

Political passion is a good thing but even better if it is an informed passion. — Barbara Tuchman

Security Risks:

National Security and the State Department

O. EDMUND CLUBB

IN view of the succession of failures that have marked US policy in Indochina a clear assessment of responsibility would seem to be in order. The Congress is, to be sure, talking about the need to reassert itself on questions of war and peace. But, strangely enough, there has been no inclination to isolate and condemn specific bureaucratic or political figures in connection with the Indochina debacle. The instrumentalities of our foreign policy were not always so sacrosanct.

As World War II ended, the Department of State came under heavy political attack for alleged errors and deviations. Shortly after resigning his position as Ambassador to China in November, 1945, Major General Patrick J. Hurley charged that "the weakness of the American foreign policy together with the Communist conspiracy within the State Department are responsible for the evils that are abroad in the world today."

A seed had been planted. In the context of a world situation in which things were not turning out as politicians thought they should, the

Truman Administration in 1947 (the year the cold war began) instituted a loyalty-security program. This was designed in large part as a protective reaction to Republican critics. But the Communist defeat of the Nationalists in China was a sharp goad to demagoguery, with Senator Joseph R. McCarthy in 1950 taking the leading role in staging witch hunts for the "security risks," who, it was argued, must have been responsible for "the loss of China."

The State Department's loyalty-security mill was soon operating at top speed, and it ground exceedingly fine with respect to members of the China Service in particular. Examples from proceedings against Foreign Service officers reveal the simplistic character of the quest for "security risks." One officer, who had reported voluminously on Chinese communism over the years, was charged with various pro-Communist attitudes. When he pointed out that no such bias was shown in his reports, the Loyalty-Security Board suggested that he might have *thought* one way and reported another. One officer, however, encountered considerable difficulty in his hearing because he was deemed so uninformed about communism that he was not fully aware of its dangers and did not, for example, comprehend the socialist un-

dertones of postwar economic reforms in Japan. Another man on the dock was held to be "one of the leading proponents in the Department . . . of the separability of the Chinese Communists from Moscow." Still another got into trouble because he took the position that any American involvement in Vietnam would turn out to be a tragic mistake. Where developments in China turned out to the detriment of the Nationalists as predicted, it was suggested that the officer who had foreseen the denouement might have had "a conditioning influence on the results."

The Foreign Service officers who were destroyed had in general been perceptive analysts of events in China *because especially trained for that function*, and over the years they had performed valuable service in analyzing developments and forecasting the course of events. There was no salvation, however, in having the historical record prove your estimates correct. The suspicion triumphed that their contacts with Chinese communism had made them "security risks"—if only for some time in the future. This was "guilt by association" with a vengeance.

The tendency to require ideological orthodoxy rather than intelligent analyses and initiative was strengthened with the advent of John Foster

O. Edmund Clubb, for twenty years with the Foreign Service in Asia, is a frequent contributor to important publications and author of several books.

Reprinted with permission from WORLDVIEW, August 1973. 170 East 64th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021

Dulles as Secretary of State in 1953. Addressing State Department and Foreign Service personnel shortly after assuming the post, Dulles demanded "positive loyalty to the policies that our President and the Congress may prescribe." He remarked chillingly that "less than that is not tolerable at this time." He thus effectively denied to the Foreign Service and to the permanent staff of the State Department the functions of both initiative and dissent. Dulles and other high appointed officials, acting by sanction of President Eisenhower, would monopolize the formulation of grand strategy.

One year later, in a letter published in the New York TIMES of January 17, 1954, five distinguished retired American diplomats expressed their distress about developments in the Foreign Service: "A premium has been put upon reporting and upon recommendations which are ambiguously stated or so cautiously set forth as to be deceiving. When any such tendency begins its insidious work, it is not long before accuracy and initiative have been sacrificed to acceptability and conformity. The ultimate result is a threat to national security."

THE corruption of the foreign policy making process was already well under way. The Pentagon Papers show that it was shortly after the Communist victory in China that the molding of our grand strategy in the pattern of "anti-communism" began, with major responsibility assumed by the National Security Council. A critical bias was thus introduced into the formulation of policy, for the NSC was by design and function strongly bent to putting prime emphasis on military factors. The Korean and (French) Indochina wars gave American policy-makers a heightened sense of danger and accelerated the process of concentrating decision-making near the top of the executive pyramid. Both strategy and procedures were developed and refined under the Eisenhower Administration. John Foster Dulles was, in practice, transmogrified into the State Department. The Department as formal institution was made increasingly subservient to the national purpose

of "anti-communism."

Although an individual Secretary of State might play an important role in formulating policy, the State Department as such was progressively downgraded. The role of the military and of cold war militants was correspondingly enhanced. In official thinking about the USSR and the Chinese People's Republic strategic judgments were distorted by ideological commitments. The formulation of foreign policy became in large measure a function of cold war operations. And, under Dulles's inspiration, the United States entered upon a series of new and undiplomatic "commitments" in Asia which inevitably fixed a martial pattern for the future.

When John F. Kennedy became President he characterized the State Department as "a bowl of jelly."

"The battle against Communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination to achieve success there—or the United States must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores."

Whether because of the Department's flaccid condition or in response to personal urge, Kennedy chose in the main to handle foreign affairs himself. Dean Rusk was no John Foster Dulles, and thus yet more power flowed away from the State Department. The President turned increasingly to other sources for advice (and inspiration); some of those to whom he turned were demonstrably amateurs in the field of foreign—and especially Asian—affairs.

Various high-level advisors to Kennedy (and to Johnson after him) were proponents of an American *realpolitik* that lacked the essential component of realism. They seemingly accepted uncritically the basic ideological heritage from the Truman-Eisenhower era, and thus their estimates were laced with distortion and fantasy. In the first year of the Kennedy Administration the American strategy with respect to Southeast Asia was reformulated. The new strategy was not based upon sober studies by area specialists in the State Department but upon sober recommendations of three special Presidential missions headed respectively by Vice Pres-

ident Lyndon B. Johnson, Professor Eugene Staley of the Stanford Research Institute and General Maxwell D. Taylor. They were charged with surveying the situation at first hand.

Returning from Southeast Asia in May, 1961, Johnson voiced his alarm: "The battle against Communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination to achieve success there—or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores. . . ." He affirmed that "there is no alternative to United States leadership in Southeast Asia," and entertained no excessive doubts about the ease with which the American mission could be achieved. Support of Vietnam, he said, would require an estimated \$50 million—with \$50 million more military and economic assistance to Thailand.

In October, 1961, top State and Defense Department officials were considering a project for US military intervention in South Vietnam. General Taylor sent President Kennedy a reassuring message from Baguio: South Vietnam was "not an excessively difficult or unpleasant place" for the operations of US troops. And so it was that the Secretaries of State and Defense joined on November 11, Armistice Day, in recommending to President Kennedy that US forces be committed to save South Vietnam from communism. They estimated that the maximum forces *required on the ground in Southeast Asia* "would not exceed six divisions, or about 205,000 men" (in addition to "local forces and such SEATO forces as may be engaged"). That action was designed to deal with the Viet Cong insurgency; but the Defense Department was to prepare plans also for the use of US forces "to deal with the situation if there is organized Communist military intervention." The reference to China was clear.

The projected action had the fervent support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who, on January 13, 1962, sent a memorandum to Secretary of Defense McNamara in which they presented as an *immediate* prospect the loss of the Southeast Asia mainland, which "would have an adverse impact on our military strategy and would markedly reduce our ability

in limited war. . . ." The Joint Chiefs then sketched the "Possible Eventualities" that would follow that hypothetical loss of the Southeast Asian mainland:

All of the Indonesian archipelago could come under the domination and control of the USSR and would become a Communist base posing a threat against Australia and New Zealand. The Sino-Soviet Bloc would have control of the eastern access to the Indian Ocean. The Philippines and Japan could be pressured to assume, at best a neutralist role, thus eliminating two of our major bases in the Western Pacific. Our lines of defense then would be pulled north to Korea, Okinawa and Taiwan, resulting in the subsequent overtaking of our lines of communications in a limited war. India's ability to remain neutral would be jeopardized and, as the Bloc meets success, its concurrent stepped-up activities to move into and control Africa can be expected. . . .

On the basis of such apocalyptic advice the American intervention in South Vietnam began. President Johnson inherited the war he had helped to start. According to the Pentagon Papers his decision to escalate the war into North Vietnam resulted from a White House strategy meeting of September, 1964. In the end the war defeated him.

PRESIDENT NIXON inherited, together with an enlarged war, a debilitated State Department. The incoming Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, endeavored in the beginning to lift sagging morale and instill new life into his department. Speaking to departmental and Foreign Service personnel on January 22, he said: "I hope to lead a receptive and open establishment, where men speak their minds and are listened to on merit, and where divergent views are fully and promptly passed on for decision." He called for the participation of younger officers for the tapping of "all the creative ideas and energies of this department in the formulation of a foreign policy responsive to the needs of the future."

Old-timers in the Department were pleased to compare Rogers's

stance with that of Dulles 16 years earlier. But just a fortnight later it was reported that Dr. Henry A. Kissinger was assuming responsibility for foreign policy planning under the Nixon Administration. The conflict with the State Department's functions was clear. Two days later the White House attempted to redress the situation, at least outwardly, by a fuller explanation. It announced that the National Security Council would become the nation's "principal forum for the consideration of policy issues" requiring the President's decision; the Secretary of State would be the President's "principal foreign policy advisor," charged with responsibility for the "overall direction, coordination and supervision" of foreign affairs. But Kissinger was in charge of NSC operations in the White House itself.

In January, 1970, the State Department announced the formation of 13 task forces aimed at revitalizing the Foreign Service and reasserting the Department's leadership in the making of foreign policy. The intent was brave enough, but was predestined to be aborted. When the Nixon Administration mounted an invasion of Cambodia that spring, over 250 State Department and Foreign Service officers protested the action in a joint letter to Rogers. The Department soon afterward acknowledged that the Under Secretary of State had warned the 50 Foreign Service officers participating in the protest that their job was to support the President and his Administration. This was essentially the Dulles position of 1953—excepting that Dulles had credited Congress with some authority in the field of foreign affairs. So far as reported no new "divergent views" were voiced in the State Department when, in 1971, the Administration further widened the Indochina war by mounting an offensive against Laos. The evidence suggests that the State Department had had little enough to do with the decision-making in either instance. Developments of 1971-72 (Japan, Chinese People's Republic, the Soviet Union and the Paris peace negotiations) only confirmed the deduction that Dr. Kissinger was de facto foreign policy chief.

In December, 1972, it was re-

ported that the President desired, in his next term, to "vitalize" the State Department and Foreign Service. "The Foreign Service needs a shake-up to give it new vitality," said the faceless "White House official." It became known about the same time, however, that Mr. Nixon proposed to concentrate more authority for both domestic and foreign affairs in a supra-cabinet organization to be located in the White House. One of the five "Presidential assistants" at the very top of the new setup, of course, was to be Dr. Kissinger.

The historical record is that men at the top of the executive pyramid, operating in substantial isolation from the experience and knowledge of lower echelon professionals, grossly misinterpreted the situation in postwar Asia and committed capital error in their decisions about the American role there. Even in implementing their mistaken strategy, they disastrously underestimated the determination and skills of the Asians and rashly overestimated American capabilities. They, and not career Foreign Service officers who might have propounded the idea of "the separability of the Chinese Communists from Moscow" or argued that American involvement in Vietnam would prove to be a mistake, are the ones who endangered the national security. They have proved to be the real "security risks."

THE NATION'S continuing need for sane foreign policies and a skilled foreign affairs establishment is self-evident, but the State Department now stands in important measure bereft of its original responsibility. True revitalization of that department and of the Foreign Service can only mean restoring their prime role and substantive authority with respect to foreign affairs. It would take a major reversal of recent trends, but the result would be a professional diplomacy operating on assumptions more sober by far than those that have governed Washington, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, during the past 20 years. Possibly, just possibly, the final denouement of the Watergate affair might make a contribution to that end. ■