much greater detail that advanced by the NLF. By then the Paris peace talks had begun. The PRG programme specified that the war had to end on the basis of the recognition of the fundamental national rights of the Vietnamese people as laid out in the Geneva Agreements.

It advanced its conception of a Provisional Coalition Government of all the forces that stand for peace, independence and neutrality. That provisional government would then organise general elections for a Constituent Assembly based on national concord. The various democratic freedoms were stipulated. Living conditions were to be raised. How to heal the wounds of war received great attention. Finally, it said that the reunification of the country would proceed "step by step, by peaceful means, through discussion and agreement between the two zones, without coercion by either side".

Essentially the NLF strategy of people's war was the same as that in the struggle against the French in the north. Again there was no single continuous front, the whole of the south was the front. Offensive war was waged with the three military wings of the NLF—regular, self-defence and guerrilla. The Commander was General Tran Nam Trung, a veteran of the anti-colonial struggle against the French.

Of the guerrilla forces, a US correspondent, Neil Sheehan, then Saigon Correspondent of the UPI Press Agency, wrote in reluctant admiration, in April 1964:

“The Vietnamese Communist guerrilla is a legendary, phantom-like figure in 20th-century warfare. He has proven that his own human resources can defeat the best technology and massive fire power of modern Western-style armies.”

Hilda Vernon, in her book, *Vietnam* quotes Colonel G M Jones, Commander of the US Army Special Warfare Centre, Fort Bragg, as saying:

“The record shows, that one guerrilla has effectively tied down or dissipated the usefulness of ten conventional soldiers. He has killed 15 conventional soldiers for every guerrilla fatality... How has the guerrilla managed to do this? The answer in great part lies in motivation, training and courage.”

As against this, the US forces had no real motivation, even if the White House and the Pentagon had. They and America's allies were suffering demoralisation and were in a stage of near revolt and collapse. As Colonel R D Heinl Jr, admitted, the US troops in Vietnam around this time were in a state of imminent collapse, with individual units trying to avoid battle and refusing to fight, “fragging” COs and NCOs, addicted to drugs, and with sagging morale. (Vietnam 1970, a Staff Report, Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, Washington.)

What it led to is now ancient history, but US leaders always want to be heroes as long as there is no chance of them dying themselves. America's war in the south, and ultimately in the north, was one of the most brutal in human history. It was a massive military intervention, including dropping a greater tonnage of bombs than that dropped in the Second World War, employing napalm, food crop and foliage poisons on an enormous scale. It resulted in 72,000 US dead and 140,000 wounded, cost 120 billion dollars, and undermined the whole of US society.

The Vietnamese dead and maimed must number millions. It was virtual genocide. Most of the dead resulting from the numberless US air strikes were civilian, mainly women and children. Many villages, including all their inhabitants, were wiped out by US ground forces. The most notorious example was the My Lai massacre.

Yet the US was defeated.

It was a just struggle. It gained ultimately the support of the whole progressive world, including many Americans.

For the US administrators, it was a colonial war, not even its own, devoid of justice. At first the Americans relied on their Vietnamese puppets, but when that failed it became a large-scale war with over 500,000 US troops. It was a war which resulted in the alienation of the US in the world, and rent the country with the greatest political crisis it had seen. It made Vietnam a world issue, and its outcome had world repercussions.

All of those killed, wounded and mentally shattered was the price the American people paid for the gambles of their irresponsible leadership. One can well understand the eruption of indignation when the public learned that it had been the victim of a colossal political swindle. Senator Mansfield demanded an investigation of what he has called the most shameful period in US history. Senator George S McGovern said the documents told a story of “almost incredible deception” of Congress and the American people by the highest officials in government, including the President.

Continuity of Deception

Note the continuity of US Indo-China deception, especially since the Republican leaders tried to dissociate themselves from the crimes committed in Vietnam by the American military over two and a half decades, taking advantage of the fact that the study was commissioned by President Johnson's Defence Secretary, Robert McNamara, and to lay the responsibility at the doorstep of the Democrats. Secretary of State Rogers, for instance, said that they did not propose to engage in a controversy on this issue but were mostly concerned with how to get out of the war.

The documents nullify the Republicans' efforts to whitewash themselves. It is common knowledge that the Republicans, Eisenhower and Nixon, sought to torpedo the 1954 Geneva Conference on Vietnam. It is also known that as far back as 1954, when the French colonialists were on the brink of collapse in Vietnam, Nixon, then Vice-President, joined with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in urging the use of nuclear weapons in Indo-China and the sending of American troops there. And, as the well-known US commentator Jack Anderson observed, the Nixon Administration, while promising to bring the American operations in Indo-China to an early end, was actually working on a plan for massive bombing of North Vietnam. The literally million of tons of explosives dropped by the US Air Force in Indo-China, were shared by governments of both governmental parties in the US, though the Republicans held the record. It highlights the continuity of policy, and the escalation by the Republican Nixon of the war he inherited from the Democrat Johnson.

Take the official thesis that the US forces were in South Vietnam at the "request" of the Saigon authorities. There never was any such request. In May 1961, Lyndon Johnson, then Vice-President, personally went to Saigon to press on the South Vietnamese authorities to ask the US government to send ground troops to Vietnam. General Taylor too urged sending troops to Indo-China, even though he felt that "the introduction of US forces may increase tensions and risk escalation into a major war in Asia." Having signed a secret memorandum on sabotage in Vietnam, President Kennedy directed the Department of State to prepare to publish its White Paper on Vietnamese responsibility for aggression in South Vietnam. The Washington Post pointed out that the Pentagon Papers confirm that the responsibility for the deadlock in the Paris talks on Vietnam rested with the US government. And while the State Department vowed loyalty to its ally Ngo Dinh Diem, it was getting ready to overthrow him because of his "neutralist" tendencies. Countless other examples of lies, provocation and perfidy could be cited.

The documents the New York Times managed to publish revealed that the policy of American leaders on this issue had been built on deception, backstage manoeuvring and provocation. Inventing a pretext for bombing North Vietnam can hardly be categorized otherwise. The Gulf of Tonkin "incident" makes the point. As early as 31 May, 1964, Melvin Laird, Republican Member of the House Appropriations Sub-Committee, declared:

“The Administration’s position is to move north, and we are now preparing to move north.”

This was immediately followed by the Tonkin Gulf incident. The US version was that North Vietnamese naval vessels shelled US destroyers. The North Vietnamese authorities claimed it was the other way round. What was clear was that the US was organising commando sea raids on the north, using heavily-armed, high-speed PT type boats. Marchetti and Marks wrote:

“At least one such CIA raiding party was operating in that part of the Tonkin Gulf in 1964 where two US destroyers allegedly came under attack by North Vietnamese ships.”

The Pentagon had planned a sham attack on American warships as a pretext for the bombing, and meanwhile the politicians and diplomats were already drafting a Congressional resolution giving the President a free hand in Southeast Asia in anticipation of it. The draft was finalized on 25 May 1964, two months before the Tonkin Gulf incident fabricated in the Pentagon, and was adopted on 7 August 1964, just after it.

As an excuse it was enough. The world political situation and balance of power diplomacy made it difficult for the US to send ground troops into the north. They therefore launched large-scale ferocious bombing from South Vietnamese, Thailand and Pacific bases and the 7th Fleet, to bomb North Vietnam back to the stone age. This caused widespread suffering and wholesale destruction, but was a gigantic military and political miscalculation. Not only did the US underestimate the tenacity of the north, it stoked up afresh the world wide revulsion against the US.

The north defeated the aerial offensive. They not only shot down thousands of US planes, but maintained communications, central and regional production, underground and in caves. They dug millions of shelters and tens of thousands of communication trenches. As Giap puts it:

“Civilisation triumphed over violence.”

By bombing the north, he said, the US enemy “looked upon Vietnam as one single battlefield, thus tacitly and unwittingly admitting that Vietnam is one”. In another essay he wrote:

“Our entire people from the north to south rose up in close unity, determined to save their country and homes...”

These principles were well illustrated in the Tet offensive in 1968 when the national independence forces struck simultaneously in Hue, Danang, the Saigon Airport and even the US Embassy, or the 1972 offensives in Quang Tri and the Kontum Pleiku Highlands.

Both at the time of this US-provoked clash in August 1964 and in the subsequent six and a half years the New York Times had ample information to tell the truth about what really had happened, but it did not do it even when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee challenged the official version by summoning the then Defence Secretary Robert McNamara to testify before it in early 1968. One has to wonder, not only at the ignorance of the US public on these things, but also at the US Senators and Congressmen who continue to give absolute dictatorial power to plainly questionable people, on dubious bases.

An idea of how far the warmongers would let escalation go can be had from official plans to use nuclear weapons in South Vietnam. As the Pentagon Papers show, Robert McNamara, then Defence Secretary, speaking at the secret conference in Honolulu in early June 1964, envisaged the “use of nuclear weapons at some point.” He was supported by the commander of the US forces in the Pacific, Admiral Felt, who asked to be given the option to use tactical nuclear weapons.

That these dangerous plans were not carried out is in no way evidence of Washington’s common sense, but merely the result of a sharp turn in the course of the war which compelled the US command to change its plans. In early 1966, Assistant Defence Secretary McNaughton said that the patriotic forces of Vietnam were effectively “matching our deployments,” while the Saigon forces were “tired, passive and accommodation prone.” The US, he said further, was “in an escalating military stalemate.” Nor did the hopes that the Saigon regime could be consolidated materialize. McNaughton admitted that Saigon’s “political infrastructure was moribund and weaker than the Vietcong’s.” To this was added growing discontent among the American people which reached such dimensions that the Pentagon already conceded “the possibility of widespread civil disorder in the US.” All of which undermined Washington’s confidence in the final outcome of the war, as the Boston Globe pointed out.

Washington’s duplicity is plain also in the US pressing for the convocation of a new Geneva conference, ostensibly to “bring peace to Indo-China.” The Pentagon Papers show that, really, the US government regarded its proposal not as a potential opening for negotiations but as a convenient means to lay down a tough line. Notice anything familiar there?

Washington not only deceived the American people, it also caused its allies to deceive their own people. Australian Premier Menzies said Australia sent its armed forces to Vietnam “at the request of the South Vietnam government.” The Australian government had to conduct an investigation of its own. Suspicions were aroused in Canada too, in respect of the dubious behaviour, according to the Canadian Globe and Mail, of the former Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson.

The reports on the Pentagon Papers were not only a blow, at the policies of one or another president, they also showed up the perfidy of Washington diplomats, government leaders and politicians. It revealed serious shortcomings in US democracy long before Bush worked his miracle of the chads. Who can now recall without disgust how Lyndon Johnson, touring the country during the 1964 election campaign to build up his image as a champion of peace, proclaimed that American boys would never be sent to die in Vietnam? The published documents show that the Johnson Administration “began planning in the spring of 1964 to wage overt war,” at the very time the President was parading his peaceful intentions. We also know now that Johnson embarked on the last stage of planning the massive bombings of Vietnam on 3 November 1964, the very day he won the elections.

Post-the Pentagon Papers

The US had now reached an impasse. Talks in Paris commenced. Long, tortuous and difficult, they were to last four years, during which ceaseless fighting took place and the bombing of the north was renewed before agreement was reached on 27 January, 1973.

With the big American losses, the US after 1968 sought a policy of Vietnamisation, as US Ambassador Bunker in Saigon said, “to change the colour of the corpses”.

So the Americans cooked up the policy of Vietnamisation to preserve the US neo-colonial grip on the south. In this they encountered the opposition of Saigon. But Thieu was inefficient and corrupt, and it was an illusion to think the Americans could carry through these new plans. So the US were delaying the negotiations while trying to strengthen Thieu.

As the long negotiations in Paris went on, the war reached an even more ferocious critical stage. Before the Paris talks in 1968, Lyndon Johnson had announced he would not seek re-election and Nixon had defeated Senator Humphreys in the subsequent presidential election.

Nixon was re-elected for a second term on a withdrawal ticket, but went on to extend the war. He built up the puppet forces to a million and carried the war into Cambodia and Laos. At the same time the world relation of forces was changing with the growth of detente in Europe and Nixon’s discussions with China and the Soviet Union. Nixon tried to pressurise the Soviet Union and China on Vietnam. While fully supporting the process of detente, the Vietnamese insisted that the war would be discussed and settled in Paris by the Vietnamese.

Nixon’s impotent answer was the huge B52 raids with the strategic bombing fleet and the mining of Haiphong in 1972. It was his last fling. The US had miscalculated in two ways—the heavy toll the bombing took of the Strategic Air Command and the sense of outrage of world opinion. There was little purpose in carrying on. Defeated politically, strategically and militarily, the US signed the Paris Agreement.

The Paris Agreement, a victory for the Vietnamese, was signed on 27 January, 1973. As on the military front, the four-year struggle on the diplomatic front was fierce. Signed by the DRV, the PRG, the US and the Saigon administration, the agreement went back to the Geneva accords of 1954, that the US had determined to sabotage. The first article confirmed the Vietnamese people’s fundamental national rights:

“The United States and all other countries respect the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam as recognised by the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam.”

The agreement also confirmed, as at Geneva (Article 15), that:

“The military demarcation line between the two zones is only provisional and not a political or territorial boundary.”

It stipulated the end of US military involvement or intervention in Vietnamese affairs, the withdrawal of US forces and dismantling of US bases. It recognised two authorities in the south, the PRG and the Saigon administration, each with its territory and forces.

Article 12 required that these two authorities...

“...hall hold consultations in a spirit of national reconciliation and concord, mutual respect and mutual non-elimination, to set up a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord of three equal segments [PRG, Saigon, and the so—called neutral forces].”

This National Council was to organise free and democratic elections. Article 15 stipulated.

“The reunification of Vietnam shall be carried out step by step through peaceful means on the basis of discussions and agreements between North and South Vietnam, without coercion or annexation by either party and without foreign interference.”

There were many other provisions, including international supervision. These vital points were to be carried out quickly. The National Council of Concord was, for example, to be set up in 90 days. Article 20 re-emphasised the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Cambodia and Laos.

The ink on the agreement was hardly dry before the US and Thieu started to violate it. Thieu never accepted it, and was led to understand the US would support him in his defiance. In a speech on 24 January, 1973, just before the agreement was signed, Nixon said:

“The US will continue to recognise the government of the Republic of Vietnam (Thieu) as the sole legitimate government of South Vietnam.”

Even as the main US forces were pulled out, military aid were poured in to Thieu. All the US governmental apparatus, military advisers, and the CIA remained.

The Americans had learnt nothing. They continued the same discredited and fatal tactics as after the Geneva Agreements with Diem. The Council of Concord was never established. The dream was still to hold the south with Thieu and his million troops and with terror. They had to be taught yet another lesson.

Le Duan summed up the position—the Vietnamese had been strong enough to compel the US to pull out, the agreement was a big victory, it had recognised two governments and two armies in the south, called for general peace, release of detainees, freedom and national concord. To the extent it was realised, it placed the Thieu regime in jeopardy.

Thieu took the gambler's course, with the tacit agreement of the US. Throughout 1973 and 1974 he launched ceaseless attacks, only to meet the strongest possible resistance and counter-offensive. As a result his power was eroded and that of the resistance grew. At the same time, Thieu's regime internally was disintegrating, with soaring inflation, mounting unemployment, corruption and ever extending political revolt.

With dramatic suddenness the climax was reached in 1975. Thieu, faced with disaster, withdrew from the Central Highlands region, which throughout the whole 30 years' war had been the strategic key to the south. In 55 days his regime collapsed. In rapid succession, Hue, Da Nang and other cities were abandoned, and the people rose in rebellion. Even then, the Americans were desperately urging their puppet to fight and make a last stand.

President Ford was demanding another 400 million dollars of arms for Saigon. But Congress and the American people had had enough. Support for the US war had evaporated in its heartland. Thieu resigned. His army was completely demoralised. On 29 April, the independence forces were in Saigon.

At long last, after 30 long and bloody but nevertheless heroic years, the war was over. Once again from the China border to the Mekong Delta, Vietnam was free. The longest war in American history had proved to be America's first outright defeat. Its plans collapsed in an orgy of looting, anarchy and complete demoralisation.

There was the tragedy and farce of American evacuation, the grandiose plan, political in intent, to pull out 150,000 refugees along with the last remaining American forces—above all, the US henchmen, torturers and criminals. But who to take? One American cynically put it to the correspondent Martin Woolcott:

“Who do you take out? The killers from the provincial reconnaissance squads, or Catholic nuns?” (Guardian, 17 April 1975)

They took the killers, Thieu, Marshal Ky and their like. Ky went to the United States, Thieu to Taiwan. The Americans took the top brass of their corrupt creation...

“...including many who played an unsavoury role in the political system in South Vietnam.” (The Times, 6 May 1975)

It was a mean and sordid end to a meaner and more sordid war of the world's greatest military power against a small but proud and courageous people. The inquest was already taking place. Many could not understand how the collapse happened, Peter Hazelhurst wrote:

“The explanation is perhaps summed up succinctly by an experienced military adviser: ‘It was like a wooden house being eaten away by termites for two years. On the outside it looked fine, but inside the structure was rotting’.” (The Times, 7 April 1975)

T D Allman, who covered the war for the last seven years, wrote that the US deliberately created refugees for military and political reasons:

“It was this “refugee policy” that created what Senator I W Fulbright called “a society of prostitutes and mercenaries”, and the caricature of civilisation produced in South Vietnam by the American Way of War, which now accounts for the collapse of a state that never had any economic, political or social basis except that provided by the Americans.” (Guardian, 8 April, 1975)

The callous, blinkered verdict of The Times was that the US failed because “in spite of all the brutality which it did employ, it rightly accepted some restraints on the use of military force”. The Times can only mean that it did not use nuclear bombs! The US used every weapon in its arsenal, without restraint, except the nuclear bomb. The restraint regarding the bomb was the restraint of diplomacy, and particularly world outrage.

From start to finish, whether with Labour or Tory governments, Britain shamefully backed the US with only occasional weasel words of admonition. In August 1961 the Foreign Ministers of the US, France and Britain jointly pledged “full political, military and economic support” to Diem.

Fortunately, in those days, the UK did not have quite such hapless poodles of the White House in Parliament, and the British public never let them send British troops, though the US continually and despairingly pressed for them.

As the war mounted, with its toll of US dead, and the magnitude of the crimes emerged, a sense of revulsion swept the country. The huge anti-war movement which resulted split the country from top to bottom. The embittered returning servicemen swelled the revolt.

The US global crusade against national independence in its pursuit of greed, its worldwide bases and alliances were buttressed by CIA coups and ruthless internal interference in Latin America, Asia and Africa. They supported the most corrupt and puerile regimes, and this in turn stoked the forces of freedom and democracy everywhere.

The more the military-industrial complex thrived, with its massive arms orders and three million conscripts, the greater were the attacks on American civil liberties, the conventions of the US Constitution, and in turn the greater the protest and counter action.

Even rich America, with its tremendous resources, felt the strain of huge arms budgets to sustain America's self-imposed military role. Vietnam alone cost 120 billion dollars, helped to devalue the currency and contributed to the undermining of the world monetary system.

Congressional power diminished, particularly the convention that only Congress could authorise war, and that of the Presidency epitomising the military-industrial complex grew, the Nixon Presidency most of all. His manifestly illegal acts abroad were matched by equally illegal acts at home with burglary, private espionage, and the White House "plumbers". First used against Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Vietnam Pentagon Papers, they were ultimately turned against the Democratic Party at Watergate. It led to Nixon's downfall under the threat of impeachment and the jailing of the lesser criminals. What has changed?

Pulitzer prize-winning historian Arthur Schlesinger, Junior, wrote:

"The weight of Messianic globalism was indeed proving too much for the American Constitution... In fact, the policy of indiscriminate intervention, far from strengthening American security, seemed rather to weaken it by involving the US in remote, costly and mysterious wars, fought in a way that shamed the nation, and, even when thus fought, demonstrating only the inability of the most powerful nation on earth to subdue bands of guerrillas in black pyjamas." (The Imperial Presidency, 1974)

As the war progressed, so the US global role, of which Vietnam was the heart, faced mounting difficulties. The world balance of forces was changing to benefit democracy, freedom, national independence and peace. National independence won in Portugal, and its colonies from an evil dictator. Another, Franco was overthrown in Spain. The Greek junta collapsed. Apartheid in S Africa was beaten.

But, these setbacks and particularly that for the US in Vietnam did not mean the power elite responsible in Washington had gone. This was no revolution, and it stands to reason that the callous hatred of these men would continue to burn low until it burst out again. Sure enough, it has.

The Storm Stilled?

The storm raised by the publication of the Pentagon documents has now utterly been stilled. The US propaganda agencies muted the vociferous chorus that first attended the exposure of some of Washington's secrets. Even those who stood behind the publication of the "confidential" and "top secret" Pentagon documents came to feel that the revelations went a bit too far, becoming too flagrant an indictment of the US leadership over decades. The exposure of deliberate and systematic deception of the public and uncontrolled behind-the-scenes intrigues by the architects of brinkmanship policies was too scandalous. It was played down or ignored as old history.

Nor did the US press, radio and TV go significantly into the mechanics of deception or the continuation and motivation of the caste of professional politicians in Washington that operate in secret, and plainly operate outside of the scope of democracy. Who are these people and why should they remain as a law unto themselves?

The response of the Washington propaganda machine was that the publication of the Pentagon Papers proved the freedom of the US press. In fact, the US press zealously supported the US leadership until the government itself began to talk about pulling out. American newspapers, magazines and other media of mass information had for years been telling deliberate lies and deceiving public opinion at home and abroad by painting a distorted picture of the war in Vietnam. They did it not because they did not know the truth. More than enough material belying the Washington version of Vietnam existed. If it had wanted to, the US press could have checked official reports, but it did not, and accepted the propaganda put out by the US political and military leaders.

Although American media of different kinds and trends—newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations, publishing houses and film companies—claim to be independent, there is constant and close control over their activities. The bulk of daily information is selected, sorted out and slanted by the bosses of the news agencies, newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations.

Press agency reports on international, national and even local affairs fill the air and the newspapers and magazines, presenting the news in the way the ruling element want it. These press agencies are immensely powerful, supplying almost the whole world with easy news at a time when most correspondents are too self-indulgent to want to do anything hard, like getting an original story. The top few agencies feed thousands of media outlets and have branches in hundreds of countries.

Some newspapers, like the New York Times itself, the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor, and Baltimore Sun and broadcasting companies are influential because they are close to the leading government departments and are well informed of their policies. The leading newspapers and radio and television companies assign their best correspondents and columnists to Washington. Political scientist, Bernard Cohen, wrote:

“The correspondents follow a path of news that is narrowed at the start because it proceeds within the framework of what they understand editors and publishers to want by way of variety and amount of foreign affairs news... Many are disturbed by the potential influence and great responsibility that in these circumstances rest in just a few hands.”

The presentation of news about major current events, especially in the foreign policy sphere, is co-ordinated directly by the US government. Nowadays it is called “spin”—for which read propaganda—and is done by the White House, the State Department, the US Information Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defence Department. The government departments have special boards and agencies—policy and planning, public relations, which give guidance to newspapers and the radio. The spin or propaganda machine hides its sources with confidential directives and instructions, and briefings, on or off the record, are given by the White House, the State Department and the other government offices and agencies.

The activity undertaken to shape public opinion often involves campaigns. The President has several meetings with the leaders of the House and the Senate and the chairmen of their main committees, invites sympathetic Congressmen to lunch, and takes part in regional briefings for newspaper publishers and editors and radio and television executives. Some members of the Cabinet visit the editorial offices of newspapers, magazines and radio networks in Washington, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas and other cities. Prominent government officials tour different states. Everything is done to present things to the public in the best possible light.

The administration attaches particular importance to the co-ordination of the activity of spin when important speeches are made that have to gather public support. Many Presidential advisers and assistants are former newspapermen. John Scalli of ABC joined Nixon’s brigade of specialist advisers, the Washington Evening Star said, to “make the President and his policies more popular.” Blair’s battery of spindoctors, copied from the US, seemed to be working excellently at first, but the trouble with spin, with any lying propaganda, is that people begin to realise the falseness of it when it does not tie in with their experience. Blair has had to join the US war party to try to win back lost credibility.

The Pentagon Papers saw the light of day not because someone suddenly had qualms of conscience and awakened to the inhumanity and criminality of the war. It was not humane considerations but the realization that continuation of the war was not only futile but was fraught with danger to the US system. The Vietnam gamble eventually divided American society and the rift eventually even cut through the administration. The Washington elite ended up itself divided between the political hawks, wanting to carry the war to its victorious finish, or at least prolong it whilst it was profitable, and those with a more pragmatic outlook who saw dissension building up at home and abroad and saw potential danger to long term profitability in it.

The US Establishment split and one faction leaked information to the press, knowing that some press barons were on their side. The latter got sufficiently influential for a time to stop the war. The war party is back stronger and bolder than ever—now that there is only one world superpower. The story of the Pentagon Papers for a while exposed the mechanism of deceit. But this mechanism continues to function, to shape public opinion so that it will accept the leadership's aggressive policy.

The, prominent US political figure, William Averell Harriman, concluded that the war could not be won. Fortune predicted that "the Vietnam war would bring on economic strains beyond what most economists appear to foresee." Brigadier General William Wallace Ford declared the war in Southeast Asia to be a mistake, and the best way out was immediate withdrawal of US forces.

These statements reflected the awakening that came to those who counted on aggression but who found serious difficulties and problems in it. If the editors of the newspapers had not had strong voices behind them, it is doubtful that the secret Pentagon Papers would have been brought out into the open. It was, in short, a political move of a pressure group that had been sidelined for too long by the Washington professionals.

Now US Presidents have started again their mad adventures. Speaking of the Washington policy makers, a New York Post commentator described them as men without moral compunctions concerned solely with US might and the prestige they assumed it engendered. The same men are in charge in Washington with the same crude and ineffective policies, ineffective that is in gaining any prestige in world terms, although they doubtless get prestige and riches out of it themselves. It is time the US electorate called their ruling caste to order and demanded that they concentrate on home policy instead of adventuring abroad.

When the nazi criminals were committing their vile deeds, they did not think that they would have to answer for them before courts of justice in Nuremberg, Krasnodar, Paris, Belgrade, Warsaw and Prague. Whether Americans commit atrocities or Nazis, the crime is the same. Americans get away with it because they are the only superpower in the world. It does not make it right. This tale ought to be a warning, but who in the US cares? They don't seem to.

War and Deception

Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld might not like it now, but the Charter of the United Nations bears, among others, the signature of the United States. It says:

“All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any member or state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”

It does not stop wicked and undesirable regimes from being punished but it brought some order into it by insisting that the UN should approve of it, and that nations should not go about attacking each other because they found each other's leaders odious men. The facts of the US Pentagon Papers, openly revealed in 1971, negate the commitment taken by the US with the other founder-members of the United Nations. Then, it was done under a veil of deception. Now Bush seems scarcely able to hide his contempt for the UN and his hope of sweeping it away, or at least sidelining it as useless. US administrations have typically high-handedly discarded the obligations they undertook to fulfil by signing the UN Charter, and they have unashamedly tricked the American people with plausible lies and propaganda.

War and Duplicity

The road of war is paved with the big lie, though often the big lie is hidden by a series of littler ones. In the build up of the Vietnam war, the Pentagon Papers showed that the US lied often. The leadership claimed, at different stages:

- “1. That the USA intended to bring peace to Asia, and that it would respect the Geneva Agreements.
2. That it would not send its ground troops to Vietnam.
3. That it would not start an air war against the DRV.
4. That the Tonkin incident was “unprovoked”.
5. That the Pentagon chief was not aware of the “secret operations” carried on by the CIA and units under General Westmoreland.
6. That the “pauses” in the bombings of the DRV were motivated by a US desire to find a way to peace.
7. That the USA would not invade Cambodia.
8. That the USA would respect the neutrality of Laos.
9. That the US leaders democratically expressed the popular will.”

And so on. Congressman Paul McCloskey, member of the ruling Republican Party, on the floor of the Congress, on 18 February 1971, said:

“A reasonable argument can be made that the President's recent decision to employ American airpower in support of South Vietnamese and Cambodian forces in the neutral countries of Laos and Cambodia exceeds his constitutional powers, and is, at best, a deliberate flouting of the will of the Congress.” (Congressional Record, 18 February 1971)

A special report issued by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in May 1970 accused the Nixon Administration of sending American troops into Cambodia without the consent or knowledge of the Congress, thereby usurping the war-making power of the Congress.

A Committee to Safeguard the Constitution, specially set up for that purpose, requested the US Supreme Court to look into the question of the illegal war the USA had been waging for seven years in Indo-china without approval of the Congress, in violation of the Constitution. This appeal was signed by prominent scientists and lawyers, including one-time Attorney-General Clark, Professor J K Galbraith, and also one time US Ambassador to the United Nations, Arthur Goldberg, who had earlier used his gift of rhetoric in the United Nations to justify the US war.

The Washington perpetual oligarchy never hesitates to discard the Constitution, treating it as a scrap of paper whenever it suits them, and they can get away with ignoring it through secrecy and propaganda.

And what about the freedom of the press? No sooner had press action gone against the grain with the publication of extracts of the Pentagon secret report, than the Republican Administration leaders resorted to the mechanism of the courts. The US Administration, through its Attorney-General, started proceedings against the press under Article 593 of the Criminal Code, which carries for each offender the penalty of a 10-year prison term and a fine of \$10,000. If the Republican Administration had to backtrack, it was by no means because its members had suddenly been put in mind of the freedom of the press, but merely because they had no other way out, for in this case the Washington bureaucracy ran up against sufficiently influential and powerful forces in the United States with whom the members of the Cabinet had to reckon. These influential people are the ones with the freedom, and usually use it to uphold the Washington fraternity.

The Tonkin Resolution was adopted in August 1964 by 88 votes in the Senate against two. Only two members of the US Congress out of 506 then taking part in the voting in its two Houses found the courage to say no. They were Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, and Senator Ernest Gruening of Alaska. At the next election, both found themselves thrown out of the Senate. Concerning the methods used in dealing with the recalcitrants, just after the votes were counted, Morse declared that the results of the polling in his state had been rigged, and demanded an official recount, but this was denied. Now we know it happens and the Supreme Court approves of it. So much for US democracy.

In October 1969, Senator Charles Goodell of New York put before Congress a bill providing for the withdrawal of all US troops from Vietnam by 1 December, 1970. It never happened but in November 1970 the author of the bill lost his seat in the Senate. Among those who campaigned against the Republican Goodell were leaders of his own party, Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew, who in this case ignored party solidarity and backed the candidate of the other party. So too for the realities of US democracy.

Addressing the anniversary session of the United Nations in San Francisco on 25 June, 1965, the US President spoke at length about the need to enhance the UN role in the maintenance of international peace and security. A fortnight later, the President announced a new step in the escalation of the war in Vietnam, arising from his order dispatching tens of thousands of US soldiers to the Vietnam theatre of military operations.

At a press conference in May 1967, replying to a question as to how he viewed UN General Secretary U Thant's statement that mankind was moving towards a third world war, the President said:

“I don't think it would serve any purpose to speculate about that.”

A few days earlier, the President had told his daughter:

“Your Daddy may go down in history as having started World War III.” (Washington Post 12 May 1967)

Hypocrisy and deceit, like bad language in the Sopranos, have become second nature to US leaders. Soon after President Nixon took over at the White House he told the governors of 50 states that he had found a yawning credibility gap between the people, and the government and all echelons of authority. This admission was made soon after Nixon took office. Later the gap, far from being narrowed, had grown so wide that Nixon was impeached and thrown out of office. During the 1968 electoral campaign, the Republicans had promised to end the deadlock in Vietnam. Instead, the Americans were faced with an extension of the war and the invasion of Laos and Cambodia.

The whole world has seen the great gap that lies between the words and the deeds of the US leaders, but US citizens seem to ignore them. Why should the assurances and professions made by Washington leaders be trusted when there is abundant evidence that they lie effortlessly? Should anyone trust politicians who habitually say one thing and do another, especially their own citizens? Should anyone trust men who refuse to recognise international law or the treaties their predecessors have signed?

If these men have deceived their own people in starting the war in Indo-china, where is the guarantee that they will not do so again in the future—that they have not done so in the Iraq war?

The published secret documents from the Pentagon archives expose those who have made lying and hypocrisy government policy, and reveal the depth of the moral degradation of those who hold forth about democracy, peace and justice, but stop at nothing to achieve their sinister ends.

There is a real danger that the pious US Right may perpetrate any crime and fraud. Many people throughout the world find nothing novel in this, but that does not make it any less alarming. The warnings thirty years ago of the dishonesty and scheming of the ambitious US politician and his advisers and backers in the military and defence establishments should have aroused universal indignation against militarism, and the bogus reasons US leaders offer for it.

Beginning with Truman and Eisenhower

In a speech made in Kentucky on 9 October 1964, US President Lyndon B Johnson insisted:

“I didn't get us into Vietnam. I didn't ring up out there and say, ‘I want some trouble’.”

By then the USA was already deeply bogged down in Indo-china. What was the exact date when the first US “aid” dollars and the first cases of weapons marked “Made in USA” started the lethal flow in the war in Vietnam? Few Americans know. Vietnam was a word they became familiar with only in the sixties when the body bags started being flown in, and the dead were replaced by draftees. In a speech at Memphis, Tennessee, on October 24, 1964, the US President assured Americans:

“I want the mothers who must supply the boys, and I want the boys who must die in the wars, to know that no impulsive act of mine, no beat of emotion, is ever going to cause me to do a rash, dangerous, adventurous thing.”

The “rash thing” had already been done—and not just a day or a week before these words were uttered. It was not the first lie in the veil of secrecy behind which the war was engineered, nor was it the last.

The first articles and documents of the Pentagon study—what came to be known as the Pentagon Papers—were published by the New York Times on Sunday, 13 June 1971, and then in a number of other big US newspapers.

The American people were shocked by what they learned. Deceit, hypocrisy and double-dealing were what was shown up in the glaring light cast on the secrets of Camelot, Washington style—a propaganda screen for the escalation of military operations. It showed deceit continuing through each administration of whatever political colour. Respected US leaders—their Presidents—did not hesitate to use ignominious methods, and the media covered up for them. It was a complete shock. Many US citizens had to ask themselves if they could believe what the top brains in Washington, including the President himself, told them and if they could believe what was daily being fed to them by the press, radio and TV. Answer: they cannot.

The articles were not chronological. On 5 July 1971, the final New York Times article actually returned to the start in the 1945-60 period to reveal early policy decisions that set the stage and the commitments of the United States to Vietnam. Truman, the head of the first postwar US administration, set himself the task to impress the electorate with the idea that victory in war had placed upon the American people the burden of responsibility for world leadership. US politicians insisted this was their country's destiny. It generated among US mandarins the burning urge to intervene in Vietnam's affairs.

As the young Senator and future US President, John F Kennedy, put it, they wanted “to hang on to the remnants of the empire” (A Schlesinger Jr *A Thousand Days* 1965). “The empire” was the French South East Asian colonies which could no longer be maintained with French bayonets and was about to collapse. The French generals commanding the last expeditionary corps of the Fourth Republic in Asia were marching to their defeat. It was inflicted on them at Dien Bien Fu in the spring of 1954. It had been almost ten years in the making. On 2 September 1945, following the uprising and victory against the Japanese, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) was set up. The Vietnamese people wanted freedom and independence.

The Truman administration initially rejected assistance to both the French and the Vietminh in their conflict but, on 30 December 1949, decided, after the takeover of mainland China by the communists, to provide military aid to the French against the communist-led Vietminh.

For great power reasons, the American rulers since the War have been unable to tolerate that any country should declare itself free and independent. Americans are proud of the US republic but steadfastly refuse to let anyone have one of their own. The US has contrived by direct intervention or by subversive methods to ensure that every country that has become free of old colonial powers has been subject to the new one—the US Empire. Corrupt kings, megalomaniac generals and upstart politicians were the choices of the US leadership rather than any democratic rule that might risk a vote for socialism.

US politicians and generals were just cutting their teeth in this policy in the early fifties. The Korean war had been fought to a stalemate, but the corporate barons had noticed in the World War and the following Korean war that war was good for their balance sheets. With the Korean war declared a draw, the US oligarchy worried that military appropriations might go into something foolish like housing, so they looked for a new intervention, and Dien Bien Fu was just what they sought. The political lexicon was enriched with the new word “escalation”, building up tension in the rising stages of the war. This was an escalation of intervention in the affairs of another country, escalation of arbitrary acts using armed force.

In June 1950, Truman issued a declaration ordering a speed-up in the supply of “military aid” to the area, and the dispatch of a military mission. The conclusions drawn by the authors of the Pentagon report on Vietnam tell every American:

“The Truman Administration's decision to give military aid to France in her colonial war against the communist-led Vietminh ‘directly involved’ the United States in Vietnam and ‘set’ the course of American policy.” (New York Times, 13 June 1971)

The succeeding Eisenhower administration pledged to abide by the Geneva Accords of 1954—though it called them a “disaster”—but nevertheless approved actions, including the introduction of American troops, that had “a direct role in the ultimate breakdown of the Geneva settlement”.

“President Eisenhower said he could conceive of no greater tragedy than for the United States to become involved in all-out war in Indo-china. No one could be more bitterly opposed to such a development than he was.” (New York Times, 11 February 1957)

“In the spring of 1954, as the French military position in Indo-china deteriorated rapidly and the date for the Geneva Conference approached, the Eisenhower Administration twice hinted to France that it was ready to intervene with American forces.” (The Pentagon Papers)

Eisenhower was at pains to convince the American public that the allocation of \$400 million to help anti-communist forces in Indo-china was “the cheapest way that we can prevent... a most terrible blow to American interests there.” (So he told a Gubernatorial Congress at Seattle on 4 August 1953.) But for the broad public, the same man was uttering honeyed words about “the supreme duty” of establishing lasting peace in any honourable way. (President Eisenhower's State of the Union Message to Congress on 6 January 1955.)

For the Pentagon generals, who knew their own business and the real aims of the White House leadership, there was no such “supreme duty”. This, too, is borne out by the Pentagon Papers. An aide memoire sent in March 1954 by Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to US Secretary of Defence Charles Wilson, said:

“The acceptance of a settlement based upon the establishment of a coalition government in one or more of the associated states (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) would open the way for the ultimate seizure of control by the Communists under conditions which might preclude timely and effective external assistance in the prevention of such seizure.” (Washington Post, 18 June 1971)

An international conference at Geneva was to seek ways of letting the peoples of Indo-china decide their own future, but a totally different kind of activity was going on in Washington's military and political headquarters—feverish preparations for direct armed intervention in Indo-china's affairs.

The Pentagon Papers explains that, in January 1954, the President's Special Committee on Indo-china discussed the dispatch of aircraft and 200 technical specialists to Vietnam. Deputy Secretary of Defence, Roger Kyes, expressed doubt about whether this would put the USA under an obligation to support the French to such an extent that with time the Americans would be involved in large-scale intervention, including the use of American combat units.

Deputy Secretary of State Smith made the rejoinder that “we were sending maintenance forces, not ground forces...” He felt, however, that the importance of winning in Indo-china was so great that if the worst came to the worst he personally would favour intervention with US air and naval forces. In this context, Senator Stennis drew the following conclusion:

“I have been impressed for some time that we have been steadily moving closer and closer to participation in the war in Indo-china.” (Washington Post 18 June 1971)

This “impression” somewhat lagged behind the realities. The USA was already fighting! By early 1952, 100,000 tons of US equipment had been delivered to Saigon. In 1953-1954, “military aid to Saigon was running at \$1 billion a year” (D F Fleming. *The Cold War and Its Origins*. 1961).

All that remained was to find moral and legal justification for open war. President Eisenhower, on 10 February 1954, had to issue—again for the public at large—a misleading statement to the effect that no greater tragedy for the USA could be imagined than involvement in the war in Indo-china, and that no one could object in stronger terms than he did to such a course of events. But the Republican President kept mum about the fact that he had long since authorised the military to decide on the course of events.

According to the Pentagon Papers, in January 1951, President Eisenhower had approved a policy-making statement made in the National Security Council on the “United States' objectives and courses of action with respect to South-East Asia.” The Washington Post emphasised that it began with a sweeping statement of “general consideration”, one foreshadowed in the Truman Administration and to be continued in one form or another, as the documents show, by the Johnson Administration.

The so-called “domino theory” was the central pillar of this bipartisan platform, to be relayed from one White House incumbent to another. If Vietnam went, the whole of Indo-china would go, if Indo-china went, the whole of South-East Asia would go. No one would be allowed to go anywhere unless the US gave them the say so. For trying, they would be bombed unmercilessly.

A policy-making statement by the US Administration at the time said:

“South-East Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, is the principal world source of natural rubber and tin, and a producer of petroleum and other strategically important commodities... Furthermore, this area has an important potential as a market for the industrialized countries of the free world.” (Washington Post 18 June 1971)

These were the motives behind the US conspiracy against the independence of the people of Indo-china, not saving the world from whatever gave US industrialists nightmares. Before US soldiers set foot on Vietnamese soil, it had been considered possible to use the remnants of the old colonial regime for these purposes:

- a. An aggressive military, political and psychological program, including covert operations to eliminate organised Vietminh forces by mid-1955.
- b. Developing indigenous armed forces, including logistical and administrative services which will eventually be capable of maintaining internal security without assistance from French units.”

Here are the main objectives of “special war” and “Vietnamisation”, later to be fully developed. The army commanders were invited to submit their opinion. The “army's stand” was:

“Seven US divisions or their equivalent, with appropriate naval and air support, would be required to win a victory in Indo-china if the French withdrew and the Chinese Communists did not intervene.”

The Pentagon did not consider this to be too hard a nut to crack. In fact, the prospect was tantalising, considering Indo-china's wealth and strategic location. Was any account taken of the attendant risks? Yes, the National Security Council said in one report:

“The US should recognise that it may become involved in an all-out war with communist China, and possibly with the USSR and the rest of the Soviet bloc, and should therefore proceed to take large-scale mobilisation measures.” (Washington Post 18 June 1971)

Evidence of the readiness to go all-out also came from the stand taken by the second man in the White House, then Vice-President Nixon, who on 16 April 1954, told the American Newspaper Editors' Association that the US Government was to take a “sober” view of the situation and send its armed forces to Indo-china. There is good reason to assume that the future President of the USA was taking even more vigorous action behind the scenes. According to the Chicago Sun-Times (17 June 1971):

“The unpublished portion of the top secret Pentagon history of the Vietnam war covers the period in 1954 in which President Nixon played a key role in the debate over dropping the atomic bomb and committing US troops... It was during the Eisenhower Administration that the US moved to the verge of a major intervention, a full decade before Johnson took the fateful step.”

“In the spring of 1954, as the French were being surrounded by the communist-led Vietminh at Dien Bien Fu, Admiral Arthur W Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reportedly sought authority to use tactical nuclear weapons to break the seige.”

“It was widely assumed at the time that Nixon and the late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles supported Radford... During that period, US Navy planes, equipped with tactical atomic bombs were in the air off North Vietnam, poised to strike at the Vietminh.”

“But President Eisenhower called them off at the last minute, reportedly after seeking the advice of General Matthew B Ridgeway, the Army Chief of Staff, who warned that a successful military intervention might require several hundred thousand US troops.”

An item in the Philadelphia Inquirer on 24 June 1971 shows that Admiral Radford had also drawn up a plan for Operation Vulture, which provided for a strike by 60 B-29 bombers from a US base near Manila.

Besides the readiness to run the risk of a big war, the plans implied the need to condition public opinion at home and in the allied camp. One of Dulles's telegrams in April 1954 stressed that the USA was doing its utmost...

“...to prepare a public, congressional and constitutional basis for united action in Indo-china.” (Washington Post 18 June 1971)

The convocation of the Geneva Conference on Indo-china proved to be the main stumbling block. Perhaps no other negotiations in the diplomatic history of the USA had so upset Washington as this conference, until the UN refusal to approve the US war on Iraq. US war planes were already on patrol in the skies of South-East Asia, prepared to obliterate Indo-china, while preparations were being made in Geneva to talk of peace for the Indo-chinese. So the US had to aim its heavy-calibre diplomatic guns at the conference to kill it off or neutralise it.

Geneva Agreements Violated

“The Government of the United States... takes note of the agreements concluded at Geneva on July 20 and 21, 1954... declares with regard to the aforesaid agreements... that it will refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them...” (Statement by the Under-Secretary of State at the Concluding Plenary Session of the Geneva Conference 21 July 1954)

“The President ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare ‘a long-range program for the organisation and training of free Viet forces’.” (Philadelphia Inquirer, 24 June 1971)

The Eisenhower Administration's decision to intervene in South Vietnam's affairs and to undermine North Vietnam led to the US Government's assuming a direct role in ultimately torpedoing the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Indo-china. This conclusion, obvious to the world, was brought home to the Americans by the New York Times on 13 June 1971, from the Pentagon Papers.

On 18 June 1971, the Washington Post carried a summary of the principal documentary evidence concerning US diplomatic activity during the Geneva Conference of April-June 1954. Secret operations were already being conducted during the Geneva conference. US Secretary of State Dulles was the chief architect of the policy to torpedo the Geneva Agreements. Dulles was the architect of the “roll back communism” policy and the “massive retaliation” strategy. The newspaper articles illustrated clearly the hypocrisy of bipartisan US foreign policy, whose proponents vindicated the escalation of the war because the Geneva Agreements was ineffective.

The French expeditionary corps at Dien Bien Fu was facing defeat. Just before the conference opened, Dulles tried to induce London to mount an Anglo-American intervention. In his memoirs, Lord Avon (Anthony Eden), then Britain's Foreign Secretary, describes Dulles's moves.

On 11 April 1954, Dulles informed Eden that US aircraft carriers had already left Manila and were on their way to Indo-china. This psychological pressure verged on downright provocation was designed to stampede Britain into the gamble. Britain's Tories were not keen on a colonial expedition in South-East Asia, because they had their hands full elsewhere. At the same time, London had undoubtedly received news from Washington of how badly Dulles and the Pentagon were in need of a show of “allied solidarity” to ensure US Congressional approval of open war. The Washington Post said:

“Dulles had trouble rounding up allies, especially the British.”

In his reports on his talks with Eden, Dulles did not consider it necessary to conceal his sarcasm over the fact that the UK stand was evidence of increasing weakness. Dulles summed it up as follows:

“The British seem to feel that we are disposed to accept present risks of a Chinese war and this, coupled with their fear that we would start using atomic weapons, has badly frightened them.” (Washington Post 18 June 1971)

Anthony Eden notes, in *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden* (1960), that even Churchill, a crafty and cautious old colonialist, had concluded that Britain was being required “to assist in misleading Congress into approving a military operation, which would in itself be ineffective and might well bring the world to the verge of a major war.”

The whole point of the rabidly anti-communist Dulles was to keep the world constantly on the brink (“brinkmanship”). Dulles and the apostles of the US corporations who backed him were ready to do anything to prevent independent governments from being installed in office for fear that they would choose communism instead of US capitalism. Frankly, Dulles and subsequent Washington cognoscenti simply do not understand what democracy means, either that or they are not democrats but autocrats. The world must do as the US leaders say. The Geneva Conference did not suit Dulles because he saw it only as a means of “opening the Communists' way to power” in Indo-china by the route of independence.

Having failed to torpedo the Geneva Conference through “united military action”, Dulles concentrated his efforts on trying to reduce the possibility of the conference calling for free elections (Washington Post 18 June 1971). Again he failed. He then lost all interest in the conference and left Geneva.

The Geneva Conference ended with the signing of armistice agreements between the governments of France and the Vietnamese government, with a declaration affirming the commitment not to station foreign troops in Vietnam, and with a date set for general elections—July 1956—to allow the people of Vietnam to express their will within the framework of a single, peaceful and independent state.

At the time, Dulles expressed his unhappiness at the impending outcome of the Geneva Conference (Washington Post 18 June 1971). He sent a telegram to various American diplomats then struggling with the problem stressing that since it was undoubtedly true that...

“...elections might eventually mean unification of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh, this makes it all the more important that they should be only held as long after a ceasefire agreement as possible.”

So, his policy was to frustrate the Geneva Agreements. To excuse torpedoing the agreements, the US representatives refused to sign the final declaration, but a declaration issued by the USA said that, since these Geneva Agreements had been signed, the USA “will refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them”.

The USA continued to step up its activity in Vietnam.

A few days after the signing of the Geneva Agreements, the National Security Council under President Eisenhower declared that these agreements were a calamity (New York Times, 5 July 1971). In late summer 1954, the US President had approved a plan of action envisaging fresh steps in direct US intervention in Vietnam's internal affairs in violation of the Geneva Agreements. A Colonel Landsdale, a CIA agent, was sent to Vietnam to organise sabotage, acts of terrorism and subversion.

American diplomacy steadily implemented Dulles's idea of throwing a veil of “common Western interests” over the intervention in Indo-china. In September 1954, Dulles's incipient plan for “united action” by America's partners led to the establishment of SEATO. In October, the President ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to:

“Prepare a long-range program for the organisation and training of free Viet forces.”

At the same time, despite French objections, the USA decided to install the Catholic, Ngo Dinh Diem, as head of the Saigon regime, and to move “emperor” Bao Dai out. As the Philadelphia Inquirer pointed out:

“Diem's rise with US help almost caused a break in American relations with France. But the American Secretary of State continued his support for Diem, which ultimately helped to drive France out of Vietnam altogether in 1955.”
(Philadelphia Inquirer, 24 June 1971)

Despite the recognition of the instability of Premier Diem's regime, his lack of support and his ineffectual measures to help the peasants, a decision was made to back him. The US blocked the elections scheduled in the Geneva Accords by encouraging Diem's refusal to hold them. The fear was that elections would lead to unification of the two Vietnams under Ho Chi Minh. But American aid—almost entirely for security with minimal funds for community development, social welfare, health and education—did not curb the Vietnam insurgents.

Dulles and Diem formulated a platform, according to which the Geneva decisions for a general election in Vietnam in July 1956 were incompatible with keeping the country divided or turning it entirely into an American protectorate. No honest election in Vietnam would have produced a result that suited them. The CIA had warned Eisenhower in advance that Ngo Dinh Diem could not hope to win the elections. The US Administration had no hesitation in approving Diem's decision to call off the “elections, which had been agreed upon in the 1954 Geneva accords” (Chicago Sun-Times, 25 June 1971).

National Security Council document NSC-5809, dated 2 April 1958, contained Eisenhower's secret directive to work for an overthrow of the popular system in Vietnam and the establishment of a single puppet state.

Eisenhower and Dulles were doing their utmost to support the Diem regime, despite the fact that the CIA assessment of the situation in South Vietnam led to the conclusion that the prospects of setting up a solid regime were insignificant, and that in the course of the year ahead the existing situation was more likely to worsen. The Chicago Sun-Times said Washington was impressed by the way Ngo Dinh Diem managed “with unexpected efficiency” to put down “a number of dissident Buddhist sects”.

The US ruling caste in Washington succeeded to a large extent in concealing all this from most Americans. Elsewhere governments were far from happy. A note sent from the USSR to Great Britain—the joint conveners of the Geneva Conference—on 30 March 1956, noted that the present threatening situation in South Vietnam could not have arisen but for the intervention on the part of “a certain power” which had taken part in the Geneva Conference and which although it did not sign the Geneva Agreements on Vietnam, had nevertheless undertaken the obligation not only to refrain from violating the Geneva Agreements, but also to regard any violation of the said Agreements as constituting a grave threat to international peace and security. The note went on:

“The acts of the South Vietnamese authorities designed to prevent the holding of a general election in South Vietnam in July 1956 are being openly supported, weapons are being supplied and military personnel are being trained for a so-called “campaign against the North” for the purpose of starting a new war in Indo-china...”

All states that had participated in the Geneva Conference had committed themselves to do their utmost to promote a settlement of the Indo-china problem in the interests of peace. At the time, Senator Lyndon B Johnson seemed to be a critic of the administration, and declared (The New York Times, 7 May 1954):

“American foreign policy has never in all its history suffered such a stunning reversal... We stand in clear danger of being left naked and alone in a hostile world.”

The extent of Johnson's hypocrisy was revealed ten years later, when he issued his orders sending tens of thousands of American boys into the war against the peoples of Indo-china. As soon as the baton of bipartisan power passed from the Republicans to the Democrats, with the election of President John F Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson became the country's Vice President, he was ordered by Kennedy to go to South Vietnam to negotiate with Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon. That was in 1961.

What was the state of the Vietnam business when John F Kennedy moved into the White House? On 1 July 1971, the New York Times described developments in the Kennedy administration, 1961-63, but another source reveals that secret operations were already being conducted in Vietnam.

In 1961, a Washington corporation, Helioaircraft, servicing airlines in South Vietnam, made a lucrative offer to an American pilot named Smith, which he accepted. Within a few months, Smith was passed on to another private company—Aviation

What was it trying to hide? Soon Smith learned that the business in which he was taking a hand was designated by the code name of Operation Haylift, and that it was being directed by the CIA. Its purpose, as Smith himself subsequently told, was to airlift South Vietnamese agents to North Vietnam for subversive operations—blowing up railway lines, bridges, etc. Smith said:

“At first, they used a C-54 for runs over the North. When this was lost they switched to four C-123s, all unmarked, and used them for recon runs and drop missions over the North.”

This was told in a book by a US journalist, Joseph C Goulden, published in 1969, *Truth is the First Casualty. The Gulf of Tonkin Affair—Illusion and Reality* (1969), echoing the maxim of U Thant, then UN Secretary General:

“In times of war the first casualty is truth.”

Goulden says that Smith was a pseudonym for a man whom the author met through Senator E Gruening in 1968. It reveals that the US aggressive action against Vietnam has a longer history than many had imagined. The tissue of lies used to cover up the war was just as long.

The Pentagon Papers indicated that Kennedy shifted the direction and involvement of the Vietnam strategy from the “limited-risk gamble” of the Eisenhower administration to one of “broad commitment”. The underlying objective was still to prevent communist domination of South Vietnam. While Kennedy resisted pressures to commit ground-combat units, the number of troops was increased, initially by 500 on 11 May 1961, but up to 16,000 by the end of his 34 months in office. He also approved of covert operations involving American military advisers. None of these commitments were disclosed to the public.

In taking these steps, Kennedy ignored the advice of the intelligence agencies, which was “conspicuously more pessimistic (and more realistic)” than other senior advisers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, advocating a range of combat operations, estimated “a good chance of... arresting things and giving Diem a chance to do better and clean up...” The administration chose a greater commitment against South Vietnamese independence. Here is how one newspaper puts it:

“Upon taking office in January 1961, Kennedy was confronted by reports from the US Embassy in Saigon that Diem was in danger of being overthrown because of his repressive policies and the toleration of corruption at the top of his government... In March 1961, the Central Intelligence Agency, in a national intelligence estimate warned that the Viet Cong were gaining ‘control and influence over increasing areas of the countryside’. The CIA said Diem was growing progressively weaker.” (Chicago Sun-Times, 25 June 1971)

What choice did Kennedy make? It was in no sense a way of reducing the US intervention or “preparing for a US withdrawal from Vietnam”, as some historians and politicians in the American liberal camp subsequently insisted. The Chicago Sun-Times said:

“Kennedy sought to bolster the regime by authorising funds to increase the South Vietnamese army by 20,000 men and the civil guard by 32,000.”

In March 1961, Kennedy approved a plan of the Joint Chiefs of Staff which gave the military command more leeway in dealing with the “hot war situation”, bypassing the US Ambassador in Saigon. It sanctioned direct military intervention in Vietnam's affairs.

So, as we saw, in May 1961, Vice-President Johnson was sent to Vietnam to “encourage Diem to request US ground troops” (Chicago Sun-Times, 25 June 1971). At first, Diem refused, but then went along and in October made the request suggested by Johnson. The Pentagon Report is clear—the “South Vietnamese request” for US military intervention was the result of direct pressure from Washington.

At the time, General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow also visited Saigon and returned with full plans. The Boston Globe testifies (22 June 1971):

“As early as 11 May 1961, President Kennedy had approved programs for covert action which had been recommended by a Vietnam task force. Among the actions were:

1. Dispatch of agents into North Vietnam.
2. Aerial resupply of agents in North Vietnam through the use of civilian mercenary air crews.
3. Infiltration of special South Vietnam forces into South-East Laos to locate and attack communist bases and lines of communication.
4. Formulation of ‘networks of resistance, covert bases and teams for sabotage and light harassment’ inside North Vietnam.
5. Conduct of overflights of North Vietnam for the purpose of dropping leaflets.”

The US President ordered “anti-guerrilla ground action, including the use of United States advisers, if necessary”, against some strong points of the insurgents. The word “adviser” in this context is a euphemism for US professional soldiers who directed operations and increasingly participated in them. They are sometimes called “special forces” and this was the start of the US “special war” against the Vietnamese. The Boston Globe (22 June 1971) says by early 1961 there were 1,000 US soldiers in Vietnam. General Maxwell Taylor advised the President to send in 8,000 US soldiers. The paper says that “Kennedy did not mention the Taylor recommendations for a US task force or whether the United States was considering one”, but concludes:

“President Kennedy stepped up covert actions against North Vietnam and increased the number of advisers to 16,000 men before he was assassinated in November 1963.”

On 1 July 1971, the New York Times published three of Taylor's reports on the results of his visits to Vietnam. These reports contain the flat recommendation to send US troops to South Vietnam, and support the need to use the threat of aerial attack to put pressure to bear on the legitimate Vietnamese Government.

In its final form, the policy of intensifying the US intervention in South Vietnam's affairs was set out in a joint report submitted to President Kennedy on 11 November 1961, by Defence Secretary McNamara and Secretary of State Rusk, both of whom argued that it could prove necessary to send in troops of the USA and other SEATO members. They insisted that the maximum numerical strength of the US forces required for use in South-East Asia did not exceed 6 divisions, that is, roughly 205,000 men. The report was submitted on the eve of the important National Security Council meeting at which, the Washington Post said on 2 July 1971:

“Kennedy, in essence, accepted the Rusk-McNamara recommendations for a fateful step into direct involvement in the war.”

It was under the Kennedy Administration that the organisers of the Vietnam venture finally realised that it was no longer possible to maintain the flimsy Diem regime in Saigon. According to the Pentagon's study, the Kennedy administration, despite its disavowal, “knew and approved of plans for the military coup d'etat that overthrew” the government on 1-2 November 1963. Many historians and eye-witnesses of these events had long since expressed the opinion that US intelligence under the Kennedy Administration had taken a hand in preparing the coup which led to Diem's overthrow and murder. This was confirmed by the secret papers published in the Chicago Sun-Times on 23 June 1971. The study indicated that:

“Our complicity in his overthrow heightened our responsibilities and our commitment.”

At least two officials recommended disengagement, but the decision was made because of the failures of Diem to control the country, manage the war effort and achieve popular support through political, economic and military reforms. And Washington was upset by Diem's favouritism to Catholics and that his promise of conciliatory actions toward Buddhists, whom he persecuted, was repudiated by repeated brutalities. This was a “watershed” period for the United States, when the Vietnam policy could have been reconsidered, even to the point of disengagement, as the Pentagon Papers note.

These Papers say that in the summer of 1963 leading Washington official circles were sharply divided in their attitude towards Ngo Dinh Diem, “with the State Department urging his ousting and the Pentagon insisting that the United States stick with him”. The newspaper wrote that a decision was finally adopted against Diem. The papers also showed that Kennedy and his chief advisers were closely connected with the moves which led to Diem's downfall on 1 November 1963.

At the National Security meeting in Washington on 17 September 1963, Kennedy decided to exert growing pressure on Diem (Chicago Sun-Times, 23 June 1971). To justify this attitude to the Saigon rulers, a rumour was circulated to the effect that Diem's brother, Nhu, was inclined to negotiate with the DRV on neutralising Vietnam. The same National Security Council sitting decided to send Defence Secretary McNamara and General Taylor to Saigon. The two men reported to Washington on 2 October, and soon Diem was removed and, with his brother Nhu, killed in the course of the military putsch.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, which published some of the Pentagon papers on 24 June 1971, relating to the period when the coup was being prepared, concluded that through that coup the Kennedy Administration had finally shelved plans for a cutback in the American military presence in Vietnam, although the paper's analysis suggests that President Kennedy had intended to use these plans for domestic political purposes in connection with the forthcoming 1964 Presidential campaign.

Consequently, towards the end of Kennedy's term in office, the continuity of the bipartisan US line in South-East Asia, designed to violate the 1954 Geneva Agreements and extend direct US military intervention in the affairs of Vietnam and other states in Indo-china, had become most pronounced. Characterising the bipartisan policy on Indo-china, the New York Times (18 June 1971) drew the following conclusions:

- “That the Kennedy Administration, though ultimately spared from major escalation decisions by the death of its leader, transformed a policy of “limited-risk gamble”, which it inherited, into a “broad commitment” that left President Johnson with a choice between more war and withdrawal.”
- “That the Johnson Administration, though the President was reluctant and hesitant to take the final decisions, intensified the covert warfare against North Vietnam and began planning in the spring of 1964 to wage overt war, a full year before it publicly revealed the depth of its involvement and its fear of defeat.”

The Boston Globe has a telegram from General Taylor to President Kennedy which is a glaring example of how insistently the architects of the intervention sought to conceal the truth from the American people and the world. Sent from Saigon in November 1961, it said:

“My view is that we should put in a task force consisting largely of logistical troops for the purpose of participating in flood relief and at the same time of providing a US military presence in Vietnam... To relate the introduction of these troops to the needs of flood relief seems to me to offer considerable advantage in Vietnam and abroad. It gives a specific humanitarian task as the prime reason for the coming of our troops.”

Subsequently, US politicians and generals invented many other pretexts and verbal screens for acts violating the Geneva Agreements, the rules of international law and humanitarian standards. General Taylor was neither the first nor the last to do so.

Still, in a telegram to Washington, Taylor found it necessary to inform the President about some of the inevitable consequences, if his recommendations on the dispatch of 8,000 US ground troops to Vietnam were accepted. These included the danger of some of the US strategic reserves being pinned down “for an uncertain duration”, and the impossibility of resisting fresh pressure to reinforce the task force, if it should prove to be inadequate, the unlimited nature of any possible new commitments, including an attack on Hanoi, growing tensions and the threat of “escalation into a major war in Asia” (Boston Globe, 22 June 1971).

Nothing of these apprehensions and doubts was said to the American people. And the new man in the White House, who took the place of the assassinated John F Kennedy, had good ground to assume that whatever new decisions and steps the Administration took in Indo-china, he too could rely on the barrier of secrecy and official untruth. At the same time, Johnson took special care to present the Republican Party before the masses as being equally responsible for the Vietnam policy as his own, Democratic Party. That is why he never tired of repeating that his policy vis-a-vis South Vietnam accorded with the policy formulated by the Eisenhower Administration in 1954. (President Johnson's statements of April 23 and June 2, 1964.)

Open Intervention Prepared

“Q. Mr President, Representative Laird of Wisconsin declared that the Administration is preparing to move the Vietnam war into the North. Is there any substance to this claim?”

A. I know of no plans that have been made to that effect.”

(President Johnson's news conference, 2 June 1964)

“[The United States' policy is] to prepare immediately to be in a position on 72 hours' notice to initiate the [previously recommended] ‘Retaliatory Actions’ against North Vietnam, and to be in a position on 80 days' notice to initiate the program of Graduated Overt Military Pressure against North Vietnam.”

(National Security Action Memorandum 288, 17 March 1964)

The early stage of the Johnson Administration was marked by a fact which left its stamp on all the methods he used to camouflage the escalation of the war. The year Johnson took his first decisions on Vietnam was also an electoral one—1964. Johnson must have realised that it would have been an unforgivable blunder to ignore the slogans of peace. That is why, among the electoral catchwords churned out by the White House machine and designed for public consumption, Johnson found this formula highly attractive:

“Our one desire—our one determination—is that the people of South-East Asia be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way.”

He would repeat it, word for word, on many occasions, as he did in Washington on 10 August 1964, and on 13 March 1965. New catchwords would be invented and fresh efforts made to bring out the Administration's “peace-making” in contrast to the extremism of its rivals, among them Goldwater and Nixon. The military intervention conveyor belt would continue to operate with inexorable momentum.

The secret papers of that period described the goings-on in the President's oval room at the White House and in the Pentagon staff rooms. On 21 December 1963, Secretary of Defence McNamara's aide memoire, *The Vietnam Situation*, was placed on President Johnson's desk. It began with these words:

“The situation is very disturbing. Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2-3 months, will lead to neutralisation at best and more likely to a communist-controlled state... We should watch the situation very carefully, running scared, hoping for the best, but preparing for more forceful moves if the situation does not show early signs of improvement.” (The New York Times, 13 June 1971)

It is this aide memoire which first outlined the new plan for extending US military operations in Vietnam in every direction, including the escalation of subversive operations against North Vietnam. The latter are to be designated as Plan 34-A and to serve as the main script for the war up until August 1964, when the war would enter a new stage. McNamara emphasised:

“Plans for Covert Action into North Vietnam were prepared as we had requested and were an excellent job. They present a wide variety of sabotage and psychological operations against North Vietnam from which I believe we should aim to select those that provide maximum pressure with minimum risk.”

McNamara's memorandum showed that when writing to each other US politicians have no use for the high-flown rhetoric to which they normally resort on television or on the stump, but call a spade a spade. At the same time (January 1964), General Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recommended a number of measures for escalating the war, including the following:

“Advise and support the Government of Vietnam [in Saigon] in its conduct of large-scale commando raids against critical targets in North Vietnam. Conduct aerial bombing of key North Vietnam targets, using US resources under Vietnamese cover, and with the Vietnamese openly assuming responsibility for the actions. Commit additional US forces, as necessary, in support of the combat action within South Vietnam. Commit US forces, as necessary, in direct actions against North Vietnam.”

Was all of this in line with President Johnson's own thinking? The answer comes from General Taylor's memorandum, which says:

“National Security Action Memorandum No 273 makes clear the resolve of the President to ensure victory over the... communist insurgency in South Vietnam. Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that the United States must be prepared to put aside many of the self-imposed restrictions which now limit our efforts, and to undertake bolder actions which may embody greater risks.”

What were these restrictions that the US sought to be rid of? They were these: not to carry the war beyond the boundaries of South Vietnam, “avoiding the direct use of US combat forces” and to limit US leadership to the action being taken. Furthermore, the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff contained 10 points on escalating the intervention, which in his aide memoire to the President on 16 March 1964, Defence Secretary McNamara reduced to four main ones:

- “1. open reconnaissance sorties over North Vietnam [invasion of another country's airspace];
2. aerial bombardments and Saigon regime commando raids ‘against critical targets in North Vietnam’;
3. aerial laying of mines in the main ports of North Vietnam;
4. steadily growing open military pressure by the Saigon and US troops.”

The analyst of the Pentagon papers in the New York Times wrote:

“President Johnson approved Mr McNamara's recommendations at a National Security Council Meeting on March 17, 1964, directing that planning ‘proceed energetically’.”

And so the Johnson Administration, as early as the spring of 1964, had already started to plan overt war against North Vietnam. It had further intensified the “special war”, that is, acts of sabotage on Vietnamese territory. In the White House this was called military “pressure”, although it meant direct military intervention in Vietnam. The Pentagon report said that the main aim of the USA was to safeguard the might, influence and prestige of the United States, which evidently was done by stifling a country's independence.

The period from the beginning of 1964 to the Gulf of Tonkin provocation in August of that year was a crucial one, when plans for subsequent stages of escalation of the US war in Vietnam were being drawn up. The reporters judged this to be a critical period which laid the foundations for a large-scale war. “An elaborate program of covert military operations against the state of North Vietnam”, as it is designated in the Pentagon papers, was launched on 1 February 1964, under the code name of Operation Plan 34-A.

Throughout 1964, operations under Plan 34-A covered everything, ranging from overflights of North Vietnam by U-2 spy planes and abduction of North-Vietnamese citizens to obtain intelligence data, to the dropping of groups of saboteurs, sea-borne commando raids on the coast for the purpose, the New York Times said (13 June 1971), of blowing up railway and highway bridges and shelling North-Vietnamese coastal installations by torpedo boats. These “destructive undertakings”, as they were described in a report to the President from Major General Victor H Krulak of the Marine Corps, were designed “to result in substantial destruction, economic loss and harassment”. The tempo and magnitude of the strikes were designed to rise in three phases through 1964 to “targets identified with North Vietnam's economic and industrial well-being”. These “covert operations” were directed on behalf of the President by McNamara through a special group under the Joint Chiefs of Staff designated as the Office of the Special Assistant for Counter-insurgency and Special Activities.

These subversive operations, the Pentagon report says, were coordinated with the US State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, including advance monthly schedules of the raids. This inter-departmental coordination was carried out by Assistant Secretary of State for Far East Affairs William Bundy and John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs. In Saigon, operations under Plan 34-A were controlled by General P Harkins.

An important element of this plan of exerting covert military pressure on North Vietnam was the so-called patrols by US warships in the Gulf of Tonkin, this part of the plan being designated by the code name of De Soto Patrols. These were mainly “psychological, as a show of force” but the destroyers collected “intelligence on North Vietnamese warning radars and coastal defences that would be useful to 34-A raiding parties or, in the event of a bombing campaign, to pilots”.

Although commentators on the Pentagon papers said the US Government had not planned “to use the ships as bait for North Vietnamese retaliation” and that “a deliberate provocation was not intended”, the course of operations in the Tonkin Straits belies this conclusion. The papers provide evidence that US intelligence circles and even the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt that the whole 34-A program had little chance of intimidating the North Vietnam and of breaking the Viet Cong's resistance in South Vietnam. Meanwhile, the White House had already considered the following stage in the escalation of the war—“a demand for more was stimulated and an expectation of more was aroused”. The USA was moving to overt armed intervention and escalation of war while keeping it from the public.

Walt Rostow, who had tremendous influence with President Johnson, assured him:

“A credible threat to bomb the industry Hanoi had so painstakingly constructed out of the ruins of the French Indo-china War would be enough to frighten the country's leaders into ordering the Viet Cong to halt their activities in the South.” (The New York Times, 13 June 1971)

Some of the men around President Johnson were coming to realise the hopelessness of supporting the puppet regime in South Vietnam, and of the US intervention in Vietnam's domestic affairs. One document said:

“The government of General Khanh [head of the Saigon government] was incapable of competing politically with the Communists.” (The Pentagon Papers, Bantam Books (1971))

Another document, an intelligence report, says:

“...the primary sources of communist strength in South Vietnam are indigenous, arising out of the revolutionary social aims of the Communists and their identification with the nationalist cause during the independence struggle against France in the nineteen-fifties.” (The Pentagon Papers, Bantam Books (1971))

In a telegram of 20 March 1964, to US Ambassador in Saigon, Henry Cabot Lodge, President Johnson dealt with some problems arising from the political back-up of the plans for war against North Vietnam. Having said that he shared General Khanh's opinion that strengthening the southern base was the most immediate and important task, Johnson went on:

“For this reason our planning for action against the North is on a contingency basis at present, and the immediate problem in this area is to develop the strongest possible military and political base for possible later action. There is additional international reason for avoiding immediate overt action in that we expect a showdown between the Chinese and Soviet communist parties soon and action against the North will be more practicable after than before a showdown. But if at any time you feel that more immediate action is urgent, I count on you to let me know specifically the reasons for such action, together with your recommendations for its size and shape.” (The Pentagon Papers, Bantam Books (1971))

President Johnson also flatly rejected de Gaulle's proposal for “neutralising South Vietnam”. Johnson wrote to Lodge:

“On dealing with de Gaulle, I continue to think it may be valuable for you to go to Paris after Bohlen has made his first try... It ought to be possible to explain in Saigon that your mission is precisely for the purpose of knocking down the idea of neutralization wherever it rears its ugly head, and on this point I think that nothing is more important than to stop neutralist talk wherever we can by whatever means we can.” (The New York Times, 13 June 1971)

Consequently, while continuing steadily to implement the policy mapped out by earlier Administrations for extending the war in Indo-china, the Johnson Administration firmly clung to Dulles's well-known idea that “neutrality was immoral”. Actually, the US rulers were contemptuous of, and were trampling on, every principle of morality and every rule of international law.

The Pentagon reports catalogued the build-up of the mentality of taking over, and escalating war. An illegal government had been set up in the South, and frustration at its failure and inability to control the Viet Cong resistance fed the escalation mentality. It was the mentality of the man who keeps losing at roulette and keeps doubling his stake hoping to win back his losses. Nothing other than outright victory was satisfactory. Anything else was considered to be a communist success and signalled the destruction of the American position in South Vietnam.

The New York Times, describing the stand of the Johnson Administration on the Pentagon's Vietnam gamble, arrived at the conclusion that in the summer of 1964 the President was on the one hand, “pushing his Administration to plan energetically for escalation while, on the other, continually hesitating”. But was this simply hesitation?

The answer comes from McNamara's following remark concerning ways of backing up these operations which he said were of a highly delicate character because “there would be the problem of marshalling the cause to justify such action”. Johnson's Administration was “calculating international and domestic political conditions before making any moves in public”.

The whole problem was to vindicate US acts and to deceive the US electorate on whose behalf thousands more lives were to be thrown into the furnace of war. Justification was the “domino theory”, the fall of all Southeast Asia to communism one country at a time, the threat of China, and the fear of loss of prestige and US world dominance.

Senior officials of the State Department and the Pentagon supplied the procedures—William Bundy, John McNaughton and William Sullivan. On 23 May 1964, they proposed a script for stepping up the war within 30 days, which was to culminate in the extensive bombing of the North. The main thing in the script was the measures to provide “moral and political” back-up for the war, including the idea of a joint resolution by both Houses of the US Congress, giving the President the go-ahead for the escalation. The script included these steps, among others:

- “1. Stall off any conference on Vietnam until D-day.
2. Presidential speech in general terms launching Joint Resolution.
3. Direct CINCPAC to take all prepositioning and logistic actions that can be taken “quietly” for the D-Day forces.
4. Get Khanh's agreement to start overt South Vietnamese air attacks against targets in the North.
5. Consult with Thailand and the Philippines to get permission for US deployments.
6. Khanh makes speech demanding that North Vietnam stop the war.
7. President informs US public (and thereby North Vietnam) that action may come, referring to Khanh's speech and declaring support for South Vietnam.
8. Khanh announces that all efforts have failed and that attacks are imminent.
9. Remove US dependents.
10. Launch first strikes.”

The Pentagon Papers quoted in the Boston Globe on 22 June 1971, showed that at the next stage of the escalation of the war the US militarists were preparing to go to extremes, including the use of nuclear weapons, in their efforts to break the Vietnamese people's resistance. The Boston Globe quoted the Pentagon papers dealing with the Honolulu Conference on 1-2 June 1964, under the chairmanship of Secretary of State Dean Rusk. It was attended by Secretary of Defence McNamara, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Taylor, CIA Director McCone, Commander of the US Armed Forces in the Pacific Admiral H Felt, and US Ambassador in Saigon Cabot Lodge.

They discussed aspects of the air war including all the details. The result was a “list of 94 targets”, ranging from bridges to industrial enterprises. The paper quoted this extract from the Pentagon report:

“Secretary McNamara then went on to say that the possibility of major ground action also led to a series of questions of having to use nuclear weapons at some point. Admiral Felt responded emphatically that there was no possible way to hold off the communists on the ground without the use of tactical nuclear weapons and that it was essential that the commanders be given the freedom to use these as had been assumed under various plans.”

One of the main questions at the Honolulu Conference was how to get Congress to pass a resolution giving the go-ahead for war. The resolution had already been drafted, apparently by William Bundy, together with the 23 May script. The Pentagon document dates this project 25 May 1964. Following the Honolulu Conference, the President apparently approved continued work for the Congressional resolution, because planning for it continued apace.

In November 1965, 18 months later, the magazine *Esquire* would be the first to inform US readers that a few weeks before the notorious Tonkin incident, the pretext for escalating the war in Vietnam, President Johnson was carrying in his pocket a draft resolution of Congress, waiting for the right moment.

A closed hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 20 September 1966, heard William Bundy himself admit that the State Department had prepared several draft resolutions, considering that “things might take a more drastic turn at any time” (J Goulden, *op cit*). The *New York Times* reported (13 June 1971):

“By June 10, there was ‘firm support’ from most of the foreign-policy-making machinery of the government for obtaining the resolution, although the account notes that at an inter-agency meeting that day five basic ‘disagreeable questions’ were identified for which the Administration would have to provide convincing answers to assure public support. These included:

1. Does this imply a blank check for the President to go to war in South East Asia?
2. What kinds of force could he employ under this authorization?
3. What change in the situation (if any) requires the resolution now?
4. Can't our objectives be attained by means other than US military force?
5. Does South-East Asia mean enough to US national interests?”

Nevertheless, in a memorandum for the second inter-departmental conference on June 12, William Bundy wrote that the Administration needed the immediate passage of the resolution by Congress as a continuing demonstration of US firmness and for complete flexibility in the hands of the executive bodies in the coming political months. While the USA did not expect “to move in the near future to military action against North Vietnam” events in South Vietnam or Laos could force it to review its stand.

In the summer of 1964, the electoral campaign in the USA was in full swing and this necessarily had an effect on Johnson's stand. The electoral battles called for the President's increasing attention and skill. A draft of one of his election speeches (delivered in New York on 12 August 1964) created the impression that the President was reasoning with restless military commanders:

“Some others are eager to enlarge the conflict. They call upon us to supply American boys to do the job that Asian boys should do. They ask us to take reckless action which might risk the lives of millions and engulf much of Asia and certainly threaten the peace of the entire world. Moreover, such action would offer no solution at all to the real problem of Vietnam.”

But this was in no sense a statesman who had finally opted for peace and justice, but a politician who was seeking to present himself as a dove in contrast to the Republican candidate Barry Goldwater, the hawk. It was just another lie behind which lurked a truth that was more unpalatable than that in Goldwater's most sinister calls for war. Goldwater himself following the publication of the secret documents, declared on 14 June 1971, that a month before the Tonkin incident he had been aware of Johnson's plans to extend the war in Vietnam. In a television interview, the Senator said:

“I did not know the exact details, but I knew that a scenario was written that would give an excuse for war.” (The New York Times 15 June 1971)

He added that during the election campaign he had known of the plans to bomb North Vietnam and to dispatch US troops for military operations in South Vietnam. He declared:

“See, I was being called trigger-happy, warmonger, bomb-happy, and all the time Johnson was saying he'd never send American boys. I knew damn well he would.”

For all the zigzagging in Johnson's official statements in the summer of 1964, the escalation machine had been switched on and was running. The Administration had gone so far in its planning of military measures that despite the delay in implementing the May script a number of steps provided by it were taken one by one in the course of June and July.

Almost at the same time, as the Washington script, Operation Plan 37-64 was made up in the Honolulu headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the US Armed Forces in the Pacific, Harry Felt.

“It tabulated how many planes and what bomb tonnages would be required for each phase of the strikes, listed the targets in North Vietnam with damage to be achieved, and programmed the necessary positioning of air forces for the raids.” (New York Times, June 13, 1971)

All that was now required to put the escalation machine into high gear was a decisive pretext, and from the standpoint of those who up on top were seeking the final justifications to prevent loss of face and from the standpoint of those who had primed the fighting machine, there was an extreme and urgent need for such a pretext. Both the “men in uniform” and civilian CIA agents who were in charge of the airborne units, aircraft carriers, destroyers and squadrons of planes, and who directed the secret operations simultaneously in three areas-South Vietnam, in the frontier areas of Vietnam and Laos, and in the demilitarised zone along the border of North Vietnam all had many opportunities for creating a suitable situation.

Tonkin Provocation

Some Pentagon Papers related to the Tonkin Gulf incident of August 1964. The Covert War revealed that the United States government had an elaborate program of covert military operations, sabotage, commando raids and destroyer patrols in the gulf against the state of North Vietnam for six months prior to the August incident. The aim was to force Hanoi to cease its support of guerrillas in the South through destruction and psychological harassment. The intelligence agencies and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had given this politicians' program little chance of success.

Public statements at the time of the Tonkin Gulf incident by Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara obscured United States involvement in previous attacks against North Vietnam. The planning of the bombing strategy and the government's political and psychological maneuvering was worked out in advance. A recommendation of a strategy conference the previous June was to prepare the American public for escalation of the war. That was the propaganda effect of the congressional and public discussions that ensued after the Tonkin event.

“Q. Mr. Secretary, can you give us the basic reasons for the Gulf of Tonkin patrol?
A. It is a routine patrol of the type we carry out in international waters all over the world.” (Secretary of Defence McNamara, news conference, 5 August 1964)

“While the purpose of the patrols was mainly psychological, as a show of force, the destroyers collected the kind of intelligence on North Vietnamese warning radars and coastal defences that would be useful to 34-A raiding parties or, in the event of a bombing campaign, to pilots.” (Pentagon Report)

On 23 July 1964, the 2,200 ton US destroyer Maddox sailed from the Japanese port of Yokosuka to take part in Operation De Soto, whose official purpose, the US Naval Command in the Pacific later said, was normal patrolling of the coastal waters of Vietnam. In a Taiwan port, the destroyer took on board a container with electronic equipment and more than 10 specialist operators. On 2 August 1964, carrying out its exercises in the area of Hon Me Island, part of North Vietnam, the destroyer radioed it was forced to open fire on torpedo boats chasing it. President Johnson ordered the Maddox to continue the operation, and dispatched the destroyer Turner Joy as reinforcement, also promising cover from the aircraft carrier Ticonderoga.

On the night of 30 July 1964, the United States and the illegal South Vietnam authorities sent their warships into the territorial waters of North Vietnam, simultaneously shelling, the islands of Hon Ngu and Hon Me. On 1 August 1964, four American T-28 fighter-bombers, flying in from the direction of Laos, bombed and fired rockets at the frontier post of Nam Can which is about 7 kilometres from the Vietnam-Laotian border, and which was clearly seen flying the North Vietnam national flag.

On 2 August 1964, seven American AD-6 and T-28 fighter-bombers, flying in from Laos, once again attacked Nam Can. At the same time, a section of the US Seventh Fleet, constantly patrolling along the Vietnam coast, repeatedly shelled coastal targets and populated localities in North Vietnam. On 2 August, a US destroyer entered the territorial waters of North Vietnam. 4 August 1964, D-day in the US plans, was fast approaching.

Early on 4 August—night time in the Gulf of Tonkin (according to Secretary of Defence McNamara this was a dark, moonless, unsettled night)—telegrams began to arrive in Washington reporting that the radars of the US destroyers had detected a group of moving targets which were identified as torpedo boats and against which the two destroyers had opened fire. By noon of 4 August, the Pentagon radio station in Washington was receiving a flood of contradictory messages from the Gulf of Tonkin, some reporting torpedo attacks against the destroyers, others casting doubt as to what had occurred, because it was impossible precisely to determine the situation in the darkness of the night and in view of the unreliable sonar evidence.

At noon on 4 August, President Johnson called a meeting of the National Security Council in Washington and there and then ordered the military to take counter-measures and issued instructions to contact the leaders of both parties in Congress for the purpose of coordinating the decisions required by the situation.

But by nightfall of 4 August, three days before the Congress decision, the Ticonderoga sent its bomb-laden planes up into the air. At midnight, US air force planes dropped their bomb-load over North Vietnam, within four hours carrying out 64 sorties over their targets.

While President Johnson was preparing the arguments for Congressmen and the public in favour of his “counter measures”, his military advisers had already launched Plan 37-64, worked out many weeks earlier, for the first airstrikes against the North and for alerting the ground forces and marine units.

At 13.25 hours on 4 August, two and a half hours after the radio report of the clash in the Gulf of Tonkin, and while Rusk, McNamara and McCone were lunching with Johnson, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff telephoned McNamara informing him of a decision to carry out strikes from aircraft carriers against torpedo-boat bases and oil depots in the North as “retaliation”.

The decisive step to extend military operations, the goal towards which the US military-industrial complex had been moving, was being taken. The US war against an independent sovereign state had already begun. The New York Times report (13 June 1971) of this was:

“At 4pm, McNamara learned from Admiral Sharp in a telephbne conversation that there was now confusion over whether an attack on the destroyers had actually taken place. The Secretary told Admiral Sharp that the reprisal order would remain in effect.”

The talk between McNamara and Sharp was held when the US war machine was going full speed ahead in unfolding the provocation planned by the White House. President Johnson did not wait. He went on television to tell the nation that in view of the “unprovoked” attack on the US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin he had decided to retaliate with air-raids against North Vietnam. He described his actions as a “limited and fitting response”. “We still seek no wider war,” he said. Meanwhile, bombs were being dropped on innocent civilians in Vietnamese towns and villages.

On the morning of 5 August, the telephone rang in the office of Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon. Morse apparently never revealed who it was, but he suggested that Morse do two things (Goulden, op cit):

- “1. Obtain the logbooks of the Maddox, which would detail its movements in the days immediately preceding the 2 August attack and put them definitely within North Vietnamese territorial waters of 12 miles;
2. Ascertain the Maddox's actual mission in the Gulf of Tonkin. The caller said unequivocally that the Maddox was not on a routine patrol.”

On 5 August, the Johnson Administration introduced its draft resolution for preliminary consideration by Congressional committees, with Senator Fulbright as the one to put it across. On 7 August, both Houses of Congress voted for the resolution authorising the President to take “all necessary measures... to repel any armed attack” against US forces, and “all necessary steps, including the use of armed force” to help any nation that requested aid “in defence of its freedom under the South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty” (SEATO). (Facts on File, 1964)

“To take all necessary measures” is double talk for starting a war. Deputy Secretary of State N Katzenbach later said that the resolution was a functional equivalent of the Constitutional obligation expressed in the provision of the Constitution with respect to declaring war. In short, this was sanction to wage unlimited war which, for Americans and their representatives in Congress, was to remain an “undeclared” war, so that the President's acts were beyond the control of Congress.

In the House of Representatives the resolution was passed unanimously, and in the Senate only two men voted against—E Gruening of Alaska, and W Morse of Oregon. Senator Gruening condemned the steps taken in escalating the war as being a reflexion of the one-sided aggressive US policy in South-East Asia, while Morse said the resolution was a historical mistake. It seems only 2 percent of US Senators have any moral principles.

The Pentagon Papers have a gap in this chronology. The New York Times did not contain any full or textual documents relating to the period between 25 July and 8 August, 1964.

The paper admitted the gap and turned to other sources, notably an analysis made by a Pentagon division in 1965, that is, at the height of the chauvinistic hullabaloo in Washington, when the authors of these reports were not at all trying to show the truth about what was going on. Accordingly, they reproduced the official version of the events in the Gulf of Tonkin in early August 1964, with all the omissions and contradictory statements, which were built into this version from the outset.

The New York Times had to admit that the Pentagon Papers lack back-up documents when dealing with the last few days of July 1964, that is, with the action which was then being carried forward under the direction of the Pentagon and the CIA, and whose true nature is apparently only revealed in the papers hidden away at the CIA.

On 6 August, 1964, as the Congressional committees were considering the draft resolution, Senators Morse and Gruening tried to throw doubt on, and draw attention to the contradictions in the Pentagon's "explanations", but Senator Fulbright cut them short, inducing the Congressmen to take an early decision. Subsequently, Fulbright was to publicly confess. At a hearing held by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the Tonkin incident in February 1968, he said that if he had had the good sense to demand a complete assessment he would never have made the mistake of approving the resolution.

The veil of lies, ambiguities and contradictory statements on the Tonkin incident was already stretched to breaking point under the first few questions put by Senator Morse at a hastily organised inquiry into the situation by Congressional committees on 6 August 1964. These questions bore on the actual assignment the Maddox was fulfilling, the extent to which the Pentagon was sure that the territorial waters of North Vietnam had not been violated, and the connexion between the Maddox's mission and the CIA's commando raids on North Vietnam then being carried out under Plan 34-A and behind a screen of South Vietnamese operations. Finally, his questions bore on the truth of the story about the "unprovoked" attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on US destroyers. Were the military sure that such an attack had actually taken place?

The Pentagon papers' analysts showed how the resolution sanctioning the "undeclared" war was imposed on Congress. McNamara and State Secretary Rusk came out in support of this resolution at the closed hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Relations Committee on 6 August. Meanwhile,

"Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon had learned that boats manned by South Vietnamese crews had attacked the two North Vietnamese islands on 30 July. Mr Morse alleged during the secret hearing on 6 August that Mr McNamara had known about the raids and that the destroyers had been associated with it."

Mr. McNamara replied:

“First, our Navy played absolutely no part in, was not associated with, was not aware of, any South Vietnamese actions, if there were any... The Maddox was operating in international waters, was carrying out a routine patrol of the type we carry out all over the world at all times.

I did not have knowledge at the time of the attack on the island. There is no connection between this patrol and any action of South Vietnam.” (New York Times 13 June 1971)

McNamara's story gave something of the gist of the official lie, which had paralysed the Congressmen, or at any rate had supplied them with the arguments in favour of escalation they had wanted to hear, and had enabled the Administration over a period of years to raise the stakes in the escalation with impunity. The material of additional inquiries, notably that carried out by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 1968, makes it possible to reproduce a part of the picture of the military-political provocation, and the untruth that went with it.

- Lie—The Maddox was carrying out a routine patrol. This exchange is recorded in the verbatim report of this sitting of the Senate Committee:

“FULBRIGHT: The Maddox was authorized in its missions, and I quote from the orders, “to stimulate Chicom-North-Vietnamese electronic reaction”. What does that language mean?

McNAMARA: It means that they turn on certain kind of equipment on board the Maddox which in turn leads the Chicom or the North Vietnamese to turn on the radar frequencies; that was clearly one of their objectives.

FULBRIGHT: That is what I meant. That is what I meant by electronic spy mission.” (New York Times 25 February 1968)

The Pentagon papers published by the New York Times on 13 June, 1971, also admit that patrolling was an element in the overt military pressure on North Vietnam, and that the destroyers collected intelligence information which “would be useful to 34-A raiding parties or, in the event of a bombing campaign, to pilots”. This admission is added truth that the provocative US actions against Vietnam in late July and early August were part of an overall plan.

- Lie—The Maddox was operating in international waters.

“FULBRIGHT: And the Maddox was given orders to penetrate the territorial waters of North Vietnam and stimulate their electronic networks assuming their territorial water was 12 miles.

McNAMARA: Absolutely not. The Maddox was specifically instructed to stay out, to go no closer than eight miles to the coastal area.

FULBRIGHT: I said assuming their territorial water of 12 miles.” (New York Times 25 February 1968)

- Lie—Our Navy played absolutely no part in... was not aware of any South Vietnamese action (the 34-A operations directed by the CIA). Here is an extract from a directive issued by Commander of the US Naval Forces in the Pacific, Admiral Sharp:

“US has stepped up assistance to RVN (Republic of Vietnam) including stationing of CVA TG (the task group including the carrier Ticonderoga) at the mouth of Gulf of Tonkin... Activity in 34-A operations has increased.”(Goulden, op cit).

On 10 July, Admiral Sharp's command authorized his fleet units involved in De Soto patrols to...

“contact COMUSMACV (Commander, United States Military Assistance, Vietnam) for any additional intelligence required for prevention of mutual interference with 34-A operations and such communications arrangements as may be desired.” (Goulden, op cit)

A message sent by Captain Herrick, commander of Operation De Soto, at 6.30am on 4 August said:

“Evaluation of info from various sources indicates that DRV considers patrol directly involved with 34-A ops.” (Goulden, op cit)

The verbatim report of the Senate Committee hearings records:

“FULBRIGHT: I quote from a cable to the Maddox: ‘The above patrol will:

- a. clearly demonstrate our determination to continue these operations;
- b. possibly draw NVN (North Vietnamese Navy) PGMS (patrol boats) to northward away from area of 34-A operations’.”

- Lie—We were fully confident that an unprovoked attack on American vessels had taken place. In its report in February 1968, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said that only a few hours before the President ordered the “retaliatory air strike” against North Vietnam, the commander of the US Forces, Pacific, continued to cable his ships to confirm absolutely that they were attacked, and to confirm the sinking of PT boats? The Maddox telegraphed back that it was not certain, and suggested an air reconnaissance. In his testimony, a member of the Maddox crew said:

“It seemed like he [sonar operator] was hollering all the time. I said to myself: Aw God, if there are that many torpedoes in the water the whole Seventh Fleet would be blown up by now. I had an idea what was happening. At 30 knots there is a big pie-wedge of dead space behind the ship, with so much noise in it—a rear roar—that an operator can't even keep his phones on it. Also when you are making sharp turns, the effect on the hydrophone is exactly what a torpedo sounds like when it is passing you. I noticed the sequence would never vary: we'd make a turn, and Dave would call ‘Torpedo’ and give a range. So we would turn again, and sure enough, up would come another call, ‘Torpedo’.” (Goulden, op cit)

Captain Herrick cabled:

“Maddox scored no known hits and never positively identified a boat as such.”

It is not at all surprising that even the censored publication of the Senate inquiry into the Tonkin incident is replete with contradictory evidence by those who were taking part in the US subversive operations against Vietnam in early August 1964. The more aware and critical sections of the public asked: surely, this is a faked incident, used as a provocation. The Pentagon Papers do not frankly answer this question, but the provocative design behind the simultaneous and combined operations on land, in the air and at sea cannot be denied either by critics or defenders of the action.

J Goulden, author of the book already cited several times, concludes that the Johnson Administration anticipated—perhaps even subconsciously desired—one set of facts on 4 August 1964, when a flash report from the Maddox said she was under attack.

“The Administration seized upon this report, clung to it despite subsequent cables from the Maddox saying the whole episode could have been a mistake, and proceeded to bomb a foreign country without Congressional authorization... The weight of the evidence presented in these pages is that the Administration acted hastily, upon incomplete and misleading information, and then refused to admit error.”

On 4 August, the Vietnames announced that they had been attacked by air, and that US warships had invaded their territorial waters on 30 July, 31 July and 2 August, and on 5 August they denied the allegation of the Pentagon that they had attacked two US warships in international waters. The New York Times notes (13 June 1971):

“The Pentagon study gives no indication that Mr Johnson informed the Congressional leaders of United States responsibility for and command of the covert 34-A raids on 30 July and 3 August. Nor does the history give any indication that Mr Johnson told the Congressional leaders of what the historian describes as “the broader purpose of the deployments” under Operation Plan 37-64...”

Summing up the August 1964 events, the analysts of the Pentagon Papers insist that at the time Johnson managed to stage three important acts from his scenario, which had been drawn up as early as 23 May 1964:

- “1. to deploy a large US air force in South-East Asia;
2. to secure Congressional approval for more extensive military operations, that is, escalation of the war;
3. to start large-scale bombing operations against the independent northern part of Vietnam.”

They add that “in the heat of the Tonkin clash, the Administration had also accomplished one of the major recommendations of the June strategy conference in Honolulu—preparing the American public for escalation.” That is what Johnson and his entourage thought in claiming that the new stage in the US war had been a victory. Very soon this victory boomeranged against Johnson himself, against his Administration and the whole of US foreign and domestic policy.

Air War on North Vietnam

On 14 June 1971, the New York Times revealed that at a White House strategy meeting in September 1964 the consensus was that the war had to be escalated, if the situation was to be saved, and the decision was reached to bomb North Vietnam.

Johnson, at the height of the presidential election contest, took a public position against enlarging the war. However, war mentality progressed with the concept of “provocative strategy”—provoking a response that would allow a retaliatory air attack. Alternative options were also eliminated. There could be no “extreme withdrawal” and no “fall back” positions, nor any tactics like a selective bombing campaign, which would lead to negotiations.

In late November a bombing strategy of “progressively more serious air strikes” was designed, yet the president was reassuring the press at a news conference that “speculating and taking positions” about expansion of the war were premature. Both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the intelligence agencies dissented from this decision, the former advocating a willingness to apply unlimited force, the latter pessimistically not giving the plan “very strong chances for breaking the will of Hanoi”. Reluctant to even hint at the existence of the plans as late as 3 January 1965, Secretary Rusk ruled out “either a US withdrawal or a major expansion of the war”. Two reprisal air strikes occurred on 8 and 11 February. The order to begin sustained bombing was given on 13 February.

“We have taken the actions that we think are best calculated to protect the national interest of this country, freedom in the world and humanity everywhere.” (Statement by President Johnson on 27 February 1967)

“Of the nearly 6 million tons of bombs used in Indo-china, nearly half have fallen during the last two years alone—a tonnage equal to the explosive force of more than 100 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs.” (Senator Edward M Kennedy The Nation 28 June 1971)

President Johnson decided to celebrate his 56th birthday at his ranch in Texas. Aside from serving two tons of beef to the guests, Johnson repeated his popular electoral decision to get the “Asian boys” not the “American boys” fighting:

“I have had advice to load our planes with bombs and to drop them on certain areas that I think would enlarge the war and escalate the war, and result in our committing a good many American boys to fighting a war that I think ought to be fought by the boys of Asia to help protect their own land.”

That was on 29 August 1964, at the height of the electoral campaign, when Johnson was trying hard to prove that he was the candidate epitomising the “forces of reason and restraint” in contrast to his rival, Barry Goldwater, who was clamouring for blanket bombings of North Vietnam.

What was going on behind the scenes? On 26 August, three days before the President's birthday party in Texas, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent Defence Secretary McNamara a memorandum, entitled, Recommended Courses of Action-South-East Asia. It stated that the air war against North Vietnam was necessary to "prevent a complete collapse of the US position in South-East Asia". It added that it did not agree...

"that we should be slow to get deeply involved until we have a better feel for the quality of our ally. The United States is already deeply involved. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that only significantly stronger military pressures on the DRV are likely to provide the relief and psychological boost necessary for attainment of the requisite governmental stability and viability [in Saigon]... We should therefore maintain our prompt readiness to execute a range of selected responses, tailored to the developing circumstances and reflecting the principles in the Gulf of Tonkin actions, that such counter-operations will result in clear military disadvantage to the DRV. These responses, therefore, must be greater than the provocation in degree, and not necessarily limited to response in kind against similar targets. Air strikes in response might be purely VNAF; VNAF with US escort to provide protection from possible employment of MIGs; VNAF with US escort support in the offensive as well as the defensive role; or entirely US. The precise combination should be determined by the effect we wish to produce and the assets available. Targets for attack by air or other forces may be selected from appropriate plans including the Target Study for North Vietnam consisting of 94 targets, recently forwarded to you by the Joint Chiefs of Staff." (New York Times 14 June 1971)

In short, the memorandum recommended to the President and the Secretary of Defence that bombings should be carried out and military operations against the North sharply extended as a means of preventing the collapse of the Saigon puppet regime. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations are also characteristic in another sense—they contain a direct recommendation once again to resort to the principles of the Tonkin provocation as a pretext for escalating the war in Indo-china.

Another important document was drawn up in that period on orders from President Johnson. It was called Plan of Action for South Vietnam and was authored by Assistant Secretary of Defence McNaughton. Here are some extracts from this long document, which is dated 3 September 1964:

"1. Analysis of the present situation. The situation in South Vietnam is deteriorating. Even before the government sank into confusion last week, the course of the war in South Vietnam had been downward, with Viet Cong incidents increasing in number and intensity and military actions becoming larger and more successful, and with less and less territory meaningfully under the control of the government [South Vietnam]. Successful ambushes had demonstrated an unwillingness of the population even in what were thought to be pacified areas to run the risk of informing on the Viet Cong. War weariness was apparent. The crisis of the end of August—especially since the competing forces have left the government largely faceless and have damaged the government's ability to manage the pacification program—promises to lead to

further and more rapid deterioration... the objective of the United States is to reverse the present downward trend...

2. A separate analysis is being made of a proposal—to enlarge significantly the US military role in the pacification program inside South Vietnam—eg, large numbers of US special forces, divisions of regular combat troops, US air, etc, to “interlard” with or to take over functions of geographical areas from the South Vietnamese Armed Forces...

3. Outside the borders of South Vietnam. There is a chance that the downward trend can be reversed—or a new situation created offering new opportunities, or at least a convincing demonstration... The course of action is made up of actions outside the borders of South Vietnam designed to put increasing pressure on North Vietnam but designed also both to create as little risk as possible of the kind of military action which would be difficult to justify to the American public and to preserve where possible the option to have no US military action at all...

ACTIONS. The actions, in addition to present continuing ‘extra-territorial actions’ (US U-2 recce of DRV, US jet recce of Laos, T-28 activity in Laos), would be by way of an orchestration of three classes of actions, all designed to meet these five desiderata:

1. from the US, GVN and hopefully allied points of view, they should be legitimate things to do under the circumstances,
2. they should cause apprehension, ideally in creasing apprehension, in the DRV,
3. they should be likely at some point to provoke a military DRV response,
4. the provoked response should be likely to provide good grounds for us to escalate if we wished,
5. the timing and crescendo should be under our control, with the scenario capable of being turned off at any time...”

“4. Actions of opportunity. While the above course of action is being pursued, we should watch for other DRV actions. Among such DRV actions might be the following:

- a. Downing of US recce or US rescue aircraft in Laos (likely by AA, unlikely by MIG).
- b. MIG action in Laos or South Vietnam (unlikely).
- c. Mining of Saigon Harbor (unlikely).
- d. VC attacks on South Vietnamese POL storage, RR bridge, etc. (dramatic incident required).
- e. VC attacks (e.g., by mortars) on, or takeover of, air fields on which US aircraft are de ployed (likely).
- f. Some barbaric act of terrorism which inflames US and world opinion (unlikely)...

6. Chances to resolve the situation. Throughout the scenario, we should be alert to chances to resolve the situation:

- a. To back the DRV down, so South Vietnam can be pacified.
- b. To evolve a tolerable settlement:
 - I. Explicit settlement (eg, via a bargaining-from-strength conference, etc).
 - II. Tacit settlement (eg, via piecemeal live-and-let-live Vietnamese ‘settlements’, a de facto ‘writing off’ of indefensible portions of SVN, etc).

c. If worst comes and South Vietnam disintegrates or their behavior becomes abominable, to 'disown' South Vietnam, hopefully leaving the image of a 'patient who died despite the extraordinary efforts of a good doctor'."

"7. Special considerations during next two months...

During the next two months, because of the lack of "rebuttal time" before election to justify particular actions which may be distorted to the US public, we must act with special care—signalling to the DRV that initiatives are being taken, to the GVN that we are behaving energetically despite the restraints of our political season, and to the US public that we are behaving with good purpose and restraint." (New York Times 14 June 1971)

So, the Pentagon invited the US President to consider several ways of staging provocations against the North, all of which could lead to a big war. The saving clause at the end left a loophole for putting off any decision on further escalation of the war until November or December 1964, that is, until the outcome of the Presidential election early in November. At the same time, the memorandum quite explicitly stressed the need "to provoke a military DRV response", to justify the planned escalation of the war for US and world opinion.

A memorandum which Assistant Secretary of State for Far-Eastern Affairs, William Bundy, sent to President Johnson on 8 September goes even further in dotting all the i's. It says:

"We should be prepared to respond on a tit for-tat basis against the DRV in the event of any attack on US units or any special DRV/VC action against SVN. The response for an attack on US units should be along the lines of the Gulf of Tonkin attacks, against specific and related targets. The response to special action against SVN should likewise be aimed at specific and comparable targets."

"The main further question is the extent to which we should add elements to the above actions that would tend deliberately to provoke a DRV reaction, and consequent retaliation by us. Example of actions to be considered would be running US naval patrols increasingly close to the North-Vietnamese coast and/or associating them with 34-A operations." (New York Times 14 June 1971)

A meeting at the White House on 7 September, chaired by President Johnson, was attended by Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defence McNamara, General Wheeler, the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CIA Director McCone, and US Ambassador to South Vietnam Taylor, and also Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, the author of the above-mentioned memorandum to the President. The official minutes of the meeting registered the decision to resume De Soto Patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin by US destroyers. It added:

“By early October, however, we may recommend such actions depending on GVN progress and communist reaction in the meantime, especially to US naval patrols.”
(New York Times 14 June 1971)

The Pentagon report drew the conclusion, on the strength of the discussions at the White House on 7 September, 1964, that in view of the weakness of the Khanh regime, the strategy of provocations in the form of an air war against North Vietnam was unacceptable.

There is an entry in the Pentagon Papers made by one of the participants in the 7 September meeting which says that the President put this question: “Can we really strengthen the GVN?” Elsewhere we find McNamara's answer. He urged that “the way be kept open for stronger actions even if the GVN did not improve”.

On 10 September, therefore, the President ordered a number of “interim” measures in National Security Action Memorandum 314, which included resumption of US naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin, and a build-up of 34-A commando operations with inclusion of South Vietnamese groups. The Pentagon report explained this as follows:

“It was believed that this step would be useful in establishing a climate of opinion more receptive to expanded [air] operations against North Vietnam when they became necessary.”

The President also ordered that the USA should be prepared to launch punitive operations—“reprisal air strikes like those during the Tonkin Gulf incident as appropriate against the DRV in the event of any attack on US units”.

Washington's tactics were clear—deliberate provocations, including commando raids, while presenting any self-defence as being attacks against US military units allegedly giving the US Government the right to take “retaliatory measures”.

Two days after Johnson's order (12 September) two US destroyers, the Morton and the Edwards, resumed their patrols of the Gulf of Tonkin, thereby provoking what the US press called the “third Tonkin incident”, which was, to be more exact, a fresh dangerous act of war.

On 4 October 1964, Johnson issued a secret order to resume commando raids on coastal installations in the DRV, each such operation being “approved in advance” by Deputy Secretary of Defence Cyrus R Vance for Secretary McNamara, Llewellyn A Thompson, Acting Deputy Under-secretary of State for Political Affairs, for Secretary Rusk, and McGeorge Bundy at the White House for the President.

At the same time, the US air operations in Laos were stepped up. “A Laotian cease-fire was not compatible with current perceptions of US interest”. The analysis in The New York Times brings out what the President feared in this respect.

“The Administration also believed that even the convening of a conference on Laos might create the impression in Saigon that Washington was going to seek a negotiated withdrawal from South Vietnam and set off a political collapse there and the emergence of a neutralist coalition regime that would ask the United States to leave.” (New York Times 14 June 1971)

Secret raids were being carried out against Laos by planes of the US Air Force and the Navy, under the code name of Yankee Team. The Pentagon Papers show that a decision was taken at the time to have Saigon troops, accompanied by US advisers, “also make ground forays into Laos up to a depth of 20 kilometres”.

On 6 October, the State Department cabled the US Embassy in Vientiane (with a copy to the Commander of the US Armed Forces in the Pacific), virtually ordering extensive air strikes against a part of the territory of Laos “as soon as possible”. This is evidence that the overt intervention in Laos, launched by the Nixon Administration in 1970, had its roots in 1964, when the Democrats were in office.

The USA was suffering one defeat after another in its military gamble in South Vietnam, and the Pentagon was working overtime to extend military operations to the neighbouring countries, including Laos. At the same time, US diplomacy was trying hard to involve as many of its allies in the gamble as possible. This was the outline of a dangerous scheme to fan the flames of war throughout the entire Indo-china Peninsula.

The powerful political campaign in defence of the Vietnamese people which swept across the world, and the numerous exposures of the US war forced the White House hastily to work out fresh propaganda measures in an effort to whitewash the policy of the Johnson Administration. One document by Assistant Secretary of State, William Bundy, is characteristic in this respect. It is dated 5 November, 1964:

“The President is clearly thinking in terms of maximum use of a Gulf of Tonkin rationale, either for an action that would show toughness and hold the line till we can decide the big issue, or as a basis for starting a clear course of action under the broad options.

2. Congress must be consulted before any major action, perhaps only by notification if we do a reprisal against another Bien Hoa, but preferably by careful talks with such key leaders as Mansfield, Dirksen, the Speaker, Albert, Halleck, Fulbright, Hickenlooper, Morgan, Mrs. Bolton, Russell, Saltonstall, Rivers, Vinson, Arends, Ford, etc. He probably should wait till his mind is moving clearly in one direction before such a consultation, which would point to some time next week. Query if it should be combined with other topics (budget?) to lessen the heat.

3. We probably do not need additional Congressional authority, even if we decide on very strong action. A session of this rump Congress might well be the scene of a messy Republican effort...

5. A Presidential statement with the rationale for action is high on any check list. An intervening fairly strong Presidential noise to prepare a climate for an action statement is probably indicated and would be important in any event to counter any SVN fears of a softening in our policy. We should decide the latter today too if possible...

7. Our international soundings appear to divide as follows:

a. We should probably consult with the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and possibly Thailand before we reach a decision. We would hope for firm moral support from the UK and for participation in at least token form from the others.

b. SEATO as a body should be consulted concurrently with stronger action. We should consult the Philippines a day or so before such action but not necessarily before we have made up our minds.

c. The NATO Council should be notified on the Cuban model, ie, concurrently, by a distinguished representative.

d. For negative reasons, France probably deserves VIP treatment also.

e. In the UN, we must be ready with an immediate affirmative presentation of our rationale to proceed concurrently either with a single reprisal action or with the initiation of a broader course of action.

f. World-wide, we should select reasonably friendly chiefs of state for special treatment seeking their sympathy and support, and should arm all our representatives with the rationale and defence of our action whether individual reprisal or broader.

8. USIA must be brought into the planning process not later than early next week, so that it is getting the right kind of materials ready for all our information media, on a contingency basis. The same true of CIA's outlets." (New York Times 14 June 1971)

The Pentagon and Washington politicians hankered for new provocations and, as one of their documents said, expected the new year to provide the opportunity for launching overt military operations against North Vietnam.

The projected air war against Vietnam was code-named Operation Rolling Thunder. The Pentagon Papers show that a memorandum from President Johnson's special assistant for national security, McGeorge Bundy, greatly influenced President Johnson's decision to carry out these aggressive operations. Returning from Saigon on the President's personal Boeing 707, Air Force One, Bundy drafted a letter to the President under the impression of the vigorous and large-scale action by the patriotic forces of South Vietnam. He wrote:

"The political values of reprisal require a continuous operation... Episodic responses geared on a one-for-one basis to 'spectacular' outrages would lack the persuasive force of sustained pressure." (New York Times 15 June 1971)

Even a Pentagon specialist said that Bundy's memorandum of 7 February 1965, was a "unique articulation of a rationale for the Rolling Thunder policy". In summary conclusions to his memorandum, Bundy wrote:

"Once such a policy is put in force we shall be able to speak in Vietnam on many topics and in many ways, with growing force and effectiveness."

These words of Bundy's are shot through with the nostalgia the US militarists have felt all along for Dulles's "positions of strength" policy. The swift strike by the patriotic forces against the US base at Pleiku on 7 February, when Bundy and McNaughton were in Saigon, appears to have rocked them.

On 8 February 1965, the US bomber force carried out another raid on North Vietnam. While issuing the order for this raid, the White House presented it to the public as a "separate retaliatory measure", actually, "the drastic US action, long on the military planners' drawing boards under the operational code name Flaming Dart, precipitated a rapidly moving sequence of events..." (New York Times 14 June 1971).

On 13 February, Johnson cabled Ambassador Taylor his decision to carry out Operation Rolling Thunder. His message said:

"Our current expectation is that these attacks might come about once or twice a week and involve two or three targets on each day of operation."

In that period, the US State Department cabled London and eight US Embassies in the Far East instructing them to "inform head of government or state (as appropriate) of above in strictest confidence and report reactions".

The President ordered the first of the approved large raids to be staged on 20 February. But, says the New York Times, five hours after the State Department transmitted this order to the men responsible in Saigon, another coup was staged against General Khanh, and the situation became more complicated. Ambassador Taylor, who was delighted at President Johnson's order to start air operations, was forced to request permission to cancel the air raids set for 20 February. Somehow the Americans managed to calm down the squabbling puppets.

Operation Rolling Thunder, repeatedly put off, was started on 2 March, 1965, when dozens of US jet planes struck at several targets in the North. On 9 March, the White House took another monstrous decision. President Johnson gave the US Air Force permission to use napalm to destroy non-military targets—villages and towns—in North Vietnam. The heaviest bombings in the air war so far were carried out on 14 and 15 March. The Pentagon Papers say that over 100 US planes took part. Subsequently, the raids were to be extended, using heavy B-52 bombers. Johnson and McNamara personally selected the targets for these bombings.

Ambassador Taylor demanded that the White House should draw up a more dynamic time table for these strikes, a program for steadily extending the action to the North. He cabled the President as follows:

"It appears to me evident that to date DRV leaders believe air strikes at present levels on their territory are meaningless and that we are more susceptible to international pressure for negotiations than they are." (New York Times 15 June 1971)

And so, the massive bombings of the North were started on 2 March 1965. The Johnson Administration expected that the systematic air attacks on DRV territory would break the Vietnamese people's will to resist the US war. An important aspect of this operation was the hoped-for psychological effect on the puppet army of South Vietnam, its generals above all for the Americans realised that they were unable to withstand the independence movement in the country. The squabbles in Saigon are well illustrated by one document in the Pentagon Papers. It is a radiogram sent from Saigon to the US State Department on 24 December, 1964 about a meeting Ambassador Taylor and his Deputy, Alexis Johnson, had with those who now constitute South Vietnam's rulers (Generals Nguyen Cao Ky, Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Chanh Thi). This verbatim report is here quoted in part.

“TAYLOR: Do all of you understand English? (Vietnamese officers indicated they did, although the understanding of General Thi was known to be weak.) I told you all clearly at General Westmoreland's dinner we Americans were tired of coups.

Apparently I wasted my words. Maybe this is because something is wrong with my French because you evidently didn't understand. I made it clear that all the military plans which I know you would like to carry out are dependent on governmental stability. Now you have made a real mess. We cannot carry you for ever if you do things like this. Who speaks for this group: Do you have a spokesman?

GENERAL KY: I am not the spokesman for the group but I do speak English. I will explain why the Armed Forces took this action last night. We understand English very well. We are aware of our responsibilities... We know you want stability, but you cannot have stability until you have unity... But still there are rumors of coups and doubts among groups. We think these rumors come from the HNC, not as an organisation but from some of its members. Both military and civilian leaders regard the presence of these people in the HNC as divisive of the Armed Forces due to their influence. Recently the Prime Minister showed us a letter he had received from the Chairman of the HNC. This letter told the Prime Minister to beware of the military, and said that maybe the military would want to come back to power. Also the HNC illegally sought to block the retirement of the generals that the Armed Forces Council unanimously recommended be retired in order to improve unity in the Armed Forces.

GENERAL THIEU: The HNC cannot be bosses because of the Constitution. Its members must prove that they want to fight.

GENERAL KY. It looks as though the HNC does not want unity. It does not want to fight the Communists. It has been rumored that our action of last night was an intrigue of Khanh against Minh, who must be retired. Why do we seek to retire these generals? Because they had their chance and did badly... Yesterday we met, twenty of us, from 14.30 to 20.30. We reached agreement that we must take some action. We decided to arrest the bad members of the HNC, bad politicians, bad student leaders, and the leaders of the Committee of National Salvation, which is a communist organization...

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: ...Now I would like to talk to you about the consequences of what you have done... Who commands the Armed Forces? General Khanh?

GENERAL THIEU: Yes, sir...

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: You have destroyed the Charter. The Chief of State will still have to prepare for elections. Nobody believes that the Chief of State has either the power or the ability to do this without the HNC or some other advisory body. If I were the Prime Minister, I would simply overlook the destruction of the HNC. But we are preserving the HNC itself. You need a legislative branch and you need this particular step in the formation of a government with National Assembly...

GENERAL THIEU: After all, we did not arrest all the members of the HNC. Of nine members we detained only five. These people are not under arrest. They are simply under controlled residence...

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: Our problem now, gentlemen, is to organise our work for the rest of the day. For one thing, the government will have to issue a communique.

GENERAL THIEU: We will still have a press conference this afternoon but only to say why we acted as we did...

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: ...You people have broken a lot of dishes and now we have to see how we can straighten out this mess.” (New York Times 14 June 1971)

This conversation shows that the military rulers of Saigon were taken severely to task, but the Pentagon Papers admit the organisation and courage of the people of Vietnam, who faced the massive raids by US bombers. Almost every part of Vietnam was bombed—towns, ports, ships carrying cargoes of food, ships at their moorings, fishing junks, factories and workshops. The Pentagon report says that the bombings appear to have merely stiffened the determination of the Vietnamese. The US was unable to break their spirit and courage.

Escalation Of Military Action

On 15 June 1971, the third set of New York Times articles expressed the decision of 1 April 1965, recognizing that the bombing strategy was not going to work, to launch a ground war using American troops. President Johnson ordered this decision to be kept secret. Later increases in military support forces, initially 18-20,000 men, were not to be publicized and the “appearance of sudden changes in policy” was to be minimized.

“Q. Mr President, General Taylor said yesterday he would be bringing you some definitive proposals [on Vietnam] today. Do you envision anything very dramatic in those proposals?

A. ...I know of no far-reaching strategy that is being suggested or promulgated...”
(President Johnson's news conference, 1 April 1965)

“The President approved an 18-20,000 man increase in US military support forces and approved the change of mission for all Marine Battalions to permit their more active use...” (National Security Action Memorandum 828, 6 April 1965)

General William C Westmoreland and others advocated a tough stand. On 17 July, “swiftly and in an atmosphere of crisis”, President Johnson approved the deployment of 200,000 troops, as requested by General Westmoreland. Warnings of failure and recommendations against committing ground forces were issued against these decisions. Under Secretary of State, George W Ball, “proposed that the United States ‘cut its losses’ and withdraw from South Vietnam”. Director of Central Intelligence, John A McCone, also warned against committing ground troops and becoming mired in jungle combat. President Johnson publicly took a posture of compromise, but the offered conditions for peace were “more akin to a ‘cease and desist’ order”, which meant surrender to the North Vietnamese.

Norman Cousins, a US publisher, in an article in Look magazine on 29 July 1969 told this story. In early October 1966, when President Johnson was paying an official visit to the UN Secretary General at the UN Headquarters in New York, U Thant recalled an episode which had occurred in the autumn of 1964. At the time, U Thant called on President Johnson at the White House and accepted his assurances that “the United States had no desire to extend the war or to bring about the destruction of North Vietnam”, and that President Johnson desired “to begin meaningful negotiations as quickly as possible”. Three weeks later, U Thant received a reply to his message to President Ho Chi Minh expressing a positive attitude to the proposal for negotiations. U Thant at once notified the then US Ambassador to the UN, Adlai Stevenson.

He had to wait for Washington's reply for over four months. Finally, in late January 1965, Stevenson informed U Thant that “the State Department was reluctant to enter into negotiations at that time, because it feared the talks might result in the collapse of the South Vietnamese Government”. A few days later, in early February 1965, the USA made fresh air strikes against the North, and these soon became systematic.

Having heard U Thant's account, President Johnson expressed surprise. He turned to Rusk and asked him whether he knew anything about this. Rusk replied that Stevenson had not been authorised to reject the negotiations, but he did not say whether Stevenson had been authorised to accept them. Nor did he say why the US State Department had failed to make a positive response to the UN initiative regarding negotiations.

What were the motives behind these clumsy moves by US diplomacy, which made the White House incumbent look like a man who did not know what was going on? The Pentagon Papers explain it. At the time, US policy makers were fully engrossed with their plans to escalate the war. The spring of 1965 was to be the starting point of a large-scale ground war in Vietnam, with the involvement of regular US military units. At the time, the Pentagon report says, Rusk's lack of interest in negotiations with Hanoi fully accorded with the views held by the President's chief aides, who believed that for the time being the way to negotiations was closed. Why? The answer is also provided by the Pentagon papers.

The South Vietnam Government was falling apart. The Pentagon strategists held that so long as US military pressure on the North failed to tilt the balance in favour of the USA, it was futile to talk of negotiation. That is exactly what they wrote for their own circle, while telling the public something quite different. They insisted that the government of North Vietnam was allegedly taking an intractable attitude.

By then, the Pentagon report says, President Johnson had received from his military leaders a series of recommendations which boiled down to the idea that it was hardly possible for the situation inside South Vietnam to be bottomed out...

“without extreme measures against the DRV and/or without deployment of large numbers of US (and other) combat troops inside SVN”. (New York Times 15 June 1971)

The South Vietnam puppet army was falling apart. The bombings of North Vietnam were failing to damage the morale of the Vietnamese.

On his desk, President Johnson had reports from the US generals in South Vietnam, repeating their demands for committing regular US Army units. Simultaneously with the start of regular air raids on the North, that is, in early March 1965, says the Pentagon report, the US leadership took the crucial decision:

“To put the two Marine battalions already in South Vietnam on the offensive. The 3,500 marines had landed at Danang on March 8—bringing the total United States force in South Vietnam to 27,000”. (New York Times 15 June 1971)

These measures were being presented as “restricted” and as designed to ensure the “static defence of the Danang airfield”, thereby “blurring the shift from defensive to offensive action on the ground during the spring and summer of 1965”.

The fact is that a day before the marines landed at Danang, State Secretary Rusk insisted on television that the task was exclusively to ensure the security of the air base and not to destroy the Viet Cong. Later on this hypocritical reference by the aggressor to the need to assure the security of US military personnel was repeatedly used by the architects of escalation for more and more arbitrary military acts in Vietnam, and intervention in Cambodia and Laos.

The Pentagon secret report speaks of a marathon campaign “to inform the public” when “misinform” would have been the right word. Secretary of State Rusk mounted this campaign at the end of February and in early March 1965. The US Administration was preparing a propaganda smoke screen for the imminent decisions on extensive ground operations involving more and more US Army units.

On March 26, 1965, General Westmoreland, the US Commander in Saigon, completed his voluminous report on the situation in South Vietnam, which was submitted to the White House. It contained a final formulation of the conclusion in favour of carrying on an extensive ground war in South Vietnam with the involvement of US and other SEATO forces. Westmoreland demanded reinforcements amounting to two US divisions. Together with the US forces already in South Vietnam the interventionist army was to be increased to 70,000 men.

The extensive use of US forces in South Vietnam was finally decided upon at a White House conference on 1 and 2 April 1965. The main meaning of President Johnson's decision was that henceforth US troops were to take part in offensive military operations. This meant a sharp extension of the US war in Vietnam. National Security Action Memorandum No 328, drawn up on 6 April in pursuance of the President's directives, said:

- “5. The President approved an 18-20,000 man increase in US military support forces to fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel.
 6. The President approved the deployment of two additional Marine Battalions and one Marine Air Squadron and associated headquarters and support elements.
 7. The President approved a change of mission for all Marine Battalions deployed to Vietnam to permit their more active use under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defence in consultation with the Secretary of State.”
- (New York Times 15 June 1971)

Meanwhile, President Johnson said on the eve of these decisions in reply to questions from pressmen hinting at “new dramatic developments” in the war:

“I know of no far-reaching strategy that is being suggested or promulgated.”

The Pentagon report admitted that “the change in ground rules... posed serious public-information and stage-managing problems for the President”. Although the decision on the participation of US ground forces in offensive counter-insurgency operations was a serious and far-reaching change of policy, President Johnson took great care that this step was not widely publicised.

The Pentagon report also stressed that the problem of escalating the ground war pushed into the background all the other Vietnam problems then under consideration. This produced something like a mutual guarantee arrangement between the accomplices in the fresh military venture. They ceased heeding the voice of reason and the warning notes sounded, in particular, in statements by the then Deputy Secretary of State, George Ball, and reports from US Ambassador in Saigon, General Taylor. The organisers of the escalation appeared to be egging each other on in mounting the stages of the war.

A meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff held in Honolulu from 10 to 12 April 1965, recommended a redeployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade in the Bienhoa-Vungtau area, a decision so hastily taken that, if we are to believe the Pentagon papers, it astounded even Ambassador Taylor. But Taylor received a cablegram from McNaughton which said:

“Highest authority [the President] believes the situation in South Vietnam has been deteriorating and that, in addition to actions against the North, something new must be added in the South to achieve victory.”

It went on to list seven proposed measures, including some which provided for the involvement of air force and civilian personnel for conducting the air war and redeploying the 173rd Airborne Brigade in the Bienhoa-Vungtau area, where according to General Westmoreland's plans it was to act “as a security force for our installations and also to participate in counter-insurgency combat operations”.

Of course, Taylor was not at all worried about the fact that the war was being extended, but he was irritated at not having been informed in advance of the White House decision. Taylor's reply to McNaughton reveals a great deal about the humanity of these people:

“Mac, can't we be better protected from our friends? I know that everyone wants to help, but there's such a thing as killing with kindness.” (New York Times 15 June 1971)

One analyst of the Pentagon papers says:

“A high-level meeting began in Honolulu on April 20 to ‘sanctify’ and “structure” an expanded enclave strategy.”

This meeting was attended by Secretary of Defence McNamara, Assistant Secretary of State for Far-Eastern Affairs, William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of Defence, McNaughton, Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, General Wheeler, and General Westmoreland. This meeting marked the final step that was at once followed by resolute measures, which Westmoreland for his part approved, says the report.

Taylor was not opposed to the US build-up per se, but rather was concerned to move slowly with combat troop deployments.

A record of the April 20 meeting, taken by McNaughton, arrived at the following conclusion:

“The current lull in Viet Cong activity was merely the quiet before a storm. The victory strategy was to break the will of the DRV/VC by denying them victory. To accomplish the ‘victory strategy’ described above, the conferees agreed that US ground forces should be increased from 4 to 13 maneuver battalions and to 82,000 men.” (New York Times 14 June 1971)

But while the US strategists were mulling things over, the South Vietnam insurgents took vigorous combat action which had a sobering effect on those who were going uninvited into war-torn Vietnam. On May 11, the Pentagon papers say:

“When the Viet Cong attacked Songbe, the capital of Phuoclog Province, using more than a regiment of troops, the storm broke in earnest. The enemy overran the town and the American advisers' compound, causing heavy casualties. After holding the town for a day, the Viet Cong withdrew. Later in May, in Quangngai Province in the northern part of South Vietnam, a battalion of government troops—the Army of the Republic of Vietnam—was ambushed and overrun near Bagia, west of Quangngai. Reinforcements were also ambushed. The battle dragged on for several days and ended in total defeat for the ARVN. Two battalions were completely decimated.”

By mid-June 1965, the report says, “the Viet Cong offensive was in full stride”. They...

“...systematically forced the GVN to yield what little control it still exercised in rural areas outside the Mekong Delta. On June 7, after the attack on Bagia, General Westmoreland sent a long message on the military situation and his needs to the Pacific Commander for relay to the Joint Chiefs.

‘In pressing their campaign’, the general said, ‘the Viet Cong are capable of mounting regimental-size operation in all four ARVN corps areas, and at least battalion-sized attack in virtually all provinces... ARVN forces on the other hand are already experiencing difficulty in coping with this increased VC capability. Desertion rates are inordinately high. Battle losses have been higher than expected. In fact, four ARVN battalions have been rendered ineffective by VC action in the I and II Corps zones... Thus, the GVN/VC force ratios upon which we based our estimate of the situation in March have taken an adverse trend. You will recall that I recommended the deployment

of a US division in II Corps to cover the period of the RVNAF build-up and to weight the force ratios in that important area. We assumed at that time that the ARVN battalions would be brought to full strength by now and that the force build-up would proceed on schedule. Neither of these assumptions have materialized... In order to cope with the situation outlined above, I see no course of action open to us except to reinforce our efforts in SVN with additional US or third country forces as rapidly as is practical during the critical weeks ahead'."

New York Times 15 June 1971

General Westmoreland asked President Johnson to increase the total numerical strength of the US forces in Vietnam to 44 battalions, or 200,000 men. This demand marked a new stage in the escalation, implying not merely an involvement of regular US Army units in ground operations in Vietnam, but the start of a big land war in Asia with the use of strategic forces of the US Army.

According to the Pentagon report, President Johnson complied with Westmoreland's demand swiftly and in an atmosphere of crisis. Again, as the report says, he concealed his decision from the public. The doubts which some US political leaders expressed were essentially ignored because the man in the White House was prepared to hear only opinion which endorsed his idea of a victorious war. The Pentagon report stresses that "there is no question that the key figure in the early 1965 build-up was the President". No wonder that President Johnson now (in June 1965) lent an ear to General Westmoreland's opinion concerning the switch to a general ground war.

Meanwhile, not all was going smoothly with Operation Deception. In the spring of 1965, US opinion was agitated by reports that the Administration had not told the people about a decision taken in March 1965 to send the US marines into action. The report says:

"The Commandant of the Marine Corps raised the tempo of speculation by saying to the press during an inspection trip to Vietnam in April that the marines were not in Vietnam to 'sit on their dittyboxes'—and they were there to "kill Viet Cong'."

The study asserts:

"The long official silence between the sanction for US offensive operations contained in NSAM 328 and the final approval of the conditions under which US troops could be committed was not without cost. The President had admonished each of the NSC members not to allow release of provisions of the NSAM, but the unduly long interregnum inevitably led to leaks."

In addition, the marines had 200 casualties, including 18 killed, as they went about tidying up their newly assigned area in April and May. World opinion was outraged by the statement issued on 8 June, by Robert McCloskey, Department of State Press officer, that US troops would give Vietnamese units combat support whenever necessary. Washington's secret machinations were coming to light.

“The White House was hoisted by its own petard. In an attempt to quell the outcry, a statement was issued on the 9th of June which, because of its ambiguity, only served to exacerbate the situation and to widen what was being described as ‘the credibility gap’.”

The White House statement said:

“There has been no change in the mission of United States ground combat units in Vietnam in recent days or weeks. The President has issued no order of any kind in this regard to General Westmoreland recently or at any other time. The primary mission of these troops is to secure and safeguard important military installations like the air base at Danang. They have the associated mission of... patrolling and securing actions in and near the areas thus safeguarded.”

Consequently, US policy leaders were repeating the same false version Secretary of State Rusk had used as a cover in March of that year. While concealing the truth about the decision taken three months earlier, they were preparing directives in pursuance of this very decision, new directives concerning a large-scale land war. Although the term “credibility gap” was becoming a part of the US political lexicon, Americans were as yet unaware of the real scale of the fraud.

On 2 July 1971, the revelations in the New York Times were that the mid-1965 to late 1966 period saw a rapid expansion of American forces, jumping from 175,000 men in June 1965 to 542,000 in June 1966. The requests for troops and the approvals of all but the last by President Johnson were kept secret from the US electorate. The build-up was based on a “colossal misjudgment” about the effect of the bombings on both the North Vietnam military capabilities and morale. The American military commanders were confident of victory, General Westmoreland pinning his expectations on “search-and-destroy strategy”, taking “the war to the enemy, denying him freedom of movement anywhere in the country...” A program of expanding the bombing, targeting oil tanks, was urged by the Joint Chiefs and, against a negative recommendation of the CIA, approved by President Johnson on June 22, 1966. However, civilian leaders, including Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, began to reveal doubts as early as fall 1966 about both the effectiveness of the bombings and the ground war. By summer's end, the enterprise had failed in its ultimate purposes. Though the major oil storage capacity of North Vietnam had been destroyed, the bombing had not persuaded Hanoi to negotiate, nor had it limited Hanoi's ability to infiltrate men and supplies to the south.

On 4 May, 1965, the President asked the Congress for a \$700-million supplemental appropriation “to meet mounting military requirements in Vietnam”. In a message he said:

“Nor can I guarantee this will be the last request. If our need expands I will turn again to the Congress. For we will do whatever must be done to insure the safety of South Vietnam from war.”

On 26 June, the White House gave General Westmoreland new powers for extensive combat operations by US troops on the territory of South Vietnam since this was “necessary to strengthen the relative position to GVN forces”. On 28 July, Johnson held a press conference at which he issued a statement concerning the growing numerical strength of the US forces in Vietnam.

“I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting war. He has told me. We will meet his needs. I have today ordered to Vietnam the Airmobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested.” (New York Times 15 June 1971)

It was no longer possible to keep secret the scale on which US troops were being sent to Vietnam, but the Administration continued to use the same cover. At the same press conference on 28 July, President Johnson was asked whether the fact that he was sending additional forces to Vietnam implied any “change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard installations and to act as emergency back-up”. His reply was short:

“It does not imply any change in policy whatever.”

The New York Times reporters on the Pentagon Papers thought this actually meant the mid-June decision to assign 44 battalions for combat operations in South Vietnam was seen as something of a turning point signifying involvement in a land war in Asia...

“The acceptance of the search-and-destroy strategy... left the US commitment to Vietnam open-ended. The implications in terms of manpower and money are inescapable.”

With the 44 battalions, the US troops in Vietnam now totalled 184,000. General Westmoreland reported from Saigon that if the USA wished to pre-empt the enemy initiative, supplemental forces would be required in the future as well. This was a straightforward demand for the smooth flow of cannon fodder. In November 1965, Westmoreland asked for another 154,000 men. On 16 December, he demanded that the numerical strength of his troops be raised to 443,000 men (New York Times 2 July 1971). Here are the dry statistical figures by the end of 1965, the strength of US forces in South Vietnam reached 200,000 officers and men. In October 1967, the figure had gone up to more than 525,000.

In early 1966, the dean of US columnists, Walter Lippmann, was saying that the USA had made an “historical blunder” by becoming involved in a big land war in Asia, and recalled the warning issued by General McArthur, Commander of the US forces in the

Far East during the Second World War and the Korean War, that any President that would send US troops to wage a land war in Asia should “have his brain examined” (Newsweek 14 March 1966).

On 3 July 1971, the New York Times revealed that the schism in the Johnson administration with regard to the conduct of the war deepened in the October 1966 to May 1967 period. The study identified three groups:

- “1. the ‘disillusioned doves’,
2. the McNamara group, which tried to set limits on the war and then reduce it,
3. the military group, urging the widening of the war.”

Early in this period, McNamara, having recognized the failure of United States policy to produce both the necessary reforms and morale in South Vietnam and the military psychological reversals to North Vietnam, recommended cutting back the bombing and seeking a political settlement. In May 1967, he advocated that the United States stop trying to guarantee a noncommunist South Vietnam and be willing to accept a coalition government to include the Viet Cong. He wrote:

- “1. Our commitment is only to see that the people of South Vietnam are permitted to determine their own future.
2. This commitment ceases if the country ceases to help itself.”

When General Westmoreland requested an additional 200,000 troops, President Johnson resisted, authorizing a 55,000 man increase, drawing the line at mobilization of reserve forces and reflecting on the concomitant increase in North Vietnam's forces. Johnson did side with the military in escalating the bombing. A proposal to reduce bombing did not re-emerge until March 1968, several days after Secretary McNamara left office, opening the way toward the May negotiations in Paris.

General Westmoreland continued to raise the stakes. In February 1968, he declared that, to win, the White House would have to send him another 200,000 men over and above the 525,000-strong army he already had at his disposal.

On 12 February, former Vice-President Nixon told a Republican Party caucus that the USA must win at any cost. At the same time, the 1971 newspapers show that, as early as 1967, Defence Secretary McNamara was disappointed with the way the war was running and had secretly informed President Johnson about his doubts that victory could be gained through escalation. These documents also show that “the President adopted a course that differed markedly from the strategy of de-escalation that Secretary McNamara had urged on him”.

Very soon Clark M Clifford took over as Secretary of Defence, but official Washington continued to conceal from the people the true picture of the war crimes, which were revealed only in part following the exposure of the bloody massacre of civilians at the

Vietnamese village of My Lie. The war continued to escalate just as the propaganda machine went on churning out its lies.

On 4 July 1971, the reports turned to the Tet offensive which occurred in February 1968. The turmoil at the front—for this North Vietnam offensive took the White House and Joint Chiefs by surprise (though this was denied)—was matched by the turmoil of the debate in February and March among advisers and among the public. According to the study, the president himself was severely shocked and disappointed because he had discounted negative analyses and attended to optimistic reports. The military's renewed requests for more troops to meet the offensive were heavily resisted by civilian advisers—only a 10,500-man contingent was authorized.

A review of United States policy, led by Clark M Clifford, secretary of defence-designate, concluded that sizable troop increases would not alter the course of the war. The group's recommendation was a compromise. The CIA thought a bombing halt could result in Hanoi's offer to negotiate.

In his speech to the American people on 31 March 1968, President Johnson gave evidence that he had reversed the decisions to send 30,000 additional troops and to continue the bombing. He also announced he would not be a candidate for his party's nomination for president. The president's new strategy signaled a turn in policy on the road to peace. Two considerations had fueled the decision:

- “1. additional troops "would not make a military victory any more likely,
2. a deeply felt conviction of the need to restore unity to the American nation.”

One thing was lacking—victory. The victory that, according to the Pentagon report, General Westmoreland had promised to win “before the end of 1967”. The victory for whose sake the Republican Nixon had urged as early as 16 April, 1954, the risk of sending in the US armed forces. For the 525,000 American soldiers, sent to Vietnam by the Democrat Johnson, the venture did not bring any laurels but the ignominy of murder. For tens of thousands of American families, it did not mean the fanfare of victory but the strains of funeral marches.

The North Vietnamese knew what the rapid escalation in ground forces meant. They issued a statement on 16 June, 1966, saying the military reinforcements did not show strength, but that the “US imperialists are inextricably bogged down in South Vietnam”.

"Pauses" In The Bombings

Important propaganda manoeuvring in backing up the US war in Vietnam were the “pauses” in the bombings of the North from 1965 to 1968, which went hand in hand with numerous calls for peace, statements about “Hanoi's intransigence”, etc. The calls for peace understood not a negotiated peace, but peace on US terms and therefore meant surrender! The Pentagon Papers gave an idea of what lay behind these “pauses”, and how they were connected with the propaganda campaigns.

The first “pause” was called on 12 May, 1965. It may be called a “pause” only in relative terms, because sporadic raids on the North continued, and the bombings of the independent parts of South Vietnam were even intensified. Nevertheless, there was much noise over the “suspension” of the bombings of North Vietnam, which continued until 18 May when the USA resumed its massive raids on the North. State Department Press Officer Robert McCloskey said the official reason was the absence of any response on the part of North Vietnam—again meaning they did not offer to surrender. From then on, Washington's presentation of such demands became a component part of the propaganda campaigns over the bombing “pauses”.

Washington propaganda made the greatest to-do over the second and longest (37-day) “pause”—from 24 December, 1965 to 31 January, 1966. This “pause” was caused by the need somehow to pacify world and US opinion, angrily protesting against the continued war. It was during this “pause”, on 7 January, 1966, that the US State Department issued its “fourteen points” which subsequently became the basis for the Johnson Administration's official program for imposing on the people of Vietnam its own solution of the Vietnam problem. It was in this period that prominent US leaders toured a number of capitals actively proclaiming Washington's “peaceableness”. Then, on 31 January, 1966, the “pause” was suddenly broken, despite countless demands at home and in the allied countries that it be prolonged.

The world was swept by a tide of indignation over the resumption of the bombings of the North. In late January, President Ho Chi Minh sent the heads of state and governments of many countries of the world a message stating that if the US Government really wanted a peaceful settlement it must recognise the basic national rights of the Vietnamese people—the right to peace, independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, and to pull out all US troops from South Vietnam. It must stop, for good and without any conditions, its bombings and all other military acts against North Vietnam.

The resumption of US air raids on the territory of North Vietnam within two days after the fresh initiative by the head of this state showed that the USA did not want to end the war in Vietnam, and that its “peace initiative” was a diplomatic move to distract world opinion.

Another bombing “pause” was called by Washington in mid-February 1967, and it, too, was staged in accordance with the well-rehearsed scenario and was accompanied by a spate of statements about the US Government's readiness for “peace” and “a settlement”, provided the people of South Vietnam wound up their struggle for independence. Once again, the massive bombings of the North were soon resumed.

A section of the American people regarded these pauses as evidence that the US Administration was seeking a way out of the impasse in which it found itself in Vietnam. Some people may have assumed that the suspension of the bombings, however short-lived, was better than their continuation. Washington Post analyst, Murrey Marder, wrote on 19 June, 1971:

“Johnson Administration strategists had almost no expectation that the many pauses in the bombing of North Vietnam between 1965 and 1968 would produce peace talks but believed they would help placate domestic and world opinion, according to the Defence Department's study of those war years.”

“The Pentagon study discloses that some strategists planned to use unproductive bombing pauses as a justification for escalating the war. This idea was first outlined privately by US officials soon after the bombing of the North began in 1965. These planners regarded the lulls in bombing as a ‘ratchet’ to reduce tension and then intensify it, to produce ‘one more turn of the screw’ in order to ‘crack the enemy's resistance to negotiations’, the report states.” (Washington Post 19 June 1971)

The proposal for a 37-day suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam, put forward in July 1965, is ascribed by the Pentagon report to McNamara and Assistant Defence Secretary McNaughton. The report says that in taking this step, the President expected to find out whether the NVG would alter its stand, considering that it had earlier declared that no settlement was possible so long as the territory of the North Vietnam was being subjected to the bombings. The Pentagon report adds that this step was designed as a means of clearing the way for an increase in the tempo of the air war... (New York Times 14 June 1971). McNamara's Memorandum to the President dated 30 November, 1965, said:

“It is my belief that there should be a three- or four-week pause in the program of bombing the North before we either greatly increase our troop deployments to Vietnam or intensify our strikes against the North. The reasons for this belief are, first, that we must lay a foundation in the minds of the American public and in world opinion for such an enlarged phase of the war.” (Washington Post 19 June 1971)

The Washington Post said that John McNaughton had perfectly encapsulated the Washington establishment's view of a bombing pause the previous July, when he had noted in pencil in the margin of a draft memorandum the words “RT (ie, Rolling Thunder) (including pause), ratchet”. That was the signal for a continuation of the bombings. The only danger was, as McNamara put it in his memorandum of 3 November:

“Being trapped in a status quo ceasefire or in negotiations which, though unaccompanied by real concessions by the VC, made it politically costly for us to terminate the pause...”

“McNamara and McNaughton were optimistic that, by skillful diplomacy”, it would be possible to avoid getting “trapped” in such a way.

The State Department, through Secretary of State Rusk, came out against any “pause” in the air raids. The Pentagon report contains a State Department memorandum which said:

“On balance, the arguments against the pause are convincing to the Secretary of State, who recommends that it not be undertaken at the present time.”

As for the military, they did not very much trust the Washington politicians' diplomatic ploys, and in general objected to any measures which would “even momentarily reduce the pressure on North Vietnam”. That was the stand taken by General Westmoreland, Commander of the US Armed Forces in South Vietnam, Admiral Sharp, Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific, and others.

The military leaders “pressed throughout the autumn and winter of 1965-1966 for permission to expand the bombing virtually into a program of strategic bombing aimed at all industrial and economic resources as well as at all interdiction targets”. Washington Post analyst, Marder, concludes:

“This then was the tenor of much of the debate behind the scenes while US Ambassador Averell Harriman... and other US envoys were circling the globe for 37 days in a spectacular search for negotiations.”

These pauses in the raids on towns and cities of a sovereign country had at least three main purposes. Washington expected:

- “1. to neutralise the broad campaign protesting against the piratical raids and to deceive world public opinion;
2. to probe the steadfastness of North Vietnam and the South Vietnam independence movement; to find out if any possibility had arisen to make them change their positions;
3. to use the pauses as an important psychological instrument for ensuring the further escalation of the war. The pauses were designed to make even more painful for the Vietnamese the subsequent US air strikes at civilian targets.”

What the outcome of this game was is well known. Washington failed to achieve its ends. The halt to the massive bombings of the North, which it had to order on 1 November, 1968, acknowledged the utter failure of US strategy.

War In Laos And Cambodia

When one morning in February 1971, Saigon troops supported by Americans, invaded Laos, they moved along roads laid in 1964, that is, before the US war in Vietnam began to escalate. The Pentagon papers did not observe on this, but it is important. Calls for an invasion of Laos, including an invasion with extensive use of Saigon units, were repeatedly made in many documents produced at various levels in Washington in 1964.

A memorandum from General Maxwell D Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Secretary of Defence McNamara, on 22 January, 1964, entitled Vietnam and South-East Asia, said:

“In order to achieve that victory, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that the United States must be prepared... to undertake bolder actions which may embody greater risks.”

It proposed that the Government of South Vietnam should be induced “to conduct overt ground operations in Laos of sufficient scope”. Consequently, as early as January 1964, the various aspects of the invasion of Laos by Washington's Saigon mercenaries were already being worked out. The Johnson Administration was planning such an invasion. The Nixon Administration brought it about.

A cablegram from the United States mission in Saigon to the State Department on 18 August, 1964, made this proposal:

“Initiate air and ground strikes in Laos against infiltration targets as soon as joint plans now being worked out with the Khanh Government are ready. Such plans will have to be related to the situation in Laos. It appears to us that Souvanna Phouma should be informed at an appropriate time of the full scope of our plans.” (New York Times 14 June 1971)

A National Security Action Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy, Adviser to the President on National Security, to Secretary of Defence McNamara and Secretary of State Rusk on 10 September, 1964, said that President Johnson himself had taken a hand in drawing up these plans. The President has now reviewed the situation in South Vietnam with Ambassador Taylor and with other advisers and has approved the following actions...

“We should promptly discuss with the Government of Laos plans for limited GVN air and ground operations into the corridor areas of Laos, together with Lao air strikes and possible use of US armed aerial reconnaissance.” (New York Times 14 June 1971)

A cablegram, signed by Ambassador Taylor, from the United States Embassy in Saigon to the State Department, Defence Department and the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, on 19 September, 1964, first specified the main objective of an invasion by Saigon or American troops in Laos, namely the control of Route 9. Route 9 was the main objective of the invasion of Laos carried out on President Nixon's orders in January 1971.

The Pentagon Papers say the independent states of South-East Asia—Laos and Cambodia—were seen by Washington as targets of war. Dozens of times the word “Laos” occurs in these papers alongside “South Vietnam”. The architects of the war were not at all worried by the fact that the invasion of Laos they were planning meant a gross violation of international law, a problem not considered anywhere on the hundreds of pages of the published secret papers.

The war in Laos was carried out along the same lines as the intervention in Vietnam. At first there were secret air raids. The papers describe in detail the mechanism behind such operations. The New York Times analyst Neil Sheehan wrote in this connection:

“The second major segment of the Administration's covert war against North Vietnam consisted of air operations in Laos. A force of propeller-driven T-28 fighter-bombers, varying from about 25 to 40 aircraft, had been organised there. The planes bore Laotian Air Force markings, but only some belonged to that air force. The rest were manned by pilots of Air America [a pseudo-private airline run by the CIA] and by Thai pilots under the control of [Thai] Ambassador Leonard Unger.”

“Reconnaissance flights by regular United States Air Force and Navy jets, code-named Yankee Team, gathered photographic intelligence for bombing raids by the T-28's against North-Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops in Laos. The Johnson Administration gradually stepped up these air operations in Laos through the spring and summer of 1964 in what became a kind of preview of the bombing of the North...”

“As the intensity of the T-28 strikes rose, they crept closer to the North-Vietnamese border. The United States Yankee Team jets moved from high-altitude reconnaissance at the beginning of the year to low-altitude reconnaissance in May. In June, armed escort jets were added to the reconnaissance missions. The escort jets began to bomb and strafe North-Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops and installations whenever the reconnaissance planes were fired upon.” (New York Times 13 June 1971)

Sheehan's commentaries tone down Washington's actions in Laos. Beginning from 17 May, 1964, the US Air Force began massive and systematic raids on Laos. The World Peace Council issued a statement on them on 25 June, 1964.

Nevertheless, the published Pentagon papers give an idea of many important details bearing on the organisation of aggressive US action against Laos. The New York Times published a report drafted by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Marshall Green, for Assistant Secretary, Bundy, on 7 November, 1964. One section of this report deserves to be quoted in full:

“C. T-28 OPERATIONS

There are now 27 T-28 (including three RT-28) aircraft in Laos, of which 22 are in operation. CINCPAC has taken action, in response to Ambassador Unger's request to build this inventory back up to 40 aircraft for which a pilot capability, including Thai, is present in Laos. The T-28's are conducting the following operations:

1. General harassing activities against Pathet Lao military installations and movement, primarily in Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua Provinces. This also includes efforts to interdict Route 7.
2. Tactical support missions for Operation Anniversary Victory No 2 (Saleumsay), the FAR-Meo clearing operation up Route 4 and north of Tha Thorn.
3. Tactical support for Operation Victorious Arrow (Sone Sai), a FAR clearing operation in southern Laos.
4. Strikes on targets of opportunity, including in support of FAR defensive actions such as at Ban Khen northwest Thakhek.
5. Corridor interdiction program. The original targets under this program have been hit and plans are now underway to hit four additional targets (including in the Tchepone area), plus restriking some of the original 13 targets.”

At the time, Washington flatly denied that US combat planes were in any way involved in action against Laos. The Pentagon Papers show all these statements have been deliberate lies designed to cover up US military action against Laos and North Vietnam. The cynical admissions we find in Green's report are highly curious:

- “4. Hanoi claims to have shot down a T-28 over DRV territory on 18 August and to have captured the Thai pilot flying the plane. The information the North-Vietnamese have used in connection with this case seems to be accurate...
5. The DRV claims T-28's have violated North- Vietnamese airspace and bombed/strafed NVN villages on 1 and 2 August, and on 16 and 17 October and again on October 28. The charges are probably accurate with respect to the first two dates (along Route 7) and the last one (Mu Gia Pass area)...
6. The Pathet Lao has called to the attention of the ICC T-28 strikes in the corridor area and called for the ICC to stop them and inform the Co-Chairmen. The ICC has already agreed to investigate another PL charge concerning alleged US/SVN activities in the corridor area in violation of the Geneva Agreements.” (New York Times 13 June 1971)

Along with the covert and overt air war against Laos, large-scale US and Saigon commando raids were mounted against the territory of Laos, and these were carried out extensively in 1964 under various code names like Leaping Lena, Hardnose, etc, with which the published documents deal in detail.

The USA began active bombings of Laos on 17 May, 1964. From February 1965, these became a component part of the massive US air war in Indo-china. Following the halt to the massive bombings of the North on 1 November, 1968, the raids on Laos were continued and even intensified. Senator Edward Kennedy remarked that the US Government cannot escape responsibility for the then 30,000 killed and wounded civilians and 700,000 refugees in Laos.

While the Pentagon report admits the fact of the air raids on Laos it attempts to obscure the question of direct US responsibility for the air raids on this independent state. At the same time, the authors of the report have to admit that the conduct of these raids was thoroughly camouflaged. Describing the results of a meeting in Saigon on 11 September, 1964, of representatives of US missions in Bangkok, Vientiane and Saigon, which was chaired by Ambassador Taylor, the report says that when considering the question of mounting raids on the territory of Laos:

“The mission representatives agreed that, once the operations began, they should not be acknowledged publicly.” (New York Times 14 June 1971)

Air and ground operations against Laos had already been going on for several months! And this is indirectly admitted even by those who wrote the report when they speak of “intensifying” the raids. One can only intensify what had already been started.

The aggressive US action against Laos provides glaring proof of the continuity between the various US Administrations and Presidents. The covert and overt air and ground actions against Laos, which were continued throughout the 1960s, were taken up and continued by the Nixon Administration from 1969 to 1971, culminating in the invasion by the US-Saigon armed forces of Laos in January and February of 1971.

The Pentagon Papers say relatively little about US aggressive action against Cambodia, and this is easily understood. The Pentagon strategists were preoccupied with Vietnam and Laos. Their stake was on a swift defeat of North Vietnam and the independent South Vietnamese. That is why the Washington war planners concentrated on the areas adjacent to North Vietnam.

Even so, the papers do say something about Cambodia. A memorandum entitled South Vietnam, from Secretary of Defence McNamara to President Johnson on 16 March, 1964, says in the section “Recommendations”, that “operations across the Cambodian border should depend on the state of relations with Cambodia”. Some raids on the territory of Cambodia were repeatedly carried out by South Vietnamese and by American troops. However, only President Nixon risked overt war against Cambodia to control another independent state in South-East Asia. On 30 April, 1971, US-Saigon troops crossed Cambodia's border.

On 28 June, 1971, the Washington Post carried an article by Jack Anderson on the results of his analysis of new secret documents which had fallen into his hands. Anderson said that just as “the Johnson Administration wasn't always(!) honest with the public about what was happening in Vietnam, the deception, dismayingly, is still going on. Despite President Nixon's assertions that he is winding down the war, the secret documents show, that he has been under pressure from the military chiefs to expand the war just as President Johnson was” (Washington Post 28 June 1971).

Anderson said, in particular, that following the withdrawal of the US troops from Cambodia in 1970, official spokesmen insisted that the US troops had not crossed the border of Cambodia or Laos. “The truth is that teams composed of US special forces and South Vietnamese rangers continued to make raids into both countries”. In the secret reports these raids on the territory of Cambodia and Laos were code-named. “Unhappily, the raiders often found the enemy waiting for them and suffered severe casualties. None of the Americans killed in these raids was included in the official casualty lists”.

Anderson testifies that the Nixon Administration's secret papers also expose the official statement about the invasion of Laos in January and February 1971, which was presented to the American people as a restricted South Vietnamese action. Actually, it was the opposite. It was part of coordinated military operations, involving several hundred thousand men, throughout Indo-china.

“American-led Kha tribesmen drove through Southern Laos to help the South Vietnamese cut off the supply lines. Meo tribesmen, also under US direction, opened an attack upon North-Vietnamese positions in Northern Laos, even the royal Lao forces took the offensive in some areas.”

“In Cambodia, both South Vietnamese and Cambodian troops stepped up their operations. And in South Vietnam, government troops opened a general offensive against known guerrilla strongholds.”

“President Nixon was kept fully informed of the coordinated offensive. Sometimes Admiral Thomas Moorer, the Joint Chief's Chairman, would stop by the White House and point out on classified maps with reddish arrows where the fighting was taking place.”

The aggressive action mounted on orders from the Nixon Administration against Laos and Cambodia in 1970 and 1971 was a direct continuation of the earlier interventionist line, with the leaders of the United States going well beyond their predecessors in the escalation in Indo-china.

Is there anyone, having read this—and this is a summary not the detail that can be read by turning to the original newspapers—who can believe without question what the present US leadership tell us?