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for Japan (in George Kennan's words) in the postwar period, with the region now under U.S. control.

By 1970, after the post-Tet escalation of the U.S. war against the south and Laos, my personal belief was that the U.S. might well "break the will of the popular movements" throughout Indochina, so that "North Vietnam will necessarily dominate Indochina, for no other viable society will remain." That would leave a "legacy of hatred," "embittering the lives of the people of Indochina and denying them the hope of creating a decent future," even if the U.S. were to withdraw. That's not far from what happened, intensified by postwar U.S. brutality. It constitutes a great victory for the United States.

The destruction of Indochina ensured that it would not provide a model that others might follow; it would not be a "virus" that might "infect others," in the terms preferred by the planners. And the establishment of brutal and murderous military dictatorships in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and elsewhere ensured that "the rot would not spread." These too are considerable victories, enhanced by the U.S. stranglehold to prevent recovery since and U.S. support for Pol Pot, via Thailand, to ensure the more efficient "bleeding of Vietnam."[30]

Bernard Fall was largely right. A terrorist superpower with unlimited resources of violence, constrained only by popular forces within, may not achieve the total "extinction" of its enemies that he feared. But it is hard for it to fail to achieve its basic goals: to maintain control, undermine the prospects of independence, and not least, destroy hope. To a significant extent, those goals were achieved. The result once again illustrates the "principles and traditions of this nation" as these are understood in practice by the McNamaras, if not by others who are inspired by a different vision of what their country should be.

[30] See FRS, my At War with Asia (1970), 286–7.

reacted much as his successor did as the military victory he sought proved harder to attain.

McNamara relates that his last official act on Vietnam was on February 27, 1968, when he "opposed Westy's renewed appeal for 200,000 additional troops on economic, political, and moral grounds." To discover what those grounds were, we have to turn elsewhere, in particular, to the final sections of the Pentagon Papers. They outline the concerns among planners caused by the "massive march on the Pentagon" that McNamara derides, the fear of massive civil disobedience among large parts of the population, the concern that troops would be needed here "for civil disorder control," particularly if "Westy's" request were granted, running the risk of "provoking a domestic crisis of unprecedented proportions."[29] The fact that Fall's fears of "extinction" were not realized can be attributed largely to such factors, as the most recent insights into the moral level of the elite culture reveal once again, a lesson worth heeding.

McNamara assumes that the U.S. war was a "failure" and a "defeat," a judgment that is widely shared. But these conclusions again reflect the narrowness of his vision. That the major U.S. war aims had been achieved was clear enough 25 years ago, and was recognized by the business press not long after. As internal documents reveal, a guiding concern was that "the dramatic economic improvements realized by Communist China" would continue to "impress the nations of the region greatly" and that this "political and ideological aggressiveness" of China would be enhanced by the anticipated Communist successes in Vietnam. That could lead to a "domino effect," with the U.S. losing control of the region. It might even lead to the much-dreaded Japanese "accommodation" to China, which would establish a "New Order" of the sort that the U.S. had fought World War II in the Pacific to prevent — though it then reconstructed very much the same "Empire toward the South"

[29] See FRS, 25.

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by fevered campaign rhetoric about the "Communist menace" that Eisenhower and Nixon had allowed "to arise only ninety miles from the shores of the United States," denouncing them for offering "virtually no support" to the "fighters for freedom" that he later sent to disaster in Cuba. Kennedy "had no qualms about the right of the United States to overthrow Castro," Gleijesis concludes, and never even considered the criticism of the operation by Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann, who pointed out that it would violate international law and treaty obligations and would be opposed by a majority of Latin Americans.

After the failure of his invasion, Kennedy "categorically refused the olive branch" offered by Cuba, Gleijeses continues. He chose instead to initiate terror and sabotage operations (Operation MONGOOSE), having drawn the from the Bay of Pigs failure the lesson "not that he should talk to Castro, but that he should intensify his efforts to overthrow him." These operations were conducted by the CIA under "unmitigated pressure from the President and the Attorney General" Robert Kennedy, who directed them (Samuel Halpern, Executive Assistant to William Harvey, Chief of the CIA Task Force for Mongoose before, during, and after the missile crisis). The terror continued through the missile crisis, and pressure on the CIA to extend it "was intensified even more in 1963" after the crisis ended, Halpern reports. During the crisis, sabotage operations increased under Robert Kennedy's urging: "sabotage was the administration's order of the day *during* the missile crisis" (Halpern), including at least one (possibly unplanned) operation that may have killed hundreds of Cubans and could easily have set off a nuclear war.[28]

The fact that McNamara is reduced to such pathetic evidence lends further support to the surmise that JFK probably would have

[28] Bernstein, in James Nathan, The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited (St. Martin's 1992). Gleijeses, J. of Latin American Studies, Feb. 1995. Halpern, Newsletter, Society for the Historians of American Foreign Relations, 24.4, Dec. 1993. Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis (Brookings Institution 1987).

less, his account is highly selective, probably out of ignorance. Thus he gives the conventional description of JFK's distress at the murder of Diem, but (also conventionally) omits Kennedy's secret cable a few days later (Nov. 6) effusively praising Ambassador Lodge for his "fine job" and "leadership" in orchestrating the coup, an "achievement…of the greatest importance" that "is recognized here throughout the Government," which was gratified that the generals may now be able to drive to the military victory on which Kennedy insisted unwaveringly as a condition for eventual withdrawal.[27]

McNamara does join with post-Tet revisionism in suggesting that Kennedy would not have taken Johnson's path. His reasons reveal again his remarkable irrationality. He offers two: (1) Kennedy "appeared willing, if necessary, to trade the obsolete American Jupiter missiles in Turkey for the Soviet missiles in Cuba in order to avert this risk" of nuclear war at the time of the missile crisis; and (2) he resisted pressure to engage U.S. military force directly at the Bay of Pigs.

Consider (1). Vice-President Johnson was one of the few who "pushed for a speedy trade of the Jupiters," Barton Bernstein observes in a close analysis of the released record, while Kennedy preferred the advice of Soviet expert Llewellyn Thompson, whom Johnson criticized as a "warhawk," and decided not to make the trade. "We were, indeed, on the brink of nuclear disaster," McNamara now believes, as Kennedy avoided this possible way out. By McNamara's logic, it follows that LBJ was much less likely to escalate in Vietnam than Kennedy.

During the Bay of Pigs affair, LBJ seems to have played little role. But Kennedy took a "relatively modest" operation and turned it into a substantial invasion, Piero Gleijeses observes in a recent study of available documents. He had backed himself into a corner

[27] See RC, chap. 3 [probably meant chap. 2 -TL], on the revisions and falsifications.

The year 1995 is a season of memories, and for some, regrets and apologies as well.

Visiting China in May, Japanese Prime Minister Maruyama marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II by expressing "sincere repentance for our past,…including aggression and colonial rule [that] caused unbearable suffering and sorrow for many people in your country and other Asian nations." Two months before, New York Times correspondent Nicholas Kristof reported a poll showing that Japanese "believe 4 to 1 that their Government has not adequately compensated the people of countries that Japan invaded or colonized," also noting an "explicit apology for the war" by Japan's Prime Minister two years earlier. Kristof's concern, however, is Japan's *failure* to offer adequate apology "for invading other Asian countries and killing millions of people." "Why Japan Hasn't Said That Word," a headline of one of his articles reads, expressing our bewilderment over Japan's unwillingness to acknowledge guilt.

The Times insists on balance. Thus Kristof adds that "Japan is not the only country that has difficulty saying it is sorry. American officials have toppled governments over the last half-century, and Americans do not lose much sleep over the American invasion of Canada during the War of 1812 or the incursions into Mexico in 1914 and 1916" — the obvious cases that come to mind when we consider possible reasons to "Say That Word."

Kristof reports that some Japanese intellectuals recognize that Germany is "genuinely remorseful" but explain the difference on grounds that Germany's powerful neighbors "would not let Germans forget what they had done"; China and Korea cannot exert such pressures on Japan. In contrast, few American intellectuals ask whether such factors might have something to do with the talent that so amazed de Tocqueville as he watched "the triumphal march of civilization across the desert," destroying the natives with complete "respect for the laws of humanity," "with singular felicity, tranquilly, legally, philanthropically, without shedding blood, and

without violating a single great principle of morality in the eyes of the world." Or the celebration of "the Winning of the West" by the racist historian Theodore Roosevelt: "As a nation, our Indian policy is to be blamed, because of the weakness it displayed, because of its shortsightedness, and its occasional leaning to the policy of sentimental humanitarians; and we have often promised what was impossible to perform; but there has been no wilful wrong-doing."[1]

More generally, could 200 years of a history of crushing weaker adversaries have something to do with the fact that the very idea of "Saying That Word" is scarcely comprehensible in American culture? Or with the regular whining and wailing about how Cuba (Vietnam, Libya, or some other punching bag) is torturing us once again? Such questions occur only to "wild men in the wings," to borrow McGeorge Bundy's useful description in 1967 of those who failed to perceive the nobility of the U.S. crusade in Vietnam.

Kristof's reflections appeared shortly before the 20th anniversary of the departure of U.S. forces from Vietnam. The event called forth much commentary, but no "sincere repentance for having caused unbearable suffering and sorrow" to people of Asia. The concept remains unintelligible.

As the 20th anniversary approached, the government of Vietnam released new figures on casualties, generally accepted here and conforming to earlier estimates. Hanoi reported that 2 million civilians had been killed, the overwhelming majority in the south, along with 1.1 million North Vietnamese and southern resistance fighters ("Viet Cong," in the terminology of U.S. propaganda). It listed an additional 300,000 missing in action. Washington reports 225,000 killed in the army of its client regime ("South Vietnam"). The CIA estimates 600,000 Cambodians killed during the U.S. phase of what the one independent governmental inquiry (Finland) calls

[1] Financial Times, May 2, 4, 1995. NYT, March 6, May 7, 1995. On Roosevelt, see Norman Finkelstein, "History's Verdict," ms. NYU, to appear in a forthcoming book.

exception, the intelligence record was devoid of the thought that Hanoi might be acting from nationalist motives, though even the most extreme fanatic could see at least that much. Or so one might have thought, not appreciating the quality of the elite culture.

It is in this and only this sense that Washington failed to appreciate that it was seeking to crush the nationalist movement of Indochina.[25]

It is pointless to run through the less serious "mistakes" that McNamara lists. In each case, we find the same traits: ignorance, rigorous subordination to the narrow confines of doctrine, and a level of moral blindness that is hard to capture in words. And again, it unfair to criticize McNamara for these qualities, because he simply draws them from his environment, as is shown clearly enough by the commentary on his book. Or on the war. It is considered quite uncontroversial, for example, to say that "Vietnam's war against the Americans from 1965" was relatively short (Keith Richburg, Washington Post); true enough, if South Vietnam is not part of Vietnam, and its struggle for independence was not part of Vietnam's war against the American invaders.[26]

It is also pointless to run through the record of McNamara's thoughts about what was happening in Laos, South Asia, Cuba, or even in Washington. At each point, we simply find more evidence of the inability of a narrow technocrat to comprehend anything beyond his specific assignment — facts that may tell us something about American political culture, but virtually nothing about the intended topic of the book.

Though his record omits the crucial decisions, McNamara does not join the Camelot memoirists who radically revised their histories of the Kennedy years to conform with changing fashions after the Tet offensive, and to salvage their own reputations. Nonethe-

[25] For details and references, see FRS, chap. 1; parts reprinted in James Peck, ed., Chomsky Reader (Pantheon 1988). Haines, The Americanization of Brazil (Scholarly Resources 1989); for extensive quotes, see Year 501, chap. 7.

[26] WP weekly edition, May 8, 1995.

Ho Chi Minh had "captur[ed] control of the nationalist movement" — by implication, illegitimately. This was recognized to pose a "dilemma," because the U.S. sought "to eliminate so far as possible Communist influence in Indochina." "Question whether Ho is as much nationalist as Commie is irrelevant," Dean Acheson explained. He is an "outright Commie," and besides, "All Stalinists in colonial areas are nationalists." Internal planning documents consistently reveal that not only in Vietnam, but quite generally, the major threat to U.S. interests was understood by planners to be independent nationalism. That is unacceptable, whatever its complexion, given that the U.S. runs the world, a right and duty it has exercised since World War II, when it "assumed, out of self-interest, responsibility for the welfare of the world capitalist system" (diplomatic historian Gerald Haines, senior historian of the CIA).

Washington understood from the 1940s "the unpleasant fact that Communist Ho Chi Minh is the strongest and perhaps the ablest figure in Indochina and that any suggested solution which excludes him is an expedient of uncertain outcome." Therefore it had to destroy the Vietnamese nationalist movement, first by backing the French war of reconquest, then by taking the war over itself at a far greater level of violence when France treacherously accepted a peaceful settlement. One of the more comical parts of the Pentagon Papers is the intelligence record after Washington decided to back France. U.S. intelligence was assigned the task of proving the required thesis: that Hanoi is a puppet of the Kremlin or Peiping (either would do). The distressing result of arduous efforts was that Indochina seemed "an anomaly," the only place in the region where "no evidence of direct link" could be found between the domestic Commies and their masters. The natural conclusion was drawn: Ho was such a loyal slave that his masters did not even have to give him orders. Once established, the conclusion could no longer be questioned by responsible intellectuals, and indeed, the Pentagon Papers analysts remark that with a single marginal

the "Decade of Genocide" in Cambodia: 1969 through 1978. Tens if not hundreds of thousands more were killed in Laos, mainly by U.S. attacks that were in large part unrelated to the war in Vietnam, Washington conceded.

The toll of Indochinese dead during the U.S. wars is impressive even by twentieth century standards. For these dead, the U.S. bears responsibility — just as Japan is responsible for deaths in China, and Russia for deaths in Afghanistan, whoever may have pulled the trigger, a truism understood very well by Western intellectuals when the responsibility can be laid at someone else's door.

It is a tribute to the U.S. educational system that Americans estimate Vietnamese deaths at about 100,000.[2] But only "wild men" will ask what the reaction would be to comparable estimates of victims in Germany or Japan, or pre-Gorbachev Russia, and what the answer tells us about ourselves.

The killing in Indochina did not stop when U.S. forces withdrew. A few weeks after Kristof's article appeared, the Director of the British Mines Advisory Group wrote (in England) that "US bombs are still killing and maiming Laotians today": anti-personnel fragmentation bombs, of which "huge numbers, perhaps millions, remain active and explode when disturbed by farmers or children. Nearly 45 per cent of victims are children under 15 years," a higher percentage than in Cambodia or any other country. This is part of the residue of the 800,000 tons of bombs dropped by the U.S. airforce on Laos, "the equivalent of a bombing mission every eight minutes," most dramatically on the Plain of Jars, far from the Ho Chi Minh trail that is invoked as a pretext by apologists. In addition, there are the thousands of Vietnamese who "still die from the effects of American chemical warfare," so we learn from the Israeli press, where the veteran correspondent Amnon Kapeliouk

[2] Sut Jhally, Justin Lewis, & Michael Morgan, The Gulf War: A Study of the Media, Public Opinion, & Public Knowledge, Department of Communications, U Mass. Amherst, 1991; median estimate. This appears to be the only study of the matter.

describes what he saw in Saigon hospitals: children dying of cancer and with hideous birth deformities, aborted foetuses in glass canisters, and other "terrifying" scenes that remain well hidden. He is describing *South* Vietnam, which was targeted for chemical warfare by John F. Kennedy and his successors, and it was there — not North Vietnam — that he listened to the "hair-raising stories that remind me of what we heard during the trials of Eichmann and Demjanjuk" — though in this case, the perpetrators are honored, not tried for their crimes.

Complete figures should also include the victims of the post-1975 economic warfare that the U.S. waged to punish Vietnam, a campaign that peaked when Vietnam invaded Cambodia in response to murderous Khmer Rouge attacks, terminating the atrocities conducted by Pol Pot — another outrage by the "Prussians of Asia," as the Times described them with fury after this atrocity.

That war continues. Like Haiti in 1825 and others since, Vietnam must pay indemnities for its liberation. The U.S., of course, refused to pay a cent of what it had promised to Vietnam, claiming that North Vietnam had violated the 1973 peace accords: namely, by finally reacting to Washington's gross violations, well-advertised with pride and optimism. In contrast, Vietnam must pay. It was compelled to take on the debts incurred by the Saigon regime to support the U.S. war effort, and to accept "free market reforms," with the usual results. The industrial base has severely eroded or been taken over by foreign capital. The World Bank reports that famines have erupted affecting over a quarter of the population while malaria deaths tripled during the first four years of the "reforms" as the health system collapsed along with other social programs. The results are much as in Nicaragua, where deaths from malnutrition of children under four have increased by 35% since the country finally accepted U.S. terms in 1990, officially rejoining the Free World.

The toll in Indochina also includes the 58,000 U.S. solders killed and 2000 MIAs, along with more than 5000 killed from Australia,

universities, where they learned the lessons they put to use so well and acquired "the favorable orientation of the new Indonesian political elite" (the army). A few years ago, McGeorge Bundy observed that it might have made sense for the U.S. to wind down its operations in Vietnam after the major domino had been secured by a gratifying mass murder that the CIA compares to the Nazis and Stalin, and McNamara expresses some sympathy with that view as well.[24]

5. "Lessons of Vietnam"

McNamara's goal is to explain how such "vigorous, intelligent, well-meaning, patriotic servants of the United States" as the men of Camelot came "to get it wrong on Vietnam." We "acted according to what we thought were the principles and traditions of this nation," he writes. What they thought was correct, at least if "principles and traditions" are illustrated by historical fact, as in the clearing of the continent, the conquest of the Philippines, Wilson's Caribbean exploits, and much else. These well-meaning planners were "wrong," McNamara concludes, but it was "an error not of values and intentions but of judgments and capabilities" — remarks that are superfluous in a cultural environment that lacks the concept of wrong-doing. The worst of the "mistakes," McNamara writes, was the failure to see the Communist movement in Vietnam as a "nationalist movement," as it appears "in hindsight": "We totally underestimated the nationalist aspect of Ho Chi Minh's movement."

McNamara's regretful account of this "mistake" has been accepted with much respect. It is utter nonsense. Even from the Pentagon Papers that he commissioned, McNamara and those who repeat his words could have learned that in 1948 the State Department understood perfectly well that the Communists under

[24] Cf. Kahin & Kahin, op. cit.; Year 501.

the party of the poor. Washington's strong support for the 1957–8 military revolt against the independent nationalist Sukarno government was motivated by fear that the PKI would win the next election, and the cancellation of all elections after the U.S. subversive activities had undermined the parliamentary system was considered a substantial victory. Washington then looked forward to the "elimination" of the PKI, which was achieved with the Suharto coup and the huge slaughter organized and instigated by the army he commanded in late 1965, an operation ranked by the CIA as among "the worst mass murders of the 20th century." This "staggering mass slaughter" as the New York Times described it, was backed enthusiastically by the U.S. government (if not instigated by it), and welcomed with unconcealed delight by the media and political analysts in the United States. The U.S. responded eagerly to the army's request for weapons "to arm Moslem and nationalist youth in Central Java for use against the PKI" in the context of the proclaimed policy "to eliminate the PKI." The General in charge of the slaughter was an "independent nationalist" in the sense that he subordinated himself to U.S. power and opened his country at once to foreign investors. He was a "pro-Western neutralist," in the Orwellian terminology of U.S. political discourse, though far more murderous even than the norm.

That is the model of "independent nationalism" that McNamara offers to the only mass-based political party in South Vietnam, without shame or probably much comprehension,

McNamara in fact knows — or once knew — more than he lets on here. Immediately after the gratifying mass slaughter, he took credit for the achievement, telling a Senate Committee that U.S. military aid to Indonesia had "paid dividends" and was therefore justified, and informing President Johnson, in a private communication, that U.S. military assistance to the Indonesian army had "encouraged it to move against the PKI when the opportunity was presented." He stressed particularly the value of the programs that brought Indonesian military personnel for training in American

New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand and elsewhere — forces rampaging in South Vietnam that apparently outnumbered the North Vietnamese fighting in the outer regions of the south until 1968, so Pentagon figures indicate.[3]

Two days before Kristof's thoughts on Japan's deficiencies appeared, the last U.S. Marines left Somalia behind a huge hail of gunfire — a ratio of about 100 to 1, Los Angeles Times correspondent John Balzar reported. The U.S. command did not count Somali casualties, surely not those killed because they "just appeared to be threatening" (Balzar). Marine Lt. Gen. Anthony Zinni, who commanded the operation, informed the press that "I'm not counting bodies…I'm not interested." "CIA officials privately concede that the U.S. military may have killed from 7,000 to 10,000 Somalis" while losing 34 soldiers, the editor of Foreign Policy, Charles William Maynes, notes in passing. Nothing to lose any sleep over, hardly more than a footnote to the record compiled from the days when the founders were caring for "that hapless race of native Americans, which we are exterminating with such merciless and perfidious cruelty," as John Quincy Adams described the project long after his own participation had ended, including his crucial role in establishing the doctrine of Presidential war that was followed in Vietnam.[4]

Kristof's ruminations appeared at a time of considerable soul-searching in Britain over the bombing of Dresden by the British and U.S. air forces just 50 years earlier, destroying the city and killing tens of thousands of civilians. Britain was then under se-

[3] AP, Boston Globe, April 4; Rae McGrath, Guardian, April 12, 1995. Kapeliouk, see my Necessary Illusions (South End 1989), chap. 2. Michel Chossudovsky, Frontline (India), May 19, 1995. Nicaragua News Service, April 30-May 6, 1995. On the 1973 farce, see my Towards a New Cold War (Pantheon 1982), reprinting 1973 articles, and E.S. Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent (MC, Pantheon 1988), for review.

[4] LAT-BG, March 4; FP, Spring 1995. Adams and executive war, see my Rethinking Camelot (RC, South End 1993).

rious attack, something the U.S. has not suffered since the war of 1812. Recall that "the date which will live in infamy" marks Japan's attack on military bases in two U.S. colonies, one stolen from its inhabitants by deceit and treachery, the other by the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people. Four days after Kristof's article came the 50th anniversary of the U.S. fire-bombing of Tokyo, which killed some 80,000–200,000 people, leaving over a million homeless in the ruins of the largely undefended city and removing it from the list of potential atom bomb targets because further destruction would hardly be impressive, merely piling rubble on rubble, bodies on bodies. The 300 bombers dropped oil-gel sticks and then napalm "on the tightly knit neighbourhoods of wooden houses," Stephen Herman recalls in the Far Eastern Economic Review, in Hong Kong. "The resulting inferno unleashed hell on earth" as people tried to escape by jumping into boiling ponds, planes "hunted down fleeing civilians to deliberately drop bombs on them," and napalmed the river to cut off an escape route. The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey concluded that "probably more persons lost their lives by fire at Tokyo in a six-hour period than at any time in the history of man." Herman quotes Richard Finn of American University, one of the American authors of Japan's postwar Constitution, who describes the bombing as "a bloody stain on the pages of American history" that stands alongside the atom bombs.

The 50th anniversary was noted in the national press here, with headlines reading "Stoically, Japan Looks Back on the Flames of War" (Kristof, NYT) and "Japan Revising Past Role: More Aggressor, Less Victim" (T. R. Reid, Washington Post). The reports noted improvement in Japan's behavior. In the past, the commemoration had been "depoliticized," treated "almost like a natural disaster," but this time it "including stern reminders that it was Japanese aggression that started the war in the first place" (WP). The reaction here is narrow: "If that's what it took to win, that's what should have been done." There happens to be a more complex background marked by closing of the Western imperial systems to Japanese

to the Chinese border, with Saigon its capital. If McNamara has even a vague idea about such matters, it's not to be found here. Rather his book is full of confusions and outright absurdities about defending South Vietnam from the South Vietnamese, and so on. Thus he explains that after Geneva, "our country assumed responsibility from France for protecting Vietnam south of the 1954 partition line," a characterization of the Geneva accords that does not even merit refutation, though it's possible that McNamara believes what he is saying. The issue was a millimeter away from his assignment, so he cannot be expected to know anything about it.

McNamara explains with admirable frankness what he means by the "independent, non-Communist South Vietnam" that he offered to the South Vietnamese whale after it surrendered to U.S. power — which, under the U.S. negotiating offers, would continue to rule South Vietnam, by violence if necessary, after external support for the resistance ends. He refers virtually in the same breath to Indonesia, which had "reversed course" after the killing of "300,000 or more PKI members…and now lay in the hands of independent nationalists led by Suharto," who had orchestrated the slaughter.

Note that Suharto's victims become members of the PKI (the Communist Party) by virtue of having been killed. The term does, however, have some merit in the light of the conclusion of mainstream scholarship that "the PKI had won widespread support not as a revolutionary party but as an organization defending the interests of the poor within the existing system" (Harold Crouch). If so, there must have been plenty of "Communists," and their extermination is certainly to be welcomed — as it was, without restraint.[23]

The case of Indonesia is an important one. Indonesia was the biggest domino, a country of rich resources and potential, which, it was feared, might be influenced by Communist success on the mainland, a particular danger because of the domestic appeal of

[23] Crouch, The Army and Politics in Indonesia (Cornell 1978), 351. On the euphoric reaction, see my Year 501 (South End 1993), chap. 5.

Note that the problem is *Hanoi's* puzzling refusal to accept U.S. terms. The NLF scarcely exists, indeed does not even appear in the book's index, as befits the only mass-based political force if it disobeys the orders of the Free World.

McNamara naturally dismisses with contempt Hanoi's negotiating position, because it insisted that "the internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves *in accordance with* the program of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation" (his emphasis). That would mean "accepting Communist control of South Vietnam," McNamara comments — plausibly, if the assessments of the Vietnamese political scene by U.S. experts had any validity. McNamara does not, however, tell us anything about the outrageous NLF program. Its 1960 version called for a national assembly elected on the basis of universal suffrage and "a broad national democratic coalition administration" including representatives "of all strata of people, political parties, religious communities and patriotic personalities," social and educational programs, a neutral foreign policy for South Vietnam with "diplomatic relations with all countries," and "gradual" steps towards reunification of the country by peaceful means. In brief, it reiterates the terms of the 1954 Geneva settlement that the U.S. rejected as a "disaster" and at once subverted. A 1962 revision called for "a peace and neutrality zone comprising Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam." These terms remained in force until the whale was finally demolished by U.S. violence. No such prospects could be tolerated by the invader.[22]

It is worth noting that the NLF was the only force in Vietnam that described the South as an independent entity. The U.S. client regime, in contrast, stated in an unamendable article of its 1967 Constitution that "Viet-Nam is a territorially indivisible, unified and independent republic," extending from the Camau peninsula

[22] Fall, The Two Vietnams (Praeger 1964), and for much more extensive discussion, Kahin, Intervention.

commerce and considerable outrage in the U.S. over the impertinence of the little yellow men who invoked the Monroe Doctrine as a precedent for what they were doing in Asia, but any hint of such matters is as remote as second thoughts over the techniques employed.

Yet to enter approved memory is the "finale" described in the official Air Force history, a 1000-plane raid on civilian targets organized by General "Hap" Arnold to celebrate the war's end, five days after Nagasaki. According to survivors, leaflets were dropped among the bombs announcing the surrender.[5]

In his recently-published memoirs In Retrospect, Robert McNamara relates that by 1967 the "stresses and tensions" were so bad that he sometimes even had to take a sleeping pill. Fortunately for the country's health, there's not much else that might cause a reasonable person to "lose sleep" as we commemorate events of recent history.

1. In Retrospect

Vietnam was not ignored during the time of memories. Quite the contrary, McNamara's memoirs quickly became a best seller and elicited a torrent of controversy. The memoirs have the ring of honesty. They contain some new information that might be of interest to military historians and students of marginalia of politics. There is little to be learned from them about the Vietnam war or policy-making.

As widely reported, McNamara expresses regrets — for what he did to Americans. He asks whether "such high costs" were justified. The costs, in toto, are the following: "we had lost over 58,000 men and women; our economy had been damaged by years of heavy and

[5] FEER, April 13; NYT, March 9, WP, March 11, 1995. Backgrounds, "finale," see my American Power and the New Mandarins (APNM, Pantheon 1969), chap. 2.

improperly financed war spending; and the political unity of our society had been shattered, not to be restored for decades." He feels that these costs were not justified by what was attained, and lists eleven "major failures" of analysis that are responsible for causing such trauma and damage.

No Laotians or Cambodians seem to have suffered, but there are a few scattered sentences indicating that Vietnamese didn't make out too well. These too are illuminating. McNamara cites his well-known concern (1967) that "the picture of the world's greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1000 noncombatants a week, while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one." The reason is that "It could conceivably produce a costly distortion in the American national consciousness and in the world image of the United States — especially if the damage to North Vietnam is complete enough to be 'successful'." The problem is the effects on America's national consciousness and world image. And the "tiny backward nation" is North Vietnam, which certainly suffered, though it was the South Vietnamese who bore the brunt of the assault that McNamara directed. The attack on North Vietnam was troubling because of the costs to the U.S., which might become severe as U.S. planes struck Russian ships in Haiphong harbor and bombed an internal Chinese rail line, and the possibility arose that the U.S. might resort to nuclear and radiological-bacteriological-chemical weapons," McNamara relates. No such problems attended the slaughter of South Vietnamese.

McNamara has been praised for his candor by doves who feel vindicated by his confessions and criticized by those who object that he misinterprets a success as a defeat or who find his remorse for what he did to Americans inadequate or belated. The doves are pleased that he finally concedes that "our blundering efforts to do good" turned into a "dangerous mistake," as Anthony Lewis put the matter long after corporate America had determined that the game was not worth the candle. As the doves had by then come

came to realize, they might be able to inspire some support among domestic collaborators, who might even emulate Hitler, with luck.

For contrast, consider the reactions of America's most decorated living veteran, David Hackworth, who fought in the Mekong Delta in 1969 with the U.S. 9th division, noted for the extreme savagery of its operations, which peaked at that time under the General called "the Delta Butcher," Hackworth relates. In 1993 he returned to the villages where he had fought to "make personal peace" with the "tough fighters" who remained alive, still living in the villages where the battles had taken place. Hackworth was welcomed with "open arms." He does not conceal the "highest esteem" he and his men felt for the South Vietnamese they were attacking and their contempt for the "corrupt and spiritless" forces that Washington had mobilized. The commander he fought is still living in "the birthplace of the revolution," though all his family were killed in the U.S. attack that "savaged" his town, killing 30,000 of its 75,000 people, 26,000 of them civilians. Nor does Hackworth hide his contempt for the U.S. leaders who "thought bombs could beat a people's hunger for independence" and their "lack of moral courage." One finds here no McNamara-style imbecilities about how "The South Vietnamese are beginning to hit the Vietcong insurgents where it hurts most… The Vietnamese armed forces are carrying the war to the Viet Cong" — "mistaken optimism," McNamara now concludes, still unable to comprehend that "the Vietcong insurgents" were South Vietnamese.[21]

Given the prevailing mentality, it is also easy to understand McNamara's perplexity over Hanoi's refusal to accept U.S. terms for political settlement: that they refrain from providing any support to the South Vietnamese whale so that the U.S. can pound it into submission. How could anyone reasonable person object to that?

[21] Newsweek, Nov. 22, 1993. On the work of the 9th division, see the study by Newsweek Saigon Bureau Chief Kevin Buckley, reported from his notes in Chomsky and E.S. Herman, Political Economy of Human Rights, vol. 1.

McNamara's excessive misgivings, though they do concede that Washington conducted its mission "unwisely."[19]

It would be useful to compare the reaction in Brezhnev's Russia to the only Soviet action that begins to compare with the U.S. wars in Indochina: the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, from which the USSR was seeking to withdraw by May 1980, well before U.S. or other involvement, Raymond Garthoff observes in the most extensive scholarly inquiry. It would be interesting to compare Pravda to the liberal press in the U.S. throughout the Vietnam war, and until today. One might also ask how the political and intellectual class would have reacted had the Vietnamese been carrying out attacks in California initiated by Soviet advisers who wanted Washington to "stay and 'bleed'" in Vietnam, adopting the doctrines of Reaganite America as it sought to undermine Soviet efforts to disengage.[20]

Washington's problem in Vietnam was always twofold: the strength of the political opposition, and the lack of "effectiveness of GVN [the client regime in Saigon] in its relation to its own people" that President Kennedy recognized, one reason for his unwillingness to commit himself to the Taylor-McNamara proposal of October 1963 for withdrawal after victory was assured. Responding to Kennedy's inquiry about this defect, Ambassador Lodge complained that "Viet-Nam is not a thoroughly strong police state…because, unlike Hitler's Germany, it is not efficient" and is thus unable to suppress the "large and well-organized underground opponent strongly and ever-freshly motivated by vigorous hatred." Our Vietnamese "appear to be more than ever anxious to be left alone," cannot be mobilized to fight Washington's war, and are even threatening to call upon the U.S. to withdraw. But if they were free to batter South Vietnam at will, the best and brightest

[19] Kahin, Intervention, 310, 412–3. The record is full of such acknowledgements from the earliest days; for a sample, see APNM. Editorial, WP, April 30, 1995.

[20] Garthoff, The Great Transition (Brookings 1994), 316f., 713f., 722f.

to recognize, although we had pursued aims that were "noble" and "motivated by the loftiest intentions," they were nevertheless "illusory" and it ended up as a "failed crusade" (Stanley Karnow). McNamara has now "paid his debt," Theodore Draper writes in the New York Review, finally recognizing that "The Vietnam War peculiarly demanded a hardheaded assessment of what it was worth in the national interest of the United States," just as the invasion of Afghanistan "peculiarly demanded" such an assessment in the Kremlin. Draper is outraged by the "vitriolic and protracted campaign" against McNamara by the New York Times. "The case against McNamara largely hinges on the premise that he did not express his doubts" about "whether American troops should continue to die" early on, but the Times did not either (though Draper did, he proudly reminds us). Could there be another question?

Scholarship is hardly different. Thus in a critique of U.S. ideology from the liberal left, Michael Hunt describes Reaganite "neo-conservatives" as "unexpectedly obtuse," rejecting "the notion that the Vietnam commitment was a fundamental mistake" and insisting that "the United States should defend freedom around the world whatever the price." The price to whom? To the peasants massacred as we defended their freedom in the Mekong Delta and Quang Ngai province? But McNamara was better than most: "To his credit, McNamara recognized earlier than most of his colleagues that the war was not winnable," a leading historian of the Vietnam war, George Herring, observes, departing from the norm by at least mentioning that the American "failure" was "far more" of a tragedy "for Vietnam than for America."[6]

Evidently, other questions are imaginable. We do not ask only whether the costs to the Japanese were too high when they invaded

[6] Draper, NYRB, May 11, 25. Hunt, Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy (Yale 1987). Herring, Foreign Affairs, May/June 1995. For sources unmentioned here and below, see RC and MC, citing also earlier materials out of print.

China, or whether the Nazis made an avoidable error by fighting a two-front war. However "wild" the idea, it is at least a logical possibility that the U.S. wars in Indochina were "fundamentally wrong and immoral," not "a mistake," the opinion of 70% of the U.S. population right through the Reagan-Bush years. The numbers are remarkable, not only because that is a high figure for any open question on a poll, but also because respondents must have arrived at that conclusion on their own, not from an intellectual culture that scrupulously keeps its distance from such heresy.

The preferred picture of public attitudes is different. Thus senior editor William McGurn of the Far Eastern Economic Review, writing in the Wall Street Journal, harshly condemns President Clinton and others who "feel vindicated" by McNamara's defection to their side. It is this "liberal establishment" that is responsible for the "national humiliation" in Vietnam and all that we have suffered since, because they "believe the whole enterprise 'immoral'" and thus abandoned the "decent America" that continues to support the war as right and just, if perhaps a mistake because of the lack of "hardheaded assessment" of the costs to us.[7]

The cultural gap between the general population and educated elites is a striking feature of the modern period, not only on this issue. McNamara's memoirs, expressing the perceptions of the Kennedy intellectuals, reflect the phenomenon, as does the reaction to it.

2. Turning Points

McNamara was involved in two crucial decisions about Vietnam. The first was in late 1961. By then, the terror state installed by Washington to undermine the 1954 diplomatic settlement had already killed some some 70–80,000 people, according to sources that McNamara considers reliable, but could not contain the resis-

[7] WSJ, April 28, 1995.

the attack against North Vietnam, not the far more vicious and destructive attack on South Vietnam.

In these terms, we can readily understand the entire story, for example, McNamara's pride in the electronic barrier devised to hamper infiltration in support of the southern resistance that Washington was seeking to demolish. By facilitating the "slaughter" of South Vietnamese, the barrier might provide a solution to the central problem the U.S. faced: the inability of its clients to enter the political arena. That option was excluded, U.S. government Vietnam specialist Douglas Pike explained, because the only "truly mass-based political party in South Vietnam" was the NLF, which had the support of about half the population (well beyond what George Washington could have claimed). Hence no one could "risk entering a coalition, fearing that if they did the whale [the NLF] would swallow the minnow." The only "possible exception" was the Buddhists, who were "equivalent to card-carrying Communists," Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge reported, and were also targeted for destruction by the U.S. invaders.

If the South could be devastated without interference, Washington could overcome a problem that was "of overriding importance in the precariousness" of the U.S. position, as a White House memorandum of March 1965 observed: "The lack of a political base for the GVN [the Saigon government] of sufficient strength to counter Viet Cong political and psychological superiorities." "We are very weak politically and without the strong political support of the population which the NLF have," the ruling generals complained in December 1966, so that while we now have "a strong military instrument" thanks to "our Allies (the U.S., Korea, etc.)," we are "without a political instrument that can compete with the communists in the South," a problem that was never solved.

As the facts pass into the elite culture, they are transmuted into the noble U.S. effort to defend South Vietnam from "an armed takeover by an outside Communist regime," in the current formulation of the Washington Post editors, who are critical of

cal settlement but had to shift the struggle to the arena of violence. For these essential reasons, at the same time the U.S. subverted the only free election in Laos, installing a corrupt ultra-right military dictatorship, apparently supported a military coup in Cambodia to overthrow the civilian government (one of several), and undermined the parliamentary system of Indonesia by first giving extensive support to a military uprising and then turning to support of the Indonesian military when the rebellion failed, thereby establishing the conditions that led to the huge massacres of 1965–6.[17] The pattern is worldwide, close to invariant, and excised from admissible history.

4. Pursuing the National Interest

In brief, uncritically adopting the conventions of the political culture, McNamara had no comprehension of the major decisions that he implemented and could perceive nothing beyond questions of effectiveness. Within the given parameters, it made good sense to give close attention to the bombing of North Vietnam, carefully considering the pace of escalation and the targets, in fear of a Russian or Chinese response. But there are no relevant costs to the "merciless bombing" of South Vietnamese. One of the few interesting revelations of the Pentagon Papers is the comparison between the meticulous preparation for the bombing of the north and the casual undertaking of the bombing of the south at vastly greater scale at the very same time — a comparison that passed virtually unnoticed in commentary, for the same reasons.[18]

It should be added that similar perceptions were shared by a good part of the peace movement, which focused its energies to

[17] On Indonesia, see now Audrey and George Kahin, Subversion as Foreign Policy (New Press 1995).

[18] FRS, for these and other references to the Pentagon Papers.

tance it had aroused by violence and repression. Kennedy therefore stepped up the attack. McNamara directed U.S. personnel and equipment to participate directly in bombing and other military operations against South Vietnamese, also authorizing crop destruction and the use of napalm (which "really puts the fear of God into the Viet Cong," Commanding General Harkins happily remarked), and sabotage and intelligence operations against North Vietnam. Hanoi had not responded to the pleas of the southern resistance that was being decimated by U.S. terror until 1959, when it began to authorize the return of southerners who had gone to the north in the — very naive — expectation that the U.S. would permit the free elections and unification planned at Geneva in 1954.[8]

As one highly expert (and very hawkish) study explains, the goal of Kennedy's 1961 escalation was "to fight the insurgency by destroying its economic base and disrupting the social fabric of the areas where the [National Liberation] Front was strongest" (Eric Bergerud). These decisions changed U.S. involvement decisively: from support for a standard Latin America-style terror state to direct aggression against South Vietnam. The consequences for the population were dramatic, as McNamara surely knew. It is hard to imagine that he was unaware of the internal reports of 1962 on the "indiscriminate firepower" that "undoubtedly killed many innocent peasants and made many others more willing than before to cooperate with the Viet Cong." And as a dedicated number-cruncher, he surely knew that by 1962, the Kennedy-McNamara war far surpassed the French war at its peak in helicopters and aerial fire power, while as Johnson took over in November 1963, U.S. personnel in South Vietnam were at almost the level of France in all of Indochina in 1949.

[8] See RC. On the internal reaction, the most important parts of which have yet to enter approved history and are misrepresented beyond recognition in the Pentagon Papers analysis, see my For Reasons of State (FRS) (Pantheon 1973), 100f.

From 1961 to the early 1965 escalation, another 90,000 South Vietnamese had been killed (half of them not "what we call VC," President Johnson observed in internal meetings), victims of the terror of the U.S.-imposed regime and "the crushing weight of American armor, napalm, jet bombers and finally vomiting gases" (French military historian and Indochina specialist Bernard Fall).[9]

McNamara knew all of this. Nothing about it appears in his memoirs — presumably, because he considered the whole matter of no significance, imposing no measurable costs.

The second crucial decision that involved McNamara was in January-February 1965: the decision to escalate radically the attack against South Vietnam. This was recognized at once by Bernard Fall to be the fundamental policy decision. As he wrote a few months later, "what changed the character of the Vietnam war was *not* the decision to bomb North Vietnam; *not* the decision to use American ground troops in South Vietnam; but the decision to wage unlimited aerial warfare inside the country at the price of literally pounding the place to bits."[10]

All of this too passes without a word in McNamara's memoirs, presumably for the same reason: the population of the south was considered fair game.

McNamara does of course discuss the decision to bomb North Vietnam from February 1965, adding some new material that confirms what was already known. He and National Security Adviser "Mac" Bundy ("a highly disciplined mind of extraordinary quality") informed LBJ on January 27 that "The Vietnamese know just as well as we do that the Viet Cong are gaining in the countryside" in South Vietnam. Johnson's two advisers were influenced by "one of the most comprehensive and thoughtful analyses we received from Saigon during the seven years I wrestled with Vietnam," Mc-

[9] For details, see RC. LBJ, see George Kahin, Intervention (Knopf 1986), 385, minutes of July 1965 meetings in which McNamara played a prominent role.

[10] Fall, New Republic, Oct. 9, 1965.

We can see why McNamara shared Kennedy's admiration for "the scholarly Max Taylor" with his high "intellectual caliber," as illustrated by his ruminations on the "national attribute" that "limits the development of a truly national spirit" among the South Vietnamese, perhaps "innate," though it does not affect the Viet Cong, whose remarkable morale and "ability continuously to rebuild their units" (by recruitment in South Vietnam) is "one of the mysteries of this guerrilla war," for which "we still find no plausible explanation." And by his preference for a "military dictatorship" in 1964 if we fail in "establishing some reasonably satisfactory government." And his concerns about "how the soft humanitarian West could compete with such people" as the "ruthless" Asian Communists (*in Asia*) and his satisfaction that at least "the substantial people" of the United States supported the U.S. war, whatever the objections of the riff-raff who considered it "fundamentally wrong and immoral" — which at least shows that his contempt for democracy was not limited to the Vietnamese.[15]

Writing in 1962, Fall also had some things to say about the first of the two fateful decisions in which McNamara was involved, words he considered important enough to repeat in 1965 along with the "encouraging news." With the escalation of 1961–2, Fall wrote, "the military 'kill' becomes the primary target — simply because the essential political target is too elusive for us, or worse, because we do not understand its importance" and therefore do not face "the Communist challenge…on its *real* terrain: that of ideas, policies and down-to-earth effective administration."[16]

Note that Fall identifies with the U.S. invasion, while stressing a feature of the war recognized by all serious commentators, wherever they stood on the matter: the U.S. was "militarily strong, but politically weak," and therefore could not consider a peaceful politi-

[15] Pentagon Papers III (Beacon 1972), 668–9. Taylor, Swords and Plowshares (Norton 1972), 158, 365.

[16] Reprinted from Current History in Viet-Nam Reader.

Recall that this is 1965, long before the U.S. attack reached the horrendous scale of later years, particularly after the Tet offensive.

Only one of Fall's observations passed through McNamara's filters: his recognition of the enormous disparity between France's limited effort and "the determinative weight of America's growing presence in Vietnam" (McNamara's rendition). Of the rest, not a word registered. Accordingly, Fall's reports were "encouraging news." Recall that McNamara is explaining why it seemed right at the time to escalate the "slaughter" of South Vietnamese that Fall describes.

In a footnote, McNamara remarks that "Growing concern about the effectiveness of U.S. military operations led Fall gradually to abandon his belief that American technology and power could not but prevail." He is referring to what Fall wrote in 1967: that "the countryside literally dies under the blows of the largest military machine ever unleashed on an area of this size" so that "Viet-Nam as a cultural and historic entity" is "threatened with extinction" under the U.S. assault — which, he feared, *would* prevail.[14]

Though a dedicated hawk who backed the U.S. and its client regime, Fall cared about the people and country of Vietnam, particularly South Vietnam, which was being demolished by U.S. savagery. For that reason, what he said could not — and still cannot — be perceived within the elite intellectual culture. The threat of extinction can therefore be nothing more than concern about effectiveness.

Elsewhere McNamara does remark that "the increasing destruction and misery brought on" South Vietnam by the million tons of bombs dropped on the South between 1965 and 1967, "more than twice the tonnage dropped on the North," "troubled me greatly." He thus falls at the extreme soft-hearted end of the spectrum, joining the "sentimental humanitarians" whom Roosevelt had derided a century earlier.

[14] Horizon, 1967, reprinted in Last Reflections.

Namara writes, a warning from Ambassador "Max" Taylor that the U.S. is "likely soon to face…installation of a hostile government which will ask us to leave while it seeks accommodation" among all Vietnamese, south and north; a similar concern entered into the decision of the Kennedy Administration to overthrow the Diem regime.

McNamara fails to mention that on the same day, January 27, he authorized General Westmoreland to use American jet planes for operations in South Vietnam, the crucial step that "changed the character of the Vietnam war." Of course, U.S. bombing had been going on for a long time, for example, exactly a month earlier, when American-piloted B-26s napalmed villages north of Saigon, killing fifty peasants. But this was to be quite different.[11]

3. "Encouraging News"

McNamara's omission of Fall's conclusions is particularly striking because he is not only familiar with them but even cites them as part of the "encouraging" news that "persuaded many [in Washington] that the U.S. effort could not fail." His treatment of Fall's judgments, and the failure of commentators to see anything odd about it, offers such insight into the intellectual culture that it merits a close look.

McNamara describes Fall (accurately) as "a renowned Indochina scholar and perceptive observer." He is the only outside expert listed among important "Personae." In his article on the crucial decision to bomb the south and two letters that McNamara also cites,[12] Fall describes the American effort as "militarily unlosable"

[11] Pentagon Papers, III 687. See FRS, 75, 77.

[12] letter, Newsweek, Oct. 11, correcting a misquotation of Sept. 27; letter, New Republic, Nov. 13, responding to a criticism of his October 9 there article by Asst. Secretary of Defense Arthur Sylvester. McNamara misrepresents the little that he cites, referring to a sentence in Newsweek misquoting Fall and Fall's letter correcting the error as "a series of statements in Newsweek" by Fall. The

because of its scale, comparing it to Britain in Cyprus and France in Algeria, where the imperial power could not be defeated but was forced to withdraw. The same will be true in Vietnam, he predicts.

The article that McNamara cites opens with a quote from Tacitus: "They have made a desert, and have called it peace." This is the news that so encouraged the men of Camelot. Fall stresses that the U.S. is attacking South Vietnam; the bombing of the North was only an aside. Relying on extensive field experience, Fall regarded the Saigon army as unhappy mercenaries who are officially called "our allies" or "the friendlies," "both terms followed by a guffaw" by U.S. troops. As of September 1965, Fall writes, there is no solid evidence that any units of the North Vietnamese army (PAVN) had yet entered combat in South Vietnam, where the U.S. troop level was approaching 175,000. That was after eleven years of U.S.-run terror in South Vietnam, almost four years of U.S. bombing of South Vietnam and sabotage operations against the North, and 7 months of intensive U.S. bombing of North Vietnam. Fall is referring to the elusive PAVN 325th Division, which, he points out elsewhere, had been (maybe still was) recruited from South Vietnamese who had gone to the North after the 1954 Geneva agreements. U.S. intelligence was still reporting only suspicions that PAVN troops might be near South Vietnam or in outlying areas in July 1965.

Fall describes vividly the "slaughter" that the U.S. was carrying out in South Vietnam, where "people are irrelevant" to the attackers: for example, B-52 bombing in areas of the Mekong Delta with a population density of up to 1000 people per square mile, with effects that "can be readily guessed." The "merciless bombing" mainly murders "innocent bystanders." That is the reason, Fall suggests, why so few weapons are found among "the heaps of dead." He describes the lies of the respected war correspondent Joseph Alsop, "always willing to swallow uncritically every official handout," and

NR article and letter are mentioned in a footnote, but their contents are ignored. There are no other citations.

the truths that Alsop casually relates about such U.S. atrocities as razing of hospitals — a "clear-cut" war crime, Fall notes, as are other atrocities he recounts from the U.S. press, such as the transport of VC prisoners "whose hands and cheeks had been pierced, and wire run through their hands, mouth, and cheeks; and then tied together," so that, as a U.S. pilot put it "them gooks sit" quietly when "*we* [Fall's emphasis] got them wrapped up like that."

Fall also responds to the official charge that the VC carry out terror too, noting that U.S. intelligence agrees with every knowledgeable observer that "the VC are deliberately keeping terrorism at a low level because of its psychologically adverse effects," unlike the U.S. invaders, who have no hope of appealing to the population and therefore must rely on their limitless resources of violence and destruction. He contrasts the U.S. attack with that of the French, not "exactly models of knightly behavior" though never descending to the appalling level of U.S. savagery. He adds that the "torture and needless brutality to combatants and civilians alike…has been sidestepped" or "ignored" in the U.S., unlike France, which had, furthermore, never dared to send conscripts or increase the draft "for fear of public opposition to the war."

Fall reported the "truly staggering amount of civilians [who] are getting killed or maimed" by the U.S. assault, estimating that deaths would reach 200,000 from 1956 into 1965, virtually all South Vietnamese. A valued U.S. adviser, Fall flew on combat missions, and in 1965 gave a graphic account of napalm raids on villages in a free bomb zone in the Camau peninsula in the deep south. Napalm bombs, he wrote, force villagers into the open so that they can be attacked with fragmentation bombs and then raked with cannon, killing an unknown number of peasants.[13]

[13] Fall, Ramparts, 1965; reprinted in his Last Reflections On a War (Doubleday 1967); New Society, April 1965, reprinted in Marcus Raskin and Bernard Fall, The Viet-Nam Reader (Vintage 1965).